



A Doll's House: Gender Performativity, Quest for Identity and Production Shifts Over Time

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A Doll's House: Gender Performativity, Quest for Identity and Production Shifts Over
Time

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A Thesis in the Field of Dramatic Arts
for the Degree of Master of Liberal Arts in Extension Studies

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Abstract

This work details how Henrik Ibsen's play *A Doll's House* reveals social constructs, gender relations, and collective identity struggles. Ibsen depicts the awakening and liberation of Nora Helmer from her confined, domestic role as a housewife. Nora becomes a symbol for the women in nineteenth century bourgeois society who were perceived as being content with the luxuries of modern culture without being affected by the injustices of a male-governed world outside of their homes. However, analyzing *A Doll's House* through both a feminist and humanist lens, will allow me to demonstrate how Ibsen's performative nature of the play emphasized the importance of freedom from societal and gender constraints of both genders, not just women. I will demonstrate the playwright's original intention of writing a humanist play by focusing not only on the protagonist Nora being trapped in a patriarchal society, but also on other characters and their interactions with each other throughout the play and their own battles to find their true identities in a closed society. I will reveal how identity exists outside a framework of gender and is instead attached to individual autonomy and independence from a closed-off society. By looking at the struggles all the characters face in the play as opposed to only Nora, we are able to get a more complex idea of the factors that shape identity or suppress identity and gain insight in how these characters are trapped in a construct of performance. Using a text-based analysis in conjunction with interpretations of two performances of *A Doll's House*, *Mabou Mines DollHouse* (hereafter *DollHouse*) by Mabou Mines Production and *Nora* by Ingmar Bergman, I will

show the notion of gender as a construct and as a performance across the five chapters of this work. Additionally by engaging with scholarly debates and critiques concerning *A Doll's House* portrayal of gender and identity as well as examining the changes in the aesthetics of the abovementioned productions of the play will help better understand the evolution of scholarly approaches to Ibsen's work and the evolution of theatrical performances of *A Doll's House*. Furthermore, this work will reveal how these evolutions mirror a changing social, cultural, and political environment that strongly reinforces gender performativity.

Dedication

Dedicated to the two strongest women in my life, my mother, Annamaria Perrone, and my Nonna, Pietra Todaro. These two women have taught me the most important lesson in life that has inspired me to pursue such an undertaking and follow my dream. “Those who don’t believe in magic will never be able to find it” has been their life-long motto, which they have passed on to the next generation of women. Thanks to the teachings of these two extraordinary women, I live my life trying to find “magic” in everyday situations and share that “magic” to others around me through reading, writing, and my love for learning. For me, the ultimate “magic” is found in not only acquiring and sharing knowledge but also in harnessing the power of one’s imagination.

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Definition of Terms

“Feminism”: According to the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, feminism is defined as the “belief in social, economic, and political equality of sexes” (Burkett and Brunell 1). Feminism involves political and sociological theories and philosophies concerned with issues of gender difference as well as a movement that advocates for women to have equal rights, opportunities, and legal protection as their male counterparts in society. Some of the central themes explored in feminist theory are oppression, patriarchy, discrimination, stereotyping, and sexual objectification. Feminists and scholars have categorized the history of feminism into three waves. The first feminist wave was in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and it originally focused on the promotion of equal contract and property rights for women and the opposition to the ownership of married women (and their children) by their husbands. However, by the end of the nineteenth century, the first feminist wave’s activism focused mainly on gaining political power, especially the right of women’s suffrage. The second feminist wave refers to the ideas and actions associated with the women’s liberation movement beginning in the 1960s. This second wave of feminism focused as much on fighting social and cultural inequalities as political inequalities by encouraging women to understand aspects of their personal lives as deeply politicized and as reflecting sexist and discriminatory power structures. The third wave of feminism extends from the late twentieth century to the present, arising as a reaction to the perceived failures of the second wave and as a response to the backlash against certain movements created by the second wave. A post-

structuralist interpretation of gender and sexuality is pivotal to the third wave's ideology, as third wave feminists tend to focus on "micro-politics" and question the second wave's parameters on what is deemed positive and not positive for females. As evidenced by the three waves of feminism, there has been an evolution in feminist thought and discourse, which is fundamental in better understanding the role of gender and identity in *A Doll's House* within this evolutionary feminist framework.

"Humanism": According to the American Humanist Association, humanism is defined as a "democratic and ethical lifestance, which affirms that human beings have the right and responsibility to give meaning and shape to their own lives. It stands for the building of a more humane society through an ethics based on human and other natural values in a spirit of reason and free inquiry through human capabilities" (1). The term humanism applies to a variety of western beliefs and philosophies that emphasize the human realm. Humanism's focus is on achieving human needs and wants in the world by relying on compassion and the scientific method, which includes reason, evidence, and inquiry, and rejects supernatural or divine beliefs as ill-formed ideas.

"Realism": Realism is recognized as the first modern movement in art to reject traditional forms of literature, social organization, and art as obsolete in the wake of the Industrial Revolution and the Enlightenment. Realism offered an accurate and unembellished depiction of nature or of contemporary life. Realism rejected imaginative idealization and instead advocated for raw truths and even "ugly" or real portrayals of life with the use of dark, earthy palettes that contrasted with high art's romantic ideals of beauty. Realism was influenced by several intellectual developments in the first half of the nineteenth century such as the following: the anti-Romantic movement in Germany,

with its emphasis on the ordinary man as an artistic subject; August Comte's Positivist philosophy, in which the scientific study of society was encouraged; the rise of professional journalism, with its factual and unbiased recording of current events; and the development of photography with its capability of automatically reproducing visual appearances with precision and truthfulness. Realist artists, such as writers and playwrights, followed the realist movement by rebelling against the established standards of a "well-made play." These playwrights shocked and horrified their audience by abstaining from writing an "ideal" ending in their plays or from writing a clear resolution. These innovators insisted on showcasing social and political issues in a dramatic scenario, imposing their discussions and controversial ideas onto their audience. Considered the father of realism, Henrik Ibsen, founded modernism in theatrical works by being one of the first playwrights to present a slice of real life on stage. Ibsen's *A Doll's House* is a quintessential example of Ibsen weaving contested topics into his plays as he not only wrote a play with a female lead and no resolved ending; in addition, Ibsen's choice of writing about the oppression of women in a patriarchal society as well as the inability of the men in the play to escape the societal pressures and traditional conventions invites Ibsen's audience to question their own individual emancipation and identity in a society governed by limitations and biases.

"Possessive Individualism": Possessive individualism or the idea that a man's normative essence consists in his self-ownership derives from Crawford Bough Macpherson's 1962 study, *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism: Hobbes to Locke*. Possessive Individualism is a "conception of the individual as essentially the proprietor of his own person or capacities, owing nothing to society for them... Society

consists of relations of exchange between proprietors. Political society becomes a calculated device for the protection of this property and for the maintenance of an orderly relation of exchange” (Macpherson 3). Macpherson’s concept of possessive individualism is helpful in analyzing the intersecting dimensions of gender, race, domesticity, ownership, and the self in Ibsen’s *A Doll’s House*.

“Domestic Individualism”: In the book *Domestic Individualism: Imagining Self in Nineteenth-Century America*, Gillian Brown uses a deconstructionist approach to untangle the meaning of individualism in America in the nineteenth century. Brown studies the domestic constitution of individualism, delineating how the values of interiority, order, privacy, and enclosure associated with the American home help construct patterns of selfhood and identity.

“Dreamplay”: August Strindberg, a prolific novelist and playwright, wrote *A Dream Play* where Strindberg’s expressionist vision of creative exploration emphasized freedom and a desire to transcend beyond the superficial to the fundamental element and aspect of all things in order to represent the interior state. Inspired by Hindu and Buddhist ideas, the structure of the play reflects this expressionist attitude and challenges the orthodox social conventions attached to creative work as Strindberg removed the traditional division into acts and replaced a linear and smoothly flowing plot with nonlinear scenes that jump through time. Strindberg’s production consisted of dreamplay qualities described as the following: “Everything can happen, everything is possible and probable. Time and place do not exist; the imagination spins, weaving new patterns, a mixture of memories, free fancies, incongruities, and improvisations” (3).

“Gender Performativity”: Judith Butler in her revolutionary book *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* rejects the assumption that sexual difference is the foundational element on which the category of gender is erected. Instead for Butler gender is the “apparatus” that produces sexual difference. According to Butler, this outdated and limited perception of gender is limiting because it adheres to traditional and historical social constraints that categorize gender as binary. Instead Butler unifies the terms gender and performance to introduce a nuanced perception of gender by claiming that gender is performative: “Gender proves to be performance—that is, constituting the identity it is purported to be. In this sense, gender is always a doing, though not a doing by a subject who might be said to pre-exist the deed... There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very ‘expressions’ that are said to be its result” (25-34).

Chapter I.

Introduction

In 1879, realist playwright Henrik Ibsen published *A Doll's House*, which explores the ideological operation of power in the context of gender relations. The first performance took place at the Royal Theatre in Copenhagen on December 21st, 1879. This three-act play's narrative exposed the internal dynamics of a seemingly happy bourgeois marriage of two individuals, in addition to exploring the bitter social reality of the role of women in nineteenth century Norwegian society through the depiction of Nora, a wife and mother oppressed by the patriarchal social system. However, audiences across Europe clearly responded and identified with the characters even though they are Norwegian, which justifies that Ibsen's depiction of women's role in nineteenth century Norwegian society is equal to the reality that women faced in European society as a whole. Additionally, the play not only demonstrates the constant sacrifice of women in a dominantly patriarchal society, but also reveals that individuals of both genders have to deal with several other issues like corruption, materialism, socioeconomic hierarchy, and a reality distorted by patriarchal structures. Ibsen highlights that each individual in the play is in a distinct journey of self-discovery in an attempt to consolidate an identity in a society predicated on class prejudices, unrealistic expectations, and inequality of opportunity. Ibsen utilized the performative nature of the play to advocate for the need of equality and freedom for all individuals of both genders, not just women.

The chief question I will investigate in my thesis is what role does gender and performance play and how have historical productions of the play shifted our understanding of that dynamic over time? The sub-questions I will also explore are the following: What does a close study of all the characters reveal about the relationship between identity and power? How does language in the text help demonstrate these gendered hierarchies in a patriarchal society? How have recent productions of the work in contrast to older productions of the work revealed new understandings of the play and its message? How have contemporary productions explored themes that have been overlooked by the common interpretation that *A Doll's House* is only concerned with ideas of gender? How have these productions over time shifted the conversation from historically situated roles of women to more broad humanistic ideas of identity to a greater emphasis on gender performance and identity? How does analyzing production shifts of *A Doll's House* over time reveal a better understanding of the change in the dynamics between characters through different interpretations of the play and expose the cultural and political tensions of society at the time?

For my thesis, I hypothesize that gender is perceived as a construct in *A Doll's House* or as a set of not entirely set categories of language, categories of affect, categories of behaviors, categories of legal and financial arrangements, and other categories of other forms of cultural expression; and as a result these social constructions heavily shape the way the characters develop an identity and distinct social interaction's under the framework of patriarchy. In my thesis, I would like to explore a back and forth conversation between humanism and feminism in *A Doll's House*, especially as feminist critiques of the play have evolved over time to include a more broadened scope of issues

that are not just concerned with women but a gender dynamic consisting of systems of social constructions of what gets coded as feminine and what gets coded as masculine. I will also look at how these themes that scholars haven't looked at have in fact played out in productions of this play as focusing on production shifts of the play over time will not only offer different interpretations of the play but also introduce new cultural understandings and insights of important tensions in the struggle for identity. This will in turn provide a model or guide as to how we can approach evolving interpretations of other plays and performances across time. I would like to use the play as a way of seeing the historical shifts in the way we think of identity, which will add to the conversation on *A Doll's House*. Furthermore, analyzing gender, performance, and identity in *A Doll's House* would also add to the conversation as to what we should be looking for in the examination of other plays across time.

Throughout the play, Ibsen depicts the intimate relationship of Nora and Torvald based on the enactment of conventional gender roles. Nora is portrayed as the quintessential submissive, economically dependent wife and mother who dedicates her life to caring for her husband, taking care of the children, and obeying the will of her husband. Torvald is depicted as the traditional masculine figure that financially supports his family, takes pleasure in playing the part of the protective and wise husband, and uses any opportunity he can to patronize Nora by treating her like a child who needs intellectual and moral guidance. At the time when *A Doll's House* was written, the patriarchal society not only dictated the standards for both men and women but also allowed for the cultural infantilization and subordination of women. Nora's identity continually changes and molds to please whomever she is interacting with. Nora plays

several different parts in the play, the flirt with Dr. Rank, the strong and assertive woman with Krogstad, and the easiest part to play, the submissive, powerless “true” woman in her marital relationship with Torvald. By the end of the play she can no longer play this role. However, Nora was able to grasp the performative structure of identity and attempts to use her own femininity to claim some power within the patriarchal society by manipulating, deceiving, and lying to Torvald. Regardless, when Nora understands her identity has just been a mere performance to please or deceive the men in her life, she decides to challenge the traditional pre-established tenets of femininity in society and instead leaves her family behind to search for her authentic identity. Nora’s radical decision calls into question the social, political, and cultural institutions which coerced her to perform her gender of an inferior, submissive individual in the first place. *A Doll’s House* challenges the traditional notion of gender, implying that gender is a social construct where an individual needs to play a certain role in order to fulfill a societal demand and expectation; and thus the play suggests an alternative to these conditions which involves exploring gender as a performance.

In *A Doll’s House*, all of the characters are inside constructs of performance, where the language, behaviors, and actions of individual’s construct a performance in order to integrate themselves within the pre-established societal norms. As a result, there are both contested versions of femininity and masculinity that rival the traditional gender dynamic of there being only two categories, male and female, where men are dominant and have the privilege of power and control and woman are powerless victims subject to male domination. However, these constructions of language, culture, and other bodily forms of expression are performances of both male and female roles, where every

individual is attempting to navigate these contested categories, each facing distinct risks and challenges along their journey. Additionally, with the notion that the characters are constantly performing, this suggests that their speech, body language, actions, and the way they relate to one another is filtered through how other individuals in the play perceive them through various cultural assumptions, insinuating that the character's identities are shaped by their own perceptions of what the others in society perceive them as. Furthermore, even though I am observing issues of gender specifically and that generally fits into the broader category of feminism, in analyzing the blocking, staging choices, and aesthetics of the theatrical productions of *A Doll's House*, this reinforces the idea that there is a central human element of the play that transcends the feminist critique. In fact, all the characters are always being engaged in a social performance of their gender, their class, their nationality, their cultural context, and most importantly their personal relationships.

In order to test my hypotheses, I will analyze all of the character's identity battles in the text of the play, not just Nora's, to shed light on the collective identity struggles faced by all the characters in the play. Second, I will use Judith Butler's concept of gender performativity and gender being a social construct to reveal how the character's actions and behaviors are not only influenced by shifting yet ever present societal conventions, but can also be thought of as performative. Third, I will correlate these gender performance patterns I analyze in the text of the play with Crawford Bough Macpherson's concepts of possessive individualism, Gillian Brown's concepts of domestic individualism, and August Strindberg's concept of "dreamplay." Fourth, I will analyze both older and more contemporary productions of the play to highlight how

production shifts over time can depict historical shifts in the way we think of identity, which would not only add to the conversation about *A Doll's House* but also add to the conversation as to what we should be looking for in the examination of other plays across time.

Scholarly Approaches to Ibsen

A Doll's House primarily reveals the universal truths of human identity regardless that the play has been widely perceived as a potent piece of gender critique that has helped advance the women's liberation movement. However, in order to understand where this argument fits into Ibsen criticism and why it is a relevant contribution to the back and forth conversation between humanist and feminist critiques of *A Doll's House*, we must first understand the evolution of scholarly approaches to Ibsen's work and how this progressive rationale concerning gender and identity performativity is mirrored through the changing aesthetics of theatrical productions of *A Doll's House* over time.

Feminist Discourse

Perhaps the most common tendency in the study of Ibsen is to create a discourse about the author as a vanguard for women's rights and feminism. Throughout the play, Ibsen depicts the bleak marital relationship of Nora and Torvald based on the enactment of traditional gender roles. Nora is portrayed as the typical compliant, financially dependent wife and mother who devotes her life to caring for her family and the household. Torvald is depicted as the conventional masculine figure that takes pleasure in thinking of himself as the family's breadwinner and protector, giving him the power to

domineer Nora and control his family. In one of the most important feminist works written, *The Second Sex*, Simone De Beauvoir highlights how the stable hierarchy created in a patriarchal society forced women to accept their passive, submissive position where they were confined to no more than a domestic role: taking care of the household; bearing children; cooking; and serving the men. However, since men fear the potential rebellion of women from their confined, domestic, submissive role in society, the men need to make sure that the women are never allowed to rise in the social hierarchy and remain chained to their familial and marital lives rather than seek alternative identities and independence. As a result, the patriarchal order can be conserved at the expense of all the women in the society. For example, De Beauvoir emphasizes that Nora's domestic life in such a patriarchal society is a reflection of the middle class women in the Victorian era: "They live dispersed among the males, attached through residence, housework, economic condition, and social standing to certain men—fathers or husbands—more firmly than they are to other women. If they belong to the bourgeoisie, they feel solidarity with men of that class, not with proletariat women" (679).

In the article entitled "The *Doll House* Backlash: Criticism, Feminism, and Ibsen," (1989) Joan Templeton further demonstrates how women are powerless in a patriarchal society and argues against the idea of Nora representing the individual in search for his or her identity "for it means that Nora's conflict has essentially nothing to do with her identity as a nineteenth century married woman, a married woman, or a woman. Yet both Nora and *A Doll's House* are unimaginable otherwise" (31). Templeton analyzes certain scenes in *A Doll's House* that support feminism's denouncement of a woman's state in nineteenth century society. For example, when Nora accuses her

husband and her father of treating her like a toy, she provides a living reaffirmation of Wollencraft's major claim in the *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), that women are brought up to be "pleasing at the expense of every solid virtue" as if they were "gently, domestic brutes" (Goulianos 142). When Nora describes herself as a doll wife who has been forced in her everyday life to perform "tricks" for her husband, she is the quintessential example of Margaret Fuller's allegation that man "wants no woman, but only a girl to play ball with" (Rossi 167). Lastly, Templeton declares that "when Nora discovers that she has duties higher than those of a 'wife and mother,' obligations she names as 'duties to myself,' she is voicing the most basic of feminist principles: "That women no less than men possess a moral and intellectual nature and have not only a right but a duty to develop it" (32). Furthermore, Templeton claims that Nora's radical transformation from a naïve child to an assertive and independent woman is in its very essence feminist; for Templeton, the feminism of the play is prevalent regardless of whether or not Ibsen intended it to be so. Katherine Rogers in the essay "A WOMAN APPRECIATES IBSEN" (1974) highlights the subtle psychological means by which society conditions women to affirm the derogatory stereotype that men make of them. Rogers claims that Ibsen dramatized Nora's indifference towards "strangers," her habitual use of unreasonable behaviors to influence her husband, and her strong dependence on her husband's judgment in order to reveal how these actions were not "personal weaknesses in Nora nor biological ones in her sex, but rather the products of society's brainwashing" (92). Rogers argues that Ibsen must have had great empathy for women in order to accurately depict this male-female relationship, debunking critics that ignore Ibsen's feminism and that challenge the notion of this play being mainly about a

woman in search for her own self-realization that can only be done by rejecting her marital and familial life dominated by the wants and needs of a man.

Humanist Discourse

In contrast to this strand of feminist critics, others have elevated the humanist qualities of the play over the more feminist ones. Robert M. Adams in his journal article entitled “Henrik Ibsen: The Fifty-First Anniversary” argued that the play’s true meaning was one advocating for equality of all human beings, not just women: “*A Doll’s House* represents a woman imbued with the idea of becoming a person, but it proposes nothing categorical about women becoming people; in fact, its real theme has nothing to do with the sexes. It is the irrepressible conflict of two different personalities which have founded themselves on two radically different estimates of reality” (416). Furthermore, though *A Doll’s House* does deal with “woman’s place in a man’s world,” Eric Bentley admits in his book *In Search of Theater*, it is more significantly concerned with “the tyranny of one human being over another; in this respect the play would be just as valid were Torvald the wife and Nora the husband,” which is the argument that Templeton attacks (350). Although Ibsen communicates a strong call for women’s rights, the play also contains issues of imprisonment of men in their role in patriarchal society. Gail Finney in the article “Ibsen and Feminism” further expounds on this idea that Ibsen is questioning the societal rules and norms that govern the world of Torvald and Nora in contrast to pinpointing only the unequal power sharing of men and women. Finney claims that Ibsen is attempting to demonstrate how every individual, male and female, in this closed patriarchal society is trapped by these social constructions and facing a collective struggle

to find their authentic identity. Thus, this play addresses the construction of these stereotypical gender roles and then challenges these social gender constructions of what gets coded as masculine and feminine.

Evolution of Feminist Discourse

However, since feminism has evolved over time, it is important to understand the new modern feminist thought in relation to Ibsen's *A Doll's House*. In the article, "'First and Foremost a Human Being': Idealism, Theatre, and Gender in *A Doll's House*," Toril Moi argues that Ibsen's critique of idealism in *A Doll's House* is what created the possibility for his "revolutionary analysis of gender in modernity" (257). Moi highlights the key line of the play to be Nora's statement that she is "first and foremost a human being" (359). Nora's struggle for recognition as a human being is considered a quintessential example of women's battle for political and social rights. However, Moi reveals that "Nora claims her humanity only after explicitly rejecting two other identities: namely, 'doll' and 'wife and mother'" (257). Moi's reading of Nora as an individual who refuses to define herself as a wife and mother is a direct "rejection of Hegel's theory of women's role in the family and society" (258). Hegel, a "great theorist of the traditional, patriarchal, and sexist family structure" argues that if *A Doll's House* is perceived to be about women, then it is not a universal or truly great work of art, basing this assessment on Ibsen's 1898 speech where he opposed the cause of women to the cause of human beings (258). Additionally, Templeton claims that "if Nora wants to be a human being, then she cannot remain a woman" (275). Ibsen, unlike Hegel and Templeton, recognized that the situation of women in the family "would have to change if women were to have a

chance at the pursuit of happiness in a modern society” (258). In traditional feminist rationale, the “human” is marked as male, so the masculine experience is deemed as “universal” but experience that is “female” or about women is framed as being outside of the “human” or universal. As a result, attacks on feminism tend to illustrate unintentionally core principles of feminism—that references to “universal” and “human” are usually made to reinforce that the “human” experience is what has the characteristics associated with masculinity—that women, if they want to be human, must experience these masculine characteristics. But what has been characterized as feminine experiences isn’t universal. Moi denounces critics like Hegel and Templeton for falling into a traditional sexist trap in arguing that since Nora is a woman, she is not universal. This argument illustrates the tenets of modern feminism that isn’t only about addressing “women’s issues,” but rather pointing out how calling some issues “women’s issues” rather than universal issues reinforces the “human/universal-is-masculine” tradition. This is an example of the frequent critique made by feminist scholars that highlight the humanist approach to *A Doll’s House*. Moi claims that critics like Hegel and Templeton “refuse to admit that a woman can represent the universal (the human) just as much or just as well as a man. They are prisoners of a picture of sex or gender in which the woman, the female, the feminine is always the particular, always the relative, never the general, never the norm” (275). Moi insists that Ibsen’s “political radicalism” and “greatness as a writer” stems from Ibsen “himself never once oppos[ing] Nora’s humanity to her femininity” (275).

Possessive Individualism and Domestic Individualism

Josephine Lee in the academic journal article called “Teaching *A Doll House, Rachel*, and *Marisol*: Domestic Ideals, Possessive Ideals, Possessive Individuals, and Modern Drama” (2007) explains the concepts of possessive individualism and domestic individualism, which prove to be helpful in relation to understanding Nora’s quest for her own identity outside of her role as a mother and wife. These modern terms transcend the black and white orthodox humanist versus feminist debate that most current critics of the play would question and challenge, in fact these terms are another way of articulating ways of performing individualism that have gender inflections, without the traditional confinement of needing to pertain to either the male or female gender. Lee analyzes the final memorable scene where Nora asserts that “before all else, [she is] a human being—or anyway [she] ought to become one,” and where she recognizes that there is more to becoming a human being than to just recognizing her equal rights in a marriage or ending her financial dependence on her husband (Ibsen 359). In fact, Nora not only declares that she and her husband must divide their possessions as she states, “I’ll take with me whatever is mine. I don’t want a thing from you, either now or later” but also proclaims that her act of leaving the marriage has negated any responsibility on Torvald’s part as she states, “Don’t feel yourself bound, any more than I will. There has to be absolute freedom for us both” (Ibsen 110-11).

Lee argues that Nora’s own understanding of her humanity and freedom is linked to a modern notion of autonomy, ownership, and independence and that Nora’s own humanity is dependent on that she is the “exclusive owner of herself, her body, and her work,” which call into mind the idea of self as “possessive individual” (623). Lee further explains that the idea of the “possessive individual” comes from the 1962 study called

The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism, in which Canadian political theorist Crawford Bough Macpherson outlined how concepts of individualism, framed by Hobbes and Locke around seventeenth-century market societies and still central for a capitalist society, defined the individual as the “proprietor of his own person or capacities, owning nothing to society for them. The individual was seen neither as a moral whole, nor part of a larger social whole, but an owner of himself” (3). Macpherson argues that this assumption of “possessive individualism” corresponds to the actual relations between human beings in a society ruled by the market, and since the market society has not been overthrown, this assumption still rings valid today. Under this conception, the essence of humanity is characterized by freedom and autonomy from dependence on the wills of others; society can be defined as a system of economic relations; and a political society becomes a means of protecting private property as well as the system of economic relations that stems from owning private property. Macpherson emphasized that the “market society” constitutes the essence of liberal bourgeois democracy and the concept of possessive individualism retains an unrivaled power as a diagnostic tool of the western capitalistic society. Lee further explains that while Macpherson’s formulations did not emphasize either race or gender, many subsequent scholars have utilized the concept of “possessive individualism” to comment about race or gender, one specific scholar being Gillian Brown’s illuminating study, *Domestic Individualism*.

Brown argued that possessive individualism imagines “a self aligned with market relations such as exchange value, alienability, circulation, and competition [formulates] the ‘selves’ within the home as well as, creating different permutations of ‘domestic individualism’” (2). Brown claims that domesticity, previously considered by scholars as

different from individualism, was actually an instrumental part of people's effective understanding of the concept itself. However, Brown contends that she does not view domesticity as "a totalizing force, but a working machinery, one that has served and continues to serve many purposes" (9). Since domesticity like individualism operated in controversial ways in order to sustain the capitalist system, debates about selfhood in nineteenth century America were centered around what could be labeled as domestic individualism. During the modern period of the expansion of the market economy "domestic ideology with its discourse of personal life proliferates alongside this economic development which removed women from the public realm of production and redirected men to work arenas increasingly subject to market contingencies" and gendered ideologies such as "domestic cult of true womanhood" were formulated in ways that helped ease "the transition to a life increasingly subject to the caprices of the market" (Brown 3). Lee also adds to Brown's argument by revealing how gender binaries have long been predicated on "marking these spaces as separate spheres and associating them with different values (public/private, capitalistic/familial, acquisitive/moral), yet ideologies of domesticity and market relations are irrevocably interwoven" (623). As a result, "home" can be thought of as both a physical enclosed place and an ideal and both are crucial to self-definition; as Brown states, "In the midst of change the domestic sphere provided an always identifiable place and refuge for the individual: it signified the private domain of individuality apart from the marketplace" (3). Lee elaborates on Brown's formulations by arguing that the home becomes an "ideal place to examine the tensions of individuation against a myriad of social forces" (623). In order for Nora to become a "proprietor of her own free capacity" she emphasizes the need to demonstrate

her selfhood during the play by rejecting her stereotypical role as only a mother and a wife in the society, dissolving the traditional patriarchal institution of marriage, and renouncing the doll house despite all of her hard work that she has put in to construct a fragile domestic ideal (Macpherson 231). As a result, Lee points out that from the beginning of the play, Nora's identity is "shaped by the needs of the market as well as by the ideal of the 'doll-wife'" (625).

Conversation between Feminist and Humanist Critiques

Lee highlights that *A Doll's House* leaves open key questions that concern both feminism and humanism, which contributes to my attempt to have a back and forth conversation with the feminist and humanist critiques of the play that I am exploring. For example, the play identifies the injustice and inequality women specifically had to endure in nineteenth century society as they were unable to possess property. However, as Lee suggests, the "deep tensions between market forces, the laws that uphold them and the human needs that conflict with them applies to both male and female characters" as all the characters in the play had to combat societal constructions in order to gain their collective freedom and individuality (626).

Gender Performance

Another approach to Ibsen's work is Judith Butler's famous notion of gender as performance or gender performativity in her groundbreaking book *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. Butler claims that gender identity is a product of an individual's actions and behaviors in society. For Butler, an individual's daily

actions, behaviors, physical gestures, clothing choices, and representations all produce what is societally perceived as a masculine identity or a feminine identity. Butler debunks the view that the identity of individuals is a manifestation of one's inner essence and instead exposes the true fabrication that gender identity is based on societal conventions and cultural norms that have developed over time and have been seamlessly integrated in the everyday life of individuals. Furthermore Butler's explanation of gender performativity provides a framework to examine Nora's actions. Butler claims that gendered acts and gestures "are performative in the sense that the essence of identity that they otherwise purport to express are fabrications manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs" (136). For Butler, gender performance is "a strategy of survival within compulsory systems [that] is produced through a stylized repetition of acts" (139-140).

Additionally, as a feminist criticizing contemporary feminism's vocabulary, assumptions, and principles, Butler exposes the internal contradictions in the feminist notions of identity that threaten to undermine the actual goal of feminist political action, which helps me have a more constructive and holistic understanding of feminism. Butler's explains how the terms "women" and "woman" actually have different meanings regardless that they have been used interchangeably. Butler points out that "women" is used in a derogatory manner as men have utilized that term to describe the negative qualities of a class of women, which for the most part is based on criticizing their inferior economic status and commenting on their sexuality. Butler instead advocates for a stronger feminist enterprise with a new feminism that abolishes the need for stereotyping, and in which gender can be used freely without any individual getting vexed. For Butler, mankind has fabricated the concept of sex and gender. Butler claims that in nature there

is no such thing as two real genders. This concept can be very helpful in analyzing not only Nora's journey to find her true identity beyond that of just a mother and wife but that of a human being. Butler's idea of gender as a social construct rather than innate is also helpful in thinking about the collective identity struggle of the other characters in the play, including the men. Butler exposes how conventional notions of gender and sexuality serve to perpetuate the traditional domination of women by men politically, culturally, and socially.

Production Shifts

Comparing the aesthetics of older productions versus more contemporary productions of *A Doll's House* will provide a more detailed and more holistic understanding of the cultural and political underpinnings of the time period when the play was produced as well as demonstrate how the more contemporary productions portray the change and progression in cultural norms and identity politics. In contrasting the older and contemporary productions of *A Doll's House* as well as taking into account various reviews and interpretations of the play, I will analyze the socio-cultural and political context of when the play was produced and reveal how contemporary productions have a different interpretation of the play due to an evolution in the cultural and political context of the twentieth century. This reveals the malleability of the text of a play and how the text can be molded to fit different social and cultural contexts in order to show the evolution of social, political, and cultural issues.

One particular older performance that I will address is Ingmar Bergman's 1981 *Nora*, which doesn't just offer new blocking or staging in terms of aesthetic differences

from other productions about *A Doll's House*, but rewrites the script itself, suggesting a shift from Ibsen's late nineteenth century to Bergman's mid-late twentieth century. *Nora* will not only help better understand the social, political, and cultural environment of the time but also serve as a reference to the changes a more contemporary production like *DollHouse* has integrated into its performances. Analyzing these production shifts over time, in particular these two case studies, *Nora* and *DollHouse*, will help broaden our understanding of social dynamics as these periodic shifts of theatrical productions that showcase different interpretations occur to indicate a reflection or a reaction to a change in broader social issues.

Furthermore, in examining contemporary productions of *A Doll's House*, the evolution of gender and identity politics will be revealed. For example, in one of the contemporary theatrical performances that I will be analyzing, *DollHouse*, the patriarchal power inherent in the system of commodity consumption in today's society is heavily criticized through satire and a powerful performative motif of visual contrast between the characters. The male roles are "doll-sized" or actors whose height does not exceed four feet while the female roles are cast by actresses whose height are all close to six feet tall. In this performance, the scale-to-power ratio has been inverted, illustrating the absurdity of the power imbalance between men and women because of the distorted reality of having tiny men domineer and control women that physically tower over them. This production continues to demonstrate these warped relationships between the men and women by having the characters inhabit a dollhouse that is built to fit the men while the women are forced to contort their bodies to fit into the cramped stage space. By shifting the doll's role in Ibsen's play from a figurative trope to a corporal reality, *DollHouse*

performatively critiques the allegorical function of the doll to fashion modern social constructions of women in a patriarchal society. This production utilized historicization and estrangement to deconstruct commodified objects, like the doll as a symbol of patriarchy that restricts a woman's autonomy and independence while exposing a progressive political and cultural climate in regards to women's rights through a visual representation of a physical imbalance between men and women that shocks the audience for its absurdity and serves as a reminder of how Ibsen's social radicalism was built on early Victorian theatrical values.

Chapter II.

Ingmar Bergman's 1981 *Nora* Case Study

Nora, an adaptation of Ibsen's *A Doll's House* produced by Ingmar Bergman in 1981 and showcased at the Munich Residenztheater, was "originally conceived as a stage trilogy exploring the gender war alongside Bergman's reworking of Strindberg's *Miss Julie* and his [Bergman's] own *Scenes of a Marriage*" (Hickling 1). This stage trilogy was entitled "The Bergman Project." Birgitta Steene describes that all three plays were performed in the same evening on two different stages in the theater, *Nora* and *Julie*, were presented on the main stage with the total duration of the performance amounting to four hours and a half. *Scenes of a Marriage*, a three hour performance, was performed in the Theater am Marstall (661). All three different productions shared the theme of marital crises and gender issues. As Steene explains, in the theater program, "excerpts from all three works were juxtaposed to demonstrate the evolving gender history and sexual strife during the past one hundred years (in Scandinavia). The motifs were specified as Unmasking, Buying and Selling, Breakup, Winners and Losers, Suppression, Deformation, and Role Play" (661).

Initially, Bergman denied an underlying reason why he paired the three plays together stating "I haven't intended to use this project to make any specific statements or draw any conclusions" (L. Marker and F. Marker 18). However, later on, Bergman explained that he intended for there to be thematic connections between the three plays in

“The Bergman Project” with regards to his interest in focusing on the intimate relationship between two human beings in order to unravel an interesting and complex narrative. In the three plays, two human beings and their relationship are scrutinized closely—Nora and Torvald, Julie and Jean, and Marianne and Johan—to “activize the audience...challenge people to make comparisons...and [incite] interesting discussions” (L. Marker and F. Marker 3). Bergman wanted the experimental project to divulge new understandings of gender, of identity, and of the interconnectedness of human beings so that people could formulate better answers to Bergman’s ongoing questions: “What does society—political, religious, pedagogical—do to the relationship between man and woman? Why does it cripple men and woman to such an extent that when they try to live with one another the result is, for the most part a catastrophe?” (L. Marker and F. Marker 3). Bergman understood that the two sexes, male and female, in coexistence dispel important tensions that if resolved could help improve the overall understanding of human beings and diminish the emotionally crippling aspect of solitude.

Bergman’s Adaptations

Ingmar Bergman created a “stripped-down and sped-up version” of Ibsen’s *A Doll’s House* that not only sparked controversy but also shed light on a new and different perspective on Ibsen’s original perception of Nora and Torvald (Hurwitt 1). For some critics, Bergman’s short version “reduce[d] the shock, creating a series of thin, melodramatic flashpoints that lack the subtle fibre of truth” (Hickling 1). Other reviewers applauded Bergman’s Nora stating it was a “boldly transformed theatrical paraphrase and a penetrating clarification of Ibsen’s *A Doll’s House* (L. Marker and F. Marker 19).

Instead, Bergman felt that although Nora's final decision to leave behind her marital and familial life "marked the beginning of the end of sentimentality in domestic drama," he felt that Ibsen could have taken the production one step further (Shirley 1).

The major plot points and conversations between the characters of Ibsen's original are also present in Bergman's *Nora* with the only major difference being that Bergman reduces the cast of the characters. For example, in Bergman's *Nora* the audience only sees these following characters: Nora, Torvald, Nora's only friend Mrs. Linde, Krogstad, and Dr. Rank. Additionally, Bergman removes the minor characters such as the servants and the children in his production. Some critics of Bergman's production have pointed out that the removal of children in the performance causes a loss in the production's complexity and sentimentality. Even though the children are only present in one scene in Ibsen's original play and that they speak no lines, the onstage presence of Nora's children makes her sacrifice even more palpable and real for the audience. Additionally, with the loss of servants in Bergman's play, the audience can no longer hear an important conversation Nora had with Anne, the nurse who took care of her when she was a child and who now looks after Nora's children. Anne gave up taking care of her own children to strangers in order to be able to look after Nora's kids; which introduces another theme about class and socioeconomic struggles in Ibsen's play that is absent in Bergman's *Nora*. Furthermore, without the presence of servants in Bergman's *Nora*, callers would just walk into the room without any introduction, almost as if they are ghosts with only their actions and words giving them a bodily and tangible form.

The structure of Bergman's adaptation of Ibsen's *A Doll's House* varies in that Bergman eliminated one-third of Ibsen's original text. Bergman claimed that cutting

Ibsen's text was essential: "Its always been said that Ibsen was such a marvelous architect of the drama...but in *A Doll's House* he still has immense difficulties with the building, the construction of the drama" (L. Marker and F. Marker 7). In fact, "of the nearly thirty percent of the original text that Bergman has pared away, the deepest and most penetrating of his cuts are aimed at the punctilious exposition and naturalistic 'small talk' with which Ibsen invariably seeks to explain when and how and why characters behave or think as they do" (L. Marker and F. Marker 21). The basic plot of the play in Bergman's production has not changed but "its meticulously constructed logic of cause and effect—which, in Bergman's view, serves only to dissipate its potential imaginative impact on a contemporary audience by closing doors, leaving no other alternatives—has been displaced by an intuitive logic of feeling, sustained by means of associations and contrasts" (L. Marker and F. Marker 21).

Furthermore, Bergman replaced Ibsen's traditional three-act structure with an episodic sequence of fifteen scenes that lack any intermission. Bergman biographers, Lisa-Lone Marker and Frederick J. Marker, describe Bergman's process as a "dismantling of the naturalistic superstructure of Ibsen's *A Doll's House*" (back cover). Bergman insisted that in employing a simplified approach in organizing the structure of the performance, "you make it easier for [Ibsen], you make it easier for the actors, and you make it easier for the audience to grasp what he means" (L. Marker and F. Marker 7). By removing many of the connecting points of Ibsen's realistic narrative, Bergman claimed that the story of the Helmer household could be recounted without "get[ting] lost in all those details" (L. Marker and F. Marker, *Life* 229). In reducing each scene to its

fundamental character interactions, Bergman was able to reveal the biggest strength of his adaptation, which is the more intricate plot substructure supporting Ibsen's work.

Bergman's script purposefully eliminates Nora's entrance alongside the porter and a conversation with the maid Helene. The script begins with Nora shouting, "Come here, Torvald, and I'll show you all the things I've brought" (L. Marker and F. Marker 49). Nevertheless, Bergman enriched the performance by reworking the opening structure of the setting in order to make up for the missing conversations in his script. In the 1981 Munich production, Nora was:

...[A]lready seated, utterly immobile, in the midst of a wilderness of dolls, and other suggestive relics of childhood. Leaning back against the pillows of the plush sofa, she stared out into empty space—virtually the picture of a human doll waiting to be taken up and played with. The very distant and faintly audible sound of an old-fashioned music-box tune [Schumann's "Träumerei" from *Kinderszenen*] added to the strongly oneiric mood of nostalgia and suppressed melancholy that was created by this silent image of her motionless, oddly dejected figure. (Törnqvist 71)

In Stockholm, eight years later, Bergman employed an extremely different opening sequence than that of his original 1981 Munich production. In this performance, there was a notable addition, the presence of Hilde.

Nora was sitting on the sofa reading the end of a fairy tale to her almost identically dressed daughter: '... but a prince and his bride brought with them as much silver as they could carry. And they moved to the castle east of the sun and west of the moon.' The reading was accompanied by sweet, romantic piano music, 'The Maiden's Prayer,' as from a music box. Having received a goodnight kiss from her mother, Hilde left for bed. Nora lay down on the sofa, whistling the tune that had just been heard, put one arm in the air, then let it fall to the floor as her whistling petered out. (Törnqvist 98)

Despite that Bergman employed the same script for both the 1981 Munich production and the Stockholm production, the characterization of Nora is presented as being radically different in these two performances. Bergman was willing to adapt and change the

internal structure of Ibsen's *A Doll's House* to convey a new understanding of Nora, of her relationship to Torvald, and of her struggles with her domestic role in society.

Additionally, Bergman employed an innovative element in his production by having Nora surrounded with the other four main characters while all of the actions are being unfolded on stage. John Northam, an Ibsen scholar, claims that central to *A Doll's House* structure is "Ibsen's construction of situations for the characters surrounding Nora which in one way or another illustrate her predicament" (27). As a result, "Nora's desperate struggle is watched all the time...by the other characters, by those four, impassive figures seated around the central platform" (L. Marker and F. Marker 9). The dreamlike qualities of Bergman's production helped justify this artistic choice as the characters' ability to effortlessly glide in and out of the Helmer household without any realistic entrances or exits highlighted how Nora was instead trapped in the small playpen area in the center of the stage. Nora could not freely move around the stage like the other central characters. Also when the characters left the Helmer house, they remained present, as spectators on the Bergman's stage, watching Nora at all times just like the audience of the performance.

With Bergman's original staging, Ibsen's text became "a magical threshold made visible, and whose attention and presence seems to become the very subject of the *mise-en-scène*" (Koskinen 84-5). Nonetheless, Bergman employed this device not only to highlight Nora's entrapment and her struggle to liberate herself from the prescribed societal role but also to show how the other main characters were also confined in their own prison. The ominous back wall of the enclosed set coupled with the lack of any offstage space helped depict the other characters just as constricted as Nora. Thus, it is no

surprise that Nora's final exit was truly a revolutionary moment as all of the characters in the performance lacked any true freedom and independence as they were locked in a cramped stage space, unable to ever break free from this hell of a confinement.

Bergman's Style

In an interview with Lise-Lone Marker and Frederick J. Marker, Bergman reveals the reasons behind the dramaturgical and scenographic changes and cuts he made to Ibsen's original *A Doll's House*. Bergman also explains his artistic and creative choices to employ Strindbergian elements in his performance and his personal motivations for focusing on showcasing more of the psychological portrait of the relationship of Nora and Torvald over Ibsen's original choice of focusing on solely the character of Nora. Bergman states that "[One] ought never to cut Strindberg—but [one] should always cut Ibsen" as Ibsen had "such enormous difficulties with himself" (L. Marker and F. Marker 7). Although Bergman acknowledges that Ibsen was an extraordinary architect of drama, Bergman claims that Ibsen struggled with the creation and the structure of the drama in *A Doll's House*.

Bergman asserts that Ibsen always had problems in creating seamless and continuous transitions and connections between the scenes in comparison to Strindberg who did not encounter these same difficulties in developing fluid transitions. In fact, Ibsen constantly wanted to disclose the reasons for the entrances and exits of the characters on stage, as he would often provide realistic explanations for the character's absences, entrances or exits, and for their actions in order to let the audience know everything that was occurring on stage. Bergman argues that his method of employing

judicious cuts throughout the performance facilitates the process of better understanding Ibsen's underlying messages and meanings, and provides more clarity for the actors playing the different characters on stage, for the spectators of the show, and for Ibsen himself. For many critics, Bergman's cutting of Ibsen's play stripped the performance in a way that allowed there to be a more central focus on Nora's struggles as the scenes became more isolated from one another, forcing the spectators to pay attention to all of the details in each scene.

Bergman's style emphasized cutting out any distraction that could transport the audience away from the performance as for Bergman his goal is to "make the spectator forget everything around him—the other people there, the settings, everything. So that he can concentrate entirely on the human beings—on the faces" (L. Marker and F. Marker 5). For Bergman, the most important aspect of film and theater is the study of human beings and how they interact with one another. In order to make sure the audience participates in this study of human beings, Bergman insists that the audience must not get lost in all of the details, which commonly occurred with Ibsen's play.

Bergman claims that it is essential to "create a reflection of reality—to capture a heightened intensity, a distillation of life—and to guide the audience through the magical process" (L. Marker and F. Marker 5). By doing so, the experiences become alive and tangible to the spectator, which allows him or her to create an even deeper connection to the performance and its "magical process." In employing dream-like transitions between the scenes, the notion of time no longer exists and the audience can focus all of their attention to Nora who is on the stage throughout the production as the other characters are already there surrounding her as she reacts to each one of their presence and their

actions. As Bergman's play becomes "virtually a dreamplay," it allows the audience to witness the multiplicity of ways into and out of the world Ibsen has created rather than closing off the many possibilities that Ibsen was guilty of with his isolated scenes and characters.

Bergman's Ending

Some critics have claimed that Bergman's ending did not have as a dramatic impact as Ibsen's original final scene in *A Doll's House*. In the 1981 Munich production, Bergman placed only Nora and Torvald onstage in order to try and have the audience focus on the troubles of the marital relationship between these two individuals. Bergman claimed, "the consequences of Nora's choice were meant for Torvald and Torvald alone" (L. Marker and F. Marker 14). However, Nora's rather easy final exit through a hidden closet door at the back of the stage, which cracked open after her last line, did not match the feeling of the opening tableau where Nora was described as a "doll waiting to be taken up and played with."

On the other hand, the Stockholm production, which differed by the Munich production because of the presence of Hilde, attempted to demonstrate the powerful effect of Nora's radical final decision on the familial relationship in the Helmer household. Bergman argued that the consequences of Nora's final decision could not just be felt by Torvald and thus, as the show ended, Bergman added the presence of Hilde on stage. Hilde had just been woken up by the yelling and arguing of her parents and in comparison to the bedtime story of the show's prologue, Hilde, along with the spectators of the show, watched the not so happy ending of her parents' marriage. Nora "left via the

auditorium—as if she were a member of the audience, departing from the theatre along with them” (Törnqvist 106). So the impact of Nora’s stomping offstage and her decision to leave behind her familial and marital life behind was undermined by Bergman’s striking final image of Hilde, as described by Törnqvist:

Left alone with her father—just as Nora had been left alone with her father—Hilde seemed doomed to relive Nora’s experience. Deprived of her mother and lacking a sister or brother, Hilde would have to console herself by playing the role of mother to her doll. In his ending Bergman clearly outlined the vicious circle in which the child with just one parent finds itself—a central issue in a social environment where divorces tend to be the rule rather than the exception. (105)

Bergman’s Nora

In Bergman’s production, Nora is portrayed very differently from Ibsen’s original Nora. In the opening sequence at the 1981 Munich production, she was already onstage when the performance began, lying motionless on the sofa, “filled with a sense of being unsatisfied, unfulfilled” (L. Marker and F. Marker 9). However, Bergman seems to share the Strindbergian misogynistic view that all female characters are liars and hypocrites as Bergman comments that in the performance:

Nora goes away because she feels that her former life has been so...dirty. Because she has been living a lie, and she has loved her lie...She got the money, she falsified her father’s signature, she has really behaved very badly, but then, you see, she’s an anarchist. All of Ibsen’s women are anarchists... You can see it everywhere, in almost every play by Ibsen. (L. Marker and F. Marker 9)

In addition to the view that “all of Ibsen’s women are anarchists,” Bergman rendered the sexual politics in Ibsen’s original script more visible in his Strindbergian adaptation of *A Doll’s House*. In Bergman’s production, the scene of Nora seductively covering Dr. Rank’s eyes with her black stockings is rendered even more erotic and sensual than Ibsen’s original production. In another highly contentious scene, after Nora

has been severely reprimanded and humiliated by Torvald, she has sex with him. Then, in the following scene, Nora, who is fully clothed in contrast to Torvald who is entirely naked in bed, explains to Torvald that she will leave him. Here Bergman focuses on showcasing Nora's inhumanity: "In that last scene her aggression and brutality are enormous...and she crushes Helmer completely" (L. Marker and F. Marker 12). As a result, many critics suggest that Bergman had interpreted the character of Nora in a very similar way as Strindberg. For Strindberg, the performance is not "a defense of the oppressed woman...[but] simply the illustration of the effect of heredity upon character" as many references in the performance suggest that the character of Nora's father had been reckless and wacky, which for Strindberg justifies why Nora herself has these similar character flaws (Marowitz 27).

Bergman's Torvald

For Bergman, Torvald is the true victim at the end of Ibsen's *A Doll's House* as he is destroyed by the "aggression and brutality" of his wife, Nora. Although the majority of viewers of *A Doll's House* do not sympathize with Torvald, Bergman said in 1981, the year his *A Doll's House* adaption premiered, "I see Helmer as a very nice guy, very responsible" (L. Marker and F. Marker 12). Bergman claims that Torvald is "a decent man who is trapped in his role of being the man, the husband. He tries to play his role as well as he can—because it is the only one he knows and understands" (L. Marker and F. Marker 12). For Bergman, Ibsen's play "is really the tragedy of Helmer" (L. Marker and F. Marker 12). In fact, Bergman strengthened Torvald's character in *Nora* by omitting many of the condescending phrases and words Torvald used to describe his wife.

Additionally, Bergman also utilized judicious cuts to render a more helpless and paltry image of Torvald towards the end of the performance: “Ibsen gives Helmer the last line, you know...something about ‘the most wonderful thing.’ Well, I’ve taken that out. He simply lies down on the bed and cries like a very small child” (L. Marker and F. Marker 12). Templeton argues that Bergman purposefully made Torvald look like “the pathetic victim of the stronger sex” (Templeton, “Updating *A Doll’s House*” 184).

However, for Bergman, both Nora and Torvald are dolls trapped in societal roles that overwhelm and consume them. Thus, Bergman believes that “Helmer’s tragedy is fully as interesting as the development of Nora” (L. Marker and F. Marker 12). As a result, Bergman even tried to paint a picture of Torvald as weak and feeble in comparison to the ruthless Nora in the final scene as Nora gets dressed after they had sex meanwhile Torvald remains naked under the sheets of the bed. Torvald remains physically inept and emotionally broken, which renders him incapable of running after Nora to try and change her radical decision. Bergman depicts Torvald as a victim to his wife’s heartless and cold-blooded actions as she takes advantage of his vulnerable position, highlighting Torvald’s ethics while casting judgment on Nora’s moral failings.

Bergman’s Structural and Visual Changes

Bergman’s production *Nora* revealed “the inner essence of Ibsen’s modern tragedy” and explored, with unparalleled focus, “the spiritual and psychological landscape that underlies the play’s realistic superstructure” (L. Marker and F. Marker 19). The title of Bergman’s production clearly shows that the main focus is on Nora, her relationship to the other characters in the play, and her constant struggle to liberate

herself from the societal constraints of a patriarchal system. As Nora embarks on a journey of liberation from the constrictive role society had forced upon her and find her destiny, Nora remains surrounded by silent dream-like presences of the different people who partake in this world. In order to better demonstrate Nora's escape from this societal entrapment, Bergman and his stage designer Gunilla Palmstierna-Weiss "employed strongly expressive visual means to communicate his perception of the inner rhythm and hidden tensions of the play. The deceptively 'natural' and idyllic framework that surrounds the characters in Ibsen's stagnant bourgeois universe was methodically dismantled" (L. Marker and F. Marker 19).

For example, the copious amount of realistic details that Ibsen incorporated in the "tastefully but not expensively furnished living room" as described in Ibsen's original stage directions was condensed in Bergman's production. Bergman focused on producing a more suggestive and theatrical image of the repressive and brutal environment Nora found herself in. The simplified setting of Bergman's production proved to effectively portray Nora's prison-like surroundings that she could not escape from:

The entire stage space was a limbo cut off from any contact with the world of reality—a void encompassed by an immense, non-representational box that was uniformly lined with a dark-red, velvetlike fabric. Within the vast, closed space, a smaller enclosure was defined by high, dark walls that suggested both the panelled interior of a courtroom and the wainscoting of a polite mid-Victorian parlor. Neither windows nor doors existed to alleviate the impression of solemnity and constrictive solidity conveyed by this maximum-security coffin-prison. (L. Marker and F. Marker 20)

As one critic (for *Rheinischer Merkur*) further noticed, "neither air nor light nor sound from the outside could penetrate this closed, hermetically sealed realm of fixed social values and conventions" (L. Marker and F. Marker 20). Bergman insisted that the acting area or the "magical point of magnetic energy" must always be defined in every

stage space and thus the acting area was located in a low, quadrilateral platform in the center of the stage space that remained isolated from the wall screens. Bergman explained that the structural arrangement of the stage helped provide “two different banks of light—one for the small stage in the middle, and the other for the wall area perimeter” so that the relationship between the wall and stage in terms of lighting could be constantly changed (L. Marker and F. Marker 10). Next, “a succession of deliberately fragmentary settings, each consisting of a bare minimum of indispensable furniture and significant objects, appeared on the platform to delineate distinct developmental movements in which [Bergman’s] *Nora* divides itself” (L. Marker and F. Marker 20). In the center of the stage, a large dingy couch and chair were positioned meanwhile the background was overshadowed by an embellished trimmed Christmas tree with a bundle of presents clumped underneath it. There were even more wrapped and unwrapped presents and toys (a helmet, an ornamental brass doll-bed, a sword, and two large dolls with human porcelain faces).

Bergman utilized these objects to make a striking comment on the Helmer game-playing world as a “playpen, a doll’s house of eternal childhood” (L. Marker and F. Marker 20). However, the playpen is then removed and the central spot for the unraveling of the plot became a big, dining table with four clumsily antiquated dining room chairs positioned around the table. The final bitter and controversial confrontation between Nora and Torvald divulges around a more intimate piece of furniture—a grand brass bed that was a definite replica of the miniature doll-bed toy present at the beginning of the scene. This scene differs from Ibsen’s original scene where Nora and Torvald’s confrontation occurs surrounding a dining table. Bergman prioritizes compositions of human beings or

any animate figure over lifeless scenery. “The important thing is what happens to the bodies,” he likes to insist. “No furnishings that overshadow the action, nothing that stands around anywhere unless it contributes to choreographic pattern that must be able to move in complete freedom in relation to space and scenery. Nothing must get in the way” (L. Marker and F. Marker 19-20).

For Bergman, it was very important to eliminate the distance between the actor and the audience by ensuring that “any drama must always be played in two locations at once—in the stage among the actors and in the consciousness of every spectator in the audience” (L. Marker and F. Marker 20). For Bergman, “a performance is not a performance until it encounters its audience. The audience is the most important part of it.” In *Nora*, Bergman innovatively couples an intense disintegration of the physical setting along with a choreographic plan that directly propelled the plot onward in order to better engage the audience’s active participation in the journey of the characters.

Interestingly, in Bergman’s production there are no “entrances” or “exits” as he insisted the importance of actors never leaving the view of the spectator’s in order to “help concentration—the [actor’s] concentration and the concentration of the audience” (L. Marker and F. Marker 9). Each of the four characters who take part in Nora’s fight for survival take individual turns stepping forward as if they were to confront her and then they each return to one of the six old-fashioned chairs that were erected in a symmetrical fashion along two walls of the “courtroom” (L. Marker and F. Marker 9). When the characters were seated back in their chairs, they were once again actors “each [sitting] in a different way, completely isolated, completely self-absorbed,” awaiting their signal to

act in a theatrical piece and fulfill their role-playing, which for Bergman remains the central metaphor (L. Marker and F. Marker 10).

Regardless, the characters in Bergman's production were not only observers; they still remain characters of a drama, enclosed together with Nora in the prison of Ibsen's domestic world. As the four characters sat underneath the dim light of the stage, they appeared to be "half-real figures in a dream landscape" (L. Marker and F. Marker 21). The costumes of the four characters were all in dull shades of monochrome that ranged from gray (Torvald) to dark black (Mrs. Linde). Nora, on the other hand, had a bright costume, which created a visual juxtaposition between Nora's effervescent costume and the general colorless of the other character's classic period costumes. As one review suggested, the bright clothing choice for Nora can be understood "as a sign of her vitality and her consequent ability to break out of the unbreakable pattern" (L. Marker and F. Marker 21). Nora's most notable moment of "break[ing] out of the unbreakable pattern" is evident in the final scene where she escapes her monotonous and constrictive role as mother and wife and leaves behind her socially prescribed role under a patriarchal system.

However, Bergman insisted on the importance of avoiding the impression that Nora's pivotal transformation from a subservient and oppressed individual to a free and independent individual is just a spontaneous moment of recently acquired courage. In fact, in order to convey that Nora's transformation resulted from a consistent journey of self-realization and newfound understanding, Bergman argues that any director must "always start with the last scene—with an understanding of what happens in the last scene. Once you have understood that, you can then go back and begin at the beginning.

In that last scene you have the solution to the rest of the play” (L. Marker and F. Marker 21). Bergman focused on developing an organic relationship between the beginning of the play and its ending, which is encapsulated in the honest theatrical metaphor of the other four characters who watch Nora from the start of the performance all the way to the end.

Bergman’s Adaptations and Strindberg’s Dreamplay

Bergman focused on the psychological aspects of Nora’s life and shifted the main attention to the crumbling marriage between two individuals rather than highlighting the oppressive battle women had to deal with in nineteenth century patriarchal society by employing Strindbergian dreamplay qualities in his production. In fact, Nora was presented as a woman who was fully aware of the restrictive societal conditions imposed upon her, and of how she could use her feminine talents and wits to come to terms with this reality. From the outset of the play, Nora was in full possession of the insight that eventually causes her to leave behind her marital life as she had a sober view of reality.

As mentioned before, Bergman’s play features fifteen short scenes with no intermission in contrast to Ibsen’s three act structure, and Bergman chose to split the Helmer’s home into three distinct areas, the parlor, the dining room and the bedroom, instead of having the play set in one place like Ibsen. The actions shifted between these three domestic settings in a linear succession, suggesting a continuous movement from the external to internal and from the private to public. The set change was evident by a brief pause in action, allowing for these basic settings to be transitioned to in a constant dreamlike manner, with no abrupt interruptions or sporadic disturbances. For Bergman,

any theatrical work of art functions through its “appeal to the imaginative faculty; it must reach the spectator directly through the medium of the senses, without any intermediary landing in the conscious intellect (L. Marker and F. Marker 22). Bergman argued that art cannot be understood as a realistic phenomenon governed by logical analysis; rather it is “a matter between the imagination and the feelings” (L. Marker and F. Marker 22).

Bergman’s version of *A Doll’s House* in terms of structure is very similar to the composition of a Strindbergian dreamplay as many critics claim that Bergman’s adaptation was an “energetic pursuit of the Strindbergian chamber play” (Templeton 41). For Strindberg, the chamber play was “intimate in form, [featured] a restricted subject, treated in depth, with few characters, large points of view, no superfluous minor characters, [and] no long-drawn-out whole evenings”—all characteristics found in *Nora* (Templeton 42).

Bergman’s production *Nora* was no longer governed by literal considerations of time and space and instead incorporated fluid, unexplained, and dream-like transitions between the scenes in the performance, becoming a quintessential example of a dreamplay or what Strindberg calls “the inconsequent but transparently logical shape of a dream” (3). Strindberg described “dreamplay” qualities as the following: “Everything can happen, everything is possible and probable. Time and place do not exist; the imagination spins, weaving new patterns, a mixture of memories, free fancies, incongruities, and improvisations” (Strindberg 3). The audience is left with uncertainty on whether the scenery, staging, and visual design are meant to convey the real world or if everything shown is a single dream or projection of different characters’ mental states. Reviewers have noted that Bergman’s 1981 play *Nora* produced in Germany had a “seamlessly

continuity and flows, like quite surreally, like a dream” (Donovan 1). Bergman biographers Lise-Lone Marker and Frederick J. Marker comment that Bergman’s experimentation with *A Doll’s House* “became virtually a dreamplay” (9):

The characters split, double, multiply, evaporate, condense, disperse, assemble. But one consciousness rules over them all, that of the dreamer; for him there are no secrets, no scruples, no laws. He neither acquits nor condemns, but merely relates the story; and, just as a dream is more often painful than happy, so an undertone of melancholy and of pity for all mortal beings accompanies this flickering tale. (Strindberg 33)

With this device, Bergman indicated the constant flux between on-stage and off-stage role-playing, between theater and life. Also, by allowing the actors, when off the stage platform, form a stage audience, he provided a visual connection between the audience and the actors. In fact, combined with the barred windows of the setting, “the impression of the stage audience was one of a jury in the courtroom sitting in judgment on the marital relationship that was acted out before them and in which they themselves, when-on-stage, where directly or indirectly involved...the spectators in the auditorium, as mentally divided as the characters-cum-actors, were virtually sitting in judgment on themselves” (Törnqvist 70).

This “dreamplay” quality of the play allows the audience to not fixate on women’s battle with liberation but rather have pity for “all mortal beings” as every individual is fighting his or her own battle, that of trying to find their own true identity in a ruthless society and the audience does not only judge the characters on stage, but they begin to judge themselves. However, some reviewers like Steene have criticized Bergman’s depiction of Nora in the play claiming that the main character’s arc was cut too far, resulting in a selfish final act: “The whole character’s hollowness shines through...She has committed a really stupid thing. She punishes [her husband’s] loving

care by leaving him. Her morals are as thoughtless in the end as in earlier scenes” (713). Jens Kistrup in *Berlingske Tidende* “thought that Helmer’s pathetic bedroom appearance, on the verge of caricature, deprived Nora’s decision to leave her home of some of its agony” (Steene 714). Inger-Lise Klausen in *Jyllands-Posten* claimed that Bergman’s ending made Ibsen’s original play more “painful and tragic, a love relationship destroyed by insurmountable conventions” (Steene 714). Other critics disliked the production’s length as reviewer Hans-Thies Lehmann commented: “There really is no plausible ground for staging Bergman’s spectacle” (714).

Bergman’s Nora Vs. Ibsen’s Nora

As a result, while Ibsen’s text and story are largely preserved, Bergman’s adaptation is enacted in the language of dreams with a singular focus on the dreamer. In this case, Nora represents the dreamer and the different internal and external forces of disruption that shatter her domestic security and propel her to embark on a new journey to find true liberation from her prescribed role in society. “Nora—and in particular Bergman’s Nora—is the center and therefore, as it were, the creator of her stage world; when she leaves, she takes that world away with her” (L. Marker and F. Marker 38). In the beginning of the production, Bergman exposes Nora’s incessant frustration and anger in a sequence of little scenes that defined the performance. In contrast to Ibsen’s Nora who joyfully and happily enters the stage, humming a gleeful tune as she juggles holding the presents in her arms. In Bergman’s version, Nora is like a frozen statue glued to her seat in the midst of various toys, dolls, and other objects that symbolize her childhood. This image of a motionless human doll staring upwards and leaning back against the

pillow of a lush couch with the subtle background music of a traditional and old music-box tune creates a mood of nostalgia and repressed somberness.

However, this lifeless image of Nora in Bergman's production is quickly overturned with Nora's sudden and energetic removal of her shoes, which sets into motion a series of restless and frantic actions: Nora wildly runs towards the presents, she desperately tears the wrapping off the children's presents, and then she frenziedly hides the wrapping paper underneath the couch. The audience can see Nora forcibly trying to calm down and regain control of her emotions before she was demanded by her husband to come and marvel at her purchases. As Torvald stepped forward from the chair, awaiting Nora to come to his beck and call, the mood in the performance changed drastically. Nora, the resourceful and strategic individual transformed into a charming, naïve, and subservient doll-wife whose purpose becomes to please Torvald's sexual desires. Torvald has also embodied the prescribed societal role as the caring but overprotective husband.

As both Nora and Torvald kneel together on the stage, holding each other's hands tightly, laughing in a sort of foreplay, these two adults become like children playing a game. However, this game that was being played from the beginning of the play was rigged because it was clearly understood that both individuals were trapped within the rigid stereotypical roles society had assigned to them. This playful scene ended with a kiss. However, Nora secretly and quickly wiped the kiss from her mouth, demonstrating that beneath this childlike submissiveness, Nora also has a defiant side where she wishes to transcend her confining existence in nineteenth century society and "to be carefree," which is how she defines her biggest longing at first (L. Marker and F. Marker 23). As a

result, Bergman's production conveyed that the forces that fractured Nora's domestic security were not merely external, but most importantly internal forces such as her own "consciousness of isolation and spiritual alienation" (L. Marker and F. Marker 23).

Bergman's Krogstad

Bergman particularly liked the character of Krogstad, emphasizing that he felt that Krogstad was many times "misinterpreted" in other performances of *A Doll's House* (L. Marker and F. Marker 10). Krogstad is then depicted as neither the villain nor the "moral cripple" as described by Dr. Rank. Bergman's "most striking and provocative innovation" was depicting Krogstad in a more sympathetic light than Ibsen in order to create a "far more interesting [character] than the deep-dyed theatre villain perpetuated by generations of stage tradition" (L. Marker and F. Marker 25). Regardless, Bergman's performance does make it evident that a relationship between Krogstad and Nora is doomed to fail as "between oppressor and oppressed there can be no relationship" (Templeton, "Updating *A Doll's House*" 184). As Bergman claims, "Krogstad is in hell, and he knows it—he's condemned to torture Nora. All of them are in hell—Dr. Rank and Mrs. Linde, too" (L. Marker and F. Marker 10). So Krogstad and his former flame Mrs. Linde, two "emotional cripples," both lash out against Nora.

Bergman's Mrs. Linde

The portrayal of the character Christine Linde differs greatly in Bergman's adaptation of Ibsen's *A Doll's House* in order to further establish the mood of disillusionment so that every dramatic action in Bergman's performance can be defined

by an eerie darkness. Mrs. Linde, a pale and ghostly figure dressed entirely in black with a veil (mourning her dead husband), abruptly intrudes into Nora's world as an omen of darkness. Bergman creates this tangible sensation of eeriness with the character of Mrs. Linde through the establishment of a semiotic pattern of actions. In fact, Bergman's Mrs. Linde is starkly different from the harmless and feeble stock character or confidante that Ibsen depicted. Ibsen had intentionally used Mrs. Linde's worldliness and her experiences of being a woman that knew what loss was as a counterpoint to the naïve Nora who had only known a plentiful life with no real economic hardship. On the other hand, Bergman's piercing psychological portrait of Mrs. Linde conveyed a raw image of a resentful and hostile woman who became so severely disillusioned after years of self-sacrifice that her own humanity pulverized into bitterness. Throughout Bergman's performance, the lifeless figure with calculated gestures portrayed by Annemarie Wernicke provided a clear contrast to Nora's liveliness and her animated, impulsive movements as portrayed by Rita Russek (L. Marker and F. Marker 24). Mrs. Linde's physical attributes reinforce her coldness as her flat, emotionless way of speaking coupled with her angular movements provide a visual of a hostile individual embittered by life (L. Marker and F. Marker 24).

Bergman viewed Mrs. Linde as the real "villain in [his] interpretation" (Mellen 3). For Bergman, her actions are "filled with a terrible resentment and aggression," which he later claims as "poison in her...she's venomous" (L. Marker and F. Marker 11). Bergman sees Mrs. Linde as a "parasite" as she transforms into a "moral fanatic" and obstructs Nora's life as a "self-appointed and vindictive apostle of the truth" (L. Marker and F. Marker 10). Bergman argues that Mrs. Linde's cruel motivations are caused by the idea

that “she hates everyone” (L. Marker and F. Marker 11). As a result, Bergman’s script emphasizes that Mrs. Linde not only develops a constant obsession with Nora’s past but also that she forces a confession from Nora about the truth by intentionally triggering the definitive confrontation between Nora and Torvald in order to expose the secret between the two individuals. Mrs. Linde wanted to ensure that Nora would be judged and punished for her actions. However, in Bergman’s play in comparison to Ibsen’s, Bergman punishes the punishers (Krogstad and Mrs. Linde) by refusing to incorporate any romantic reconciliation between the two, as he believed “anything that would happen to the two of them afterward is terrible” (L. Marker and F. Marker 11). As a result, the portrayal of Mrs. Linde in Bergman’s performance emphasized the overall darkness that hovered throughout the performance and introduced a more intense thematic intrigue.

Parallels between Bergman and Strindberg’s View of *A Doll’s House*

Some scholars have branded Bergman’s tampering’s as a means to turn “Ibsen into his avowed spiritual father Strindberg,” as Bergman’s obsession with Strindberg would potentially reinforce his own latent misogyny in his adaptation of *A Doll’s House*; however, Strindberg’s own arguments against the feminist inclinations of the play are valid (Templeton 184). During most of the stage production Hilde’s presence was symbolized by having her doll sit in a chair when she was not physically present on stage, which could suggest Bergman’s misogynist view of women being no more than dolls to be played with. Joan Mellen emphasized that Bergman might depict what “he sees” reflected in society around him, but in doing so “accepted an anachronistic view, without questioning how his adherence to the spirit of Northern Protestant Culture from which he

emerges has shaped his understanding of the potential of women” (3). Mellen further notes that on stage, “the [women’s] lives lack meaning because they are rooted in biology and an ability to choose a style of life independent of the female sexual role. In this sense Bergman is far harder on his women than on his men. They are depicted as if on a lower notch on the evolutionary scale” (2).

However, Strindberg outwardly disapproved of the existence of feminist inclinations of *A Doll’s House*, focusing on the “swinery” of Nora, who “lies to her husband, conceals her forgery, smuggles away some cakes, and behaves shiftily over all kinds of simple matters, apparently because she has a taste for lying” (Marowitz 159). The audience forgets how Nora benefits from her forgery by being able to immensely enjoy her lavish trip to Italy that she ostensibly purchased for her sick husband. Additionally, in order for Nora to raise money to pay off her debt she unabashedly flirts with another man, Dr. Rank. The audience becomes so “impregnated with compassion for Nora” that Nora’s questionable actions are overlooked and Torvald inevitably emerges as the anti-feminist villain (Marowitz 159). Strindberg claims that Torvald is the real victim as he is treated like a doll manipulated by Nora’s deceitful behavior: Torvald “openly confides everything to her, even the affairs of his bank, which shows that he treats her as his true wife. She, not he, is the one who never tells anything. It is consequently a lie to say that he treats her like a doll, but true to say that she treats him like one” (Marowitz 159).

Strindberg’s most telling criticism concerns Nora’s decision to abandon Torvald, which obviously means abandoning her children to her husband. Strindberg brings to light an important argument against the branding of the play as feminist: If she truly

wants to “find herself,” why doesn’t she begin by reestablishing a new relationship to the realities of the life around her, her family and her misguided marriage? By analyzing Strindberg’s extreme views, Strindberg’s arguments reinforce he was an explicit hater of feminism, perhaps even of women. Furthermore, since Bergman’s focus was in depicting the tragic relationship between two individuals, each with their own flaws, Bergman’s stage production enforces Ibsen’s humanist view. As a result, “Bergman does not produce and foremost, stage a play that is a debate about women’s liberation. [His] subject is nature and love, the stage is as so often in Bergman—a magnetic field where the poles are eroticism and death” (Szabo 1).

Bergman’s Darker Interpretation

All the characters in Bergman’s performance are entrapped within a hostile social order that annihilates their own identity. Bergman incorporates a darker and more uncompromising vision of Ibsen’s drama. For example, the scene where Krogstad and Mrs. Linde are reunited in order to face the harsh truth was presented as “one more facet of a bleak pattern forged by the life-denying forces that hemmed Nora in and sought to dictate her destiny” (L. Marker and F. Marker 25). While most critics have idealized this reunion between Krogstad and Mrs. Linde as the beginning of a fresh start with the two individuals having a greater understanding of each other and their different perspectives, Bergman did not interpret their reunion as a mere sentimental reconciliation moment. Bergman added an interesting visual twist to the loveless reunion scene; the audience could see Nora completely as she stood in the shadows next to the low-stage platform. Nora appeared to be as motionless as a statue in her bright red dancing outfit, looking

straight into the darkness of the stage. Nora then wrapped herself with her dark shawl as if she was protecting herself from oncoming colder weather. However, positioning Nora in full view of the audience in such a vulnerable state suggests that the audience needs to focus on the societal constraints faced by the characters and the effects these constraints have on the actors. Bergman specified a short stage direction for this scene, “It is night, snowy and cold” to first expose the palpable atmosphere of darkness until Mrs. Linde unleashes a hostile attack against Nora.

As previously mentioned, in the performance, Krogstad appears to be one of the most striking innovations as the character of the secretive lawyer became a much more significant figure than the decadent and corrupt individual that Dr. Rank describes, which is specified in more detail in Ibsen’s drama versus that of Bergman. In Bergman’s performance, Krogstad’s entrances differed from Mrs. Linde’s shocking appearances as his entrances slowly signaled a mood shift as described by Lise-Lone Marker and Frederick J. Marker:

A few moments before he was to step forward to take part in the action, this pale, black-clad figure could be seen each time rising from his chair and hovering silently beside the stage-platform—or even slowly circling behind it. Perceived by the audience in a kind of theatrical slow motion, his movements projected a strong visual suggestion of a threat to Nora that was far more insidious and more universal than simple blackmail. Yet, from the moment Krogstad first rose, isolated in lacerating, chalk-white shaft of light, his hands buried in the pockets of a heavy overcoat that enveloped him like a straitjacket, his figure also clearly bespoke the tormentor who is in turn the sufferer, tormented by the same condition of anguish and dread he seeks to instill in his victim. (25)

Krogstad’s first terse appearance conveyed the image of a dangerous man because he was confined and deserted in a cruel world where he had found that he was trapped, unable to escape. Krogstad and his “scuttling side-ways across the stage like an obsequious crab” was the manifestation of darkness—“the undercurrent of ‘freezing,

coal-black water’—that was, in Bergman’s interpretation, never very far beneath the surface of Ibsen’s drama” (L. Marker and F. Marker 26). As a result, Krogstad employed fierce brutality and even violent behavior to defend his position at the bank because it not only represented his existential struggle for survival in this hostile world, but it also represented the only identity he had ever known.

The mood changes that are signaled by Krogstad’s entrances in Bergman’s production can be identified in two different confrontations between Nora and Krogstad. In the first encounter, Nora reacts in a cold and cynical manner to Krogstad’s bitterness and wistfulness. However, in the second confrontation, there was a mood shift as the tension between the two characters transformed into a mysterious irony. In this unusually merciful scene, Krogstad’s intentions are not only selfish in trying to force Nora to help him but he oddly also wants to “commiserate with her as a fellow sufferer—someone locked together with him in hell (or a nightmare)” (L. Marker and F. Marker 26).

As Krogstad also suffers for the consequence of committing a similar crime as that of Nora, he now witnesses this circular vicious behavior replay over and over again. Interestingly, Krogstad moves along the stage in a series of erratic and circular movements (emphasizing the “circular vicious pattern”) in order to connect with Nora and convince her of the uselessness and hopelessness of the dire action that Nora wants to take in order to save herself from this calamity. However, reiterating Bergman’s idea that “between oppressor and oppressed there can be no relationship,” Nora’s obstinate attitude sparked the resentment again that this dark and shadowy character had in the first place, which triggered Krogstad to drop his letter that exposes Nora’s lie into the locked mailbox that dangled on the framed wall next to the other observing characters (L.

Marker and F. Marker 26). Next, Nora helplessly tried to break open the locked mailbox with a hairpin and once she realized that the tragedy of Torvald finding out the truth was now unavoidable, Nora can be seen by the audience sitting frozen in a chair at the edge of the table, covering her whole face with her hands, with intense fear and desperation etched into her whole physicality (L. Marker and F. Marker 26).

The powerful emotional charge of this scene where Krogstad's attempt to talk to Nora is heavily juxtaposed by Nora's growing sense of desperation and distress made this scene even more powerful than the plot twist or the potential arrival of the incriminating letter that Torvald must not be able to receive and read (L. Marker and F. Marker 26). As a result, Krogstad's "thwarted, self-contradictory attempt to reach out to Nora was a deformed image of the countless attempts made by all the characters in the play...to reach out to one another, without success" (L. Marker and F. Marker 27). So the characters in Bergman's performance have all attempted to communicate with one another and to understand each other's struggles but ultimately they are all oppressed by the society they inhabit, which renders their attempts futile as they must focus and prioritize their own existential struggles to maintain their semblance of an identity and basically survive in this hostile social order.

Bergman's Twist on the Tarantella

A quintessential example of Nora trying to "reach out to one another, without success" is the famous tarantella scene where Nora attempts to reach Torvald in order to convey her suffering and misery to the emotionally handicapped Torvald who is unable

to understand any of her agony. Bergman showcased an extremely different tarantella dance as remembered by Lise-Lone Marker and Frederick J. Marker:

Nora's tarantella was not really a dance at all—at least not the frantic and increasingly more confused and pathetic dance that generations of Noras have performed, to the tuneful accompaniment of Doctor Rank at the upright, in order to distract her husband's attention from the fateful letterbox. Instead, Rita Russek's defiant, whirling tarantella danced on top of the table to the rebellious pounding of her tambourine, was not a copy maneuver designed to divert Helmer's attention but a hieroglyph of desperation intended to attract it. (27)

This sensual choreography, observed thoroughly by Dr. Rank and with complete illiteracy by Torvald, was not really a frantic and confusing dance like in Ibsen's version but rather an intentional desperate plea for help. The dance itself was short as Nora signaled its end when she dropped the tambourine on the floor, making a loud clank sound. Nora's altered tarantella dance in Bergman's production was "virtually a mute, conscious outcry for help in a situation that Nora herself now knew to be beyond help" (L. Marker and F. Marker 27).

Bergman and his depiction of Dr. Rank and Nora's Relationship

While Ibsen depicted the empty shell of a relationship between Nora and Torvald, two individuals stuck in the gender constructs of performance, Bergman's interpretation transformed Nora's relationship with Dr. Rank into one of understanding and contentment. In Bergman's performance, the scenes of Dr. Rank and Nora provided temporary moments of peace and relief that ruptured the constant underlying and growing tensions throughout the play. It is no surprise that then Bergman's statement "Rank is Ibsen" is supported by Bergman's interpretation of Dr. Rank in a performance that is fueled with the spirit of "Ibsen's love for a woman he himself created" (L. Marker and F.

Marker 27). In Bergman's performance, Dr. Rank is depicted as an outsider rather than an active participant in Nora's dramatic life. However, Bergman's interpretation of Dr. Rank and his statement that this is a "play about love" are congruent as Bergman showed that only Dr. Rank's love for Nora was authentic and meaningful—"although it was only a fleetingly perceived dream-image of love" (L. Marker and F. Marker 27).

Dr. Rank was able to have a profound connection with Nora founded on his compassion and understanding of Nora and her struggles, as Nora confesses to Mrs. Linde "with Doctor Rank I can talk about *everything*" (Ibsen 69). As a result, Nora developed a reciprocal warmth and empathy because of her interactions with Dr. Rank that validated Bergman's comment of Nora being "one of the most wonderful of Ibsen's women" (L. Marker and F. Marker 11). In Bergman's performance Dr. Rank first appeared behind Nora in the scene, in the "unannounced and yet perfectly expected way a figure in a dream might materialize, in direct response, as it were, to her need—her passionate longing to be alive and to be happy" (L. Marker and F. Marker 28). After Krogstad's dark appearance, which cast a shadow in the performance, Dr. Rank eradicated the bone-chilling atmosphere that Krogstad brought to the stage, causing Nora's restlessness to be replaced by a feeling of comfort and warmth.

In Bergman's performance, there are various examples of Bergman employing visual poignancy that express the profound relationship between Nora and Dr. Rank that serves as a stark contrast to the artificial relationship between Nora and Torvald: Nora can be seen laughing light-heartedly with Dr. Rank, clasping both of Dr. Rank's hands enthusiastically, and secretly sharing the forbidden macaroons like two partners in crime would. Dr. Rank even encouraged Nora's mischievousness, which enticed her to finally

proclaim a naughty statement (“Kiss my arse”) as she stood near the couch (Ibsen 60). These visual signs also assert that for Dr. Rank, Nora provides lightness and a temporary escape from the overwhelming darkness that is present in his life.

Additionally, Bergman was very concerned with the significance of compassion and empathy and in his performance he attempts to get to the bottom of how these two characters demonstrate compassion for each other. Thus, the scene where Nora and Dr. Rank are alone with each other visually demonstrates not only the powerful, unspoken relationship between Dr. Rank and Nora but also expresses the underlying importance and meaning of compassion. In this emotionally charged scene, Bergman intentionally removes any natural distraction such as Nora’s frivolous comments about the harmful effects of champagne and truffles, the confusing remarks about Mrs. Linde’s presence in the next room, and the interferences of the maid. Even the realistic image of the characters discussing with each other is eliminated in this scene to keep the audience’s central focus on the emotionally textured interaction between Nora and Dr. Rank. In this scene, Dr. Rank knelt in front of Nora and placed his hand on his heart, desperately trying to leave Nora a memory or expression of the genuine love he had for Nora. Nora’s purpose was similar of that of Dr. Rank as Dr. Rank’s head lay on her breasts, she wanted to comfort Dr. Rank by trying to alleviate the hopelessness and misery that haunted Dr. Rank in his struggle in confronting death. Bergman’s main focus in this scene is to reveal how electric the relationship is between Nora and Dr. Rank. Bergman did not employ this scene to function as a plot reversal, where Nora who had the original idea of asking Dr. Rank for money so that she could pay off her debt, is unable to go through with her plan because of Dr. Rank’s unanticipated proclamation of love.

There are many critics of this production that condemn Nora's obscenity as she prepares to entice sexually Dr. Ranks' assistant by seductively flinging a pair of "flesh-colored" silk stockings in front of him. Strindberg denounced this act in his preface to *Married* as he states "Nora offers herself for sale—to be paid for in cash" (L. Marker and F. Marker 29). However, Bergman transformed this old-fashioned Victorian eroticism into a moment of heightened compassion as described by Lise-Lone Marker and Frederick J. Marker:

Slowly, in a virtually hypnotic manner, Nora helped Rank to push back the horror of death. As he began to relax, he leaned his head against her; slowly she covered his eyes with her hands. Then, with dreamlike slowness, she drew a slim stocking (not "flesh-colored"!) across his closed lids, as though somehow conjuring up a consoling version of loveliness for him—a dream of Nora dancing only for him ("and for Torvald, too, of course—that goes without saying). (29)

Therefore, in this scene, empathy and humanity reigned supreme over the widespread melancholy and darkness present in the play. In fact, Dr. Rank's brief final appearance, where he says goodbye to "these cherished and familiar surroundings," signaled the beginning of the end of the play's final movement. Bergman clearly communicates to the audience that Dr. Rank's exit from the play marked the end of "amusing disguises" for both Dr. Rank and Nora.

Bergman's Winner and Loser

Some critics have pointed out an ironic twist to Bergman's interpretation in that he claims this drama is as much "Helmer's tragedy" as it is a play about Nora's growth, development, and plight. Torvald is portrayed as a candid, self-centered, and childlike individual who has not the slightest idea of the gravity of the situation. Bergman's version of Torvald is even more crippled and ensnared by a profound uneasiness—"a

kind of ignorance of others and of himself...[that] would later come to [be] defined [as], with bitter self-irony, as emotional illiteracy” (L. Marker and F. Marker 31). Torvald inebriated from the champagne, remains a self-absorbed emotionally illiterate individual who does not gage the sufferance and misery felt by Dr. Rank as well as the atmosphere of cold disillusionment in which Nora find herself as she prepares for her looming confrontation. Even Krogstad’s disquieting disclosure about Nora’s lie did not even faze Torvald. After Torvald tore apart the incriminating letter and drank another glass of champagne he comforts himself by declaring out loud that he would not “sink miserably to the bottom and be ruined” by discarding the reality and instead he decided to continue his attempts to make love to his wife (L. Marker and F. Marker 29). Torvald speculated that he could apply the same resolutions to previous dilemmas, like drying Nora’s tears or calming her down to also resolve this conflict. However, Torvald failed to realize that this crisis was radically different. Nora had no more tears left and she was no longer that vulnerable, hopeless “little girl,” as she permanently emotionally detached from Torvald and her prescribed domestic role.

Bernard Shaw has announced that in this very point in Ibsen’s drama, Nora “very unexpectedly stops her emotional acting” and requires that they both sit down at a table and discuss the problem at hand (L. Marker and F. Marker 30). In Bergman’s *Nora*, this “unexpected” point that Shaw refers to does not take place as his version of Nora had gained awareness of the uselessness of the roles they had to play due to societal conventions a long time ago. Bergman’s Nora wants there to be an emotionally charged conversation addressing the issues rather than an intellectual discussion around a table, with the only individual feeling any “unexpectedness” being Torvald himself not Nora as

he states, “You’re making me uneasy Nora, I don’t understand you” (L. Marker and F. Marker 30). In the most climactic scene, as Torvald lies naked in their fancy brass doll-bed after his sexual desires had been fulfilled by Nora, he is harshly awakened and startled by a woman in a black dress grasping a packed bag in her hand. As previously mentioned, Bergman paints a picture of a vulnerable and fragile naked Torvald as he is stripped emotionally and physically with his wife leaving him indefinitely.

This dramatic scene was “accentuated, by a single, piercing shaft of light that turned his figure and the bed clothes into a blaze of white, was confronted by what Bergman’s script describes as Nora’s ‘complete ruthlessness and brutality’” (L. Marker and F. Marker 30). As Torvald listened with utmost disbelief and the other characters watched the scene unravel from the hazy darkness behind the brass doll-bed, Nora delineated the damage that he and her father had caused to her life and to her identity. Nora’s revelation was met with fervent physical anger as Torvald futilely attempted to reaffirm his misogynistic tradition of dominating her by yelling “Oh, you think and talk like a naïve child” but finally his remark evaporated into thin air as Nora’s courage and fortitude diffuses into every crevice of the stage (L. Marker and F. Marker 30). This toxic ritual of domination had been severed and “without a sound, as if by magic, a hidden aperture in the apparently solid wall swung open, and Nora stepped through it to freedom—an escape artist who left the captors of her dream behind” (L. Marker and F. Marker 30).

In Bergman’s dark and intricate production, Bergman has described Nora as a “winner,” although Nora had ultimately won an immeasurable amount of loss. For Bergman, one of Nora’s final bitter accusations towards Torvald was also one of the most

painful statements she had to make during the performance, “I’ve got to do it myself. And that’s why I’m leaving you” (L. Marker and F. Marker 30). This line is highlighted in Bergman’s script as “absolutely the central line in the entire play” (L. Marker and F. Marker 30). For Bergman, Torvald automatically becomes the “loser” as he is rendered the victim trapped in a patriarchal society’s and its social and gender constructions. Bergman suggests that Torvald “collapses under” this “socially imposed role of being the man, the husband” (L. Marker and F. Marker 31). Additionally, returning to the notion of “countless attempts made by all the characters in the play...to reach out to one another, without success” Bergman’s production emphasizes that all of the characters, excluding Nora once she has an epiphany that sets her free from the socially imposed role of being a woman in a patriarchal society, are left “groping in the dark, stricken by the inability to reach others and be reached by them in return, [they’re] left without a chance, ignorant and remorseful among the ruins of [their] ambitions” (L. Marker and F. Marker 27-31).

Bergman and the Study of Human Beings

In conclusion, in Bergman view, *Nora* revealed the fundamental tension that arises when the two sexes, male and female, coexist. Regardless that there can be both positives and negative results of this union between men and women, Bergman insists that this important tension does not only exist between the two sexes. Bergman emphasizes that this natural tension has to do “with something larger—with our incredible inability to understand each other as human beings, with something incredible primitive and barbaric that exists not only in relation between the sexes but in our relations with all human beings” (L. Marker and F. Marker 18). As a result, Bergman

stresses that if people could find a solution to these tensions between all human beings—
“then the problems between man and women would naturally also be resolved” (L.
Marker and F. Marker 18). Bergman’s production *Nora* emphasizes the universal
importance of two sexes coexisting in harmony in order to have a balanced society as “a
solitary woman isn’t complete, a solitary man isn’t complete, and that this solitude—or
freedom, as the feminists often like to call it—is crippling. Emotionally crippling” (L.
Marker and F. Marker 18).

Chapter III.

Mabou Mines DolHouse Case Study

Mabou Mines is a theater company that for fifty-one years provided a collaborative platform for avant-garde theater artists interested in exploring, interrogating, and representing a multiplicity of identities. Mabou Mine's mission according to their company website is to "generate, support, and connect audiences with original works of experimental performances and inventive re-imaginings of the classics, while nurturing the next generations of innovative theater artists" (1). The creative vision of Mabou Mines is accredited to the ethos of its co-founders: Joanne Akalaitis, Lee Breuer, Philip Glass, Ruth Maleczech, and David Warrilow. In 1970, these artists convened in Philip and JoAnne's House near Mabou Mines, Nova Scotia to create their first theater piece, *Red Horse Animation*. From then on, the company or this collective of artists with experimental and inventive ideas became known as "Mabou Mines." Europe's seminal avant-garde theater collectives heavily influenced Mabou Mines. The co-founders had spent five years in Europe observing and analyzing the "working methods of the Berliner Ensemble, the politics of the exiled Living Theater, and the demands of physical training with Jerry Grotowski" ("Mabou Mines" 1). Now Mabou Mines has created and performed more than one hundred and twenty works and has been honored with more than one hundred prominent awards.

Awards

In 2003, New York avant-gardist and MacArthur Prize-winning director Lee Breuer and his experimental troupe Mabou Mines showcased *DollHouse* in St. Ann's Warehouse, a post-modern adaptation of Henrik Ibsen's classic *A Doll's House*. The show was conceived and directed by Lee Breuer and co-created by Lee Breuer and Maude Mitchell. The inspiration behind wanting to adapt Ibsen's original play occurred at a post-performance talkback, where Breuer and Mitchell learned from an Ibsen scholar that *A Doll's House* was directed mostly by men. Since Breuer and Mitchell struggled to cope with the play's underlying universal humanism they chose to re-imagine Ibsen's classic play to be able to impart its revolutionary legacy to a contemporary audience. *DollHouse* presents an experimental and innovative take on Ibsen's *A Doll House*, renown for naturalistic drama and for using the fourth wall dramaturgical technique as the form to convey messages to its audiences.

This production, which is presented locally by Court Theatre and the Museum of Contemporary Art in New York, showcases a combination of Vaudeville, grand opera, and melodrama while touring around the world, further garnering mass audience appeal and praise as the production won various awards and recognitions. *DollHouse* as described on Mabou Mines' company website was awarded the OBIE award to Lee Breuer for Direction in 2003, the OBIE award to Maude Mitchell for Performance in 2003, the Dora Mavor Moore Award (Toronto) for Outstanding Touring Production in 2007, the Golden Herald Archangel Award (Edinburgh International Festival) for Sustained Achievement to Lee Breuer, the Garland Award (Los Angeles) to Maude Mitchell for her performance as Nora, two Drama League Nominations in 2008 (Distinguished Revival of a Play and Maude Mitchell for Distinguished Performance),

and the Elliot Norton Awards (Boston) for outstanding visiting production and outstanding actress-Maude Mitchell in 2012 (1).

Breuer's Radical Casting Choice

In *DollHouse*, Lee Breuer, who has a history of aggressively re-oriented classics, criticizes the imbalance of power found within the patriarchal system by employing drastic differences in perceptions of scale between the male and female characters. In the production, the male cast members all stand below four feet tall while the female actresses cast are all heights of six feet or greater, which reverses the scale-to-power ratio and serves as a profound visual metaphor of the absurdity of sexism, as miniature men dominate and control women that tower over the men both physically and as human beings. This is also an example of how Breuer uses estrangement to reveal the inherent problems within a patriarchal society as “the size differential provides a contradiction in which the scale that is associated with power becomes unfamiliar, but does so in a way that allows for a closer reading of the power dynamic within the larger context of social relations” (Taucar 270).

In the *Backstage* article entitled “Lee Breuer: Playing with Doll's” Leonard Jacobs reveals that Breuer insisted on making the set a real dollhouse because by making all the props miniaturized one can “physically represent a world fitting the men but not women, with all the implications that come out of that, such as the metaphor that life is a dollhouse” (1). Breuer explains that he “liked the ironic take on the patriarchy represented by little men ruling the roost while women suffer in their environment” (Jacobs 1). In fact, Breuer claims that “there's something about power being vested in a

3-foot-6-inch person. If a 3-foot-6-inch man is in control of a large and beautiful woman, [one has] a series of beats to play” (Jacobs 1). Breuer further argues that employing this experimental theatrical element in the production allows the actors to feel “empowered by the breadth of their performance” (Jacobs 1). On the other hand, Fuchs recounts a controversy surrounding the casting of the short men. “A few left the theater outraged,” she reports. But she concluded that “Breuer ridiculed a smug male world that held women down because it couldn’t see above their waists, yet regarded these same males with evident compassion. The identification with the male point of view, which Breuer has said was one of his intentions in the production, carried over to artistic respect for the three strong actors as well” (Fuchs 498-500).

Breuer’s bold artistic choice in casting people shorter than four feet tall to portray the male characters helps transform the metaphor of the story being about small-minded men into an overt visual pun. “It’s a hilarious image,” Breuer says of the size gap he has added to Ibsen’s controversial drama about identity politics. “It’s virtually a cartoon. And yet, at the same time, it’s tragic because it [masculine domineering] works” (Pressley 1). The concept for *DollHouse* is unquestionably groundbreaking and innovative as casting little men to domineer big women “has just never been done,” says Mark Povinelli, who has played Torvald since the show was first in workshops in New York (Pressley 1). For Breuer, the “patriarchy in reality is three feet tall but has a voice that will dominate six-foot women” and thus “male power isn’t dependent on physical size” (Fischer-Lichte et al. 47). With Breuer casting women with towering heights of six feet, Breuer devises a new politic of scale: “Who really are the dolls in this house?” (*Stagediary* 1). In fact, Breuer explains that the “[production] is exploring the metaphor from the woman’s point

of view, the way maternal love is lavished on these child-size men, which only infantilizes them further” (Fischer-Lichte et al. 47). Breuer attests that despite other productions of *A Doll’s House*, he’ll “put [his] ‘*Dollhouse*’ up against any of them as being more informative. More incisive. And a better production for our time” (Pressley 1). Even the reviewer Robert Dawson Scott in *The Times* of London praised the production commenting, “Ibsen will never be the same again. Would that all classics could be so searchingly but lovingly reexamined” (1).

Visual Disjunctions and Gender Imbalance

The production also becomes full of visual disjunctions that help highlight the absoluteness of male power. The following are all examples of the absoluteness of male power in *DollHouse*: Torvald browbeating Nora by calling her “my little squirrel” when he attempts to show his affection, Torvald’s anger causing Nora to hover in fear, and Nora cradling Torvald like a helpless baby in her arms. In these moments the dramatic height difference between the two sexes emphasizes how absurd this tyrannical power of men are as their power has no correlation to their physical size or strength. There is another instance that underscores the absurdity of this authoritarian male power rooted with deep insecurities through some changes made to the text of the play. Breuer substitutes the word “small” for “petty” when Torvald is telling Nora how much he detests the presumptuous way Krogstad talks to him. Nora comments to Torvald “These are such small things,” and to which Torvald aggressively replies, “You think I’m small?” (*Mabou Mines DollHouse* 1 Feb 2007).

As a result, the usual societal stereotype of a man being a powerful individual due to his physical dominance over a woman is reversed with the radical casting choice of little men and big women on stage. Breuer comments in *The Chicago Tribune* article entitled “‘*DollHouse*’ hits the heights” by Nina Metz that the casting is an approach that enables him to “make a political statement without being overtly political” (1). Metz argues that Breuer’s casting choice allows him to “characterize the patriarchy [of Nora and Torvald’s relationship] literally... [Torvald] is too small to classically and metaphorically knock [Nora] over the head and drag her into a cave. But no doubt, he dominates her emotionally, economically and culturally” (1). Additionally, Breuer claims that he is “interested in a theater that shows its metaphor, rather than speaks its metaphor, [and thus] if [one] can’t look at a play and see what it says, it’s a little bit of a failure” (Pressley 1). Breuer employed visual disjunctions in *DollHouse* to further reinforce the absurdity of male power in a patriarchal society as well as the women’s inability to defend themselves from the oppressive and unjust societal constraints.

DollHouse and Gender/Identity Politics

The politics on display in the production demonstrate gender and identity issues. In Ibsen’s *A Doll’s House*, there is an irreversible awakening of a woman who had been domineered and infantilized by Torvald who represents the tyrannical power of a patriarchal society in keeping women in an inferior social, economic, and political status compared to the men. In order to showcase the power imbalance between the two genders, the production incorporated a mix of exaggeration and quaintness for greater effect as Breuer explains how the “patriarchal desire at the time” was to reduce a

woman's life "like a little doll on top of a music box" (Lowe 1). In fact, divorces were not common and there had only been one divorce in Norway during this time as Breuer further discloses, "no woman could borrow money. They were absolutely, completely politically and socially curtailed. But the women lived good lives: They married well; they had big houses, lots of children, lots of servants—but still, no power, no freedom" (Lowe 1). In fact even Ibsen himself noted before writing *A Doll's House* that "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" (Ledger 33).

Structural Changes in *DollHouse*

DollHouse invokes an ethereal aura by transforming the familiar Helmer household of Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House* into a literal dollhouse with minute chairs, a pocket-size Christmas tree, a small rocking horse, and a doll with blonde hair dressed in a baby blue dress that mimics Nora's own dress and hairstyle. *DollHouse* adopted a more symbolic approach in exploring the power imbalance between women and men in the nineteenth century patriarchal society. The production is set in what seemingly appears to be a cozy baroque opera house behind velvet red curtains. Once the curtains open, a jumble of flats lying down on the stage is hoisted vertical and the scene becomes a brightly wallpapered nineteenth-century miniature dollhouse with doors, windows, and period furniture proportionally scaled to the "little people." Everything fit inside of this dollhouse except the doll. The miniature scale of the set highlights the gender imbalance and creates a specific frame for which the performance could take shape. Elinor Fuchs's

review of the production in the article “*Mabou Mines DollHouse*” in *Theatre Journal* reveals that this experimental technique used by Mabou Mines was not inconsistent with Ibsen’s text but it did disregard many of Ibsen’s original stage directions:

In three moves, before a line was uttered, Breuer had signaled a dense theatricality; he would keep before our eyes the drawing room play of a century ago, shift its scale to frame it in a ferocious commentary, yet remind us that behind the stage illusion (and its dissolution) lies the impassive machinery of theatrical artifice. The layering of metatheatre is of course licensed in the text, whose centerpiece is Nora’s performance of the notorious tarantella. (498-500)

Thus, Breuer imposed a theatrical vocabulary with the *mise-en-scène* he chose to employ throughout the production. This theatrical vocabulary would ensure the audience’s attention to be on this Victorian-themed parlor, shift its size to create a shocking commentary on the absurdity of male power, and still remind the audience that behind the stage illusion “lies the impassive machinery of theatrical artifice” (Fuchs 498-500).

Furthermore, Moi claims that the tarantella rehearsal scene demonstrates a “theatricalist agenda” (Friedman 259). This scene is a quintessential example of Ibsen’s metatheatricality as Nora dances crazily, breaking nineteenth century societal norms, Torvald complains, “as if [her] life depended on it” and she willingly agrees that her husband is right. In the tarantella dance, Nora attempts to desperately escape the domestic chains of her life and of society as a whole. Additionally, Moi claims that Nora “dances for multiple on-and off-stage audience” as Torvald (her husband), Dr. Rank (her admirer), and Mrs. Linde (her friend who is trying to piece together Nora’s complicated relationships) observes Torvald and Rank as they watch Nora perform the tarantella (Friedman 259). Nora’s “off-stage audience” gets an even more complete and layered view of the complex relationships between all the characters on stage. For Moi, “this show-stopping flamboyance reminds us that we are in a theatre” and reflects Ibsen’s

“sense that we need theater—I mean the actual form—to reveal to us the games of concealment and theatricalization in which we inevitably engage in everyday life” (Friedman 259).

In placing great emphasis on the disturbing elements of his spectacle, Breuer establishes clear narrative frames through the use of strategic and innovative staging that further reveals the suffocating sexism of nineteenth century society. As the red curtains roll down, a claustrophobic smaller space is presented where then Nora with the help of her maid constructs a literal life-size doll’s house piece by piece, decorating the dollhouse with roses and patches of pastel wallpaper. The set is adorned with cloyingly sweet colors and arches that make the dollhouse deceptively look like a candy store. However, in reality the dollhouse is more like a prison as the women must physically adapt their bodies to the walls of the dollhouse that act as physical barriers in order to please the men. In fact, in order for the women to inhabit this cramped space, they must crawl on their hands and knees to enter a room and pass the tiny doors or squeeze themselves awkwardly on chairs that cannot even accommodate them. Breuer is able to depict Ibsen’s subtext about marital manipulation by creating a stage where all of the furniture and doorframes are scaled to the men. Breuer explains his theory for the innovative staging in *Times Argus*: “The idea was to make a visual statement that reverberates with the politics of the work but doesn’t necessarily change the language. I wanted to characterize the patriarchy by taking Ibsen’s ‘doll-ness’ literally as a doll-sized world” (1).

Breuer wanted the staging to draw a parallel with the idea that instead of Nora’s children being given a toy dollhouse, all of the men in the play actually fit into the

playhouse. Breuer further explains his concept behind his unique staging choice in *The Rutland Herald*: “It’s like we’re going to a kindergarten with those little chairs—but the women don’t fit. The doll concept of life was the men’s world, and their idea was to try to fit the women into it, to cut them down to size—to put them in little wigs, with eyelashes and makeup and make them fashion items in this particular world—so they could control it” (1). However, both in Ibsen’s play and Breuer’s original adaptation this concept didn’t work in reality because as Breuer claimed “the men’s world was actually smaller than the women’s world” (Lowe 1). Thus, Breuer “wanted to demonstrate this simply by showing the relative size of the feminine power. As much as these men boss these women around, as much as fate made them small to make their men big, the fact is that the whole control factor was illusory—it just needed an anarchist like Nora to strike the match that burned up the illusion” (Lowe 1). As a result, the set employs an original twist of theater of the grotesque in that it is suited to fit only the very short, dollhouse-sized actors who play the men which are characterized by their false presumption of superiority and relentless attempts at domineering and patronizing the women of the play. Meanwhile, Nora is kept literally on her knees throughout the performance in an attempt to conform to the demands of her male chauvinist husband.

DollHouse and Mise-en-Scène

The mise-en-scène of *DollHouse* echoes a nineteenth century theater to convey the Victorian period. The stage at St. Ann’s where this production was first presented is spacious and far-reaching, surrounded by chocolate-box layer upon layer of red velvet. The setting includes a fold out dollhouse set with its doll-size furniture colored beige and

sky blue, red velvet curtains with gold tassels, and a chandelier hangs center stage. The walls of the diminutive dollhouse are the confines for the majority of the play. The entire cast, dressed in idyllic period costumes, performs with much exaggeration. In the performance, Torvald Helmer (played by Mark Povinelli) is introduced as the arrogant patriarchal head of the family; the newly appointed bank manager; Dr. Rank (played by Ricardo Gil) is presented as his indulgent and pompous friend; and Nils Krogstad (played by Kristopher Medina) is introduced as a sketchy bank clerk whose questionable past has led him to lend loans as a side job and who exploits Nora at his will. All three men wear Victorian jackets and trousers, although Krogstad's clothes are more run-down and his spectacles make him look more intimidating than the other two men. They walk pompously around the stage, smoke cigars, and act like toy soldiers.

Breuer employs different exaggerated theatrics to not only display the Victorian period but also to reveal the play's potential in uncovering hidden truths about the constructs of performance related to gender. As Sharon Friedman comments, "If Ibsen's depiction of gender is exaggerated and his use of the well-made play subversive, so Breuer's mise-en-scène exploits the melodrama embedded in the script for its full theatrical and ironic potential" (258). Breuer incorporates new experimental theatrical elements, which create visually powerful theatrics that are missing in Ibsen's original *A Doll's House*. For example, the casts' stylized gestures make them look like actors in a silent movie, regardless if they speak a fragmentary version of Ibsen's text. In fact, as in the silent film era there is a piano accompaniment throughout the performance. Additionally, in Breuer's production, a ghostly figure on stilts appears in a phantasmagorical dream sequence. All of these innovative theatrical elements that Breuer

incorporated in his production are meant to “exploit the melodrama embedded in the script for its full theatrical and ironic potential.”

The acting in *DollHouse* further reveals the different power dynamics Breuer created within this theatrical world. The statuesque Nora (played by Maude Mitchell) lives in a literal dollhouse where she does not physically fit into unlike her husband who fits the child-size furniture perfectly. Torvald both infantilizes Nora and grants her power within the domestic sphere, entrusting her to take care of the children, their morals, and their purity. A woman in Torvald’s world was confined both literally (the restrictive corsets and dresses) and figuratively (lack of any autonomy). During the show, Nora does her best to make her husband happy by speaking in a childish, breathy, and squeaky girlish falsetto, giggles at her husband’s demeaning pet names; pouts, flutters, and swoons; tosses her curls, frolics around the dollhouse, and sucks her thumb; and she most importantly never stands upright in front of Torvald. In fact she only crawls or bends down to her knees on the floor, shrinking physically herself to fit into her husband’s world while simultaneously granting Torvald a pretense of some shred of physical power.

For Mitchell, the experience of playing Nora with her disarming little shrill cries, relentless hysteria, and compulsive movements was extremely challenging. Mitchell states, “This is such a physically extreme production. I say it’s like doing an extreme sport. I have to physically diminish myself and make myself smaller. I’m on my knees, or picking up the children, picking up Torvald” (Metz 1). Mitchell’s movements are those of a wind-up toy in order to reinforce the unnaturalness of the image Nora had to construct in order to fit within the social constructions of society. Nora nonstop scurries and flutters around the stage like a frenzied puppet to portray the character’s nervousness while

Torvald pulls all of the strings. Mitchell's acting in *DollHouse* reinforces the powerful gender imbalance in a patriarchal system.

DollHouse and Melodrama

Furthermore, in Breuer's adaptation of Ibsen's play, the text shifted towards the melodramatic, which was heavily expressed when Nora first enters the stage. Nora enters the stage with a festive holiday spirit, seemingly bouncing of joy and excitement. Nora's every energetic step matches the cheery music from Edward Grieg. Edward Grieg, performed by pianist Ning Yu, played the musical score from an upright piano under the stage. The lid of this massive concert grand piano appeared to extend from this small instrument to cover a large portion of stage left and the effect of this artifice was to create an extra performance platform, an operatic stage upon the stage. Breuer established a move towards opera for the performance by both adding music and diminishing dialogue. In fact, Breuer removed certain phrases from the original text such as "I see's," "come now's" and "how so's" to help the text flow better with the music and allow for the performance to function more as an opera and melodrama.

Breuer's performance was influenced by many nineteenth and early twentieth-century Victorian theatrical conventions that demonstrated a strong connection to melodrama. For example, the draped silks with captions and the particular monologue from Dr. Rank's and his moral failings that was staged with his back to Nora, before an open window, further reinforce the melodramatic aspect of the performance. In the performance, there was a strong presence of frontal acting, uncontrolled strobe lights, and music emanating mainly from the piano that revived the connection between stage

melodrama and silent film. Additionally, there were certain scenes of inevitable physical comedy in Breuer's production that were anchored in realism as these scenes revealed how little men still had authority over the world of women in a patriarchal society: Dr. Rank sexually chasing Nora with the dexterity of a long jump athlete, the silly erotic game of Mrs. Linde and Krogstad, and a tarantella comic opera with Nora swinging Torvald in the air in the midst of strobe lights and storm effects on stage. Gender ambivalence can be noted in Breuer's performance, which adds a layer of complexity to deciphering the identities of the characters.

Additionally, the musical choices Breuer employed in the production recalled the melodrama of silent films, which were mostly accompanied by live musicians when shown in movie theaters. In the beginning of the show, a woman dressed in a long dress walks to the center of the stage, bows, and then proceeds to sit at a piano on the furthest corner of the stage. The woman plays a dramatic accompaniment throughout most of the scenes in the play. Breuer's original choice of having the play accompanied by a sentimental piano score arranged by composer Eve Beglarian and of the production closing operatically with music created by Beglarian is associated with Victorian melodrama and early silent film. Helene (played by Margaret Lancaster) plays a bass flute and adds a high-pitched soprano to the violin, which Neil Krogstad (played by Medina) ostentatiously removes from his briefcase for the provocative scene where Mrs. Linde seduces him.

In the second act, a dream sequence is showcased and then the "rehearsal of the tarantella dance becomes a strobe-lit bacchanalia" (Puchner 1). The strobe lighting that depicts Nora's frenzy as she dances the tarantella in her Capri costume also reveals her

insufferable passion. Then as the play edges closer towards its climax, the lighting becomes more diffused and subtle to demonstrate how melodrama and open sexuality have become interlaced, especially in the conciliation scene between Krogstad and Mrs. Linde in which Krogstad mimics the individual with the violin in hand while simultaneously receiving a blowjob in order to create a strong visual juxtaposition (Puchner 1). However, the strongest sexual underpinnings of the melodrama can be seen in Torvald's last pompous speech presented with dimmer, hazier light versus the strobe lighting and hallucinations before with Nora where he supposedly forgives Nora for her noble sacrifice (Puchner 1). The lighting and music employed in *DollHouse* are very effective in displaying the feelings of the characters and the interior conflicts they are facing as both men and women in this society.

DollHouse and Extravagant Theatricalism

Breuer employs extravagant theatrical vocabulary and presents an elaborate spectacle to showcase how gender constructs limit individuals to become tireless performers in a world full of societal constraints. The following are some examples of these exaggerated elements in the play: the striping and groping between these characters who usually only arch eyebrows at each other; the naked leading lady lip-synching opera surrounded by an ensemble of puppets; a live pianist playing throughout the scenes; a trio of singing Lilliputians; the use of cod Norwegian accents throughout the play; and Nora's nightmare of a giant governess, around nine to ten feet tall, who represents the wife who remarkably leaves her oppressive domestic life behind in Ibsen's groundbreaking 1879 play. This particular production forgoes any attempts at realism, and instead emphasizes

the theatricality of the play. The Mabou Mines company website states Breuer's theory that fueled his artistic choices in *DollHouse*:

We find that the men are the same size as the children. Is this 'dollhouse' the world of patriarchy, the world in which a woman never fits? Lee Breuer asks rhetorically. Here Ibsen's feminism is metaphorically rendered as a parable of scale. The 'dollhouse' is a man's world and only doll-like women who allow their men to feel grand can hope to live in it. Even the Norwegian accents are miniaturized; it is like the accents for the living dolls in Disney's 'It's a Small World. Nothing here is real except the pain. Both Torvald and Nora are trapped in a meta-narrative playing out an illusion of male power. Both pay the price: the death of love. (1)

However, in Ibsen's original play at the end of the show, Ibsen communicates the opposite metaphor in that the women have been diminished to mere living dolls, at the expense of the manipulative and deceitful men in society. *DollHouse* straddles between employing a non-real approach and delineating realistic struggles the characters face by detailing the mise-en-scène with an elegant pianist accompanying each scene with snatches of Grieg, which illuminates every line of a text, that besides minimal cuts, remains true to Ibsen's text.

Breuer's use of extravagant theatrical vocabulary helps dramatize the overwhelming patriarchal system. With the production keeping Ibsen's text practically intact, the show further demonstrated the power of social truth by combining Ibsen's text with hyperboles, embellishments, and innovative experimental elements like visual disjunctions and risqué nudity and sex scenes to accentuate the power of art, revealing social injustices, gender constructs, and identity frameworks within a patriarchal society. Additionally, Breuer in fact shows how the social radicalism embedded in Ibsen's original work was built on Victorian theatrical values. Breuer's incorporation of sentimental melodrama, experimental puppet theater, and Nora's operatic aria at the end

of the show are all examples of theatricalization meant to unravel deeper meanings about identity and gender politics in *A Doll's House*. As the silent movie style accompaniment that culminates in puppet versions of Nora and Torvald who witness their own marriage fall apart, Breuer's production is able to always comment upon performance itself, specifically gender performance. With Breuer's incorporation of eerie Fellini-style sequences, the production fractures both the societal conventions associated with nineteenth century bourgeois marriage and that of bourgeois theater itself. As Jacqueline Gerdne points out in the article "Theater Design in *Mabou Mines DollHouse*" the design elements employed in the performance subvert "gender expectation and patriarchal power" as the "walls of the [miniaturized dollhouse] set never change showing the stagnation of patriarchy, which is only broken by Nora's radical decision to escape her marriage and live independently of society's expectation of women by making her way in the world" (1).

Additionally, the *mise-en-scène* reveals gender performativity for both the female and male characters as the walls of the dollhouse reinforce how both genders are trapped in a patriarchal society that enforces gender as a social performance. As the red drapes open, the audience sees miniature boxes with replica puppets of Torvald and Nora performing the same movements as the life-size characters, insinuating that "both men and women are entrapped in the expectations that adhere to their respective gender roles and is bound to repeat the same action if not set free" (Gerdne 1). Additionally, the acting in the performance is powerful because it's incited by consistent underscoring. In fact, actors faint, scream, throw furniture, and hide in corners of the stage to spy on one another. At times the audience even sees some of the characters moving along the outside

wall of the dollhouse to eavesdrop secrets or more intimate conversations of other characters. These exaggerations are consistent with Ibsen's original *A Doll's House*.

DollHouse employs an almost ritualistic acting style rather than realistic, what Breuer calls formalistic, in order to better highlight the stark contrasts, which transforms Ibsen's drama into an almost puppet-like black comedy. Breuer further explains the history of this method of acting that was employed in the performance: "This certainly steals an acting style that was used in the clubs in Munich in 1900 and picked up by playwright Bertolt Brecht. We associate it, and rightly so, with some of the high melodrama that was used for silent films...with this style of acting and the piano in the background, [one] get[s] the idea that [one is] in a silent film melodrama" (Lowe 1). In the performance, there is also an element of nineteenth century melodrama, where the actor would speak to the music with tremendous dramatic effect in an attempt to enact speaking opera in the show. Breuer's directing choices "can work against the melodrama and the music, and parody the melodrama. [For example] in the love scenes, the men are picked up by the women—the men are swept off their feet—so [Breuer] can get a lot of comedy from it. It's a comedy of opposition" (Lowe 1).

DollHouse, Brechtian Techniques, and the Uncanny

In a special issue of the *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature* titled "Playing (with) Gestic Dolls in *Mabou Mines DollHouse*," Jacqueline Taucar attests that "by shifting the doll's role in Ibsen's play from a figurative trope to a physical presence, *DollHouse* performatively critiques the symbolic and formative function of the doll to shape and structure contemporary social constructions of women in patriarchal society"

(268-69). Taucar explains how three different Brechtian theater techniques, estrangement, gestus, and historicization, are employed by Breuer and Mitchell in *DollHouse* to help reveal how commodified objects, like the doll, are used to reinforce the gender imbalance of power present within the patriarchal system that renders women's freedom and independence obsolete. The first scene of the play opens with a powerful allegory, Nora grabs the blonde hair of a doll, which is dressed just like her, and aggressively tears open its head. This shocking but realistic gesture not only encapsulates the violence with which dolls are treated by children but also demonstrates Nora's internal frustration of being reduced to a mere doll taking care of her dollhouse and of being constantly infantilized by her dictatorial husband, Torvald.

In the essay *Uncanny*, Sigmund Freud, the philosopher and psychologist, had been very interested in exploring the "uncanny" which he suggests is "nothing new or alien, but something which is familiar and old-established in the mind and which has become alienated from it only through the process of repression" (241). In addition to analyzing the relationship individuals have with something familiar that then becomes unfamiliar, Freud explored the ambivalent nature of dolls' and their human-like doubling where the creation of dolls as a human double results in the loss of the human identity as more dolls are produced. Thus, Freud insisted that searching for life inside of dolls triggered the effect of the uncanny. As Puchner claims, Freud examined human's desire to saw open dolls in order to search for their souls and as Nora finds a macaroon inside the skull of the doll, which she keeps hidden from her controlling husband, this moment further dispels the uncanniness of *DollHouse* (1). This production successfully dissected Ibsen's *A Doll's House* with the same determination as Nora in order to investigate each

of the characters and their search for their own souls and their own identity under the framework of patriarchy. Puchner explains that “the entire production takes place on a miniature set, with toy chairs, toy beds, toy doors, toy pianos, toy everything, forcing the life-sized actors into the world of dead and animated puppets. An army of dolls is employed to reanimate this overly familiar play and in the process make it seem strange and unfamiliar” (1).

The stage design in Breuer’s production involves a dramatic visual contrast between the men and women as well as the inclusion of Brechtian *gestus* and estrangement in order to enact Nora’s dollhouse world, a world ruled by patriarchy and societal conventions that drowned her own sense of self. *Gestus*, a term coined by German theater practitioner Bertolt Brecht, refers to a gesture, word, or acting that renders visible the societal and cultural conventions and attitudes that is hidden in the text of the play. *Verfremdungseffekt*, the alienation or estrangement effect is the process in which a subject that is familiar is made unfamiliar to the audience.

In the opening scene of the play, Brechtian elements are visible in the scenographic design as Breuer reveals the technical “behind-the-scenes” of the performance before the show starts and any actions occur, which estranges the audience from traditional theatrical conventions. The setting reveals an empty set with boxes of props, a piano that is placed at the edge of stage left, low height portable stages are noticeably positioned in the back wall of the stage, and different scenery flats placed on the floor of the stage. This further allows the audience to focus on the distinct lighting used in the production, how the space offstage to the right and left of the acting area is utilized, and how the production incorporates different technological apparatus in the

production. Through this estrangement, the audience can better understand how both a stage and a production itself is constructed and de-constructed in order to give a theatrical experience. Now after the pianist enters the stage and begins to play, falling red drapes cover the behind-the-scenes props of theatrical production, re-instating a momentary frame of theatrical tradition. However, Breuer intentionally wants to strip the performance of theatrical conventions and thus uncovers and satires the intense metatheatricality present in Ibsen's *A Doll's House*. Additionally, Breuer's use of Brechtian techniques in the scenography of the performance demonstrates how the dollhouse, an object of consumption, molds the actions and behaviors of the women who figuratively and literally live inside this dollhouse, and that Nora plays a very big part in her dehumanization and self-objectification.

DollHouse and Gender Performance

Brechtian gestus helps exemplify Judith Butler's claim that gender is performative in *DollHouse*. As Butler explains in *Gender Trouble*, "there is no gender identity behind the expression of gender; identity is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results" (25). Mitchell's performance of Nora offers a parody of the conventional physical traits associated with femininity as she is dressed in a very girlish and ladylike fashion that flaunts not only her bountiful breasts and tight waist, but also emphasizes the vastly envied and strongly desired "hour-glass" female figure that was marketed to both genders in society as an object of male gaze. In addition, there are specific examples of social gestus that Mitchell performs consistently in every scene throughout the production that highlight conventional social constructs of what it means

to be feminine: flirting with men, fainting when encountering adversity, acting subserviently to Torvald, and speaking with a squeaky, high-pitched childlike voice.

In analyzing Mitchell's satirical portrayal of Nora, which represents the historicized understanding of gender constructs, the performance calls into question gender norms by demonstrating the comic absurdity of this limiting heteronormative hyper-femininity. Regardless that Mitchell alludes to historical nineteenth century performances with her hyper-feminine actions such as fainting, using a doll-like voice, and showing extreme deference to her husband, the effect of a Brechtian sense of historicization, which "in addition to pointing out historically significant forces and relationships at work in the past...is of course intended to suggest the continued impact of the dramatized conditions in other historical periods" (Laughlin 219). Mitchell's performance demonstrates similarities between the historical and modern gender performance.

Furthermore, Breuer's production employs Brechtian historicization in order to demonstrate the fluidity of social relations within a historical context. Social relations can be characterized as part of a moving dialectic, illustrating the ways in which current social institutions are historically determined, transient, and variable. Laughlin claims that "the argument for the 'historicizing' of dramatic events has aided women eager to reclaim and re-examine history from a woman's perspective while at the same time revealing the social and political forces at work in shaping women's destinies" (214). Many feminist theories founded in discussions about the female body have used Brechtian historicization to communicate the idea that both the female body and gender

have been social and culturally constituted which allows for the female body to be subject to change because of historicization.

Also, another example of Brecht's social *gestus* is Mitchell's use of certain theatrical elements. For example, Mitchell breaks the fourth wall by establishing a connection with her audience by winking at them, acknowledging the presence of individuals in the audience, sporadically losing her "Norwegian" accent, and often breaking from her character by addressing the audience with her natural lower pitched voice that has a higher resonance than the breathy falsetto she employs to play the character of Nora. Mitchell purposefully breaks her standard constructed femininity to shift the audience's attention away from the character she plays to the reality that the audience is watching a performance of an actress playing a role on stage. Brecht describes this gestic process as the way an artist's "performance becomes a discussion (about social conditions) with the audience he is addressing" which propels the audience to notice and examine these social conditions (139). The spectators are now aware that gender is just another form of performance that is guided by certain codes and constructs.

Thus, Mitchell's breaking of the fourth wall through her winks, direct address, and character slippages are a form of social *gestus* or an anti-characterization that severs the relationship between the female body and the patriarchal system. This anti-characterization undermines the idea present in naturalistic acting where a character is viewed as passive and changeless and where social processes are seen as deterministic and one-dimensional. Regardless of the naturalist illusion of reality where the character appears whole, a character represents an individual in society who realistically is not a fixed entity with one clear-cut identity but is instead an entity that has fragmented into

multiple identities with constantly changing dialectics and perspectives. As a result, the effect of a historicized body demonstrates that the body is not a definitive entity but instead a site of change. With Mitchell's employment of Brechtian techniques, Elin Diamond claims that an actress no longer appears like a "self-contained 'whole' in which the character is seamlessly laminated onto body in a one to one relationship" (Taucar 274). Diamond argues that:

The body, particularly the female body, by virtue of entering the stage space, enters representation-it is not just there, a live, unmediated presence, but rather (1) a signifying element in a dramatic fiction; (2) a part of a theatrical sign system whose conventions of gesturing, voicing, and impersonating are referents for both performer and audience; and (3) a sign in a system governed by a particular apparatus, usually owned and operated by men for the pleasure of a viewing public whose major wage earners are male. (89)

As a result, during the production, the audience's focus is divided between different orders of representation: the female body, the actor or actress, and the character of Nora. For Diamond, *gestus* is a moving dialectic between the character, audience, and actor in which the audience may measure her or himself against new understandings of gender based on how it has been historically perceived and how these perceptions have historically evolved. In creating this awareness of new formulations of gender, this will help the female character resist their coercion into a patriarchal system dominated by the "male gaze" conceptualized by Laura Mulvey as a way of seeing. This "male gaze" is further exemplified by *mise-en-scène*, story line, and cinematography, which is an experience that both actors and the audience of both genders witness. As Mitchell breaks the fourth wall by directly addressing the audience, she is confronting the gaze of the audience, which shifts their engagement from being passive spectators to active critics.

Additionally, Mitchell's "looking-back" reveals different nuances about the female body from within representation while fracturing its perceived cohesion and balance.

Another example of how Mitchell uses gestic action in the performance is the relationship between commodification and the physical adaptation of a woman's body to fit into the patriarchal society that occurs in the theatrical scene where Nora begs Torvald for money. In this scene, Nora is portrayed as an object, similar to the doll, whose sole purpose is to fulfill Torvald's desires. In this particular scene, Mitchell's six foot figure shrivels as she crouches down to her knees on the stage until she is below the eye level of Mark Povinelli, who plays Torvald. Torvald teases Nora by holding out a banknote that is barely out of her reach, demonstrating a power play that however is rendered ridiculous as Mitchell with her natural height could have easily grabbed the bill. However, Nora diminishes her own size and capability on purpose to please Torvald and to show her utmost deference to his authority. Then, Torvald strategically places the bill between his lips where Nora crawls on all fours towards Torvald and snatches the money from between his lips with her own. This scene can even be interpreted as a sick and twisted sexual game, which regardless diminishes Nora as a physical object, not a human being. Nora's ridiculous behavior only serves to satisfy Torvald's desires, to reinforce Torvald's power, and to emphasize the shocking negative effects a patriarchal system has on the freedom and autonomy of the women living under this system. Torvald is the master puppeteer while Nora is his puppet as he is pulling all of her strings for his mere entertainment.

The Doll in *DollHouse*

The doll in *DollHouse* represented both an example of cliché male-oriented femininity and of a disconcerting gendered performance of Nora in society. Nora in the opening sequence is presented as a consumer that passes consumerism to her children as she enters home with several Christmas gifts for her children: “But come over here” she beckons Torvald, “I want to show you all the things I’ve bought. And so cheap! Look, some new clothes for Ivar...and a little sword. There’s a horse and a trumpet for Bob. And a doll and a doll’s cot for Emmy” (Ibsen 3). Interestingly, the doll that Nora purchases for her daughter looks identical to both Nora and her daughter, as they are all wearing blue gowns with their hair similarly styled with voluminous, cascading, blonde curls.

In a dramaturgical sense, Nora mirrors the doll throughout the performance, which reinforces the consumption process, and the legacy Nora is passing down to her daughter. In fact, the toys Nora buys and brings into her home represent implicit social and gender coding that will shape the identities of her three children, Ivar, Bob, and Emmy. 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 as “Daddy’s doll child” (Ibsen 80). In fact, the doll becomes a symbol for the experiences women faced within society. Additionally, Mitchell’s performance of Nora where she acts like a doll employs specifically Brechtian *gestus* which refers to Brecht’s theater techniques where the cultural limitations of women instilled through consumerist practices that are embodied in everyday life are exposed and denounced. *Gestus* is not just an imitation of social relations, but a specific

interpretation that encourages the audience to reevaluate social and gender constructs. In the production, gestic actions and costumes in Mitchell's portrayal of Nora are used in three ways: to chronicle the performative nature of a heteronormative womanhood; to theatrically examine and interpret the depiction of the female body stage; and to condemn the process of consumption and the role of specific consumer items like the doll that play a fundamental part in the curtailing of women's freedom and individuality.

Nora's Self-Objectification in *DollHouse*

In fact, Nora conforms to the doll by reducing her own status to that of an object. In this process of self-objectification, Nora herself acts like a doll, which then allows Torvald to take advantage of her as she deliberately presents herself as submissive to Torvald, bowing down to patriarchal power. As Nora performs the clear signs of consumer-shaped femininity such as her delicate and dainty doll-like steps as she walks around the stage or her girlish high-pitched falsetto as she sheepishly giggles her lines, she becomes a quintessential object upon for which Torvald can satisfy his sexual desires. Mitchell, who is presented as a colossal being in comparison to her very short husband, quite literally performs Nora as Torvald's "little songbird" through her employment of comic actions and childlike subordination to her farcical short husband.

Through Mitchell's performance of Nora mirroring the doll, Mitchell conveys how dolls are gender-coded toys that implant unique traits of gender identity, as well as impose traditional social and cultural structures. John G. Richardson and Carl H. Simpson conducted a research on children and playthings in the article "Children, Gender, and Social Structure: Analysis of the Contents of Letters to Santa Claus" where

they established that there is a causal relationship between gendered play patterns and adult life patterns (430). Richardson and Simpson claim that playing with gendered playthings is a “factor reducing the life choices of girls” as they analyzed other studies that also linked children’s exposure to gendered playthings as affecting their cognitive development (430).

Furthermore, Richardson and Simpson argue that girls who play with gender-specific playthings are indoctrinated and conditioned to act in a way that reinforces the patriarchal system and limits their own agency since the toys are “passive and less demanding” in comparison to the toys that are constructed for boys that Shirley Weitz claims are “more demanding in design, engaging active and creative interactions” (qtd. in Richardson and Simpson 430). For Butler, a girl is “girled” when she is born, as the moment that this baby has been labeled a “girl” her social identity has been constituted (“Critically Queer” 22-3). As a result gender-specific play is just another example that shows how a girl has been “girled.” In *DollHouse*, the doll that Nora carries becomes the exemplary model for her role in the household as a mother and wife, the doll contributes to her limited understanding of “femaleness” and ability to have the same freedoms and rights as men, and the doll structures her performance of femininity in society.

Changing Normative Understandings of Femininity

Now despite that the doll has been identified as an object of consumption that supports particular behaviors and actions of women in a patriarchal society, the doll can also represent a beacon of hope for women in achieving freedom from societal constraints by removing the denotative possibility of the doll. Additionally, by organizing

provocative and different social and gender performances of the doll, the normative understandings of femininity have the potential to change. Arthur Frank in *For a Sociology of the Body* emphasizes that the corporeality of the body opens up possibilities for a type of agency that questions and undermines external discourses. Frank argues that “bodies, of course, do not emerge out of discourses and institutions; they emerge out of other bodies, specifically women’s bodies” (49). Regardless of the notion that the body exists among various discourses, the body cannot be categorized as solely one-dimensional but in fact the body is an entity that exists as something beyond the limitations of image, language, and even the space of a stage in theater. Thus, the body can be thought of as something that is conditioned by external factors. As Frank suggests, 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 (47). Variation and improvisation occur when the social practice of consumption allows the body to understand itself, its limits, and its ability to find new resources (Frank 48-9).

Undermining Heteronormative Gender Coding

Mitchell, an actress that understands the power of improvisation and variation in acting, uses the doll in ways that undermine its own heteronormative gender coding. For instance, another gesture can be seen when Mitchell starts using the doll’s head to hide her forbidden macaroons from her controlling husband. In this scene, Nora is secretly asserting her own sexual desires, which are shown to be for the first time in the show independent from her husband. Thus, this doll’s secret hiding spot provides Nora a new

performative space free from the tyranny of her husband. Nora is aware that her own desires are placed on the backburner as her whole value as a human being is in being an object that satisfies her husband's desires while Nora crams the forbidden macaroons into her mouth behind his back, Torvald denounces her, "Didn't [you] go nibbling on a macaroon or two?" Nora replies, "I would never dream of doing anything you didn't want me to" (Ibsen 5). The macaroons can also be thought of as a satisfactory substitute for sex, which help Nora fill a void that Torvald can never truly satisfy. There is a scene where Torvald comes back home from the dance with Nora and he desperately wants Nora sexually as he pins Nora to the bed onstage ripping off her clothes, as she snubs him "No No! I don't want to!" To which he grumbles, "Don't want to? I'm your husband!" (*Mabou Mines DollHouse* 1 Feb 2007)

However, Nora performs an alternative understanding of the doll in several moments throughout the show where she is able to challenge and undermine Torvald's authority by refusing to be subservient and docile to Torvald. For example, Nora's forging of her father's signature for a loan, Nora's use of the money from the loan to travel and save Torvald's life, Nora working a secret side job in order to pay off the loan, and Nora hiding the forbidden macaroons from Torvald all prove Nora's defiance towards Torvald and the controlling patriarchal social system. Nora's most transgressive act occurs when she finally walks out on Torvald and her societal role of being a housewife. These moments rupture the role that women were expected to fulfill in a patriarchal society as they were reduced to mere objects for the consumption and entertainment of their male counterparts. In fact, the story line in Ibsen's *A Doll's House* strongly resembles the actual life circumstances of one of Ibsen's protégés, Laura Kieler.

Ibsen mentored Kieler, as he would offer advice and opinions about the various manuscripts and other written work Kieler would send to Ibsen. In 1876 Kieler borrowed money to travel to Italy to save [her husband's] life as he had been recently diagnosed with tuberculosis (Hanssen 1). As Kieler got into conflicts with her creditors, in the same way Nora got into an argument with Krogstad, Kieler committed forgery to obtain the money she needed. As soon as the husband discovered the forgery, he divorced Kieler, forbid her from ever seeing the children again, and committed her to a mental asylum (Hanssen 1).

Fracturing Constructs of Performance

Meanwhile Nora is able to construct a façade of being the perfect housewife to Torvald as her subversive performances are hidden from her husband, which allows her to have more freedom and independence than was permitted by the society at the time. The controversial final scene of *DollHouse*, where Nora leaves behind her husband, her children, and her home, demonstrates how Nora socially and physically refuses her doll-like object status. This shows that there is a possibility for females to gain more agency by enforcing the need to challenge the patriarchal system and the placement of women in the same status as mere objects of consumption rather than as human beings with basic human rights. In the scene where Nora sings an operatic aria, she demonstrates the fracture of the constructed identity of femininity and the rise of a new identity for women that is measured in agency and freedom rather than subservience and ultimate deference to a man: “Our house has never been anything but a play-room. I have been your doll wife, just as at home I was Daddy’s doll child” (*Mabou Mines DollHouse* 1 Feb 2007).

As Nora rips off her doll-like trappings by tearing her dress off her body and pulls her lush blonde curls, until she is completely bald and naked, she symbolically rejects the physical representations of the societal construction of her identity. This symbolic stripping of one's garments is a classic Brechtian *gestus* that displays how Nora's identity is shaped by the social, cultural, and political circumstances surrounding her and to which Nora intentionally tries to not acknowledge. Only when Nora becomes conscious of her objectification and gains self-awareness of how the patriarchal system has historically controlled the representation of the female body does that incite her into leaving behind her marital and familial life at the end of the performance. This crucial moment signals the possibility for Nora to start a new life and find her identity as a free human being no longer shackled by the chains of patriarchy. It is essential that Nora strip herself of her doll articles in order to start a new life as the garments represent the historicized trappings of heteronormative femininity and her new baldness represents the further removal of the ideal notion of femininity.

Dramaturgical Shift in Style in *DollHouse*

Additionally, Nora's transformation in Breuer's production is underlined by a dramaturgical shift in style from melodrama to opera in the final scene. This serves as a performative trope that showcases the magnitude of Nora's pivotal emotional epiphany, and mirrors the action on stage with a wall of toy puppets that represent Nora and Torvald. This dramatic shift in style from melodrama to opera is a quintessential example of Brechtian estrangement or alienation effect. The Brechtian estrangement technique is visible in two ways: The audience of the performance is forced to adapt to both this

dramaturgical change of two different genres as well as the transition from one genre to another during the performance. Breuer's choice to employ exaggerated theatricality over a more realistic approach serves as a satire of the archetypal characteristics of Nora and helps create an evolved and progressive outlook on what a "feminist" hero looks like and acts like. As Nora strips of her clothes, removes her wig, and leaves behind her domestic life, the power of the *gestus* is evident as the performance heavily critiques the patriarchal system and the limited roles women have under this social order.

When Nora gains self-awareness that Torvald's love is a selfish and empty one and that women were considered mere objects of consumption in this patriarchal society, she leaves the stage and everything that once was her life. Nora re-enters the stage in an opera box on stage left while Torvald stands at center stage. There has been an interesting switch in costumes as both Nora and Torvald are no longer wearing their nineteenth century garments but instead they have changed into togas, which reminds the audience of how individuals dressed in classical opera. At the end of the show, the red curtains surrounding the stage are now pulled up displaying various half-sized opera boxes with a wide chorus of Torvald and Nora puppets mimicking the conversation and actions between the real actors of Torvald and Nora.

Puppets and Nora's transformation in *DollHouse*

Even the puppets illustrate Nora's transformation from a passive doll to an active free subject as they mimic all of Nora's actions, even the ones where she transgresses Torvald's authority. In *DollHouse*, there is a small pause in Nora's song where Torvald walks to the opera box in which she stands and the following is sung:

Torvald: I would gladly toil day and night for you, Nora, enduring all manner of sorrow and distress. But nobody sacrifices his honour for the ones he loves.

Nora: Hundreds and thousands of women have.

Torvald: You think and talk like a silly child. (*Mabou Mines DollHouse* 1 Feb 2007)

After this phrase is sung, the various Torvald puppets repeat in unison: “Silly Child!” The

Nora puppets on the other hand respond: “Thousands of women have done just that.”

Then in a symbolic gesture, each Nora puppet exits the stage leaving behind her Torvald puppet alone in the opera boxes while the sound of the door slam echoes in the theater.

Breuer’s artistic choice in employing a repetitious act of Nora puppets leaving their

Torvald puppet counterpart makes the audience reflect on the meaning of Ibsen’s original

“door slam” scene to an even greater extent by seeing it play over and over again. Finally,

the dollhouse set is dissolved after the audience hears the echoed sound of a slamming

door, the audience sees Nora running naked across the stage, leaving behind her

societally prescribed domestic role. This powerful visual image of Nora at the end of the

performance further shows the fragility and vulnerability of the patriarchal system and its

social and gender constructs.

DollHouse’s Redoubling Theatricality in Final Scene

In the historic door slam final scene in Ibsen’s original *A Doll’s House*, the

audience witnesses antritheatricalism. Throughout the entirety of Ibsen’s performance,

Nora’s life within the domestic sphere is increasingly unmanageable and out of control,

thus her future would be an exit from theater and a reawakening to realism. However,

Breuer’s work differs in that his production redoubles theatricality in the final scene and

showcases the inequality between the two genders. As Torvald waits for Nora in the

center stage doll bed, he is lost in a sexual daydream. As soon as Nora leaves her husband and marital life behind, she can be seen standing in seat above the stage, as she is completely naked while Torvald rests on the top of their bed. Nora's power is stripped bare in juxtaposition to Torvald's secret and hidden power. In this dramatic scene, her blonde wig is stripped away to reveal a frightening bald skull. The dollhouse then collapses around Torvald and he is begging at Nora's feet. The audience hears fragments of their final scene, sung. The red curtains that encircle the stage now also surround the different opera boxes that each contains a large female and small puppet doll. In the final moments of the show, Torvald wanders the auditorium aimlessly in his underwear, shouting Nora's name over and over again. The small Helmer daughter (played by Tate Katie Mitchell) is riding on her rocking horse alone into the future on the broken set, imitating her parents' final lines while flaunting a toy sword. Similar to the final glimpse the audience has of her mother, the audience has to depend on their imagination to interpret what will be of Nora's daughter's future. The ending serves as an ambivalent representation of the struggles both men and women face as the girl could find an opportunity to carve a new role for herself in society or she could remain trapped in the doll's house, indefinitely vulnerable to patriarchy's lasting effects involving loss of identity and individuality.

Rejection of Gender Constructs in *DollHouse*

As a result, the show reveals how the power of the patriarchal social order depends on the participation of individuals. Lee Breuer and Maude Mitchell disrupt the historicized consumer-shaped femininity by using Brechtian techniques that transform

the symbolic role of the doll to a tangible and physical element of performance. *DollHouse* re-creates the controversial but ground-breaking “door-slam” by refusing to incorporate the naturalistic approach to acting and staging that Ibsen’s *A Doll’s House* emphasize. By deterring from this naturalistic approach, *DollHouse* can reject gender constructs, especially in objects produced for their consumption, in a more playful and comical manner. Also *DollHouse* employs Brechtian acting, which prevents the spectators from being passively absorbed by the illusion of “reality” in theater. Instead, the spectators are kept engaged and mobilized to be active critics to question the social and gender constructions of the patriarchal system. Mitchell always reveals that she is performing. Thus, the audience can understand how femininity is part of a heteronormative performance: various physical expressions women perform and that in return also perform women and their social constructions under a patriarchal social order.

Consequently, Breuer and Mitchell’s adaptation of Ibsen’s classic play *A Doll’s House* consisted of not only re-imagining Ibsen’s work both in its content and its shock effect to the audience but also in calling for a more actively critical audience rather than a passive complicit audience. Breuer and Mitchell in *DollHouse* emphasize the importance of encouraging an audience to be critical of the social ideologies and historical constructions revealed in the performance that restrict a woman’s freedom, independence, and development of a true identity outside of the realm of consumer capitalism in today’s society.

DollHouse and its Shock Value

James Gibbons Huneker, an influential New York drama and music critic, said at the time, that the final slamming of the door in Ibsen's first performance of *A Doll's House* in 1880 "reverberated across the roof of the world" (Jefferson 1). Taucar affirms that *DollHouse*, regardless of it being a contemporary production, was still able to bring back the original "shock value" that Ibsen's *A Doll's House* generated when it was first performed (268). Ibsen's decision to have Nora slam the door and leave behind her marital and domestic life shocked the sensibilities of its nineteenth century audience. However, a contemporary production needs to reimagine Nora's revolutionary door slam in a way that resonates with the different societal conventions and limitations present to women in society today. *DollHouse* is able to successfully recapture the dramatic effect of Ibsen's original play through incorporating experimental elements and stagy theatrics, intense theatricalization, and powerful visual contrast.

In the final tableau of the performance, the shape-shifting power dynamics between the two sexes is finally resolved with Nora announcing to her husband that she is leaving the doll's house forever in the style of nineteenth century grande opera. In this dramatic ending, Nora is singing not just to the spectators of the show but also to an audience of elegantly dressed puppets in operatic boxes in the back wall of the stage. For Breuer, this ending "turns the play into a wonderfully ironic comedy as [the] audiences don't know whether to laugh or cry" (Metz 1). Breuer claims that the audience engages with this "melodramatic style of acting, in the style of silent movies, and when [one] puts all this together—the over-the-top comedy, the visual punning—it becomes a tragic sort of comedy" (Metz 1). Breuer chose to employ a more melodramatic style while keeping the content realistic in the performance as opposed to Ibsen's more realistic acting style

as Breuer deems that melodrama is very applicable to the twenty-first century. At the end of the show, “everything and everyone becomes a doll” (Puchner 1). Puchner argues that “the large female characters are dolls to the small men. At one point, Torvald flies through the air carried by a stagehand as if he were a puppet. Nora carries her own Nora doll and her two children are both dressed to resemble dolls and treated like them as well. The final scene features a whole array of mechanically moving puppets” (1). There is also a specific moment in the final scene where the daughter, who is dressed up like Nora with the only difference being that she is grasping a toy sword in her hands, delivers the infamous last line, “leaving [the audience] with the sense that the next generation of Nora’s will not be content with leaving their dollhouses. They will return as avenging angels, breaking toys, husbands, and opera houses apart” (Puchner 1).

Breuer’s ending in *DollHouse* proves that what was generally believed to be a modern drama is in reality a nineteenth century melodrama with a largely mechanical narrative. In Ibsen’s original ending of the play, Nora does not accept Torvald’s apology, delivers a feminist manifesto against the patriarchal society, and gives back her wedding ring to Torvald. Nora fundamentally rejects her role as a doll in a dollhouse. Breuer’s ending in *DollHouse* differs by shifting the register from melodrama to opera that also results in dramatic monologues turning into operatic solos. The dollhouse stage is transformed into an opera house with a chorus of puppets sitting in a few rows back from the stage echoing the argument with their voices. Nora, who has had a costume change from the blue doll’s dress to a traditional, delicate white dress, is revealed in one of these rows, singing her final cry of liberation wholeheartedly. On the other hand, Torvald is found snoring after his decisive speech and as soon as he awakens he joins his wife

singing several pleas. During Nora's last operatic solo, Nora never actually slams a door but Nora removes what turns out to be a wig, revealing a shaved head. Nora stripes both literally and figuratively, discarding all of the limitations of her life as a doll. During the whole final discussion, both Nora and Torvald only sing to each other. Thus, Breuer establishes the innovative idea that the dolls observe the dolls: "I wanted to allude to the fact that we're all dolls, programmed to observe and to comment. In the last analysis, we're all kind of programmed" (Bonetti 1).

In the final scene when Nora's cloak of romantic illusion is stripped away from her, Breuer's use of theatrical elements causes the show to "transform in a disturbing coup-de-theatre from puppet-play into opera" (McMillan 1). The audience is able to trace Nora's development from someone who is just a housewife taking care of the home, who then begins to evolve by the end of the first half, into a truly dominating and towering character. Nora's escape in the final scene seems infinitely brave as she strips off her corset and blonde wig to reveal her naked and hairless self to the patriarchal environment assertively stating "I have another duty, just as sacred...my duty to myself" (*Mabou Mines DollHouse* 1 Feb 2007). In this visual, Nora looks extremely vulnerable, like a newborn baby about to enter the vicious world.

Nora's unglamorous nakedness represents her stripping off the weight of having to be constrained in a patriarchal society, the development of inner strength, and her newfound identity beyond that of just a housewife and mother but that of a free human being. Even Nora's voice is now free from the shackles of societal conventions as her childish, breathy squealing deepens into a deep masculine range. Torvald's continuous suppression of reality coupled with his obsession with his reputation cause Nora to

realize that she's been married to a stranger. In fact, Torvald's last words to Nora before she leaves are "What will people think?" (*Mabou Mines DollHouse* 1 Feb 2007).

DollHouse has successfully brought back Ibsen's original "shock value" through its innovative incorporation of experimentalism and extravagant theatricalism to enhance the play's overall dramatic effect.

DollHouse Conclusion

Ibsen's play was less about nineteenth century marriage norms and feminism than the assertion of individual rights. Breuer is able to convey the main image of Ibsen's original play, which displays the conventional gender tension in nineteenth century society dominated by patriarchy. As Ibsen scholar Joan Templeton claims, Ibsen himself "never meant to write a play about the topical subject of women's rights; Nora's conflict represents something other than, or something more than a woman's" (110). In Ibsen's play, Nora has historically been read as a feminist figure, but Ibsen's declared intention was to "examine the repressive conditions that limit an individual's self-fulfillment" (Taucar 269).

Even though Ibsen refuted any feminist motivations for his play, he did showcase Nora's struggles to critique nineteenth century society and its patriarchal values by showing how women's freedoms were curtailed and how dependent the women were on their "father figures" (Nora's father and Nora's husband). Templeton explains that social conditioning has rendered Nora limited by her social conditioning: "Patriarchy's socialization of women into servicing creatures is the major accusation in Nora's painful account to Torvald of how first her father, and then he, used her for their

amusement...how she had no right to think for herself, only the duty to accept their opinions” (142). Templeton argues that “excluded from meaning anything, Nora has never been subject, only object” (142). Although Breuer accepted that Ibsen’s original intention was not to create a feminist piece, he did notice that *A Doll’s House* has been used in the feminist movement or as Breuer calls it “Marseillaise of feminism” (Talkback 1 Feb 2007). Nora represents both the women’s struggle for freedom and independence in Victorian society as well as Nora becoming a signifier for large social causes that focus on equality for all, for both men and women in society.

In conclusion, Breuer continuously tears down the fourth wall and draws attention to the artifice of his own spectacle, wanting to connect the audience to the characters performing on stage insinuating that all human beings are trapped in a giant dollhouse, still exploring our true identities by playing children’s’ games. As Friedman argues:

Just as Ibsen subverted his audience’s happy expectations of a tidy resolution, Breuer explodes our knee-jerk belief that we know the play, its form, and its familiar critique of women’s inequality. [Breuer] supplants Victorian decorum with bawdiness and surface realism with self-conscious special effects. These postmodern interjections what is nearly tucked into the original, well-made frame and animate dormant theatrical impulses. They allow us to see beneath the veneer to the underlying structure of the play and the social scaffold around which it was constructed. (258)

Breuer startles his audience in order to dissuade complacency and instead motivate the audience to challenge the gender and social constructs that the audience presumes to have vanished the shocking moment that Nora slams the door on her familial and marital life in Ibsen’s original *A Doll’s House*. Breuer demonstrates that the audience is a part of this perpetual vicious cycle of suppressing different identities and prohibiting change in developing new understandings of femininity and masculinity. Thus, by “physicalizing the gender paradigm in this way, the production critiques and ridicules the [audience’s]

prejudices about size and power and sexual prowess” (Freidman 259). Mabou Mines “looks at Ibsen’s play through a post-modern kaleidoscope that in turn challenges the [audience] to dissect how [they] see [themselves]” (Friedman 259). Breuer’s innovative and experimental theatrical techniques keep the audience eager for the next surprise to be revealed throughout the performance while simultaneously pushing the audience to engage with the spectacle on a more critical level to better understand the complexity of gender and identity politics.

Chapter IV.

Mixed Reception of Performances

Both *Nora* and *DollHouse* sparked controversial reception. In the case of *Nora* some critics considered the production an impressive feat meanwhile others claimed that the project was unsuccessful as a whole. As Bergman continued to incorporate meta-theatrical features in his stage productions, his version of *A Doll's House, Nora*, included allusions to the Dramaten tradition and specific theater history. Many critics, like Kristoffer Leandoer, who had exceptional theater memory, disliked Bergman's sophisticated theater allusions: "Ingmar Bergman seems to be more interested in talking with Alf Sjöberg and Orson Welles than with us" (Steene 714). In his review for the distinguished German newspaper *Die Zeit*, Helmut Schöd commented that the "Bergman trilogy was nothing sensational (rather somewhat of a disappointment)...What the Munich press has called a 'theatre event' does not even have the quality of an emergency exit" (Steene 714). Schöd harshly claimed that "[Bergman] has nothing more to say onstage in Munich" (Steene 713). On the other hand, Bergman biographers Lise-Lone Marker and Frederick J. Marker in the book *A Project for the Theatre* comment that Bergman's version of the play is "perhaps the freest and most experimental of the three texts that he brought together to form his Project" (19).

Positive Reviews of *Nora*

Unlike the mixed reviews he received in Germany, Bergman's performance methods seem to better connect with his Swedish audience as reviewer Leif Zern raved "today I am not going to have any inhibitions, for what Bergman has done with *A Doll's House* is a performance so beautiful, so moving, so incomparably rich that I have to go back to 1969 to find anything similar in his and The Royal Dramatic Theatre's history" (4). In addition, Bergman realized that the absence of children in his Munich production of *Nora* was a mistake as the reviewer Quentin Letts notes that not seeing the children in the Belgrade Theatre production in 2012, "makes it easier to believe Nora's decision at the end of the story, but it robs the events of some of their humanity" (1). So in Bergman's Stockholm production he included a scene of Nora reading to her daughter, Hilde, a romantic fairy tale about a damsel in distress and Hilde waking up from her parent's argument to be present just in time for Nora's exit. This further highlights that the play is not just about a mere confrontation between husband and wife or a woman's personal fight for freedom against societal chains but a more complicated battle between father and mother in a crumbling marriage and their own search for their true identity in society. There was a general consensus that Bergman successfully showcased Ibsen's original intentions of highlighting a description of humanity itself, no matter how individually flawed. Bergman's creative and original interpretation of *A Doll's House* has been applauded for its profound emotional texture, its complex closure (Nora achieving freedom from societal constraints through self-realization), and its revelation of new conclusions about the development of human understanding and compassion.

Many critics who watched Bergman's *Nora* as it went on an international tour to Madrid, Venice, Bergen, Glasgow, Oslo, Barcelona, Copenhagen, and New York, praised

Bergman's production. In Venice, reviewers and theater critics were impressed by the "robust projection of Nora and Bergman's ability to turn Ibsen's housewife into a consistent character whose break-up from her marriage seemed motivated from the start" (Steene 716). Theater critics in Bergen applauded Bergman's "existential reading of Nora's situation, his stylized scenography and his conception of the play as a piece of theatre rather than a realistic slice of life" (Steene 716). Syversten, a reviewer, applauded Bergman as he had "seen many Doll's house performances but none that has made such an impression on me as this one. With simple but ingenious means Ingmar Bergman has made Ibsen's text new and close" (Steene 716). Critics and audiences in Oslo widely praised Bergman for incorporating a "cinematic cutting away technique that did away with Ibsen's realistic paraphernalia" in his production, *Nora* (Steene 716). One reviewer, Larsen, commented: "Is there such a thing as 'theatre happiness'? It must be what I felt after having seen Ingmar Bergman's staging of *A Doll's House*" (Steene 716). Another critic, Fjermeros admitted that "it is seldom that one experiences a theatre so moving that one's reactions are generated to the skin" (Steene 716). In New York, during the first half of June 1991, "Bergman's productions represented, to a number of New York critics, a performance standard that they felt their own city could not offer" (Steene 718). Mel Gussow from *The New York Times* praised Bergman's "step away from naturalism" as "there [were] no transitions, just quick cinematic cuts, capturing the cross-currents of conflict that permeate this household" (1). Bergman's *Nora* was considered flawless, "as stylized as a Bergman film" (Gussow 1). Jan Stuart, a reviewer, claimed that Bergman's production was "grippingly austere" because of Nora's powerful transformation from doll to woman (Steene 718).

Despite many critics questioning Bergman's mise-en-scène of having the characters remain on stage and act as observers throughout the performance, the critics praised Bergman's innovative theatrical elements that "furnished the kind of artistic experience that transcended national boundaries" (Steene 718). Michael Feingold, another theater critic from *Village Voice*, stated: "Here was...an aging master, at the height of his power, being served loyally by executants equally high in artistry, making a statement that was at once aesthetically decisive, in touch with the past, and wholly alive to the outside world. It would be hard to imagine art more complete or transfiguring" (Steene 718).

DollHouse Criticism

Critics have claimed that the *DollHouse* production and its creative artistic choices "fail to cohere into a nuanced artistic whole, and the production merely makes a mockery of Ibsen's masterpiece" (Smurro 1). Breuer has been called "megalomaniacal" for this audacious overhaul of Ibsen (Pressley 1). Breuer's exploration of sexism is most quintessentially visualized through Nora, who first appears onstage as a towering blonde with wild, curly hair and a classic blue silk dress with ruffles and a train. However, when Nora begins to speak, the audience clearly sees that she has been completely infantilized. Nora's voice resembles that of a toddler with her high, girlish, chirping tone, frolicking around the stage, crawling under tables, and scrambling into boxes. Furthermore, Nora's childlike mannerisms transform into a subservient dependence to her husband as she gets on her knees and crawls to him on all four, begging Torvald for bank notes like a dog licking its owner for doggie treats.

Critics argue that Nora's depiction in Breuer's adaptation obscures the subdued strength of Ibsen's original Nora. Despite that Ibsen's Nora was also unquestionably oppressed by her patriarchal environment, critics have pointed out that Ibsen's Nora was still able to arrange complicated financial and legal transactions while being mentally strong and resilient. However, these characteristics of Nora are heavily obscured by Breuer's interpretation of the script. For many critics, Breuer characterized Nora as too simple-minded when in reality she is a very intelligent, capable, and complex individual. In fact in *DollHouse* there are many whole scenes that purposefully lack any subtlety like for example when Nora is practicing the Italian folk dance known as the tarantella, instead of being charming and alluring, she dances frenziedly as actors scramble onto the stage dressed as devils and begin to hit her with red whips. Also in the midst of intense shrieks and a quivering strobe light, white sheets printed with dialogue from the script unroll from the top of the stage to serve as a backdrop to this jarring scene along with hushed cries for help. Critics claim that *DollHouse* and its "flattened, unsympathetic characters and over-the-top visual and aural theatricality... fails to present any instances of creative dilation. Instead, it washes over all of the script with an unrelenting intensity that leaves Ibsen's work sullied like a once beautiful field mercilessly trampled by a garish carnival" (Smurro 1). As a result, the following elements in Breuer's production have been criticized for tainting Ibsen's beautiful original work: the oversimplification of Nora's character; the lack of subtlety in actors delivering their lines and performing certain actions in different whole scenes; the incorporation of shocking and violent images in the visual field; and the intense brushing over of Ibsen's script.

Some critics claim that the doll motif, along with other visual theatrical elements that Breuer employed in the performance, serves a more aesthetic and artistic purpose that fails to include any moments of spontaneous creativity that isn't already overdone. Additionally, some of the critics of *DollHouse* claim that if the production's objective was to literalize the power imbalance between men and women, the more logical choice would have been to cast tall men and little women. In fact, some critics highlight that the image of large women engulfing small men added to the undercover sexism. Breuer was demeaning the little people in the same way that Torvald denigrated Nora; implying that the casting choices ridiculed Ibsen's original work and insulted the actors who played these characters.

Positive Reviews of a *DollHouse*

On the contrary to many critics who claim Breuer's work twisted Ibsen's original intentions due to the intense theatricalization, Breuer's passionate allegory and incorporation of experimental theater successfully demonstrated gender performativity to its very core. In fact, theater critic Brustein explains that *DollHouse* begins as a "metaphor" production because it concretizes images and intentions in the text" (Friedman 257). Breuer's Nora acts, talks, and walks like a doll. Breuer also employs an exaggerated height differential between the female and male actors to provide a visual disjunction of the power imbalance between these two genders in a patriarchal society.

Breuer explains that his adaptation of Ibsen relies on the knowledge that our bodies inherently crave order, that from early childhood we consistently try to control politics of scale and proportions. As a result, Breuer's intentional display of height

differences offers a fresh outlook on familiar characters and situations. The experimental height difference employed in Breuer's production is "an ironic metaphor for the distorted, disfiguring impact of patriarchy on the women and men who live in its grasp" (Friedman 257). Breuer's purpose is not to make fun of the actors but to "take a jab at the perverse gender system of which their bodies are symbolic. He prompts his audience to examine further their own prejudice about size and sexuality as he unleashes the libidinal tensions that under-grid Ibsen's delicate references to intimacy" (Friedman 262). Although some critics claim that it could be potentially dangerous to base the central directorial design of a production on experimental ideas as the performance could risk one-dimensional interpretation. Consequently, the production could lose its subtlety, its dynamic quality, and most importantly its intense emotional texture about the central theme. However, "the beauty of Breuer's staging is that he uses his highly entertaining gestures to explicate and interrogate the text" (Friedman 257).

As a result, *DollHouse* "moves beyond metaphor to a total deconstruction of the text, its cultural baggage, and the preconceptions the contemporary audience brings to its depiction of women and gender. Breuer fractures Ibsen's decorous veneer with exaggerated, stagy melodramatics, defying us not to reconsider what we think about Ibsen's classic" (Friedman 257). Additionally Breuer's exaggerations are true to Ibsen as *DollHouse* is an "extravaganza of nineteenth-century theater conventions" (Jefferson 1). Regardless of the stagy theatrics in *DollHouse*, "the validity of Breuer's invention rests on the fact that he adds nothing that is not already present or implied in the text" (Friedman 259).

DollHouse exhibits the grandeur of opera, the power of melodrama, and the influence of theatricalization. Certain powerful visual effects like the short male actors versus the tall actresses or the puppets mimicking Torvald and Nora's actions will captivate the contemporary audience, make visually apparent sexism, and help transport the audience on the character's journey to seek their true identity in an innovative and artistic way where passion and parody overlap (Jefferson 1). Breuer's innovative theatrical elements provide a new twist on Ibsen's original play, push the audience to ask more questions, and challenge every spectator to be aware of gender and social constructs and their performative nature.

DollHouse has completely turned Ibsen's original play inside out to reveal the play's true nature. For Breuer, *DollHouse*, "asks a lot of questions" and thus there has been "some pretty emotional responses to this play" (*Times Argus* 1). Breuer's production can be identified not only as a homage to Ibsen's classic but also as a deconstruction and parody. This production has rendered Nora vital and modern while giving an audience a visual representation of just how repressed and controlled Nora is by her husband. As a result, critics of Breuer's production understand the show's deconstructive conceits: actual little people playing the male characters opposite life-size women portraying the female characters, a miniaturized doll house set, and the incorporation of a self-consciously theatrical performance style.

However, Breuer's employment of experimental theatrical elements coupled with intense theatricalization has helped the production demonstrate an even more nuanced and artistic reading of Ibsen's text. Breuer's innovations allow the audience to formulate a fresh and different perspective on Ibsen's text. Additionally, Breuer's theatricalization

helps better understand the emotional relationship between Torvald and Nora and reveals the intricate and complex relationships between all of the characters. Also, Breuer's more naturalistic approach to acting and staging exposes the various social tensions that the characters, along with the general human population, in a patriarchal society struggle with. Lastly, Breuer's provocations disrupt the audience's comfortable expectations of theatrical realism. As a result, many critics applaud *DollHouse's* provocations, finding them revelatory. Thus, "the illusion of Ibsen's structure in his classic play is rendered quite literally in *Mabou Mines' DollHouse* with an almost more accurate and truer progression that is developed in this performance in comparison to the former interpretation" (Sandman 1).

Chapter V.

Conclusion

Although both Bergman's *Nora* and Breuer's *DollHouse* accept the continued relevance of feministic interpretations of Ibsen's *A Doll's House*, both productions strive for similar "radical recuperation." Both performances emphasize that relationships between all human beings, men and women, need to be better understood, analyzed, and valorized. Ibsen's play with Nora's slamming of the door unleashed a new dramatic revolution as the play demonstrates facets of modernism and realism in a progressive dramatic form. However, most revivals "accept Ibsen's formal dramatic decision, present an illusionistic simulation of Victorian domesticity, and stand or fall on our sympathetic acceptance of a passionate, realistic, three-dimensional performance of Nora" (Rabkin 44). Instead, Bergman's *Nora* and Breuer's *DollHouse*, revivals of Ibsen's *A Doll's House*, are two rare examples of revivals that employ radical production strategies and theatrics in order to make a social statement about the complex relationship between men and women.

Bergman's Radical Theatrics

Bergman innovatively stripped away the performance's realistic structure in order to "transcend the play's historical reality and to bridge past and present" (Rabkin 44). As

mentioned previously, Ibsen's original three-act structure was not featured in Bergman's adaptation of *A Doll's House* and instead Bergman's performance consisted of fifteen scenes short scenes without any intermission. Bergman also cut Ibsen's original text and transformed Ibsen's realistic structure of the story's plot; incorporated dream-like and fluid transitions between the scenes of the performance; staged the performance in three different areas of the Helmer's home in contrast to Ibsen's singular central area where all of the story unfolded; and reduced Ibsen's original cast by eliminating some of the minor characters such as all of the Helmers' household staff and their three children in order to maintain the focus on the crumbling marriage of Torvald and Nora. In Bergman's production, three-dimensional Victorian décor is removed and the traditional middle-class living room is replaced by an imperfectly furnished platform where all of the actors, like dark shadows, were present amidst Nora's dramatic journey to freedom. A contemporary critic commented: "This visual vice creates a drama of destiny and entrapment, in which Nora is conscious from the outset of her frustration and her longing to break out of the pattern of roles and masks and games in which she finds herself confined" (Rabkin 44). Additionally, Bergman employed innovative and exaggerated theatrics, such as in the final scene, where the central action was moved to a bedroom, with Torvald lying naked in bed begging Nora to reconsider her radical decision to leave him and her children behind. Here Bergman also exposed the price of Nora's emancipation by providing the audience a final shocking image of Nora's daughter Hilde standing unnoticed in the background of the scene as Nora makes her great escape.

Breuer's Radical Theatrics

Breuer aims “to make a political statement without hanging politics from the stage” by employing radical production strategies and exaggerated theatrics (Rabkin 44). As mentioned beforehand, Breuer’s main strategy relied on a visually shocking physical metaphor by casting all male actors under four feet tall and all female actors above six feet tall. The men in the play are the quintessential representation of small-minded individuals with stunted possibilities for growth and development as human beings. On the other hand, the women’s large physical size not only displays bottled energy, but they also showcase the imagined and expected roles of women in Victorian society. The women were depicted as angels, evil temptresses, maidens, and monsters in the Victorian period. As previously mentioned, Breuer’s set also further highlights the visual disjunction as the play unfolds in a literal dollhouse with miniature tables, chairs, beds, and cups in which the female actors have to physically contort their bodies in order to move around the cramped space while the men are seen to comfortably and freely move throughout the set. Breuer’s powerful visual metaphor is so extreme that it initially appears satiric. However, Breuer employs several radical strategies throughout his complex deconstruction of Ibsen’s play as his interpretation reveals “an arsenal of oppositions: between comedy and tragedy, between realism and stylization, between nineteenth-century and contemporary theatre styles” (Rabkin 45). In the performance, the setting of the play is physically constructed before the audience as an “act of self-conscious postmodernism” (Rabkin 45). Red velvet curtains frame the production’s central playing area meanwhile stagehands bring beige and blue flats into the newly constructed dollhouse set along with miniature furniture. Breuer’s set can be seen as “an outsized, cartoonlike stylization of a dollhouse sitting warily in the outlines of a

nineteenth-century theatre, a scenography increasingly appropriate to the drama that is about to be enacted” (Rabkin 45).

Breuer, for the most part, maintains Ibsen’s original text and structure, while simultaneously introduces an “array of nineteenth century theatrical genres ranging from melodrama to opera and ballet to Punch and Judy show, appropriately accompanied by a pianist playing variations on the work of Grieg” (Rabkin 45). Breuer’s Nora is characterized by exaggerated stagy theatrics, such as a cod Norwegian accent, a high pitched and nasal tone, and mincing body movements in order to resemble a large human size doll. Breuer employs these radical exaggerations to “merely enlarge the truth that Nora herself is her society and her husband’s artificial plaything, the traditional songbird in the gilded cage” (Rabkin 45). Now while Bergman physically cuts the highly dramatic door slam in *Nora*’s last act, Breuer instead employs a dramaturgical shift where the performance shifts from melodrama to opera and puppet show. In Breuer’s final scene, as Nora confronts her husband and exposes the false pretenses in their marriage, the set opens up to reveal eighteen miniature stage boxes, where a pair of puppets of Nora and Torvald dressed elegantly now occupy each stage box. These puppets, as a collective, represent the audience of an opera show as the protagonists of Breuer’s production start singing to signal the aesthetic presentation shift to opera, with Nora’s declaration of freedom being voiced “as a soprano’s aria of liberation” (Rabkin 46). As Rabkin notes, “*Dollhouses* operatic coda, with its puppet surrogates witnessing and hearing their own last duet, aims to evoke opera’s excessive grandiloquence, an emotional climax for which word alone are inadequate. The piece brilliantly reveals Breuer’s postmodern conflation of the past to comment on the present” (46). In fact, Breuer’s production does not end

with Torvald's utter shock and dismay, but instead with the bleak image of the future, where Torvald and Nora's daughter is holding up her brother's toy sword as she repeats her mother's last words like a mantra.

Bergman's *Nora* and Feminist Critique

Bergman employs a radical thematic, theatrical, and textual approach to *Nora* in order to showcase the male-female conflict within a patriarchal society. As Roger W. Oliver claims in "Bergman's Trilogy: Tradition and Innovation" Bergman's progressive production "highlights the connections Ibsen makes between patriarchy, materialism, and suppression" (85). In order to allow the audience to understand Nora's courageous act of leaving behind her comfortable marital life as well as all of the material comfort and security that came along with her domestic role, Bergman "progressively strip[s] [the performances] of the naturalistic theatrical trappings that might have been necessary when first produced but now may obscure more than clarify" (Oliver 86). As previously mentioned, Templeton saw Bergman's tamperings as a means to "turn Ibsen into his avowed spiritual father Strindberg" and others claimed Bergman's adaptation was an "energetic pursuit of the Strindbergian chamber play" (42). For Strindberg, the chamber play was "intimate in form, [featured] a restricted subject, treated in depth, with few characters, large points of view, no superfluous minor characters, [and] no long-drawn-out whole evenings"—all characteristics found in *Nora*" (Templeton 42). For Bergman, his sole focus was to showcase the crumbling marriage between two individuals and introduce Nora not as a helpless and powerless woman but as a strong and intelligent woman from the onset of the performance. While other scholars like Templeton and

Rogers claim that Ibsen's *A Doll's House* centralized on Nora and women's rights, Bergman emphasized Nora's relationship with all of the other characters in the play, especially her relationship with Torvald to demonstrate Nora's struggle for individualism and her acknowledgement of her duty as a human being to escape the confines of a closed off-society in order to search for her true identity. Bergman's interpretation of Ibsen's original play in his adaptation *Nora* is similar to the humanist interpretation of the following Ibsen scholars: Adams, Bentley, and Moi. Bergman's *Nora* is more clearly a "play about people threatened by old values and the behavior they generate" as all of the characters in the play become victims of the societal conventions of a patriarchal society and the societal pressures of a materialist society (Oliver 85). Furthermore, Oliver highlights how Bergman's radical dramaturgy helped reveal important social concerns in relation to gender and identity: "Like an expert stripping a painting of layers of accretions so that the original underneath can be restored, Bergman and the artists of the Dramaten enable a contemporary audience to see these plays not as theatrical relics but as vibrant contributions to our ongoing dialogue on gender..." (86). Additionally, Bergman's *Nora* emphasized the importance of revealing the fundamental tension that exists between man and woman as these two genders co-exist in society.

Breuer's *DollHouse* and Feminist Critique

Although Breuer characterizes *A Doll's House* as "the greatest feminist work and the second-most-performed play in the world [because] it has really caught the imaginations, the spirit, the political desires, the fantasies of women worldwide" his production *DollHouse* strives to better understand the play's underlying gender-neutral

humanism (Lowe 1). Breuer's view, in this instance, is in accordance with one of Templeton's previously mentioned arguments as she claims that Ibsen himself "never meant to write a play about the topical subject of women's rights; Nora's conflict represents something other than, or something more than a woman's" (110). However, as mentioned beforehand, Templeton also argues against the idea of *A Doll's House* primarily being about an individual's search for his or her identity as it would mean that "Nora's conflict has essentially nothing to do with her identity as a nineteenth-century married woman, a married woman, or a woman. Yet Both Nora and *A Doll's House* are unimaginable otherwise" (31). For Templeton, Nora should be anachronistically read as a feminist figure as in her view Ibsen purposefully used a marginalized female figure, Nora, as the protagonist of a story that criticizes a nineteenth century patriarchal society where women had constricted liberties and no sense of agency. However, Breuer's *DollHouse* instead emphasizes both Nora's and the other character's struggle for identity and emancipation from a patriarchal society.

In accordance with Taucar, regardless of Breuer's acknowledgement that Ibsen's stated intention was not to create solely a "feminist work," Breuer does recognize that *A Doll's House* had become somewhat of a "feminist anthem...and that the figure of Nora became analogous to Eugene Delacroix's painting 'Liberty Leading the People'" (Talkback 1 Feb 2007). Taucar further explains how Delacroix "co-opts female figure 'Liberty' to represent a struggle for 'liberté, égalité, et fraternité' within a larger humanistic representational economy. Both Nora and 'Liberty' become signifiers for larger social causes, which level out the strictures that women experience in society as a result of their sex'" (Talkback 1 Feb 2007). At the end of *DollHouse*, Breuer reveals a

more humanist interpretation of Ibsen's work by emphasizing the individual struggles of Torvald and Nora due to the societal pressures and conventions of patriarchal society. As Rabkin claims "despite all of [Breuer's] postmodern tricks, jokes, and ironies, Breuer remains distinctly in the American tradition of reviving *A Doll's House* primarily in order to make some sort of social statement about the relationship between men and women" (Fischer-Lichte et al. 51).

Bergman, Breuer, and Gender Performance

Both Bergman's *Nora* and Breuer's *DollHouse* emphasize the inherent gender performance of both the male and female actors in both productions. The Victorian era is characterized by an underlying tension of strict gender roles where both the women and men were expected to fulfill prescribed societal roles. As previously mentioned, Butler claims that an individual's daily actions, behaviors, representations, clothing choices, and physical gestures all produce what is societally perceived as a feminine or masculine identity. Butler argues that there is no such thing as innate femininity or masculinity. For Butler, the identity of individuals is not a manifestation of one's inner essence but rather a byproduct of cultural norms and societal conventions that have been repeatedly integrated in an individual's everyday life.

Nora's actions are a quintessential example of an individual conforming to societal expectations of her gender as a domestic, obedient, and dependent wife and mother. Nora performs her gender role by fulfilling Torvald's sexual fantasies, caring for the household, and spending money carelessly so that she can be labeled a financially inept and dependent wife. However, Nora's role playing is evidenced in many occasions

through the play as she secretly defies her husband when she borrowed money to finance their trip to Italy to help cure Torvald's sickness or when she secretly purchased macaroons. Nora's secret business transactions and economic knowledge challenge Torvald's view of financial incompetence of being a natural characteristic of the female gender. Nora's play-acting demonstrates she is performing a specific gender role fabricated by society versus a natural gender order, which she only becomes fully aware of toward the end of the play. Torvald, on the other hand, is constantly performing the role of being the breadwinner of the house, the protector of his family, and the responsible and hard-working man of the house in charge of providing economic stability and material comfort to his wife and his children. However, at the end of the play, Torvald's gender performance is unveiled as his desperation and cowardice leave him lying naked in a bed, squealing and begging Nora not to leave like a big baby; Torvald fails in fulfilling the societally prescribed role of being a strong man capable of having a woman by his side representing his propriety, his wealth, and his family. Instead, Torvald is depicted as an incapable, weak man unable to keep his wife happy, to protect the unity of his family, and to maintain a respectable position in society. Ironically, it was Nora who saved Torvald's life with her financial knowledge by borrowing money and finding other sources of income like copying work that helped Torvald overcome his health issues and economic hardship. Nora's defiance and strength not only overshadowed Torvald's cowardice and insecurities but she figuratively "wore the pants" in the relationship as for Nora working and making money "was great fun all the same....It was almost like being a man" (L. Marker and F. Marker 56). Nora has tried out and liked, the role of the breadwinner and protector of the family, which has been more conventionally

associated with men. Both Nora and Torvald have been performing specific gender roles due to societal fabrications of gender stereotypes and of what is perceived as feminine and masculine character traits; their marriage has fallen apart because of the lack of a more free performance of gender roles.

Butler's claim that gender is a social construct is demonstrated in both performances, *Nora* and *DollHouse*, as both the men and women in these two performances experience a collective identity struggle because of the societal pressures and conventions of a nineteenth century patriarchal society. Both Nora and Torvald are seen determinedly performing their gender stereotypes as well as breaking from these prescribed gender norms in *Nora* and *DollHouse*. Furthermore, in both Bergman's and Breuer's productions, the clothing choices of Nora and Torvald in the tarantella scene reflect stereotypical gender roles. In Bergman's production, Nora is wearing a masquerade costume while Torvald is dressed in evening clothes. In Breuer's production, Nora dresses as a peasant dancing around for Torvald's sexual pleasure while Torvald becomes the master of the tarantella dance with his cloak. Both performances, through clothing choices, highlight how Nora is forced to act as an entertainer and put on a seductive show to satisfy her domineering master's sexual needs with her masquerade dress while Torvald remains clothed in a classic evening attire not only watching the dance but also trying to control Nora through the dance. On the other hand, Nora is consciously using her looks and her sexual appeal through her masquerade dress as her main source of power over Torvald. Nonetheless, the clothing choices reflect the sexual objectification and dehumanization of Nora as she attempts to adhere to the strictly defined bourgeois gender norms, characteristics conventionally associated with women.

However, the behaviors of Nora and Torvald suggest that both characters are play-acting or performing a specific gender as both are seen breaking from the patriarchal bourgeois ideology. The powerful tarantella scene inspired English Victorian poet Arthur Symonds to write the poem *Nora on the Pavement* in 1895; for Symonds, Nora's dance represents a liberating way of transcending her routine life as a wife and mother:

[The dance in the drawing-room] takes us suddenly out of all that convention, away from those guardians of our order who sit against the walls, approvingly, unconsciously; in its winding motion it raises an invisible wall about us, shutting us off from the whole world, in with ourselves; in its fatal rhythm, never either beginning or ending [...] gathering impetus which must be held back, which must rise into the blood. (39)

In fact, during this ritual performance, some of Nora's actions can no longer be considered bourgeois norms of "proper behavior" as she undergoes a complete cognitive transformation. Meanwhile Torvald, who should act as a representative of the bourgeois ideology constricting Nora's freedoms, is unable to successfully control his wife; thus, this failure on Torvald's part in stopping Nora's "improper" behavior at home can be viewed as Torvald breaking established gender norms in nineteenth century patriarchal society.

In her article entitled "What did Nora do? Thinking gender with *A Doll's House*," Unni Langås uses Butler's arguments on gender to demonstrate how Ibsen uses Nora to "demonstrate how gender operates on the level of spoken and performed acts" (149). Langås claims that the tarantella can be seen as "Nora's pivotal performance" as "Nora liberates herself from Helmer's inflexible choreography...signifying a break with the rigidly directed way of living that has been hers" (163-4). Langås highlights that throughout the dance, Nora appears to stop listening to Torvald's instructions, her locks of hair gradually loosen and become wilder, and her dance becomes more and more

untamed. Another critic, Anne Marie Rekdal in her book *Frihetens Dilemma; Ibsen lest med Lacan* employs a psychoanalytical point of view to argue that Nora undergoes a “full transformation,” on a deep psychological level (44). Moi instead has a different interpretation of the tarantella scene as she claims that Nora and Torvald “spend most of the play theatricalizing themselves by acting out their own cliché idealist scripts” (263). Regardless that Moi points out that “Nora’s tarantella is a graphic representation of a woman’s struggle to make her existence heard, to make it count,” for Moi, the tarantella scene also demonstrates “Nora’s own unquestioned commitment to the traditional understanding of women’s place in the world” (269-74). In both *Nora* and *DollHouse*, the tarantella scene emphasized the conflation of role playing and natural behavior of both Nora and Torvald, two characters stuck in the constructs of performance.

Nora, DollHouse, and the Power of Revival Plays

Bergman’s *Nora* and Breuer’s *DollHouse* demonstrate the power of revival plays in voicing social concerns. Both productions employed radical strategies and exaggerated theatrics in order to provide social commentary on gender and identity issues. Friedman explains some of the early criticism about the radical dramaturgy employed in Breuer’s performance:

We have seen how early critics of *A Doll House* mistook radical dramaturgy for ineptitude. Ibsen cloaked his theatrically and thematically subversive script in the familiar garb of well-made melodrama; Breuer’s bold directorial strategy rips away the realistic veneer that hoodwinked the playwright’s contemporaries and risks making the play a relic now. The logic of Breuer’s adaptation is that he doesn’t have to dig far below that surface to pull up and exploit the text’s latent theatrical potential. (259)

Both Breuer and Bergman didn't "have to dig far below that surface to pull up and exploit the text's latent theatrical potential" as both of their productions focus on the crumbling marriage between Torvald and Nora, Nora's radical transformation from Torvald's "little songbird" to an independent and free woman, and the inherent injustices of the patriarchal society that affect both the women and men of the society. Additionally, both productions employed "bold directorial strategy" to transform Ibsen's original realistic structure. As mentioned beforehand, Bergman's performance did not feature an intermission as well as lacked any cuts between each scene; the performance was "a seamless continuity and flows, quite surreally like a dream" (1). Bergman transformed Ibsen's traditional three-act structure often associated with realism and modernism into an emotionally charged and fast-paced performance with elements of surrealism and minimalism. As previously mentioned, Breuer employed visual disjunctions through his radical casting choice where the male actors in the performance were all under four feet tall versus the female actors who were all around six feet in order to dispel the myth "that the patriarchy was safe was illusory" (*Times Argus* 1). Both performances demonstrated not only that "women for varieties of reasons—psychological, historical, biological...[were] now turning" but also that the men in society were also trapped by the societal roles prescribed to them in a patriarchal society (*Times Argus* 1).

Both *Nora* and *DollHouse*, like Ibsen's *A Doll's House*, provide a social commentary on human rights, not just women's rights, which is the idea that many feminist scholars like Templeton and Rogers argue against. In fact, in accordance with Adams, Bentley, and Moi, Ibsen was primarily concerned with questioning human rights in a patriarchal society. During the 19th century, socialism and feminism were linked with

one another. Finney argues that “the most prominent socialist thinkers of the day, male and female, saw that true sexual equality necessitates fundamental changes in the structure of society” (89). Ibsen was considered “one of the most prominent socialist thinkers of the day” and as previously mentioned, Ibsen never admitted being a feminist as evidenced by his speech held at the festival of the Norwegian Women’s Right league in Christian on May 26th 1898:

I am not a member of the Women’s Rights League. Whatever I have written has been without any conscious thought of making propaganda. I have been more poet and less social philosopher than people generally seem to believe. I thank you for the toast, but must disclaim the honor of having consciously worked for the women’s rights movement. I am not even quite clear as to just what this women’s rights movement really is. To me it has seemed a problem of humanity in general. And if you read my books carefully, you will understand this. True enough, it is desirable to solve the problem of women’s rights, along with the others; but that has not been the whole purpose. My task has been the description of humanity (Ibsen, Letters 337).

Ibsen’s concerns, based on his own speech, prove to be humanist ones as he seeks to better understand humans and their own struggle with individuality and identity.

Bergman’s *Nora* and Breuer’s *DollHouse* remain true to Ibsen’s original social concern, “the description of humanity,” through the employment of radical dramaturgy, innovative and experimental theatrics, imaginative theatrical elaborations, and the incorporation of different dramaturgical shifts in style. As these two performances incorporated radical production strategies and theatrics, both audiences became even more socially and critically engaged. This active engagement from the audience helped establish the relevance of both performances, *Nora* and *DollHouse*, as each performance showcased important social concerns regarding gender and identity issues. To conclude, Bergman’s *Nora* and Breuer’s *DollHouse* provide an even more radical interpretation predicated on gender-neutral humanism rather than a mere feminist interpretation to Ibsen’s *A Doll’s*

House as both Bergman and Breuer emphasized the importance of studying and understanding the psychological complexities of mankind in order to ensure a harmonious coexistence between men and women in society.

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