



Feminism in 19th Century Norway

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Overview

- ▷ Norwegian Feminism
- ▷ Female/Male Gender Roles
- ▷ Critiques
- ▷ Ibsen's Response
- ▷ Current Influence
- ▷ Easy Concepts
- ▷ Challenging Concepts



Norwegian Feminism Background



- ▷ Ruler Christian V (1670-1699) issued a law proclaiming that unmarried women were minors.
 - ▶ The law was changed in 1845 to grant majority to single women at age 25.
 - ▶ Shortly after women began to work in factories in jobs for small hands.
- ▷ There were 2 waves of feminism from 1879-1890 and 1960-1990
- ▷ Suffrage movement occurred in several stages:
 - ▶ 1898: Universal suffrage to males
 - ▶ 1901: Women who paid their own taxes or were married could vote
 - ▶ 1913: Universal suffrage

Norwegian Feminism Influence



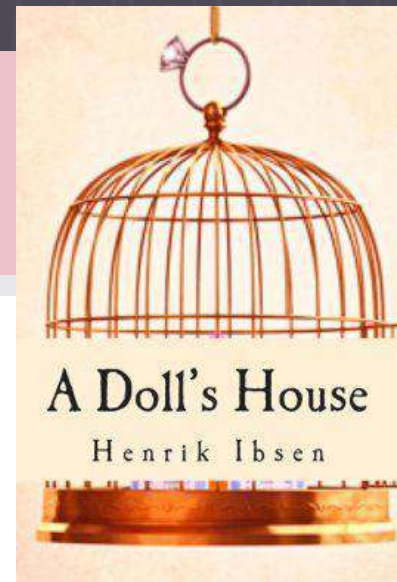
- ▷ Literature played a role in inspiring women.
 - ▶ The purpose shifted from reactionary to progressive.
 - ▶ Henrik Ibsen: *The Pillars of Society* (1877) and *A Doll's House* (1879)
 - ▶ Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson: *A Glove* (1883) and *Leonarda* (1879)
- ▷ Debate over double standards arise.
 - ▶ Male “conquests” equivalent to female prostitution as seen in the story of Don Juan

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- ▷ NORA: “Tell me, is it really true that you did not love your husband? Why did you marry him? MRS. LINDE: My mother was alive then...I had to provide for my two younger brothers” (2191).
- ▷ NORA: “I have been performing tricks for you, Torvald... It’s because of you I’ve made nothing of my life” (2230).
- ▷ HELMER: “I’d gladly work for you day and night, Nora... but there’s no one who gives up honor for love” (2232).

Gender Roles Background

- ▷ Married women VS. unmarried women
 - ▶ Unmarried women were dependant on their fathers
 - ▶ Married women were dependent on their husbands
- ▷ Women were not expected to acquire any further education beyond high school.
 - ▶ They were instead in charge of domestic activities such as maintaining the household and caring for the children.
 - ▶ Women were not expected to work unless their was an extreme financial crisis at home - men were expected to provide income.
- ▷ The father had complete control over the kids



Gender Roles Influence

- ▷ A Doll's House focuses on the way men and women are seen in society.
 - ▶ Nora runs and maintains the home.
 - ▶ Torvald provides the income.
- ▷ Torvald has a clear definition of women's role.
 - ▶ Men = superior
 - ▶ Women = inferior
- ▷ Characters in the play see Nora as a child.
- ▷ Torvald calls Nora several pet names to demean her.
- ▷ Ibsen indicates that Nora is not satisfied following the typical female stereotype.



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- ▷ NORA: “You know I could never think of going against you” (2189).
- ▷ NORA: “How painful and humiliating it would be for Torvald, with his manly independence, to know that he owed me anything!” (2197)
- ▷ HELMER: “You will see I am man enough to take everything upon myself” (2223).

Critiques of A Doll's House



- ▷ There were several attacks on Nora's morality.
 - ▶ Abandonment of husband and children
 - ▶ "... denounced as an irrational and frivolous narcissist; an 'abnormal' woman" (Templeton).
- ▷ Ibsen's portrayal of "two Noras"
 - ▶ Initial introduction of her character was different than the end
 - ▶ Her actions in Act 3: some say she changed without development.
- ▷ Many believe Nora is not qualified to be a heroine.
- ▷ People were unsettled and dissatisfied with the fact that the play was meant to show realism because they argued that a woman would never do anything compared to what Nora did.

Henrik Ibsen's Response

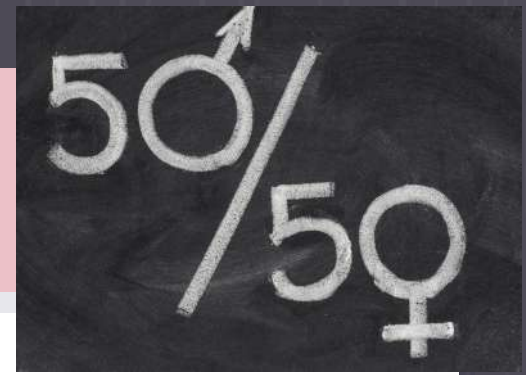


- ▷ Ibsen's main purpose: to explain what it meant to be human
- ▷ He wrote a second ending in which Nora gave Torvald a second chance and stayed with her family. After doing so, he felt deep regret because it took away from his realist perspective and his truest intentions.
- ▷ Background of Nora's character
 - ▶ She was based off of his close friend who committed forgery to borrow money for her dying husband.
 - ▶ Once her husband found out, they divorced, she suffered from a nervous breakdown, and was admitted into a mental hospital.
- ▷ He wrote *Ghosts*, to focus on the struggles of another woman debating whether or not to stay with her corrupt husband.

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- ▷ “True enough, it is desirable to solve the woman problem, along with all the others; but that has been not the whole purpose. My task has been the description of humanity” (Ibsen quoted by Templeton)
- ▷ “A Doll’s House is not about Everybody’s struggle to find him- or herself, but according to its author, about Everywoman’s struggle against Everyman” (Templeton)
- ▷ “And perhaps this is the play’s most radical aspect: that it presents a woman’s dilemma as a human dilemma, relevant to both sexes, when so often women’s struggles are treated as a special subject of concern only to women” (Rustin)

Current Influence



- ▷ There are parallels to the U.S. feminist movement.
 - ▶ Suffrage was granted around the same time
 - ▶ Equality wave in the mid-late 1900s
- ▷ Women are still stereotyped to a certain extent, but now they have more independence.
- ▷ Gender role barriers beginning to fall with redefinition of male and female roles.

Easy Concepts



- ▷ Ibsen's sympathy towards the treatment of women.
- ▷ In Norwegian society during the 19th century, it was expected for a woman to be dependant on either her husband or father.
- ▷ During this time period men were expected to handle financial matters while women were expected to maintain a household.

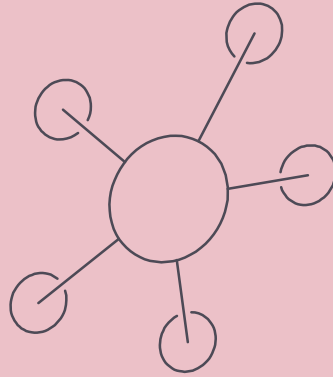
Challenging Concepts



- ▷ Level of Ibsen's success in explaining humanity through both male and female characters
- ▷ It is difficult in a society to maintain a moral consensus on what is considered “right”. There will always be traditional mindsets and progressive mindsets on how each gender must act in a society.
- ▷ The debate between loyalty for other people and making decisions to save oneself.
 - ▶ Society pressures each gender to decide differently on those concepts.



Hattie Morahan on playing
Nora in *A Doll's House*



Discussion

Question 1:

- ▷ If *A Doll's House* was set in modern times, what aspects with respect to women of the play would be different?



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- ▷ Nora's ability to take out loans
- ▷ The belief that a woman without a husband was to be pitied.
 - ▶ NORA [softly]: “Poor Kristine, you've become a widow” (2190).
- ▷ The relationship between Nora and Torvald

Question 2:

- ▷ How is Ibsen's purpose (what it means to be human) portrayed throughout the play? Cite specific examples from the text.



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- ▷ NORA: “You’re [Mrs. Linde] just like all the others. You all think I’m incapable of anything serious-” (2192).
- ▷ NORA: “I don’t believe in that anymore. I believe that, before all else, I’m a human being no less than you- or anyway, I ought to try and become one” (2231).

Question 3:

- ▷ In what other works (such as literature, music, drama, and film) do we see similar views of women as demonstrated in *A Doll's House*?



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- ▷ In *A Streetcar Named Desire*, the roles of Stella and Blanche
- ▷ In *The Glass Menagerie*, the roles of Laura and Amanda
- ▷ In *Antigone*, the role of Antigone

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