

Woman Empowerment in Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House*

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Abstract

This research paper explores the theme of woman empowerment on Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House*. It attempts to justify how the epiphany of the major protagonist, Nora, liberates her from the abusive husband. She is unaware of subtle micro oppression until she is harassed for saving Torvald. Torvald exercises authoritative control over her, restricting her autonomy in both emotional and social life. Saving her husband's life earned her no praise but this incident opens her eyes to behold Torvald's hypocrisy. Torvald's narcissism contributes immensely to evolve Nora and she, ultimately, decides to abandon Torvald and his house. Guided by micro feminist perspectives and Judith Butler's theories of gender performativity and the materialization of norms, this study investigates on entanglement of Nora in patriarchal structures and her awareness of recognising her prolonged eight years' confinement. It further explores how Nora confronts these constraints and champions her agency. By tracing her journey from innocence to freedom, this paper highlights how micro-level oppression controls everyday life and how acts of resistance can lead to empowerment.

Keywords: abuse, epiphany, marionette, narcissist, patriarchy.

Introduction

A Doll's House (1923) is a three-act play written by Norwegian Victorian playwright, Henrik Ibsen. In this drama, Ibsen portrays how the women endured the suffering during Victorian era. The major protagonists of the play are Nora and her husband, Torvald. Torvald exercises control over Nora at both micro and macro

contexts. He is dangerously narcissistic person who manipulates and abuses Nora alarming her mentality. He treats Nora as if she is his child and she, in turn, assimilates this patronization. Other characters, such as Mrs. Linde, Krogstad, Dr. Rank and Nora's father, play significant role in helping Nora realize her extreme entrapment within Torvald's sinuous cave. This realization enables her to take bold steps toward separating from Torvald and leaving his house. Her epiphany in the third act is crucial in empowering her to make a decisive to liberate herself from the Torvald's labyrinth. By slamming the door behind her, she commences on a new venture of life.

Ibsen wrote this play in the emerging period of feminism, including suffrage movement, inspired by his friend, Laura Kieler's real-life story. She was declared insane but Ibsen gives justice to Laura in *A Doll's House*. Martin observes (2011), "In Ibsen's revolutionary plot twist was thereby stripped of its political impact; with the wife returned to her proper sphere, Victorian viewers could go about their lives without fear of social catastrophe" (p. 187). However, when the play was first performed, several theatres and people were outraged, pressuring Ibsen to write an alternative ending in which Nora stays with Torvald for the children. Ibsen was pressurized because people thought that it was against the 19th century's Victorian marriage law. However, he "gives the reader the impression of experiencing a piece of reality" (Wellek, 6). Therefore, Nora calls Torvald stranger at the end despite investing her eight years with him. Torvald's plea does not sway her, and she no longer believes their life "together would be a real wedlock" (Ibsen, 1923, p. 58). By slamming the door on him, Nora affirms her sovereignty. To explore this journey toward self-autonomy, the micro- feminist framework is applied.

Micro-feminism has recently emerged organically through social media and academic discourses for exploring everyday acts of resistance to confront noticeable daily gender inequalities. This practice highlights the significance of taking a stance- even if on a smaller scale- to challenge the biases that continue to be strongly connected to traditional gender roles (Woods, 2024). Micro-feminism is about creating a space where women can feel equal and heard (Martinez, 2024). Based on this framework, this research article endeavours to address the following questions:

1. Why is the female protagonist ensnared in patriarchal quagmire?
2. How does Nora come to recognise her prolonged incarceration?
3. In what ways does Nora struggle to achieve liberty?

This research paper seeks to explore the struggle of Nora, the heroine of Ibsen's *A Doll's House*, to attain liberation from nebulous domestic and psychological subjugation. The micro-feminist theories help the study to investigate how Nora finds the way to free herself ultimately from the traumatic and oppressive environment.

Literature Review

While discussing how Nora holds a deep affection for her spouse and admires him, the researcher Mocbil (2023) argues that, "Throughout the European era, she serves as a representation of a woman who is objectified and treated as a plaything. She allows her husband to express his opinion without interrupting or disrupting him" (p. 147). Mocbil focuses on the suffering of female characters in the play, particularly highlighting their struggles and the ways they empower themselves at the end. However, he concludes that although Mrs. Linde and Nora's maid, Anne Marie, move on more easily, Nora has to leave her house in order to achieve self- autonomy that costs her to leave her children behind. Torvald's excessive suppression ultimately provokes Nora's final realization and departure. Thus, Mocbil emphasizes the personal growth of female characters particularly focusing on Nora's painful yet transformative journey toward independence. Similarly, Insenga (2022) studies that, "In purchasing a doll for her daughter to play with, Nora is unintentionally continuing a vicious cycle of patriarchal oppression for Emmy as Nora recreates the same conditions that shaped her childhood (p. 82). Hence, Insenga focuses on how Nora is being treated as a marionette and how she is unaware of it. Insenga even asserts that by doing so Nora is also creating the same world for her daughter by treating her in the same manner.

Nora struggles against society to free herself from patriarchal boundaries, beginning with her father and then from her husband. The scholar Bhattacharya (2022) claims that, "Nora makes a huge independent decision of going away from her house and this senseless marriage to explore the world around her and find her true self. This act of breaking away from the chains that society had imposed on her, she emerges as a symbol of strength and empowerment" (p. 92). His article concentrates on the conflict between the individual and society, giving weight to Nora's resistance as a challenge to social norms. Lale Behnam (2007) observes this

situation with the insight that, “Nora’s lacks of authority pushes her to lies and tricks; she has to hide her competence because neither her husband nor society can endure it” (p. 51).

The extreme subjugation eventually leads to Torvald’s downfall when Nora ultimately leaves him. Ahmad and Akbar (2019) studies that, “A Doll’s House is the play in which problems related to female gender like women emancipation, their freedom of expression of thought as well as of action are discussed” (p. 45). They centralize on gender-based study to discover the discrimination prevalent in society, where males are prioritized over females. This electrifying climax demonstrates that Nora is not only able to “slam the door on this wretched potlatch of serial self-sacrifices” (Johnsen, 2011, p. 196) but also Nora’s physical and social rejection of her doll-like object status, suggesting the possibility to develop greater agency and a subversive female subject-position (Taucar, 2011, p. 277). This makes her the first real “feminist” character in the history of theatre (Calvani, 2017, p. 1). These scholars further suggest that Nora’s decision to leave would not have occurred if patriarchal structures had treated her with dignity and equality.

The play manifests a realistic image of the patriarchal society of the time, where women were ill-treated and considered lower than animals. However; a similar scenario is still prevalent in the modern society despite significant social change, as women’s roles are still largely limited to household errands alongside their huge ongoing struggle to balance professional careers. Emon (2021) explores the realistic issues portrayed in the play claiming that, “The door to Torvald’s study, in the form of emasculation will lose all its authority and power; whereas the menacing door to the outside world will be transformed to become the door of liberation from the doll home which will become an unbearable prison to the newly awakening, Nora” (5). Thus, Emon’s study meticulously presents this constant and disturbing reality symbolically reading Nora’s journey from innocence to awakening. Another researcher Khurram (2016) argues over the significance of the title and states that, “This title speaks to and identifies with the entire play ‘A Doll’s House’ identifies with power, it speaks to a doll being played with and claimed” (p. 6485). She explains the title from a patriarchal perspective and asserts that it embodies the power relationship between Nora and Torvald, as Nora is characterized as an infantilized spouse whom Torvald treats as a doll keeping her in delusion. Therefore, Khurram insists that the ‘doll’ metaphor in the title carries a humorous irony,

depicting Nora as a dull and lifeless object with whom Torvald plays according to his wishes. Langas (2005) explores that Torvald “even accuses her of being unchristian, though his invocation of religion rings embarrassingly hollow—a mere ineffectual exercise of patriarchal power” (p. 150). Lavender (2008) illustrates that, “Nora and Torvald have built their marriage and lives around a shared mythology, based loosely on Christian concepts of morality, sin, and redemption, in which Nora idolizes Torvald as a god in whose presence she must submit and behind whose back she lives a secret, “sinful” existence (p. 119).

Torvald is never grateful to Nora, reflecting the double standard because men apologize less frequently than women, even when confronted with similar offenses—this behaviour highlights how societal norms and expectations can differ based on gender—challenging these norms, even in small ways, can be a form of resistance (Schumann and Rose, 1923). The critic Saima Akter (2021) observes that, “A reading of *A Doll’s House* which focuses on the restrictions in Nora’s lifestyle and her emancipation from a patriarchal society is over-simplistic and ignores the existence of many other factors” (p. 84). In modern society, a woman cannot fully be herself because it is an exclusively male-dominated sphere (Meyer, 2017). Durbach (1991) explains this situation as the “compartmentalized lives of modern urban living dominated by doors . . . that shut in fantasies and shut out reality, that isolate a community of domestic strangers and insulate them against the cold and forbidding world outside” (p. 42). Torvald’s hypocrisy rises from this so-called modern society where women are immured within domestic walls to safeguard hypocritical patriarchal illusion in the public sphere.

Thus, there have been several major studies on *A Doll’s House*, with many focusing on its feminist dimensions. However, none have thoroughly analyzed micro-domination and the psychological trauma experienced by Nora through the lens of Judith Butler’s theoretical framework. Although previous researches address women’s issues broadly, they neglect the collective effects of the subtle, everyday repression that shape Nora’s psychological state. This clear research gap emphasizes the significance of the present study, which aims to contribute to existing research by offering a fresh and critical perspective on the play.

Methodology

This research article explores the theme of micro-feminism on Henrik Ibsen's three-act play, *A Doll's House*, focusing on how women are ill-treated at both micro and macro levels, within domestic, social, and psychological contexts. Historically, feminism addresses primarily the macro-level issue such as general gender inequality. However, third wave feminist discourse, emerging after 1990s, emphasizes the everyday, subtle forms of harassment that women face in economic, social, racial, sexual and academic spheres. . Micro-feminism primarily examines how the women are treated in every aspect of life, stressing all the subtle forms of subjugation often overlooked in the earlier feminist movements. This study employs Judith Butler's theories of gender performativity as presented in *Gender Trouble* (1990) and *Bodies That Matter* (1993) to explore these dynamics in *A Doll's House*. Butler's concepts of performative gender, societal expectations, and the materialization of norms provide the tools to examine how Nora is restrained by patriarchal structures and how daily micro-discriminations buttress her subjugation. Through this methodology, the study investigates how Nora recognizes these subtle forms of control and, eventually, fights for her autonomy. By applying Butler's theories in combination with a micro-feminist lens, the research examines how Nora reads the map for the resistance to emancipate herself from Torvald's oppression, and, finally achieves liberation.

In *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (1993), Butler explains how societal norms **materialize and regulate bodies and behaviours**. Gendered expectations are imposed through social and cultural practices, determining how women are perceived and treated. Nora's speech, actions, and even physical presence are persistently constrained by Torvald and societal norms. Micro-feminism helps uncover this oppression and highlights her eventual affirmation of autonomy.

Thus, these works, all together, provide a **lens to analyze micro-level oppression**. They show how gendered performance and societal regulation limit women's autonomy, and how acts of resistance such as Nora's challenge to patriarchal boundaries can gift independency to her.

Discussion and Result

Nora's Deification to Torvald

Nora deifies Torvald. Her sycophancy is justified, but erasing one's esteem while loving such a narcissist is not good either. Nora disregards her own value. She is a bootlicker of Torvald because she considers him not less than her father. Torvald enslaves her making Nora feel that she is uneducated, dull, and infantile because, if gender is constructed through relations of power and, specifically, normative constraints that not only produce but also regulate various bodily beings (Butler, 1993, p. X). According to Butler, such power relations normalize gendered behaviour and inflict strict expectations and whoever does not follow these conformed norms is rather corrected, controlled, punished, and shamed. Nora is trained to become Torvald's "doll-wife"—childish, decorative, and dependent—performing the gendered role imposed upon her. Earlier she cannot perceive her pathetic quagmire condition. Torvald's treatment is always dominative, and his tortuous zone never frees Nora to act autonomously, decide for herself, or oppose the norms imposed upon her body and behaviour. This absolutely exemplifies Butler's concept of gender as regulatory and performative.

Torvald treats Nora as a doll who needs pampering all the time. In the first act, Nora returns home after shopping for Christmas. Torvald addresses her, "Is that my little lark twittering out there? Is it my little squirrel bustling out?" (Ibsen, 1923, P. 2). Equating Nora to a bird renders her demure and ranks Torvald as her master. Nora responds kindly, "Yes! Just now" (Ibsen, 1923, p. 2), performing the role of Torvald's expectation. Torvald even allows her to be spendthrift, but only to control her. In this regard, Butler (199) argues that:

Something similar is at work with the concept of materiality, which may well be "something without which we cannot do anything." What does it mean to have recourse to materiality, since it is clear from the start that matter has a history (indeed, more than one) and that the history of matter is in part determined by the negotiation of sexual difference (p. 29).

This implies that Nora's body and actions are not innately her own but are constructed and regulated through the materialized norms of femininity and the household. The doll, as a symbolic object, regulates her performance of gender, and Torvald's treatment imposes the historical and social restrictions that define her "femaleness," illustrating Butler's notion that gender is performed and materially

constituted within patriarchal systems of power. Torvald and his Victorian society enforce norms on Nora regarding how a wife should behave—cheerful, submissive, and dependent. In this way, patriarchy materializes gendered expectations, shaping how bodies are perceived and treated. Consequently, Torvald controls Nora in every possible way; his money and power degrade her to a marionette. Nora’s hazy insight inhibits her from fully comprehending his intentions. He playfully reigns on her desires for shopping; his emotional blackmail—threatening his death due to her profligacy mortifies her. She is retarded and devoid of willpower, compelled to act in this way because a girl is “girlled” from birth; the moment a baby is labeled a “girl,” her social identity is constituted (Butler, 1990, pp. 22-23). Butler’s concept demonstrates that our minds regulate our bodies, and if a person lives constantly under mental pressure, this will negatively affect both their mental and physical health (Gillihan, 2016). Nora is anxious and therefore cannot fully comprehend Torvald’s blackmailing. She feels grateful that Torvald gives her money; however, through his manipulative word games, he restricts Nora’s desires to the minimal. Nora easily falls into this malicious complicity, restricting her desires for purchasing only inexpensive products. Thus, Nora’s performance is constrained by the patriarchal norms forcing her to perform the role of a submissive and controlled wife.

Nora forged her father’s signature to borrow the loan only to save Torvald’s life, with the help of Krogstad. Immediately after their marriage, Torvald was sick and his health was at risk. Krogstad also blackmails her if she would not secure is he would reveal the truth. Nora is severely trapped into the sinuous world of these males. Torvald initially disowns her as the forgery is exposed, but he changes his mind once Nora firmly decides to leave him. As Parijat (2012) observes, when love and emotion die in a man, he survives as nothing more than a machine (p. 8). He absurdly declares, “I have forgiven you, Nora; I swear to you I have forgiven you” (Ibsen, 1923, p. 52). As Nora is about to exit, Torvald’s requests become nonsensical: “Try and calm yourself, and make your mind easy again, my frightened little singing-bird . . . I have broad wings to shelter you under” (Ibsen, 1923, p. 52). As Butler (1993) argues, “Materiality of sex is forcibly produced” (p. Xi); in a similar manner, Torvald expects his “good wife” to recommence performing her prescribed femininity when all of a sudden she abandons him. His shocking behaviour opens Nora’s mind—she feels as if she has just given electric currents to give birth to her awakened conscience. Torvald’s sadistic treatment becomes a

catalyst for the emergence of a new “awakened Nora.” Nora’s disheartened expression to Torvald, as she reveals the bitter truth that they never “have had a serious conversation” (Ibsen, 1923, p. 53) during their eight-year marriage, emphasizes the hollowness of their relationship. Torvald tries to assure her that leaving him will mean suffering from paucity, but Nora laughs hideously at his misunderstanding. This experience of insult is not new; her father treated her similarly before her marriage, establishing a lifelong pattern of patriarchal control.

The Doll/Dull Nora

Dr. Rank flirts with Nora, reflecting his crude patriarchal gaze upon her. Nora, in turn, becomes flippant with Dr. Rank, requesting him to convince Torvald to forgive Krogstad. She forces him to fulfill her demand as if she were his wife. However, the “Doll” Nora is actually dull; her inanity involuntarily strengthens Dr. Rank’s intentions. The “Doll” Nora eventually reads his purpose. As Northam notes, “the heroic woman underneath, the woman of fundamentally sound principles . . . puts a stop to the nonsense when it begins to offend her sense of rightness” (qtd. in Lavender, 2008, p. 123). When Nora rejects Dr. Rank’s romantic proposal, he gets insane and leaves the house in rage. His infatuation with a woman of his daughter’s age highlights his obscenity. Due to Nora’s inanity and naivety, she is initially unable to grasp his intentions.

Nora is trapped among the three men. Krogstad’s extortion for his job strains her more. He blackmails her for forging the dead father’s signature. She had trusted him at that time, but now Krogstad’s malevolence deceives her. Nora’s startling condition causes intense anxiety—worsening by each second. Despite knowing Krogstad’s felonious reality, Nora requests Torvald to secure his position. However, Torvald does not listen. He belittles Nora, saying, “Aha! So my obstinate little woman is obliged to get someone to come to her rescue?” (Ibsen, 1923, p. 22), and Nora even accepts, “Yes, Torvald, I can’t get along a bit without your help” (Ibsen, 1923, p. 22). Nora’s repeated pleas arise from the apprehension of facing Torvald’s wrath if the truth is exposed. Her servile compulsions coerce her to plead him continuously. As Butler (1990) argues, “Wittig is clearly attuned to the power of language to subordinate and exclude women” (p. 35). In this context, language functions as a tool to subordinate Nora, excluding her from agency and selfhood. She is constantly treated as Torvald’s decorated possession rather than an independent

adult. Torvald dismisses Nora's requests and orders her to prevent Krogstad from entering the house, referring the potential harm to their children. His allegation of Krogstad as a swindler further shocks Nora, thudding her heart and fortifying her subordinate position.

The funniest part is that Torvald acts as dance teacher of Nora for the Christmas performance, and she dances completely to his rhythm. When Nora moves faster than his rhythm, Torvald judges her to be violent, and controls her by shouting, "Slower, slower!" (Ibsen, 1923, p. 39). Dr. Rank plays the music for Nora and acts as a second teacher, which lets Torvald to "correct her better" (Ibsen, 1923, p. 39). He reproaches her for wrong steps and humiliates her by saying she needs "a lot of coaching" (Ibsen, 1923, p. 39). He demands her absolute dependence on him. In order to hide the letter sent by Krogstad, Nora actually dances on Torvald's rhythm. However, she begins to liberate herself from Torvald's inflexible choreography breaking the rigid direction. This symbolizes her second step toward revolution, following the concealment of the forged letter, which empowers her for resisting restraint.

Narcissism

Torvald is a narcissistic man. Whatever the issue is, he turns the scenario in his favours and indicts Nora. In his game, Torvald places himself always a victim, while Nora is cast as the culprit. Nora hides the truth because she has never been treated as a beloved; instead, she remains under Torvald's tyranny. Her fear cultivates secrecy. Torvald believes that Nora's slanderous action will make him disreputable in the society. Nora has acknowledged that either she must fight for autonomy or must remain Torvald's doll to survive. This aligns with Butler's notion that, "'Materiality' designates a certain effect of power or, rather, is power in its formative or constituting effects. Insofar as power operates successfully by constituting an object domain, a field of intelligibility, as a taken-for-granted ontology, its material effects are taken as material data or primary givens" (p. 34-35). Torvald calls Nora "a hypocrite, a liar—worse, worse—a criminal" (Ibsen, 1923, p. 51), devaluing her existence. He accuses her of destroying all his happiness and ruining his future, disdaining her sacrifices and contributions to building the family. Torvald reveals a controlling personality, constantly keeping himself at the centre and prohibiting Nora from escaping his impasse.

Torvald's behaviour throughout *A Doll's House* illustrates patriarchal manipulation that systematically denies Nora's individuality. Whenever Nora attempts to express discomfort or resistance, Torvald reframes the situation on his favour to present himself as the injured party, thus reasserting moral authority. Torvald's reaction to Krogstad's second letter—"I am saved! Nora, I am saved!" (Ibsen, 1923, p. 52)—reveals that he is not primarily concerned regarding Nora's suffering or sacrifice, but narcissistically focused on the preservation of his social identity. Nora's years of silent secret labour to repay the debt using her allowance by working discreetly even during Christmas—remain invisible and unacknowledged, emphasizing a gendered double standard. As Butler (1993) argues, "For women, then, propriety is achieved through having a changeable name, through the exchange of names, which means that the name is never permanent, and that the identity secured through the name is always dependent on the social exigencies of paternity and marriage" (p. 153). Nora's self-abnegation and secret labouring thus function as performative acts that sustain Torvald's deceptive authority, authenticating Butler's claim that women are compelled to make masculine power stronger at the cost of their own subjectivity.

Torvald is pejorative toward women. He believes that a woman has only two roles: nurturing and raising children and managing the home. He epitomizes traditional patriarchal philosophies that treat the feminine as submissive, objects, or minor. As Butler (1993) observes, "feminine is made to stand for matter or for universality; rather, the feminine is cast outside the form/matter and universal/particular binarisms" (p. 42). Nora embodies the graceful, uncontainable feminine. Her harshness towards the end is the result of harsh patriarchy. Torvald does not inquire about Mrs. Linde's job in his bank. If he had wished, he could have easily provided employment to Mrs. Linde. However, he obdurately tells Mrs. Linde that widows should not work.

Nora's jealousy comes from learning Mrs. Linde's hardships. In spite of recognizing Torvald's recognize the verbal and psychological abuses she experiences a sense of inferiority because she lives off her husband's money and faces no scarcity. Torvald. For Butler (1990), gender performance is "a strategy of survival within compulsory systems [that] is produced through a stylized repetition of acts" (pp. 139-140). Nora falsely tries to convince herself that she is also a considerable individual in the household, contributing significantly to the family. After the first

confidential conversation, Nora constructs another “hide-and-seek” game with Mrs. Linde. Her feminine insecurity coerces her to assert superiority by revealing selective secrets. Her exaggeration of those secretive past events however ultimately shows her the hideous domestic subjugation. Although, her apparent silliness makes Torvald powerful to dominate her, reducing her to a mere marionette, still her actions concurrently reveal her micro-level empowerment, as she plots a route to subtly resists the constraints foisted by patriarchal authority.

The Epiphany

Torvald mocks Nora for being an “expensive bird,” and Nora even accepts this portrayal. She obsequiously asks for absolution without having committed any mistakes. One of the most notable manifestations of gender bias is the frequency with which women apologize, often unnecessarily (Woods, 2024). Modern definitions of gender violence expand beyond visible, immense domestic abuses to include the subtle yet pervasive patriarchal misery inflicted on women. Judith Butler’s (1993) insight is predominantly relevant here:

The name takes the place of an absence, covers that absence, and reterritorializes that vacated position. Inasmuch as the name emerges as a site of loss, substitution, and phantasmatic identification, it fails to stabilize identity (p. 150) Torvald’s address to Nora using diminutive names—“my skylark,” “my little songbird,” “my squirrel”—functions exactly as Butler theorizes: these names hide Nora’s true identity and replace it with an imaginary version of womanhood that aligns with Torvald’s desires. This illustrates how gender violence can operate symbolically, strengthening patriarchal control at the level of language and social expectation. It highlights that patriarchal oppression is not limited to physical or financial domination but also includes understated forms of identity erasure and psychological suppression.

A similar pattern appears in the Bollywood movie *Mrs* (2025), which demonstrates how girls in South Asian Patriarchal societies are unappreciative, ungrateful and are taken for granted as a wife and daughter-in-law within their husband’s family. The father and son don’t feel they’ve done any wrong because their actions aren’t challenged ever (Sharma, 2025). Like Nora in *A Doll’s House*, the heroine Richa suffers under systemic patriarchal oppression but ultimately succeeds in breaking the chains by leaving her husband’s house and chasing her goal

of becoming a professional dancer. Both narratives emphasize the epiphany that comes only after enduring numerous physical, sexual, and mental harassments. Similarly, Torvald depreciates Nora's hard work in decorating the house for Christmas, calling it "the dullest" (Ibsen, 1923, p. 5), even though she had previously locked herself in to prepare the decorations. Just as Richa's emancipation challenges the expectations imposed by her family, Nora's inhibited labour and repressed autonomy highlight the subtle yet pervasive forms of patriarchal control, informing that both women's awakenings emerge from resistance to systemic oppression.

In the final act, as Nora gets ready to leave, Torvald's temperament visibly vacillates, and he proposes that they continue living together as "brother and sister." This proposal emerges precisely at the moment when Nora has gained awareness of the inseparability of her inner consciousness and social existence, resonating Butler's (1990) assertion that "for inner and outer worlds to remain utterly distinct, the entire surface of the body would have to achieve an impossible impermeability" (p. 170). Nora's awakening exposes the artificiality of the role Torvald assigns her, his actions and words do not seem moral but more as an attempt to preserve his shallow prestige. As Ledger (2008) observes, "a woman cannot be herself in contemporary society; it is an exclusively male society with laws drafted by men, and with counsel and judges who judge feminine conduct from the male point of view" (p. 33). Anticipating such societal restrictions, Ibsen portrays Torvald as belligerent force to maintain his authority that continues to deny Nora's voice as his spouse but seeking to keep her as a symbolic "doll" without acknowledging her individuality. Torvald resists for the separation—not because he desires to maintain his marriage or he loves Nora but to protect his public image and masculine honour. Somehow, he appears ethically true with his declaration that "no man would sacrifice his honour for the one he loves" (Ibsen, 1923, p. 57) that ultimately reveals the doggedness of patriarchal values and a self-centred moral framework that depicts the reality that genuine transformation is impossible.

Nora's epiphany empowers her to dismantle all her previous meekness, ultimately confronting and rejecting Torvald. However, this moment is melancholic as she witnesses the full extent of Torvald's hypocrisy. Frank (1993) observes that "individuals are conditioned by the ideologies present in society to construct and use their body in accordance with these ideologies, stripping them the right of making their own decisions" (p. 47). Variation and improvisation emerge when social

practices allow the body to understand itself, its limits, and its capacity to find new resources (Frank, 1993, pp. 48-49). Nora sees Torvald as a selfish autocrat, a realization that shocks him because her departure threatens his social reputation. As Butler (1990) argues:

The masculine subject only appears to originate meanings and thereby to signify. His seemingly self-grounded autonomy attempts to conceal the repression which is both its ground and the perpetual possibility of its own ungrounding. But that process of meaning constitution requires that women reflect that masculine power and everywhere reassure that power of the reality of its illusory autonomy (p. 57).

For Butler, autonomy is treated as natural, self-originating, and unquestionable. The woman becomes the “Other,” her primary role being to sustain the man as the central subject; women’s conformity keeps masculine authority alive. Torvald appears sovereign only because Nora continually feeds that illusion; his masculinity is built upon her subjugation. Even at this stage, he attempts to affirm control and keep her as his object so that he can remain the subject. He pleads, “My poor little Nora, I quite understand; you don't feel as if you could believe that I have forgiven you . . . I have forgiven you everything. I know that what you did, you did out of love for me” (Ibsen, 1923, p. 52). Torvald’s attempt to degrade and forgive Nora, who is neither criminal nor culpable, reveals his narcissistic and controlling nature—one that has incarcerated Nora throughout their marriage. Nora declares (Ibsen, 1923):

I mean that I was simply transferred from papa's hands into yours. You arranged everything according to your own taste, and so I got the same tastes as your else I pretended to. . . . When I look back on it, it seems to me as if I had been living here like a poor woman-- just from hand to mouth (p. 54).

At this moment, Nora is adamant and decisively exits Torvald’s house, sarcastically thanking him while rejecting his forgiveness. Her language transforms, reflecting a newfound authority and rationality but also symbolizes the potential liberation of all women enduring absurdist patriarchal constraints. Butler’s (1993) insight illuminates the significance of this moment:

The example of physical pain thus gives way, through a textual detour through sleep, dreams, and the imaginary, to an analogy with hypochondria and finally to an argument that establishes the theoretical indissolubility of physical and imaginary injury (p. 58).

Butler proves that symbolic or imaginary forms of oppression such as restrictive norms, demeaning language, and gendered expectations have material consequences on the lived body. In Nora's case, the collective effects of symbolic violence caused by Torvald—his autocracy, and belittlement— give Nora real psychological and emotional injuries. Her departure denotes her shatter from these materialized constraints, reclaiming agency over both her body and social identity.

Nora is adamantly and remarkably exits his house sarcastically thanking Torvald while ditching his forgiveness. His declaration, "You will still remain in my house—that is a matter of course" (Ibsen, 1923, p. 51), diminishes Nora to a possession rather than an independent subject. This objectification is further strengthened when he forbids her from raising their children, claiming that her presence would morally destroy them, even though his own ethical catastrophes remain unquestioned. However, she even accepts Torvald's decision. He has consistently disparaged Nora, revealing his callousness, and his anger now becomes heavier upon himself. Torvald cannot accept Nora's refusal and behaves outlandishly. He deludes her into believing that she cannot live alone because she is supposedly still a kid, unaware of worldly things. Conversely, this liberation carries both misfortune and boon. Nora had expected Torvald's support, but instead of supporting her, he considers her his villain. According to Torvald, Nora's first role as a mother and a wife do not allow her to leave home.

In part, this trajectory is enabled by Krogstad; his decision of not exposing phoney sets Nora's itinerary toward emancipation. The symbolic "door slam" scene represents a Butlerian materialization of resistance, in which the emblematic injuries she has suffered explode into a vital bodily act that rebuilds her identity. Nora recognizes that she has always been Torvald's doll-wife, dancing according to his commands. Mrs. Linde plays crucial role for her liberation: first, she becomes a catalyst to emerge awareness in Nora regarding responsibilities; second, her amendment with Krogstad changes his rebellious attitude to Nora. Ibsen did not give Nora the same tragic ending as his friend Laura Keiler, who was imprisoned to a mental asylum simply for borrowing money to travel to Italy to save her husband's life. The parallelism in their stories inspires Ibsen to write *A Doll's House* to give justice to his friend, revealing the transformative possibility of resistance and self-determination.

Conclusion

A Doll's House is the portrayal of pervasive patriarchal subjugation to women. Despite living a seemingly lavish life, many women, like Nora, are still suffocated by patriarchal domination, especially in terms of economic independence. The psychological abuses in minimalistic matter compel the victim toward an eventual outburst. After enduring everyday harassments, Nora explodes at the end. However, when she realizes how she has lived as a mere puppet in her married life, she raises her voices and asserts her freedom. Inspecting the micro actions and language of Torvald reveals his hypocrisy and emotional coldness towards his wife. Instead of being grateful for Nora's sacrifices, he further compels her to feel guilty. This awakening leads Nora to act decisively, symbolized by the iconic slamming of the door. Butler's theory of gender performativity and materiality illuminates this dynamic which explains that repeated prescribed acts of femininity empower masculine authority more but symbolic and linguistic abuses on women extremely affect their bodies. Nora's decision to leave Torvald thus embodies not only a rejection of his authority but also a material performance of resistance: she rejects the imposed "doll-wife" identity, reclaims agency over her body, and distorts the illusion of Torvald's tyranny. The iconic slamming of the door surpasses the personal resonating with Butlerian materialization of rebellion, suggesting all women to confront and challenge the structural and symbolic abuses imposed upon them in patriarchal societies.

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