

Dr Bhawna Singh

Paper title: World Literature in Translation

A Doll's House

A play in three acts by Henrik Ibsen, a Norwegian playwright.

It was written and produced in 1879. Its first performance took place in Copenhagen.

The first English performance of *A Doll's House* took place in London in 1884.

Characters:

NORA HELMER: conflicted housewife of Torvald Helmer

TORVALD HELMER: A banker

DR RANK: family friend of the Helmers

MRS LINDE (KRISTINE): friend of Nora. A single woman, widowed, willing to be independent by seeking out work in the public sphere

KROGSTAD: a social outcast as a result of forgery he had done in the past that was publically exposed

ANNE MARIE: nanny

HELENE: A housekeeper working for the Helmers.

BOB, EMMY and IVAR: Nora and Torvald's children

Themes:

Some of the themes found in the play are listed below. Read the text thoroughly to correlate these themes through textual references. The themes have been discussed during the lectures in detail:

- Institution of marriage
- Sacrificial role of women
- Quest for identity
- Self-awareness
- Family
- Parental obligations
- Gender roles
- Sexism
- Honour, reputation
- Individual versus society
- Appearance and reality

Symbols

Money (it symbolizes men's control over women as women were not allowed to have access to it in the same manner as men. as exemplified by Nora asking for money from Torvald in

the beginning, and her refusal to take any financial help from him when she is leaving the house for good. During Ibsen's time, Norwegian women did not have the right to vote, own property, or borrow money. The right to control their own wealth did not come to Norwegian women until the 1890s).

Christmas tree (The state of the Christmas tree in the beginning of the play and later in the second act represent the passing of time and foreshadows Nora's emotional decline in its "dishevelled" state)

Masquerade ball (Nora is not her true self in front of Torvald. This comes to light in Act III of the play as the self-realization takes place)

TORVALD: No, stay—What are you doing there in the alcove?

NORA [*from within*]: Taking off my masquerade costume.)

Birds (nicknames like "skylark", "songbird", "dove" used by Torvald to address Nora. Her being addressed as a bird also indicates her status as the same as a bird in a cage)

Doll's house (Nora as a doll/plaything/puppet for her father and then for her husband)

Macaroons (Torvald has refused Nora the right to eat macaroons, but Nora still eats them without his knowledge. Macaroons symbolise her disobedience. She rebels and is capable of deceit which is symbolised through this act.)

Tarantella (a rapid whirling dance originating in southern Italy. An Italian folk dance where one dances with wild abandon. The dance was thought to be a cure for tarantism, the victim dancing the tarantella until exhausted)