

Reconnoitering the Feminine-Voice in Henrik Ibsen's Plays: A Feminist Eye on the Lady from the Sea and a Doll's House

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ABSTRACT

Internationally acclaimed that Norwegian playwright Henrik Ibsen came under considerable scrutiny and criticism in Europe in the late nineteenth century, owing to his obsession with women's issues, which were certainly conservative at that time. Ibsen's writings were a critique of the existing social structure of his times, referring to the beliefs, values, conventions, and moral standards of the nineteenth-century European middle class. The framework supported the idea of a protecting husband and a submissive, obedient wife. This research delves into the nature of feminine vocal in Ibsen's *The Lady from the Sea* and *A Doll's House*. The main focus is on Nora's and Ellida's developing consciousness. Because of their subordinate place in the social structure, they have to bang the door violently in the face of patriarchy and domesticity. By breaking down the patriarchal social framework that marked eccentric design, they've managed to catalyze their own self-advancement. Through inner growth, they are able to see beyond their home and experience a bigger world outside. As women are subordinate to men, they suffer patriarchal oppression, which they struggle against unrestricted them on or after the masculine dominion as well as discrimination to which they are subjected to. Both plays send a clear message to society that women, be they rich or poor, will no longer tolerate oppression of any form. Rather, they will rise against the shackles of the patriarchy. This study makes much use of gender studies, feminism, patriarchal sexual politics, gender performativity, and objectification in its assessment as well as endorsement of claims.

KEYWORDS: Feminine-Voice, Patriarchal-Dominion, Reconnoiter, Sex-doll, Object.

ARTICLE DETAILS

Published On:
30 January 2026

Available on:
<https://irijsh.com/>

INTRODUCTION

Ibsen, in his plays *The Lady from the Sea* and *A Doll's House*, concentrates on the conditions of women in a masculine dominion world where they are suppressed, oppressed, alienated and dominated. Women have always been seen as an object in patriarchy-dominated society. The woman's identity is unclear, as she is not indicated as someone's mommy, offspring, or spouse. On the contrary, their identity is represented through masculine-oriented concepts associating objects with them. Nora and Ellida are both shown to be involved in marriages which results in the victimization of each of them. In *A Doll's House*, Helmer perceives Nora by means of his playfellow to pass his leisure time. He desires to restrict her using limited vocabulary. She appears as an everybody's back and call especially enjoying herself with kids' and performing dances to satisfy Helmer's needs. Nora decides to leave Helmer because she saw his true nature and was disgusted by it. Nora's leaving Helmer astonishes the community as well as some critics. This astonishment stems from its violation of the social law. Nora's voice rises to revolt against the established patriarchal ideologies. In Ibsen's play *The Lady from The Sea*, Ellida is a smart and courageous enough to question the family structure. She finally assents to patriarchal norms and places herself at the mercy of the hegemony of men, as well as the expectations and constraints of society concerning women. She shows features of submission, silence, complacency and possessiveness.

Nonetheless, she places importance on the family values connected to both marriage and divorce. Her autonomous freedom is her 'priority' in resisting the effective patriarchal norms and values. In Ibsen's play, Ellida challenges the patriarchal ideas and practices of the 19th-century society and stands for her ideas. She makes attempts to defy the domination of the capitalist middle

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class without success. She does not refuse to become a mother and a wife but it is on the condition that she will only become one when she completely achieves mental and physical independence. One's understanding of the concept of 'self' depends on a family system present in society. Thus, Ellida raises her voice for her individual freedom. In the context of a patriarchal social framework, women are often regarded and treated as objects of commodification (Andersen 430). The concept of a "play thing" refers to an object or item that is used for recreational purposes or entertainment. A masculine engages with the commodity at his leisure, driven by his own interest in it. For this reason, this article will explore the feminine voice analyzing Ibsen's both plays from feminist perspective (Jackson 50).

LITERATURE REVIEW

The nineteenth century was a period marked by rigid patriarchal structures that defined women's roles within domestic, social, and legal spheres. European societies, such as Norway, sought to place women firmly under the yoke of marriage, motherhood, and conformity, losing the element of individuality, self-sufficiency, and speaking power that they did possess. Feminist sociologists argue that European societies are patriarchal ones; they are a part of a men's world that constrains the potential for women to do, say, or be as they pleased. There was a silencing or dismissal of women's voices in these societies, as were their desires, feelings, and aspirations.

Ibsen began his career as a pioneering playwright who challenged these basic premises by offering stark depictions of the world of social convention, particularly within the realms of matrimony and domesticity. Ibsen's works vividly capture the psychological consequences of a patriarchal order, favoring the lives of women, particularly those who were governed more by the demands of convention as opposed to desire. Women, his female protagonists, particularly live with a sense of tension, going along while also defying convention, which speaks volumes for the nature of the lives of women in the nineteenth century. In his works, the struggle towards self-determination is particularly highlighted.

The Lady from the Sea written in 1888, Ellida Wangel is depicted as being in a conflict between her commitment to her marital union and her tremendous, almost uncontrollable thirst for freedom. She is a wife to Dr. Wangel, but she also feels an unquenchable thirst that springs from a psychological alienation, emotional confinement, and a sense that she is simply an outsider in her own home (Fjelde, *Four Major Plays: Vol. II* 238-245). The huge love she feels for the ocean serves as a counter-space to man's domination, symbolizing freedom, non-fixity, and the ability to control her own destiny. As a wife, Ellida's conflict is a microcosm for women who are constrained by a social contract that fails to take into consideration her emotional and psychological well-being. As she begins to find her own path toward independence and honesty about her feelings, we can understand the importance of independence to a full, human connection. Similarly, in *A Doll's House* written in 1879, the social function of bourgeois marriages in women's lives is revealed in Nora's journey. Nora appears to conform to a child-like image in her submission to Bergen's society in the novel's outset, only to find her awakening in terms of power in marriage relationships itself (Balaky & Sulaiman 35; Bhat 163). She comes to recognize her objectification rather than personhood in Bergen's life and makes a point to assert herself in terms of her education and autonomy.

Nora's exodus from her husband's abode stands as the bold opening with patriarchal expectations, giving a signal to an emerging woman's voice pushing against convention in society. Together, these plays demonstrate how women's voices are stifled under patriarchal power and how self-knowledge can ignite resistance. In fact, feminist thought posits that it is only when a woman occupies an active subject position in a relationship and society, rather than that of an object, that her true emancipation is achieved. As illustrated, for instance, by de Beauvoir (16) and Ruth (62), voice pertains not merely to words but is a form of agency, choice, and moral consciousness. Ibsen's portrayal of voice thus forms part of a larger indictment of sex dictates that proscribe what women are allowed to do and that rob them of their right to a say in shaping their own lives. This work places itself within that historical and social framework to analyze how women's voices serve as instruments of resistance in both texts. In tracing the psychological arcs of Nora Helmer and Ellida Wangel, it seeks to demonstrate how voice, decision, and autonomy come together in the struggle against patriarchy. Understanding these dynamics is essential not only for appreciating Ibsen's contribution to modern drama but also for recognizing the enduring relevance of women's voices in contemporary discussions of gender equality and social justice (Aryal 1; Bulut Sarikaya 75; Woolf 228).

RESEARCH METHOD

This article is qualitative research and during conducting the work on following methods and procedures have been pursued. For the purpose of this research, both primary and secondary resources are analyzed. As primary resources, the texts *The Lady from the Sea* and *A Doll's House* have been examined to explore the aspects of woman suppression which directly affect their individual freedoms. And in case of secondary resources, the researchers have gone through several texts based on the theory of feminism, patriarchal sexual politics, gender performativity and objectification etc. (Butler 23). In addition, various research papers, articles, and essays written on Ibsen's both plays have already been studied. Social, cultural, historical books relevant to

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this topic of article have also been used. Moreover, the study has made the use of library resources, critical texts, articles, etc. as the secondary resources of this paper.

DISCUSSION

Exploring the Woman's Voice in The Lady from the Sea

Ibsen's *The Lady from the Sea* reconnoiters women's psychological struggles and quest for autonomy within nineteenth-century Norwegian patriarchal society. The play foregrounds the restrictive social norms that limit women's freedom and inhibit their emotional and intellectual development. Through the character of Ellida Wangel, Ibsen discloses the tensions between marital duty and personal freedom, portraying a woman torn between domestic attachment and an overwhelming desire for self-determination. Ellida is deeply devoted to her husband, Dr. Wangel, yet feels alienated within his household and disconnected from her stepdaughters. Still, she lives in a place that looks out onto the vast sea, she does not become a part of the ordinary world that the sea represents, and this ache bothers her. Her turmoil causes her to question the validity of her marriage because, instead of being a commitment based on love, her union resembles more of an agreement based on financial needs more transactional than familial. She boldly charges that her husband has "bought" her, defining marriage not as a bond but as possession (Ibsen 304). For Ellida, marriage needs to be a visceral connection that suffuses the body and soul, not a social expectation forced upon her.

Ellida's passion for liberty is ubiquitous through the imagery like the tide, particularly the sea and the dying Mermaid the artist, Ballested, depicts. Her being on the land, far from the sea, has caused her to die in the brackish waters, struggling to stay alive in exactly the same manner as her own plight to stay alive in the stiff, domesticated environment of Wangel's home. The sea, on the contrary, represents unlimited liberty, self-discovery, as well as society void of patriarchal rule. Another factor Ibsen utilizes to create depth of emotional turmoil in Ellida is her preoccupation with the enigmatic Outsider guy who originally possessed a symbolic, non-physical connection to the protagonist. Their dialogues on the sea, sea creatures, as well as the call of the sea have carved the Outsider as the epitome of unlimited liberty as well as release (Ibsen 268). Ellida's fixation on the sea as well as the Outsider soon reaches the level of mental imprisonment, creating confusion amongst the audience on whether things really did occur or were merely the stuff of fantasy. Critics, including Lou Andreas-Salomé, have developed the theory Ellida is imprisoned behind psychological chains as opposed to actual chains due to desires yet to be realized as well as the fear of making decisions. Her fixation on the sea as well as the Outsider has disrupted her marriage, led her to be isolated from the family, as well as multiplied her sufferings.

In spite of her non-traditional nature, Ellida is clearly not averse to marriage, motherhood, and even the idea of having a partner. She simply requires equality and an open channel of communication and mutual understanding. She is of the firm belief that social change and women's emancipation do happen through non-violent and collaborative approaches. Ellida faces the climax of her emotional turmoil when faced with choosing between her lover and her husband. What is perhaps more telling is the fact that Ellida is adamant on making a choice since only then can she be set free from captivity. "I have to talk to him myself. It's the only way I can make a free choice" (Ibsen 305). The final goal is reached when Dr. Wangel relinquishes his paternalistic power and allows Ellida complete liberty and power of choice regarding her life and future. In doing so, he is breaking down Ellida's perceptions of marriage as captivity and making her face her psychological bondage. Once granted liberty and freedom of choice, Ellida turns away from her lover and understands the power he has does not actually exist. The Outsider is no longer either scary and appealing simultaneously; hence, Ellida is finally set free from her psychological captivity (Ibsen 320). Andreas-Salome explains how it is imperative that the Outsider comes back home, since then can Ellida gain psychological liberty and adulthood. Therefore, Ellida, a woman, towards inner freedom, which she finds not in fleeing her social bonds, as typically expected, but in choosing her life, as she does, with awareness as well as respect. Ibsen, consequently, seems to suggest that freedom, in reality, lies neither in fleeing our social bonds, nor in our altering them; freedom lies in altering our perceptions of our bonds. Ellida's voice, therefore, emerges as a powerful feminist declaration asserting a woman's right to decide her life, her autonomy, as well as her inner freedom.

Exploring the Woman Voice in A Doll's House:

A Doll's House is an exploration of the Norwegian character Nora who was living in an era where men are in control. This play created social impact since it was noticed by media and social organizations in the entire world. This led to the beginning of the social dialogue concerning culture and how society considers women in society; particularly in the context of the family. Importantly, the main theme of the play was the marriage of the Norwegian female character Nora and her husband Helmer after nine years of marriage. In the play, Nora broke the trust of her partner due to her deceit. In the novel, Helmer considers women childish and hopeless; nevertheless, the character recognizes the importance of considering the morals of women. From the novel's theme and contents, Nora decided to end her marriage and explore the world because she knew Helmer was not ready to uphold the morals of society as much as he demanded the same from her.

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A Doll's House discusses a lot of hegemonial problems pertaining to the position of a woman regarding her husband and her home. The drama depicts the contexts of a married woman being controlled too much by her husband. Nora communicates her insight what she has first deceived and got injustice from her father and later on by Torvald (Ibsen, 1992: 122). Nora is presented, once considered a darling daughter, now a humble wife who needs her husband's guidance on what to do, what to wear, etc. She cannot exercise independent judgment and is a perfect model of loyalty to her husband. Nora's dependency on men is a corruption, as she puts it, just like treating her children as if they were toys without realizing it. The mindset of The Doll's House causes this corruption. Nora leaves the play alone, dissatisfied and aged, just like the entrance of Mrs. Linde. Beyond The Doll's House, Nora's journey can be seen as analogous to the culmination of a long and painful illness that turns fatal (Mano Ranjani 751).

Thus, her very existence becomes to death. The title of the play itself puts us in touch with the notion of power. The audience of A Doll's House deems that the occurrences of the events in Helmer's house have a resemblance with gaming of child wherein the puppets are in a puppeteer's control and in that way creating an artificial existence. It is widely acknowledged that Nora remained inside the boundaries of the big bed room from the opening of the play till to the final act. It is the evident of the outset of drama, Nora is represented as a vulnerable, intellectually limited, and reliant wife. The action sustained in the Act-II and Act-III: Nora stated here after marriage with Torvald she got the hands of him that the last shift from her father to her partner where her feeling of big married room turns into a captivated beast room for her husband's patriarchal psychology. She had no say how to live well independently rather than a doll. A wife material, mostly submissive to any time for sex without ensuring her approval. Everything happenings on her like a barbie doll, a doll of her father, a doll of her husband, and her children will be her future sex-doll. She nothing but a play material in regards of whimsicalness. Based on the aforementioned words, it may be inferred that Torvald has seen her as an object akin to a "doll," meant to be manipulated and appreciated. He gets social satisfaction by possessing a visually appealing and youthful wife, whom he proudly showcases to others as a symbol of his success. This act incites envy among his peers when he escorts her away from social gatherings to fill his carnal desire, therefore satisfying his greater excitement resulting from her dance. This scene can be analyzed via the lens of feminist ideological criticism. According to the theoretical framework, it is possible to uncover the representation of Nora. Nora is a young lady individual residing under a societal framework characterized by patriarchy.

The character who is most victimized in A Doll's House with respect to personal and social impact is Nora. She is not only insulted by Torvald and Krogstad; she considered by means of a barbie doll and not a human being. Nora undergoes mental torture in the play and her physical beauty is shown in the dancing part. Ibsen's play, while not representative of a feminist text in a precise level, it certainly does undermine the patriarchal mentality and also masculine ideas about women. In Act III, Nora transforms from a doll-like puppet into a fully-fledged human being, highlighting the need for women to explore and develop their own identities. She departs as an individual lacking a defined identity, driven by the desire to develop into a whole individual. Here, Nora is poised on the brink of complete independence and vitality. However, in his response to Nora's crisis, there is revealed his grip on the old patriarchal codes when he states categorically that no man would surrender his honor and pride for love, even when he confesses his unstinting dedication to his own wife (Ibsen 64). Yet when Nora refuses to concede to the idea of women making those sacrifices, like countless others, she is beginning to see an identity and move away from the relegation of the position of women. She is beginning, perhaps, to understand her position.

Through her introspection, Helena is aware of living under male dominance, from the control of her father to the control of Torvald, without the opportunity to create her own self-identity (Ibsen 66). In response, Helena accuses her father as well as her husband of preventing her from realizing her own self-identity, leading her to have a sense of an unfulfilled life (Ibsen 67). This awareness leads Nora to become disenchanted and disbelieving in marriage on account of its foundation on illusions. She considers herself a "doll-wife" locked inside a warm and comfortable "play-room" at home, just like when she was considered an object as a young girl, and admits to herself that "such play-acting formed the foundation" for the marriage she was in (Ibsen 68). Finally, "Nora concludes...her principal task is to learn...something for herself...he will not tell me a single word.... And I will go.... To have freedom and independence" (Ibsen 69).

However, the audience is shown a woman who ultimately rejects the expectations of society while simultaneously completing her role as a woman in the home. Initially portrayed as somewhat childish and obedient, the character evolves to confront the expectations placed on her while challenging Krogstad and patriarchal societies in a journey of self-freeing feminine spirit (Ibsen 63-65). Through the character of Nora, Ibsen buries the old stereotype of the woman as irrational, subservient, morally weak creatures in the service of the stereotype of the woman as brave, cunning, individualistic placed in the home with the power to make their decisions in opposition to male power. "He who cannot recognize the other sex as possessing an equal right to the joy of life cannot have joy of life at all."

Finally, Ibsen develops the character of women further by bringing Nora together with the figure of Mrs. Christine Linde, who serves as an alternative image of womanhood. Nora occupies the position of fluttering, innocent youth, while Mrs. Linde is

practical, experienced, and emotionally well-adjusted. In the first act of the play, the character of Mrs. Linde appears to be "dejected and timid." She is even called by Torvald "a frightful bore." However, it becomes apparent later on that Mrs. Linde is imbued with the spirit of honesty and sharp perception of the real situation. She cannot imagine secrecy in marriage and believes Nora and Torvald have to confront the truth. In other words, "the possibility of real mutual comprehension can never come into being under cover of secrecy and lying." This contrast between the two women is also evident when we consider Christine's relationship with Krogstad a relationship that is based on honesty and equality. When Christine and Krogstad meet after years of separation, they are honest and intimate with each other and consider each other "two shipwrecked people" dependent on one another for sympathetic help (72).

Unlike this, Nora and Torvald have their first open conversation about their relationship only after eight years of marriage, thereby exposing the lack of real content in their marriage relationship in the first place. Through this contrast between the two relationships, Ibsen presents his commentary on women who exist merely as decorations while simultaneously highlighting the ambiguity of masculine authority in the process as well. Through this relationship as presented by Ibsen, over the lens of feminist theory as well, Nora's transformation follows the path presented by feminist scholar Elaine Showalter as moving from "angel in the house" turns into "monster" as well. At first sight, Nora appears to be the "angel in the house" as she is the "happy" compliant wife, but soon she appears to be fully aware that she does not fit into this role anymore as well (Ibsen 58–60). This turmoil inside her is portrayed through her mad tarantella dance in Act II due to the dilemma presented by Krogstad's blackmailing as well as her thoughts about suicide to that effect as well (Ibsen 55).

However, as she finds out that her loyalty is met with no similar commitment by Torvald himself, instead of the "little squirrel" that Torvald knows her to be, Nora transforms into her quiet but steadfast persona as well (Ibsen 67). Through her transformation as presented in the play by Henrik Ibsen as well, Nora's shift of authority as relates to her marriage as well as her role as a woman is huge as she finds herself wondering about her role as a "wife," her "upbringing," as well as her "faith" as well as choosing to forego her roles as both the "wife" and "mother" as well to address her own needs as well as her integrity as well (Ibsen 69). This awakening gives rise to a sharper central theme about power struggles, revealing the disintegration of masculine dominance. Torvald, initially confident about his patriarchal authority, displays swelling uncertainty, reflecting on the weakness that lies in masculine authority when a feminist asserts her independence (Ibsen 70).

CONCLUSION

Ibsen investigates the character of the human being, specifically focusing on the female character constrained by marital relationships as the partner is the authority. Ibsen changes the viewpoint to social factors influenced by the patriarchal pattern of society, promoting human character as opposed to individualism. Characters in Ibsen's writing predominantly demonstrate the wish to be free from bondage (Ghafourinia 426). In both stories that displays a person's liberation from the shackles of societal hierarchy, particularly marriage and the subaltern place of a woman. The fiction of societal uprising and the consequent friction displays Ibsen as a masterful writer and a forward-thinking professional who believes and celebrates women's involvement in the workplace. Nora, the rebellious wife, challenges patriarchal norms through constant educational and personal growth, having placed a firm view that a woman can reach above obedience and docility. Another such essentially rebellious character is Ellida, whose rebellious nature is a reaction to the popularly accepted ideas pertaining to marriage and family life. She struggles for freedom (Ghimire 44), even if it means compromising it for a calculated give-and-take situation with her husband and occasional self-reflection. She also believes that change is attainable through the system, providing ideas for a better society. The women in Ibsen's plays who lead are either challenging or affirming of patriarchy in their pursuit of independence and standing up for what they choose to believe in as women and as individuals. These women in Ibsen's plays face mixed situations in terms of costs in their pursuit of self and identity. They take isolation, solitude, or suicide, but fail to perform appropriately, resulting in declining their inferior position and conflicting ambitions.

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