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Restructuring the quixotic vision: A comparative analysis of Mary Wollstonecraft's a vindication of the rights of woman and Henrik Ibsen's a doll's house

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Abstract
Henrik Johan Ibsen (1828-1906), the "Father of Modern Drama," was a national emblem in the nineteenth century. He was a renowned Norwegian poet and dramatist who offered a fresh moral perspective to European Realism. Ibsen's plays were scandalous to many of his contemporaries, who believed that any challenge to Victorian notions of family life and decorum was immoral and disrespectful. He thundered his fiery indictment against the four cardinal sins of modern society: the lie inherent in our social arrangements; sacrifice and duty, the twin curses that fetter the spirit of man; the narrow-mindedness and pettiness of provincialism, which stifles all growth; and the lack of joy and purpose in work, which turns life into a vale of misery and tears.
Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-1797), an uncompromising demolisher of false ideas, social shams, and hypocrisy, pioneered a new secular outlook. She blamed society's degradation for its adherence to antiquated rules that failed to ensure gender equality. Her works are philosophical treatises containing arguments and concepts that examine the flawed conventional mindset that separated men and women in society.
A Doll's House, Henrik Ibsen's masterpiece, may have relevance to Mary Wollstonecraft's A Vindication of the Rights of Woman. Though two centuries apart, Wollstonecraft and Ibsen saw the tragic side of humanity hidden behind beautiful façades: moral duplicity, captivity, treachery, and fraud causing continual unease. Nora, Ibsen's protagonist, examines the gender disparity constrained by customary thinking, which denied women education for optimal growth. She played the attractive mistress who ignored her duties as a loving wife and rational mother. She was an extension of her father's and husband's ideas. Caught between fantasy and reality, she lost her personality, destiny, and dream life.
The drama aimed to unravel the intricate ties between Nora, her husband, Torvald, Krogstad, and Linde. Nora finally discovers the significance of being an independent after a series of unpleasant events. At the play's end, Nora shuts her dollhouse door on Torvald and her past. The only way to relieve the burdened soul and restore the long-lost "Garden of Eden" is through sound education for the human race, as shown by Nora's tragic life.

Keywords: Freedom, societal norms, women struggling, self-identification, male supremacy

1. Introduction
A Doll's House depicts Nora, a seemingly reckless lady, whose supposedly divine life disintegrates into a conflict between self-obligation and duty to others. Her reactions to life were shaped by her childhood experiences as an adult. Nora's inclinations fight with her belief in authority and masculine dominance, and she goes from ignorance to knowledge and imprisonment to freedom. Ibsen and Wollstonecraft share an ideology. Nora will remain in the dollhouse, serving the powerful, until she realises that all she believes is a lie. Unexamined lives, especially lies, are not worth living. Nora, the symbol of all women, should reject the comfort and security of complicity in an ideology that prizes money, respectability, and patriarchy over self-worth. Everyday reality was a lie, destined to be fundamentally reorganised into artistic truth. The doll home, once beautiful but now a ghost house, must fall to free the fettered human spirit.

1.1 Research Objectives

- Analysing the imperfection prevalent in human society through the life of Nora, in A Doll's House in the light of A Vindication of the Rights of Woman, where there is a struggle for redemption of the true worth of an individual.
- Exploring the reasons for the lack of polished sensibility in the protagonist.
- The need for liberation, exposure of faulty societal norms, and self-identification.

2. Literature Review

2.1 The Woman – an entity

PB Shelley asked, "Can man be free if woman be a slave?" in 1817. Women were seen as frail and slave-like. They had lofty goals. Women were expected to do housework, care for the ill and dying, and help other women give birth. Women become whitened corpses to appease society. All that hides a woman's physique must go. Educational philosophers believed women couldn't reason.

However, Mary Wollstonecraft and other female reformers like Hester Chapone believed women were reasonable and needed education. A Vindication of the Rights of Woman (1792) analyses the responsibilities and duties of individuals, the complementary and interdependent connection between men and women, and women's unique character and contribution to society, especially as mothers. The passions must be conquered, she says, in Restoration-era terms. She is not claiming that reason automatically leads to virtue and knowledge, but virtuous deeds that are not the outcome of conscious moral choice-reason are not truly virtuous.

A solid marriage is based on mutual understanding between husband and wife. It's a social compact where both parties are equally educated and committed to the children's education and the state's social and public life. Thus, the woman must have equal knowledge and sense to keep half the commitment. "The basis of the Vindication is a religious argument...it is about how women should be a better fit to fulfil their duties, especially their maternal duties," said critic Patricia Howell Michelson. Wollstonecraft believes women are human beings with the same rights as men. The Solitude of Self, January 18, 1892, by Elizabeth Cady Stanton,

“In discussing the rights of woman, we are to consider, what belongs to her as an individual, in a world of her own, the arbiter of her own destiny, an imaginary Robinson Crusoe, with her woman, Friday, on a solitary island.”

2.2 From Relational to Individualistic

“The situation of woman is that she-a free and autonomous being like all creatures- nevertheless finds herself living in a world where men compel her to assume the status of the other.” (Simone de Beauvoir, The Second Sex)

In Henrik Ibsen's A Doll's House, a lady comes to consciousness and realises the falsehood of what she thought was real, allowing her to reject the ideology that manipulates her and everyone else into compliance. The drama emphasises individual alienation, society's suppression of individuality, and modern life's impediments to living courageously. In her Vindication to the Rights of Woman, Mary Wollstonecraft wrote that "women are created on this planet to unfold their capabilities." Society frowned on women asserting themselves and deviating from their tasks of supporting their husbands, raising children, and keeping the house in order (3). However, she warns that the developing intellect, in the absence of a true thinking faculty, is not reinforced by the exercise of responsibilities that dignify humanity; rather, such individuals merely live to entertain themselves, which will always end up as sterile enjoyment of women. The Cambridge Companion to Ibsen critic Bjourn Hemmer writes,

“The people who live in such a society know the weight of public opinion, and of all those agencies which keep watch over societies’ law and order; the norms, the conventions, and the traditions which in essence belong to the past, but which continue to the present and there thwart individual liberty in a variety of ways.” (69)

Nora, the protagonist, lives in a conflict between her social and intrinsic selves. She obeys family, friends, community, and society to be accepted and protected. Her marriage to Torvald exemplifies bourgeois ideology, which gives the ruling class the authority to subjugate people. She submissively follows her husband's whims. Torvald utilises her pettiness to assert his control by calling her "little squirrel," "skylark," and "singing bird."

"I wouldn't want my pretty little songbird to be the least bit different from what she is now." (7)

Wollstonecraft believes Torvald's manipulation is an attempt to subjugate women as beautiful objects, and "intoxicated by the admiration, do not endeavour to obtain a persistent interest in their hearts..." (Proof 2)

Torvald is a pleasure-seeker who expects nothing more from his female partner. Daydreams help them cope with life. "I might have obtained it from some admirer," Nora tells Kristine, "Then I used to sit here and think that some rich old gentleman had fallen in love with me" (18). Nora's romantic illusions of constant love and congenial feelings kept her imagination alive at the expense of rationality, Wollstonecraft says.

‘Because women who have fostered a romantic unnatural delicacy of feeling, waste their lives in imagining how happy they should have been with a husband who could love them with a fervid increasing affection every day…’ (Vindication 23)

Society created Nora and Torvald's ideal home and marriage. Finance, power, and love made women like her reliant. Marriage fails to fulfil their spirits. Only when the heat of love dissipates in a true union can the calm tenderness of friendship and respect replace blind admiration and physical fondness. "I'm pretending that we are secretly in love, secretly engaged and nobody knows there is anything between us," Torvald says, denying marriage's fact. (72) In consequence,

‘When the lover is not lost in the husband...a prey to childish caprices and fond jealousies...and the caresses which should excite his children are lavished on the overgrown child, his wife.’ (Vindication 21)

Nora's father's training won her husband. This means raising children to assume their societal roles. Nora buys girls dolls and boys swords, horses, and trumpets because "boys love sports of noise and activity...girls on the other hand, are fonder of things on show and ornament...the doll is the special entertainment of the feminine" (Vindication 59). She subconsciously conforms to society's standards. A big miracle—not the one Nora wishes for—could awaken Nora's identity and character. She tells Torvald, "I must take steps to educate myself" to lose her superficial graces. "I

must get experience," again (83). (84) Nora's shift from wife to woman is virtually a social revolution since she was forced into it by the repressive and selfish male hands that wrote history. Tradition has justified the eradication of women and the rise of wives. Nora had ideas of a future shared and enjoyed with her husband, but she was violently awakened out of complacency when she realised she had been subtly conditioned into an existence chartered and defined by another. He calls her independence "delirious," but he doesn't realise that he owes her an apology for training her. Torvald lies:

"For a man, there's something...very satisfying in knowing that he has forgiven his wife...

he has given her a new life, and she becomes... both his wife and at the same time his child." (80)

Nora says, "If you get your doll taken away..." to bridge the huge gap between them. "I am going to see who is correct, the world or I," Nora says, leaving her shallow life as a wife and mother (85). The "miracle of miracles" that can free Torvald from the appearance of a stranger is giving Nora complete personality and wisdom to overcome the obstacles and storms that may come her way-a condition of pure bliss, as she says,

"Where we could make a real marriage of our lives together." (88)

2.3 The Ongoing struggle for Individuality, Freedom, and Womanhood

Charlotte Perkins Gilman's short novel "The Yellow Wallpaper" describes 1900s women's subjugation. Jane, the protagonist, hints to her marital deception.

“John laughs at me, of course, but one expects that in marriage.”

As shown by Torvald calling Nora his "little squirrel" and John calling Jane his "fortunate little goose," society had labelled women as undiplomatic and irrational. The wallpaper-bound woman breaks free at the end, symbolising psychological salvation from the abusive spouse.

“I’ve got out at last,” said I, “in spite of you and Jane! And I’ve pulled off most of the paper, so you can’t put me back!”

Kate Chopin's Edna in "The Awakening" is another Nora who leaves society because she's dissatisfied with her duty and obligations.

“Yes,” she said. “The years that are gone seem like dreams - if one might go on sleeping and dreaming - but to wake up and find - oh! Well! Perhaps it is better to wake up after all, even to suffer, rather than to remain a dupe to illusions all one’s life.”

Men forget that women are intelligent animals and make unreasonable requests. When they lack soul and mind strength, women become models. If a woman is no longer a shadow of the guy, she can show her actual worth.

3. Methodology

In this collaborative study, the researchers will utilise the descriptive technique to evaluate Henrik Ibsen's A Doll's House's themes of individuality and the imperative need to restructure society standards. The protagonist, Nora, will be highlighted. The drama will be compared to Mary Wollstonecraft's A Vindication of the Rights of Woman to reveal social tendencies.

4. Discussion

Henrik Ibsen's portrayal of Nora expressly meant to remove male privileges, uproot women's biases, and reconstruct family and societal gender relations. The protagonist acts like a meek, selfish, and dumb lady who believes she has free will:

"Please, if only you would let it have its way...it'd scamper about and do all sorts of marvellous tricks."(43)

Her husband's tyranny and sensuality have shaped her. "The sensualist, truly has been the most dangerous of tyrants, and women have been misled by their loves, imagining that they reigned over them," says Wollstonecraft. (17) Nora is expected to carry the whole weight of her husband on her breast, let him have his way, and be quiet so he can enjoy himself. She says,

"I would never dream of doing of doing anything you didn’t want me to.” (7)

Torvald pretends to be secretly married to Nora: "I lay your shawl round those shapely, beautiful shoulders...my young bride...alone with your young and trembling attractiveness" (72). She was his amusement. "Torvald is so hopelessly in love with me that he claims he wants me all to himself (40), and he feels jealous if she merely mentioned the names of her excellent friends," Nora tells Kristine. According to Wollstonecraft, he is a sensualist who lives for transitory pleasures:

“The man...contented to live with a pretty, useful companion without a mind, has lost in voluptuous

gratification...never felt the calm satisfaction that refreshes the parched heart…” (Vindication 66)

Nora's spouse thinks she's a squanderer. Thus, Nora's eventual admission to the latter that she had covertly taken odd jobs and hard work to save her husband, whom she cherished, is shocking. "My cute little pet is quite sweet, but it runs away with an awful lot of money," Torvald remarks. (6) Nora worked hard to portray an ideal household, but she was worthless. Her husband says, "Ugh, I never felt so bored in my life." Thus, she must adapt to shifting situations. Nora's reliant and autonomous selves are blended, producing internal and outward tension. Her greatest shortcoming was that she learned life by snatches without ever reflecting on the big goal of human nature.

Nora ignores Kristine's advice to tell Torvald about her stupidity and end her deception:

“O yes, someday perhaps...when I am no longer pretty...when Torvald isn't quite in love with me..." (17)

She is unconsciously aware of her mask, which she feels will dissolve with time. It almost resembles Wollstonecraft:

‘The woman who has only been taught to please will soon find out that her charms are oblique sunbeams, and they cannot have much effect on her husband's heart...when the summer is passed and gone.’ (Vindication 19)

Nora struggles between illusion and reality. For Torvald, "eat, drink, and be happy" is a transient reality. Torvald had a good income, a gorgeous wife, and three lovely children. "And now your spouse wants to kick me off the ladder again, back into the mud," Krogstad says of Torvald, who rules a utopian society by eradicating evil and good. (28) Torvald is not seeking a bright society, but rather removing all obstacles to his success.

‘for the strong wind of authority pushes the crowd of subalterns forward, they scarcely know why, with headlong fury." (Vindication 11)

Torvald tells Nora, "Little songbirds must keep their charming little beaks out of mischief; no chirruping out of tune," even though he pretends to love her. (33). He opens and closes his study door. Security, authority, and patriarchal power. His presence behind that door feels godlike. Torvald values self-sufficiency through hard labour and honest relationships:

"There's always something inhibited, something unpleasant, about a home built on credit and borrowed money." (5)

Ironically, debts would have killed him. As a proud man, having his wife support or influence him would be embarrassing:

"Do you want to make me the laughing stock...Give people the idea that I am susceptible to any kind of outside pressure..."(44)

He ruled his domain like a dictator and interpreted freedom differently. Nora defines freedom as being a submissive wife and mother. She tries to find herself outside the pedestal. She felt "almost like a guy" doing things. Nora becomes "a slavish parasite or loathsome pander," according to Wollstonecraft. Ignorance causes her immorality and family pain. Torvald's mental supremacy clashes with Nora's corrupt behaviour.

Nora's residence and marriage are a replica. As the bank manager's adored wife, she was protected from life's hurts:

The loyal wife becomes a weak, lethargic mother because "the intellect inherently weakened by dependence on authority, never develops its powers." Vindication 52

Nora hasn't really accepted her husband in eight years. Wollstonecraft calls gentleness "the meek attitude of dependence...because it desires protection; and is forbearing, because it must silently undergo assaults; smiling under the whip at which it dare not snarl" (23). She grins quietly and replies: Torvald accuses her of being irresponsible with money.

"Ah, if you only knew how many expenses the likes of us skylarks and squirrels have, Torvald." (6)

"Everything feels so silly, so pointless," she cries as she secretly eats macaroons and says "damn" (33). "From apparent need, has developed an equally artificial manner of behaving" (Vindication 96) and superficial graces through her husband's delusive flattery, resulting in conceit and empty-headedness.

Escape from the past to live in the present and future. Nora couldn't let go of her father's security. Nora was a doll child from her father and a doll wife from her husband. Mary Wollstonecraft views parental love as the blindest form of perverse self-love. Nora was protected by her father, who brutally loved her and sacrificed every relative responsibility to advance her in the world. She became indulgent and humble because her mind was conditioned in that immature and cruel turbulence that corrupted her. The Vindication says such women "seldom shows enlightened mother concern; for she either neglects her children or ruins them by improper indulgence." (110) Her obsession with luxury opposes her ingenuity in scrounging and buying cheap clothing; her defiance of Torvald by eating the forbidden macaroons contradicts her commitment to his beliefs; and her flirting disposition contradicts her devotion to her spouse.

Ignorance caused Nora to seek happiness in her love and adopt metaphysical ideas about that emotion, which led her to abandon her life and fall into vice. Krogstad is her first legal encounter. "Isn't a daughter entitled to rescue her father from worry...isn't a woman entitled to save her husband's life...it must say somewhere that things like this are permissible." (31) She is a noble criminal who broke male-dominated society's unfeeling and insensitive laws. Women can set home rules but not business ones. "You comprehend nothing of the world you live in," Torvald remarks as Nora mocks Dr. Rank's experimental testing. (85)

"Her insipidity, her dollishness originate from the continual repression of her family life," Edmund Gosse said of Nora. Wollstonecraft called her "a queen merely to be misled by hollow worship." (40) She can't make a moral decision when she's suddenly in charge. The situation almost matches Wollstonecraft's;

"In beauty's empire is no mean, and woman, either slave or queen, is quickly scorned when not adored."(Vindication 40)

She realises she played hide-and-seek with herself, her husband, her children, and society in the doll house. Nora had twisted Torvald into an indulgent father figure, hoping he would rescue her from her predicament. Torvald's "Many's a time I wish you were threatened by some awful danger so I could risk all, body and spirit, for your sake" inspired this notion. "This woman who was my pride and joy...a hypocrite, a liar..." (76) Her husband ruthlessly destroys her innocence and self-esteem as the truth comes out. She becomes a "feather-brained woman" who jeopardises his future. This disappointment destroys her toy house. The play's second-act tarantella continues the dollhouse theme. The play's technical portion is likewise a reflection of Nora's transformation. The tarantella expresses her existential psychological state more than art. Nora "condescend to apply art, and pretend a sickly delicacy, to earn her husband's love." Vindication 20 She dances wildly to express her agony. It signifies her doll house existence's "death." "You are dancing as though your life depended on it," Torvald remarks (61). Nora agrees. The standing position from which she begins her movements presents her as a lovely, spoilt pet; her trying to conform to all the forces in her life creates a wildness in her, which is manifested in her spontaneous and uncontrolled circles; and her imaginary world shreds its covering one by one to reveal the lie she had always believed. The dance signifies an existential change into a self-reliable, responsible free spirit, dancing out of regressive darkness into civilised life. Nora leaves her illusory existence and discovers reality after the tarantella. Gail Finney writes in the Cambridge Companion to Ibsen,

"A mother in modern society is like certain insects that go away and die when she has a duty in the propagation of the race." (90)

When the truth comes out, Torvald rejects Nora, revealing their marriage's truth. He followed society's rules and supported society above his wife. He merely used Nora to shape his credibility and maintain his social standing. Nora's request for Krogstad is ignored: "If it ever got out that the new manager had been talked over by his wife..." "I would gladly toil day and night for you, Nora...but nobody sacrifices his honour for the one he loves" (44), again (86). After learning of Nora's vice, he replies, "All we can do is save the bits and pieces from the wreck, preserve appearances..." (78). "...I am rescued! Nora, I am saved!" he exclaims after receiving Krogstad's apology letter. "And me?" Nora asks coldly (79).

Nora throws away her gorgeous dress and breaks the marriage ritual by refusing to wear the ring. The doll house collapses. "All I know is that my ideas...are extremely different from yours...apparently a woman has no right to spare her old father on his deathbed, or to preserve her husband," she says (85). Torvald's inability to give safety when Nora had believed in his unlimited worth is nearly shocking, forcing her to discover strength within herself. She had built her existence on the pretence that "He would never hesitate for a minute to sacrifice his life for me" (50). He likes her because she's helpless: "Here I shall embrace you like a hunted dove I have rescued undamaged from the harsh claws of the eagle" (80), but she knows he's not "man enough" to defend her.

"Fragile in every sense of the word, they are obliged to look up to man for every comfort.

In the most trifling danger they cling to their support. Piteously demanding succour...from what..." (Vindication 44)

Nora decides to withdraw from her passive life and view it objectively. She goes out not to prove herself but to discover and educate herself, a mandatory journey for all women because:

'The conduct and manner of women, in fact, evidently prove that their minds are not in a healthy state; for like the flowers which are planted in too rich a soil, strength and usefulness are sacrificed to beauty...after having pleased a fastidious eye, fade...long before the season when they ought to have arrived at maturity.' (Vindication 3)

"Little Nora isn't as foolish as people thinks," Nora learned through her jobs (11). She experienced the triumphant spirit of conquering an uncharted domain by almost feeling like a man, which is why when her spouse rejects her, she has the mental capacity to go out into the world and reconsider the ideology that binds society in a terrible scenario. Mary Wollstonecraft questions women's value in a world that doesn't recognise them. Nora's honour and eternal bliss come from losing her identity:

"No more worries...making the house nice and attractive, and having things as Torvald likes to have them..." (18)

She has been falsely taught that: "A little knowledge of human weakness, softness of temper, outward obedience...will obtain for her the protection of man..." (Vindication 13)

Nora considers happiness residing in the arms of attractiveness, dazzling riches and extravagance, and life fulfilled in the pavilion of a good job with a fat income. Unless she lets go of her arbitrary power of beauty and her role as an alluring mistress desirous of pleasing, she will be unable to assert her independence. Wollstonecraft believes that the corrupt state of society is because women are enslaved by having their understandings and senses cramped and stifled.

"Taught from their infancy that beauty is woman's sceptre, the mind shapes itself to the body, and roaming round its gilt cage only seeks to adore its prison." (Vindication 30)

"Strengthen the female mind by widening it, and there will be an end to blind obedience," Mary Wollstonecraft suggests to re-dignify women (17). Nora Norah embodies the female traits of gentleness, docility, and spaniel-like devotion. She is deceitfully withheld from the tree of knowledge, corrupted by coquettish arts to please Torvald, and rejected because she tried to save him. Nora's naivety leads to a bodily and emotional escape. "Careful" education produces "beautiful ladies, brimful of sensibility, and teeming with capricious imaginations, or mere noted women," according to Wollstonecraft. (47) Nora was content in her marriage and didn't worry about the future. She nearly worships her children and lavishes them with riches and imaginative aspirations, treating them like playmates. "They are so used to being with their mummy," the maid explains, as she treats them like demigods. (37) The Vindication considers extensive care harmful and destructive:

"A child should always be made to receive assistance from a man or woman as a favour...they should practically be taught to...not require that personal attendance." (139)

Nora can free Torvald only by obliterating herself from the world; complete independence from each other alone will forge a new life for her; "Ah, Torvald, you are not the man to teach me to be a good wife for you" (83), and grants him absolute freedom:

"I can, at any rate, free you from all responsibility. You must not feel in any way bound... There must be full freedom on both sides." (87)

Mary Wollstonecraft believes that reasonable women's first duty is to themselves and then to their children. "I have another obligation equally sacred...My duty to myself," Nora says, only after realising this concept (84). She was "like the lawless planet dashing from its orbit to steal the cosmic fire of reason..." (Vindication 9). Torvald persuades: "If you're honest, I'll make all the decisions." 81, and "Lessons begin after playtime." (23) "Stop play-acting!" (77) is a cruel suggestion that their lives and family had been a game. Her sensibility into foolishness and sin startled Nora. She's dejected now. The Vindication sympathises with the pitiful, degraded state of women like Nora, who relied on men's virtue.

"He who ought to have directed thy reason, and supported thy weakness, has betrayed thee. In a dream of passion thou consented to wander through flowery lanes...they, instead of guarding, lured thee...to face a sneering, frowning world, and to find thyself alone in a waste..." (Vindication 91)

5. Conclusion

Even though Ibsen and Wollstonecraft write in different genres, both show a world where women are assumed to do particular things and their methods are rarely questioned until a problem arises. When Nora closes the doll house door, she unlocks the gate of life for women, proclaiming the revolutionary message that only absolute freedom and communion build a true relationship between man and woman, meeting in the open, without falsehoods, without shame, free from duty.

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