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Ibsen and Hnath's *A Doll's House*

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Keywords: <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Author versus reader- Form versus content- Formalism- Realism- Unified ontology- Well-made Play	Abstract <p>Henrik Ibsen's concern in <i>A doll's house</i> (1879) is the exposition of what he deems social evils and shortcomings, consequently leaving his protagonist's future, after she famously slams the door on her married life, to the audience's speculation. His open ending thus exemplifies Barthes's seminal argument against unquestioned authorial authority in 'The death of the author' (1967), reasoning that what matters is the impression that a text makes on its destination, i.e., the reader. This paper looks into the take of one such reader on Ibsen's text. Lucas Hnath, who provides a sequel to Ibsen's play, daringly calling it <i>A doll's house, part 2</i> (2017), interprets Nora's venturing into the outer world in terms of career and financial success. He begins his play with a knock on the same door ushering in, supposedly fifteen years later, the now established and self-assured feminist novelist Nora. As the two plays thus form a unified ontology, they showcase the Formalist postulate of the recurrent devices and the binding autonomous interrelations of literature. The themes that Ibsen starts are continued and elaborated by Hnath, who offers an extensive portrayal of various perceptions of Nora's decision to leave her family. He does so through the tactic of the discussion, originally introduced by Ibsen, which goes counter to the latter's general style of the well-made play. As New</p>
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	Criticism shares with Formalism its focus on the literary text itself, severing it from author and social context, its approach of close reading is used in this paper to analyze the merged schema of the two plays
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"بيت الدمية" لابسن ونيث

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<p>الخلاصة: ينصب اهتمام ابسن في "بيت الدمية" (١٨٧٩) على كشف مايعتبره شرورا ونواقص اجتماعية، مما يؤدي الى تركه لمستقبل نورا، شخصية مسرحيته الرئيسية، بعد اغلاقها الشهير والعنيف للباب على حياتها الزوجية، لتصورات جمهور المشاهدين. النهاية المفتوحة للمسرحية هذه تمثل نقاش بارث عالي التأثير ضد سلطة المؤلفين المطلقة، وذلك في مقاله "موت المؤلف" (١٩٦٧)، محاججا ومبررا ذلك بأن ما يهم هو الأثر الذي يتركه النص على هدفه المقصود، أي على القاريء. ينظر هذا البحث في تناول أحد القراء لنص ابسن، وهو لوكاس نيث، الذي يعرض تصوره لمغامرة نورا وجراتها في تركها لعالمها الى العالم الخارجي كنجاح مهني ومادي لها، وذلك في تنمته لمسرحية ابسن التي يطلق عليها بجرأة تسمية "بيت الدمية، الجزء الثاني" (٢٠١٧). يستهل نيث مسرحيته بطريقة على نفس الباب بعد مرور افتراضي لخمس عشرة عاما، يتبعها دخول نورا وقد أصبحت كاتبة ناشطة نسائية ذات ثقة بالنفس. يبين وجود المسرحيتين الموحد الناتج عن ذلك افتراض المدرسة الشكلية باستقلالية الأدب وبتكرار أدواته ووسائله. يستمر نيث ويتوسع بالموضوعات التي يبدأها ابسن ويقدم تصويرا ممتدا للرؤى المختلفة لقرار نورا بترك عائلتها. لتحقيق ذلك، يستخدم نيث نفس تقنية المناقشة الموضوعية في الأصل رهن الاستعمال من قبل ابسن، وذلك بالرغم من كونها مضادة لاسلوب المسرح المتقن الظاهر بشكل عام في مسرحيته. وحيث أن مدرسة النقد الجديد تشارك المدرسة الشكلية التركيز على النص الأدبي ذاته، فاصلة له عن كاتبه وسياقه الاجتماعي، فقد تم استخدام نهج قراءتها المتمعنة في هذا البحث لتحليل الترسيم المندمجة للمسرحيتين.</p>	<p>الكلمات الدالة:- المؤلف مقابل القاريء الشكل مقابل المضمون الشكلانية الواقعية المسرحية المتقنة الصنع</p> <p>معلومات البحث تاريخ البحث: الاستلام: ٢٠٢١_٧_١٢</p>
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I. NRODUCTION

Ibsen (1828-1906) hints at Nora's innate strength throughout *A doll's house*, and brings it to full light at the end. On his part, Hnath (date unknown-) also brings her strength of character to the fore. Contrary to the general expectation that Nora's end would be dismal in a world for which she is not equipped with experience or knowledge, Hnath presents her as an established novelist advocating feminist causes. She has achieved what she set out to do at the end of Ibsen's play, but at a great cost to her family. Hnath does not exonerate Nora from responsibility nor does he judge her. His concern, like Ibsen's, is humanity at large, and he shows that, despite the time span, the relevant dialectics started by Ibsen are still valid today.

2. A REDADER'S TEXT

In 'The death of the author', Barthes (1915-1980) declares the death of the author and the birth of the reader. He marks the beginning of the process of the author's death by the moment a fact is narrated in disconnection with reality, i.e. when writing begins. Barthes also addresses the novelty of the figure of the author. He maintains that the importance attached to the person of the author emerges from the discovery of the prestige of the individual, which results from English empiricism of the Middle Ages, combined with French rationalism and the veer towards personal faith with the Reformation. When believed in, the author is conceived as the past and the origin of the text, and is perceived as existing before the text, same as a father antecedes his child.

Barthes is critical of the urge to focus on details of authors' lives or personalities, whether on the part of writers themselves or on the part of literary critics. He finds that this reduces a work to the voice of a single person, the author's, and argues for the removal of the author in reading a modern text. In complete contrast to this fixation on the author, a modern writer is born concurrently with the text, neither preceding or exceeding it, nor is the writer a 'subject with the book as predicate' (1967: 145). Added to that, there exists no other time than that of the writing as 'every text is eternally written here and now' (1967: 145). Barthes's proposition is that a prerequisite of writing is impersonality, and that the area of writing is a neutral space where every voice is destroyed and all identity is lost. The impersonality should reach a point at which only language speaks, acts, and performs, rather than the writer of that language. The neutrality and impersonality are also signs that a text is made of multiple writings and is drawn from many cultures, thus entering into reciprocal relations of dialogue. The reader is where this multiplicity is focused, not the author as hitherto maintained: 'a text's unity lies not in its origin but in its destination' (1967: 148), hence the birth of the reader at the cost of the death of the author.

Much that happens in *A doll's house* is based on the married life of Ibsen's friend Laura Kieler (1849-1932). She too had to borrow money secretly for a trip to Italy as a cure for her sick husband, upon the discovery of which the husband divorced her and had her committed to an asylum. At his urging, she returned to him and to her children two years later, continuing her literary career and eventually becoming a well-known

author. Ibsen wrote his play at the point when Laura Kieler had been committed to the asylum, and he was deeply concerned about what might become of the whole family. Not being able to help in any way, Ibsen turned this life situation into his famous play (*Complete works of Henrik Ibsen*, 2013: 2645). According to Barthes's theory above, this literary employment of the true story disconnects it from reality and marks the beginning of the death of its writer.

Ibsen himself seems to have thought along similar lines as Barthes. In a speech at the festival of the Norwegian Women's Right's League in 1898, Ibsen responds to the League's presentation of him as a defender of women's cause, saying:

I [...] must disclaim the honor of having consciously worked for the women's rights movement [...]. To me it has seemed a problem of humanity in general [...]. True enough, it is desirable to solve the problem of women's rights, along with all the others; but that has not been the whole purpose. My task has been the *description of humanity*. To be sure, whenever such a description is felt to be reasonably true, the reader will insert his own feelings and sentiments into the work of the poet [having earlier in the speech described himself as more poet than social reformer]. These are attributed to the poet; but incorrectly so. Every reader remolds it so beautifully and nicely, each according to his own personality. Not only those who write, but also those who read are poets; they are collaborators; they are often more poetical than the poet himself. (*Complete works of Henrik Ibsen*, 2013: 9271)

In other words, Ibsen is positing the same idea as Barthes's about the reader-centered creative literary process, especially that his aim is to unequivocally lay bare social ills for audiences and readers. This in itself indicates that he does not want his writing to be exclusively his and that he wants to involve his recipients. In point of fact, his own intention is for his writing to be perceived as concerned with humanity at large rather than with feminist issues in particular, yet the general perception of him is as a defender of women's rights. This showcases his words about each reader remolding what he reads, resulting in a literary text being continuously recreated.

Ibsen does not end *A doll's house* conclusively. Although Nora famously slams the door shut on her life with Torvald, yet the last thing heard in the play is Torvald expressing his hope that 'the most wonderful thing of all' (Ibsen, 1879: 68) might happen; he hopes that he and Nora might both change enough to restart their lives together in 'a real wedlock' (Ibsen, 1879: 68). This open-ending, added to Ibsen's deliberate drawing in of the audience, has allowed for a continuous flow of sequels to be written, with varying imagined resolutions to his narrative. These sequels either condemn or vindicate Nora. Some of them are written as articles, some as short stories, some as novels, and a few as plays. In their majority, they take much liberty with Ibsen's play, whether in ideas, in time spans and locations, or in the addition of characters. This practice would not have been strange for Ibsen; Helland and Holledge (eds. 2018: 98) recount that he made the acquaintance of Laura Kieler herself through her novel *Brand's daughters: a life portrait of Lili* (1869), which she had written in response to Ibsen's *Brand*, first performed in 1867. Hnath's *A doll's house, part 2*, is one of the sequels to Ibsen's play, supporting the idea that once a text is written, it is no longer the exclusive property of its writer, and that readers are at liberty to receive it as they will.

3. *A DOLL'S HOUSE: A DEPARTURE FROM THE WELL-MADE PLAY*

Because Ibsen had been stage manager for many years, it is only to be expected that he should be influenced by the prominent types of theatrical presentation of his time, hence the aspects of the well-made play in his *A doll's house*. The formulaic construction of the play is evident and has often been noted. It is seen in the succinct neatness of the quick moving and compelling three-act plot, the removal of any part of which would ruin the whole. It is also seen in the complications and intrigues of the narrative which are based on a secret only known by some; this secret is a key piece of information which moves forward in a chain of actions, building up the suspense to a climax close to the end of the play. This neatness and conciseness of the plot is supported by the characters whose every speech develops it. Also an aspect of the standardized formula of the well-made play is that the characters of the play are types. There is Torvald as the authoritative husband who, to all appearances, is a pillar of society, Dr. Rank as the family friend, Mrs. Linde, Nora's school friend, as the dejected woman who has had a very hard life, Anne the Nurse, who has had to leave her illegitimate child and support herself by raising Nora and now Nora's children, and of course, there is Krogstad as the villain of the piece, who almost miraculously undergoes a change of heart through the love of Mrs. Linde, and thus takes back his threats against Nora.

It is only Nora who breaks free from the cast of a type character. At first she does give the impression that she is the typical loving and obedient wife whose family is all that she wants out of life, yet hints are given every now and then to show her insubordinate nature. Her going against her husband's directions in secretly eating macaroons and in generously tipping the porter for carrying in her Christmas purchases, may seem insignificant in itself. But these examples gain significance when the play reveals that Torvald wants to have full control of Nora, even her eating habits, and that he wants to supervise the family expenditure because he believes that his doll of a wife does not have the ability to do so.

The play gradually reveals that Nora, unbeknown to Torvald, has already had to deal in financial affairs. There was a time when doctors had told her that only a trip to the south would save her husband's life, to provide for which she had to borrow money from the corrupt Krogstad, and to forge her father's signature as surety. She is very proud of having saved her husband's life and of having spared him and her father the agony of fearing for Torvald's life; in her inexperience, she thinks that the law should forgive her the forgery because she did it out of love for the two most important men in her life. Ever since then, exhibiting her resourcefulness, she has been repaying Krogstad, in installments, out of the money which she could coax out of Torvald, at the expense of her own necessities of life. In his obtuseness, Torvald never suspects that she may have other reasons for wanting the money and, in fact, accuses her of being a mindless spendthrift; nor does it ever occur to him that her crocheting, needlework, and copying, are all to raise money.

Krogstad's threat that if Torvald does not keep him in his post at the bank, where the latter is now manager, he will reveal her forgery and expose her to the world, becomes the touchstone of Nora and Torvald's marriage. Nora has so much faith in her husband and in his assertions that he would always protect her, that she expects him to take the blame of the forgery on himself to save her from social condemnation and from the punishment of the law. When Krogstad reveals her forgery to Torvald, she is sadly disappointed when he shows no concern for her and thinks only of his reputation and his job, and shows every intention of yielding to Krogstad's threats. As Krogstad retracts his threat under the influence of Mrs. Linde, Torvald shouts: 'I am saved! Nora,

I am saved' (Ibsen, 1879: 61), again showing his total disregard of her. He acts as if nothing has happened, reasserting his empty assurances of his constant protection of Nora. His hollowness of character embodies Shaw's statement 'that in killing women's souls [men] have killed their own' (1891), which in turn shows that Ibsen's concern is indeed humanity at large; social precepts have dehumanized both men and women, with men believing themselves to be in full control.

Unlike Torvald, Nora is true to herself and has her eyes opened to the reality of her marriage, to the character of her husband, and to how she is perceived by him. Consequently, she walks out on Torvald whom she now regards as a stranger, and decides to face the world and make out her own life depending entirely on herself. She reaches this decision after discussing their marriage with Torvald in what has famously become known as the discussion scene. Technique-wise, the discussion scene replaces the expected *scène à faire*, the obligatory ending scene of the well-made play, in which the outcome the audience expects and desires comes to pass. The intellectual substance of the discussion, which exposes masculine egotism, prevents this conventional ending of reconciliation. Moreover, the ideas which Ibsen posits in this scene, considered anarchic at the time, dissect the social and emotional aspects of the plot, revolutionizing drama. Thus, despite the aspects of the well-made play, Gassner, among many others, maintains that Ibsen established realism in modern drama by his drama of ideas, and by the avoidance of the then conventional sentimentality through the power of his critical mind (1958: viii). His heroine seeking to find herself by leaving her family, brings her strength, only hints of which had been given so far, to full light, showing that she is not the 'helpless little mortal' (Ibsen, 1879: 46) whom her husband thinks her to be. Ibsen thus brings Nora to life, out of the mold of the submissive wife of the well-made play, by making her the representative of his ideas. When she says to Torvald 'this is a settling of accounts' (Ibsen, 1879: 62), and 'I have been greatly wronged, Torvald, first by papa and then by you' (Ibsen, 1879: 63), she is putting to practice Rooney's argument that the exposure of masculinism and patriarchal domination of women is a must for any settling action to be taken against them (2016b: 73). This allows for Hnath's more collective and comprehensive tone, through his portrayal of Nora in relation to her family.

4. A DOLL'S HOUSE, PART2: A SPIN-OFF IBSEN'S PLAY

Hnath's sequel is one of the latest to be written in the form of a play, and it is the truest to Ibsen's play in its depiction of its characters, in using Ibsen's style and techniques of presentation, and in focusing on discussion, Ibsen's most outstanding feature in his social plays. This, along with the fact that Hnath begins his play where Ibsen ends it, is a reminder of what Heller describes as the serial continuity in Ibsen's drama (1912: 142), especially that Hnath daringly calls his play *A doll's house, part 2*, as if the first play of the same title is also his. This is yet another manifestation of Barthes and Ibsen's argument that a text is in fact the property of its recipient. In response to the attacks on him after *A doll's house*, Ibsen wrote *Ghosts* (1882), showing the tragedy that befalls a family in which the wife does what the audiences wanted Nora to do, and that is stay in a loveless marriage of pretense and sham respectability.¹ Hnath goes further in establishing the sense of continuity by depicting the play *A doll's house* itself, only fifteen years later, showing the effect of those fifteen years on its characters. In a logical evolution, Hnath's Nora embodies the qualities of a New Woman in her adamant feminist stance and total self-reliance. Naturally, such a woman could never have had a solid and healthy marriage with Torvald who, in his sexist solipsism, cannot understand Nora's perspective.

Hnath's play begins with Nora, all but dead to her family, knocking on the same door that she slams shut at the end of the first play. She has returned, not to her past life, but to have Torvald sign their divorce. All these years she had thought that he had filed the divorce, when in fact he had not. Believing that she was divorced, and because of her own negative marital experience, she has been outspoken in her pseudonymous writings as a feminist novelist against the establishment of marriage. Influenced by her popular books, many women have broken free from marriages in which they felt suffocated and controlled. Unfortunately for Nora, one such woman is the wife of a judge who, in retaliation, has probed into the identity of the writer of these books, has found out her real name and that she herself is married. He now threatens to expose Nora unless she retracts her attacks on marriage, and publically apologizes for her views. Nora clarifies how damaging this would be to her: 'I've signed contracts, done business, had lovers—all sorts of things that a married woman isn't allowed to do, that are illegal, that amount to fraud—This judge could make a lot of trouble for me' (Hnath, 2017: 44). As in Ibsen's play, Nora is again facing legal trouble because of a signature, which renders it a motif in the two plays. When she confronts Torvald with this, and tells him that divorce is much easier and quicker for him as a man to process than it is to her as a woman, he cites his grievances against her, and vindictively refuses to sign the divorce saying that she does not deserve for it to be so easy. But Emmy, Nora's now grown daughter, adds that Torvald had let people believe that his wife had died rather than letting them know that she had left him, and that divorcing her now would be an admittance of his lie. In this, Torvald again shows his concern for appearances as he does in Ibsen's play, where he is also willing to succumb to Krogstad's threats to spare his reputation. Hiding the fact that his wife is alive is Torvald's intentional fraud, unlike Nora's unintentional one as she did not know that she is still married; like her, Torvald too could be in serious legal trouble. One is aware of how ironic it is that Torvald intentionally commits fraud, for which he is very quick to condemn Krogstad and Nora in the first play, using it against them as an indicator of an innate rottenness, which he claims they have inherited from their parents and are very likely to pass on to their children. Emmy also tells Nora that if her father's lie is exposed, then this would be a scandal that would ruin her own upcoming marriage to her fiancé, a banker working with Torvald. To prevent that from happening, Nora will face the judge's threats even if that results in her going to prison, explaining that it would be like an imprisonment anyway if she lets herself be beholden to all the hypocritical rules of society, if she continues to write under a pseudonym, and if she has to rely on Torvald for the divorce. She adds: 'because twenty, thirty years from now the world isn't going to be the kind of place I say it's going to be unless I'm the one to make it that way' (Hnath, 2017: 120).

In this instance, Nora is clearly speaking for feminists in general, which endows Hnath's play with its expansive reach. It is true that she expresses this opinion when Emmy says that she could end all the problems by forging a death certificate for her mother, thus placing herself in the same danger as Nora in Ibsen's play, also because of a forgery, yet Nora is still voicing the general feminist hope for a world which is fairer to all women, not only to herself or to her daughter. This more comprehensive tone of Hnath's play is also seen in his division of his one-act play into scenes of dialogues between Nora and the other characters, allowing for the expression of different viewpoints about the effects of the choices which Nora has made. This is another way for Hnath to achieve an inclusive dialectic, expressive of various standpoints. The Nurse's views are disapproving as she fails to understand how a mother could leave her husband and children. Although she herself had left her own

illegitimate child, as Nora reminds her, yet in becoming Nora's nurse and later that of Nora's children, she has still fulfilled the role which she believes to be the natural role of all women. Torvald's tone is that of a wronged husband who still has not found it in himself to allow Nora any right in what she has done; he is as strict and inflexible as ever. Emmy has no memories of her mother because she was very little when Nora left, so, unlike her two brothers, she never missed her mother. As a result, she is rather neutral in her reception of her mother, and speaks with her in an unemotional and practical manner. Being raised by Anne Marie and Torvald, she worries about the scandal that might arise should it be known that Nora is still alive. Each of these characters speaks from a defined outlook creating a collision of viewpoints, because these viewpoints are not lectures masquerading as discussions as in the final scene of the first play. Looked at closely, it will be revealed that the passages in that scene do not constitute, in Williams's words, 'a living confrontation between actual people' (1969: 48), for it is in fact Nora who is delivering a long speech with Torvald only uttering sporadic comments or questions prompting the points she discusses. The dialogues in Hnath's play provide comprehensive and clearly articulated discussions of questions originally raised by Ibsen.

Like the first play, the complications that arise in the plot are those of a well-made play, and like the first play they do not end in the well-made play's typical obligatory scene resolving all the conflicts and complications, but again in a discussion scene between Nora and Torvald. This happens with Torvald's uttering the famous words that Ibsen assigns to Nora: 'We should talk' (Hnath, 2017: 121). Showing that he still has not learnt to take her writing seriously, Torvald is holding one of what he describes as Nora's 'little books' (Hnath, 2017: 124), from which he quotes passages expressive of Nora's uncomplimentary perception of her husband. Torvald is worried that when he dies, Nora's story will be the only mark he will leave in the world; and because he wants the memory he leaves to be better than that, he has finally filed the divorce, hoping that she might write another book portraying him as a better man. Quick to recognize his self-serving intention, Nora refuses to accept the signed divorce paper telling Torvald that he has not changed at all. However, as they recount the difficulties each of them experienced after their separation, there is a promising sign of change in Torvald when he expresses his hope of marrying a woman whom he knows, based on the sound foundations mentioned in his and Nora's first ever discussion fifteen years earlier. This shows that they have achieved some communication. Nora sincerely hopes that he will find such marital happiness, but makes it clear that on her part, she values her freedom too much to ever venture on another marriage. Here again she shows that she is a New Woman fighting off the patriarchy instilled in her by society. She and Torvald are on amicable terms as they eventually walk together to the door, another prominent motif in both plays, and Torvald watches Nora walk out of it and shut it again between them and their different worlds.

For a woman of Nora's time to emancipate herself, according to Shaw, she has to 'repudiate her womanliness, her duty to her husband, to her children, to society, to the law, and to everyone but herself' (1891). Nora gives voice to this idea in saying that she is ready to do what she did in the time span between the two plays all over again, to go off into an even harder battle as this time she might lose everything that she has gained. She regrets that the world has still not changed as much as she thought it would, but is confident of a better and freer future, saying: 'I just hope I live to see it' (Hnath, 2017: 144). Nora's marked achievement, seen from Shaw's (1891) perspective, is that she has freed herself from the shackles of ideals which have proved unworthy of the sacrifices they necessitate. She has lost faith in the ideal of the sanctity of marriage and

of the protection and sense of fulfillment it is supposed to provide for a woman. Hnath is, in a sense, granting Nora her wish of seeing a changed world in allowing her to tell her story of hardships to audiences who are more understanding and compassionate than those of the first play, one hundred thirty-eight years earlier. It is thanks to the work and sacrifices of women like her that such a change has been possible.

5. CONTENT VERSUS FORM IN THE TWO PLAYS

Victor Shklovsky (1893-1984), leading figure in Russian Formalism, introduces the concept of defamiliarization in his essay 'Art as device' (also translated as 'Art as technique') (1917). He argues that habitualized perception jades life in automatizing its aspects, to which art provides an antidote, its purpose being the recovering of the sensation of life by defamiliarizing objects and deautomatizing perception. The formed nature of poetic speech is in itself a literary device whereby language defamiliarizes the ordinary, and thus makes forms difficult. Communication thus made more difficult, the desired effect of lengthening the process of perception is achieved, which is an aesthetic end in itself.

In his play, Ibsen uses the ready-made and handy form of the well-made play, a form of presentation so popular then that it had become all too familiar and taken for granted. Itself a system of communication, like language, its focus on intricacies of plot and usage of standard situations and characters, enhanced and encouraged placidity and obtuseness and lulled the intellect. In Formalist terms, it had become automatized. To this standardized presentation, Ibsen introduces the element of discussion, thus defamiliarizing the well-made play presentation, and thus making it more difficult for his audiences to grasp his meaning. This is because the ideas he presents in the discussion scene are too heavy and serious in a scene which, within the conventions of the well-made play, is expected to resolve all the complications of the plot. Instead, here are direct questions raised with no answers to follow. This scene makes it finally clear that Ibsen's concern is not resolving the plot as expected, but raising awareness that what is apparent should not be taken for reality. Based on the givens, this play is supposed to end in a resolution, but it does not, and only by reaching its end is the significance of its innuendoes of familial and social misconception realized. Ibsen thus defamiliarizes both form and content.

Williams identifies the general recognition of *A doll's house* as a principally social rather than a literary phenomenon (1969: 47), thus expressing Ibsen's success in delivering ideas by adapting a conventional form of presentation. It is through close reading of his text that the complementary influence between his form and content can be discerned, and it is close reading that New Criticism's Wimsatt and Beardsley call for in 'The intentional fallacy' (1946). In this seminal text of New Criticism, they maintain that '[j]udging a poem is like judging a pudding or a machine. One demands that it work. It is only that an artifact works that we infer the intention of the artificer' (1946: 469). Within this context, the fact that Ibsen's adapted technique works is evident in his achieving his intention of raising awareness of the social ills portrayed in his play.

Traditionally, the content/form distinction is thought to be motivated by realities outside the literary realm, and formal devices are subordinated to content. Formalists, on the other hand, counter this concept by their claim that literary devices are autonomous of outer motivations and evolve independently. In this instance, Ibsen is not in accordance with Formalists because in his play the form follows the content, and his content is not merely a justification for the use of the formal devices. He shows that, realistically, a woman like Nora is bound to react as she does. His motivation is what

he finds in life, and his purpose is to, at least, raise awareness about those realities of life. The ideas that he posits are taken from outside the literary world, and his addition of the realistic element of discussion is his way of conveying these ideas. Paradoxically, because the artificiality of the dramatic presentation of the well-made play is so jaded, it is through the *realistic* element of the discussion that Ibsen achieves what Formalism considers the aim of literature, namely, defamiliarizing the familiar, thus enlivening perception and reaction. Ibsen, essentially a realist, is practicing realism's strategy of disguising its artificiality. It is in consideration of Hnath's play in relation to Ibsen's that the Formalist belief in the literariness of literature and its power thereof comes into play.

Hnath's dialectic indicates an ongoing argument, and he still wants the focus to be on content, so that other viewpoints besides Nora's could be elaborated and amplified. Consequently, he follows the same technique of the discussion, however he does not restrict it to the end of his play as does Ibsen, but disperses it throughout his whole play. This too is in line with the Formalist belief, as again shown by Shklovsky in 'Art as device', that poetic images do not change much with the passage of time, with the change of location and culture, or with the change of the poet. Changes happen in the adaptation of the inherited techniques and in the use of language, for what poets mainly do is organize images, not create them (1917: 2). Indeed, Hnath writes his play as dictated by Ibsen's prequel, resulting in the two plays forming a unified ontology as, in a Formalist standpoint, form and content of their art evolve from within, Ibsen's play being the motivation for Hnath's. This is also a reminder of Barthes's theory that once the writing begins, the text begins its dissociation from the world outside the boundaries of literature. Thus, in Schmitz's words, 'art offers us a fresh perception of everything that we normally just take for granted; it makes us "see" [*sic*] objects to which we have become accustomed and prevents us from merely "recognizing" [*sic*] them without paying attention' (2007: 23).

6. THEMES IN THE TWO PLAYS

Ibsen puts out his concern for humanity as his broad theme. Consequently, he raises basic questions such as individual freedom, moral autonomy, the right to self-governance, financial independence, social justice, legal justice, reputation versus true character, and heredity and environment, all of which display general human concerns. As Hnath picks up the play, he continues with the same themes which reverberate across the years, showcasing the effects of freedom and solitude versus responsibility and attachment, and individual growth versus domestic stability. Hnath also adds the question of how much has effectively changed for women like Nora in a world which still has not changed enough to accept them. The following offers a discussion of these themes.

6.1. FEMINISM

Ibsen's main encompassing theme is humanity contained within mundane restricting laws. He makes it clear that his aim is to objectively display general societal ills negatively impacting all individuals, and not only women. As Hnath continues in the same vein, feminism becomes a leading motif as a distinctive repeated idea in both plays. It is mainly in reference to Nora, the wronged woman, that all the questions of the plays are tackled. In Ibsen, this is done through dramatic situations exposing past and current issues, all of which involve Nora. In Hnath, it is done through the dialogues, also exposing past and current issues, and again all of which involve Nora.

Shaw maintains that male-dominated societies regard women merely as a means of ministering to men's appetite, whereas men are regarded as an end in themselves (1891). Hnath sums up this idea in Nora saying to Torvald that he wants 'everyone giving up everything for [him] — same thing as always' (Hnath, 2017: 134). Shaw continues that this degrading position of thus being denied the right to live is insufferable. Women who dare to face the fact that they are so treated, either loathe themselves but still submit to the status quo in order not to be cut off by society, or else they rebel. The women who choose to accept may also deceive themselves by denying that the love offered them by men is tainted with sexual appetite. Men themselves want to confirm this illusion because the truth is unbearable to them as well; they also want to believe that they form affectionate ties with women, and not degrading bargains. The women hope to regain the self-respect they lose as wives in their role as mothers, a capacity comparing favorably with the role of men in the world of business (1891). Of the female characters in the plays, Anne Marie and Mrs. Linde fall into this category. They accept the roles assigned them by society, and they are clear examples of women who can only find their worth as mother figures. Mrs. Linde makes this clear when she says that now her life is 'unspeakably empty' because she has no one to care for anymore; her mother has passed away and her two brothers have grown and do not need her anymore (Ibsen, 1879: 10). Her self-worth depending on others' need of her, she finds no pleasure in working for herself: 'give me someone [...] to work for' (Ibsen, 1879: 51). It is this predisposition in her which prompts her to unite with Krogstad, who has gone astray, and lead him back to rightful paths. In Nora's case, however, she is told by her husband that she is too tarnished to be a fit mother; she herself later thinks that she could not be a fit mother because of the way she has allowed herself to be treated. She puts an end to this treatment, thus coming out as a rebel in Shaw's above characterization.

In Ibsen's play, as made clear in the title, Nora is perceived almost as a plaything by her husband; he sees her as his 'little song-bird [.. who must] acknowledge [that] everything [she] think[s] of seems so silly and insignificant' (Ibsen, 1879: 26). Mrs. Linde also draws attention to Nora's ignorance in matters of the world: 'Listen to me, Nora. You are still very like a child in many things, and I am older than you in many ways and have a little more experience' (Ibsen, 1879: 32). However, Nora has long realized that to get something from the men, the easiest way is to use her charms as a pretty woman, as she has found that to be the line of least resistance with men, and this is what she does when she tries to ask the family friend, Dr. Rank, for some money to redeem her forged signature from Krogstad. In this regard, Shaw points out that Nora 'has learnt to coax her husband into giving her what she asks [...] by playing all sorts of pretty tricks until he is wheedled into an amorous humor' (1891). This idea is further clarified by Nora herself. Asked by Mrs. Linde whether she will ever tell Torvald about her procuring money for his life-saving trip, she responds that she might one day, 'when Torvald is no longer as devoted to [her] as he is now; when [her] dancing and dressing-up and reciting have palled on him; then it may be a good thing to have something in reserve' (Ibsen, 1879: 13). Sadly for her, when Torvald does find out what she has done, he fails to appreciate the risk she has taken for his sake, and only throws accusations at her. Shaw continues his argument by pointing out that what her manner with Dr. Rank gets her is his declaration of love for her, opening her eyes to the 'real nature of the domestic influence she has been so proud of' (1891), i.e., to the fact that her influence, rather than being that of a homemaker, is primarily sexual. Her innately free spirit leads her to shed this sexual objectification which, along with her questioning all the handed down practices that she has been subjected to, renders her an enigma to her husband.

Hnath eloquently encapsulates this in Torvald saying to Nora ‘I don’t know what to do around you, I don’t know how to behave’ (Hnath, 2017: 135).

Nora’s aura of mystery in the eyes of Torvald is further developed by her return as a feminist novelist, two things considered dangerous by masculine chauvinism well into the twentieth century. This is due to the association of reading with female power threatening to open doors to female freedom, which also explains many artistic images depiction of reading women. Discussing the idea that reading transports a woman to a private world beyond the objectifying male gaze, Gan points out Roussel’s (1847–1926) *The Reading Girl* (1886) as a case in point. The engrossment of the portrayed girl in her reading presents a severance, though temporary, of societal restrictions and perceptions. Therefore, she is proffered nude because of the ‘need to disrobe her, to render her visible and readable in other ways’, to be able to violate the privacy of her mind (2009: 159). In this respect, Rooney draws attention to the attacks on the increased numbers of women readers starting with the rise of the English novel in the eighteenth century, because of the threats this was thought to pose to female virtue and domestic duty (2016a: 4). Hnath identifies this idea in his depiction of his Nora as a feminist writer herself, therefore even farther in the sanctuary of her own mind, out of the reach of societal expectations and patriarchal surveillance. His association of Nora’s honesty to self and strength of character with her literary vocation, showcases the eventual acceptance of women’s reading. Furthermore, Nora’s success as a writer exemplifies Woolf’s famous argument of the high likelihood of literary achievement and fulfillment for a woman if she had ‘money and a room of her own’ (1929: 5) to ensure her independence and privacy, freeing her from patriarchal dominance and intrusion. True enough, in Ibsen’s play, Nora does not have her own private space as does Torvald, or as do even the children and the maids. She is under continuous scrutiny by Torvald of all her movements and actions, besides always being required to take care of some domestic issue.

After the epiphany which Nora experiences at the end of the first play, she determines her own morals and acts accordingly. She decides to own her self-governance and financial independence. Most importantly, she resolves on being true to herself, which is also her final decision at the end of the second play: she will again go out into a hostile world and face it, come what may.

6.2. REPUTATION VERSUS TRUE CHARACTER

As the two plays handle this theme they counter humanity with reputation and supposed respectability.

Reputation is all important for Torvald. He is willing to forgive Nora’s forgery the moment he learns that Krogstad is not going to expose it, and all his indignation at Nora is revealed to have been for the sake of his social image. Torvald cares so much about his reputation that even his signing his divorce from Nora is to ensure the good name that he wishes to be remembered by after his death. For his wife, on the other hand, what matters is honesty with oneself. However, she too is in danger of falling in the trap of reputation when she fixates on her divorce to save her name as a feminist writer, but she regains herself and faces the ramifications that are certain to come if her marital status is revealed.

Reputation also matters for Emmy who has hidden from her fiancé the fact that her mother is alive, and who is willing to commit forgery to spare her good name. Like her mother before, the focus on reputation forces her to hide matters from her husband to be, who is implied to be a man of business similar to her father with whom he works at the bank, and who is thus under the same societal pressures as her father. One of the

reasons why Nora commits her forgery in Ibsen's play is because Torvald, who is so upright and righteous, would be saddened by his wife coming up with the money necessary for his treatment. He believes that it is only he, the man, who should be the financial provider for the family, and expects obedience and respect for it, otherwise, he is at a loss. He is so much the product of his society that he cannot conceive of things any differently. He is oblivious of the humane part of marriage, and of the compassion and cooperation that are associated with it. Emmy and Nora being forced to commit these legal trespasses also shows that one is likely to infringe laws for the sake of reputation and the preservation of social values.

It is in relation to this theme that the motif of the signature gains its importance as it can either make or break a reputation. Nora forges her father's signature because she needs it to procure money from Krogstad for her husband's recuperation, and she is in constant fear that this forgery would be revealed. Later, she needs her husband's signature on her divorce paper to save herself from being accused of fraud. In both cases, Nora is in need of the signature of an important man in her life which is expected to save the day. However, the signatures, so threatening at first, lose their power when they come into contact with honesty of character in the person of Nora.

6.3. HEREDITY AND ENVIRONMENT

Naturalistic concepts of the reciprocal influence between environmental factors and hereditary compositions, are highly prominent in Ibsen's time, and are part and parcel of realistic and naturalistic literary writing. They influence Ibsen's objective presentation and his dissection of social ills.

The idea of heredity, in its physical manifestation, is clear in Dr. Rank inheriting a venereal mortal disease from his father as a result of the latter's loose life style. He clearly says that sons must pay for what fathers have done: 'To have to pay this penalty for another man's sin! [...]. And in every single family, in one way or another, some such inexorable retribution is being exacted' (Ibsen, 1879: 37). Dr. Rank also helps manifest the power of environment. Supposedly a friend of the family, he is unable to treat Nora on equal terms and can only think of her as an attractive woman. He is no different from Torvald in this respect, which conveys the idea that men are governed by their environment in their reaction to pretty women only as objects of desire. Having established these ideas, Dr. Rank disappears from Ibsen's play as he quietly faces his certain death.

The mental and psychological manifestation of heredity and environment is also portrayed in the plays. Explaining to Nora why he had fired Krogstad from his position at the bank, Torvald says that Krogstad grew up in a home infected with deceit, hence his readiness for seamy business dealings. 'Because such an atmosphere of lies infects and poisons the whole life of a home. Each breath the children take in such a house is full of the germs of evil', and 'I have often seen it in the course of my life as a lawyer. Almost everyone who has gone to the bad early in life has had a deceitful mother' (Ibsen, 1879: 27). Nora, already in fear of her forgery being revealed, is filled with terror at the thought that she might pass on her moral disease to her children, having repeatedly been told by Torvald that her squandering money is a trait which she inherits from her late father, also condemned by Torvald for his laxity in legal and financial matters. Torvald, so certain of his own honor and so judgmental, is oblivious to the possibility that going against the law and strict standards might be compelled by circumstances. He is however willing to come up with justifications for himself in his own infringements of legal and moral codes. This is clear in his concealing the legal trespass of Nora's father because of his attraction to Nora, in his readiness to let go of

Nora's forgery as soon as he learns that Krogstad is not going to act on his threats of exposure, and in his letting it be assumed that Nora is dead to spare himself shame. The moral standards of both Nora and Torvald are put to the test again when Emmy proposes to solve the problem of the divorce by forging a death certificate for Nora. Her mother refuses to let her go through a situation similar to her own forgery in the past, and she also refuses the signed paper of divorce by Torvald, because she has experienced life without the need for deceit and appreciates its value and beauty. Torvald, on the other hand, is still preoccupied with how he will be seen by others, even after his death. Ironically, it is the supposedly upright Torvald who sets the corrupt example for his daughter, whereas it is Nora, the woman whom he would accuse of innate corruption, who sets the honest example.

6.4. STRUGGLE FOR SURVIVAL

Naturalists draw heavily on the Darwinian understanding of the natural struggle for survival as embodied in the relation between individuals and their environments. Therefore, they deem psychological and physical character to be the result of arbitrary circumstances, which disallows free and rational action. This would particularly apply to women of whom the promoted idea is that they are the weaker individuals. Nora rebels against this determinism in Ibsen's play, and proves it wrong in *Hnath's*. The humane concern of the plays shows that human nature is bound to assert itself and react against such negative resignation and acceptance.

To defer such reactions as Nora's, Althusser contends that authorities resort to Ideological State Apparatuses, also to nurture a sense of determinism, on the economic, political, and social levels. In 'Ideology and ideological state apparatuses: notes towards an investigation' (1970), Althusser expands on Marx's discussion of the interconnection between social labor and product exchange value. In a letter to Kugelmann (1868: 195), Marx states this interconnection to be essential for social formations, in order for them to reproduce the conditions of production concurrently with the process of production itself; otherwise, the social formations would perish within a year. Althusser's ideas in this regard can explain much in the relation between Nora and her husband, economic aspect included, economics being a main focus in his essay.

Althusser assumes that every social formation emerges from a controlling mode of production which operates the existing productive forces under definite relations thereof. In a capitalist regime, this reproduction of labor power skills is not achieved intrinsically from within the production, but outside of it by other institutions. These, in turn, are determined by State Apparatuses which Althusser divides into two bodies: institutions representing the Repressive State Apparatus (RSA), and institutions representing the Ideological State Apparatus (ISA). The RSA is entirely in the governmental and public domain, as opposed to the ISA being largely of the private domain. This leads to the RSA functioning predominantly by violence, and to the ISA functioning predominantly by ideology; still, it too has its own repressive measures albeit only ultimately and in a concealed and symbolic manner. Thus families, schools, and churches, all of which are ISA institutions, have their own methods of disciplinary punishment. The unity of the ISA is secured by the commanding ideology of the ruling class. In addition to family, school, and religion, as mentioned above, Althusser lists many other institutions as part of the body of ISA, institutions like the law, the trade-unions, the communication outlets in the media, as well as culture as manifested in literature, in the arts, and in sports.

Althusser focuses on the educational systems. Besides academic teaching, schools also teach rules of good behavior, which he explains as the attitudes that are to be observed by everyone in the division of labor, each according to the job he is destined for. These are rules of respect for the socio-technical division of labor, which ultimately means the rules of the order established by class domination. Learners are also taught to speak correctly so that they, the future capitalists and their servants, learn how to handle workers and order them about properly, and to speak to them in the right way. Althusser continues that the reproduction of labor power requires not only a reproduction of its skills, but also, and at the same time, a reproduction of its submission to the rules of the established order. More specifically, he means the reproduction of submission to the ruling ideology on the part of the workers, and the reproduction of the ability to manipulate the ruling ideology correctly on the part of the agents of exploitation and repression. Educational institutions thus ensure subjection to the ruling ideology, by all parties concerned, for all are subjected by ideology.

This shows that no one is excluded from the power of ideology, neither the oppressed nor the oppressor. They each carry out the role that has been instilled in them by Ideological State Apparatuses. This again brings to mind Ibsen's assertion that his concern in his play is all of humanity. It is not only the women who are subjected to the ideology that they come second to men, but also the men, hence Torvald's entitled attitude, and hence his and Dr. Rank viewing Nora as a sex object. The specimens portrayed in the play of this bourgeois society, act according to what they have been taught. The men correspond to the ruling class in Althusser's argument, and the women to the oppressed. This is even seen in the way they speak to each other, each wanting to manipulate the other. Torvald addresses Nora using terms of endearment meant to hide that he is manipulating her into obedience. Nora's manner of speaking to him also reflects that this is how she has been coached to handle men. Confronting him about this later, she says: 'All the flitting around, the whole "oh Torvald, oh help me, I can't figure out this or that, I can't do anything myself, oh help me"—that's not me. That was a thing I was doing, because if I didn't do it, then you wouldn't have paid attention to anything that was important to me' (Hnath, 2017: 68). The teaching does not necessarily mean schools, but all cultural institutions, like the institution of family and of marriage, and the institution of the church; Nora proves that when she says to Torvald that all she knows about religion is what the clergyman told her (Ibsen, 1879: 65). Fifteen years later she expands the idea: 'We do a lot of things that aren't good for us—things we do because our parents tell us from an early age—our parents, our churches, our leaders—everyone tells us that we need it, so we believe it, and the idea gets etched inside our skulls, but you only think you need it because it's all you've ever been told' (Hnath, 2017: 37). That is why she finds it necessary to leave in Ibsen's play, saying 'I must try and educate myself' (Ibsen, 1879: 64); she wants to break free of handed-down ideologies.

The plays are also reflective of both Marx and Althusser's argument in the fact that those in control, i.e., the men, want the current productive system to continue as it is. Focusing on the economic aspect, men want women to stay at home and carry out domestic duties so that they could be the providers for the women, who thus would have to depend on them financially. Nora expresses the degrading effect this has had on her: 'it seems to me as if I had been living here like a poor woman, just from hand to mouth' (Ibsen, 1879: 63). Men would feel threatened if women went to the workplace and earned financial independence, because that would disrupt the status quo which men want to perpetuate. Torvald gives voice to this male insecurity when he says that men have 'to stand up straight and lead', explaining 'if we didn't project some kind of

confidence—an assuredness in what we know or think we know—would women even be attracted to men?’ (Hnath, 2017: 63) In other words, what this amounts to is that men want to reproduce the conditions of production concurrently with the process of production itself.

Consequent to the belief that a woman’s place is only her home, society finds it undesirable that a woman should make it on her own financially. This idea is seen in the plays in reference to Nora’s clothes. In the first play Nora’s clothes are not expensive because she subtracts from the allowance given by her husband for her own expenses, to repay Krogstad. In the second play, the rich quality of her dress draws surprised and incredulous comments from Anne Marie and from Torvald. Anne Marie, for example, says: ‘I look at your clothes and it looks like you’re definitely not destitute [...] it looks like the opposite of destitute’ (Hnath, 2017: 19-20). She also says that she thought that Nora must ‘have had a difficult time, being a woman’ (Hnath, 2017: 28) and that Nora must have had to struggle. When Nora tells her that she did not have to struggle, Anne Marie can only imagine that this must have been a matter of luck, and not a result of Nora being clever or resourceful. Nora responds: ‘[I]t’s to be expected that a person would think that after I left this house and my husband and my children that I’d have a very difficult time [because] so we’re trained to think. I mean I think there’s something in our time and place and culture that teaches us to expect and even *want* for women who leave their families to be punished’ (Hnath, 2017: 28-29). Althusser’s argument resonates strongly in this instance.

In such an ideologically controlled world, ideology being disparagingly described by Althusser as only ‘an imaginary relation to real relations’ (1970: 48), a free-spirited woman like Nora could only prosper in independent work aimed at and appreciated by women like herself. That is why Hnath depicts her as a feminist writer who, like historical female writers of her time, has made it in a patriarchal world. This shows, again in reference to Althusser’s exposition, that indeed the oppressed, women in this instance, could prosper, should the conditions of production change, something that those in power, men in this instance, try very hard to prevent from happening, in order to preserve their own control.

CONCLUSION

Ibsen’s *A doll’s house* mirrors its own present but also influences the future, as seen in Hnath’s sequel to it, *A doll’s house, part 2*. This evidences Barthes’s idea that a literary text is a mere potential until it is read, with readers interpreting and recreating it at their will. Barthes’s idea dovetails into Ibsen’s own affirmation that texts are continuously recreated, with each reader adding part of his own personality to it. That Hnath’s depiction is dictated by Ibsen’s play also allows for a Formalist view of the plays as independent art comprising their own life and reality. In their literariness, they become valid sources of knowledge which can only be communicated in their own terms. Hence the choice of New Criticism’s close reading as a fit method of studying the two plays as an integrated entity.

Ibsen adapts the form of the well-made play by introducing the device of the discussion at the very end of his play. It is in this discussion that he revolutionizes ideas and defamiliarizes the handed down and automatized lulling form of the well-made play, thus energizing his play and vivifying his audience. Rather than conventionally resolving the complications of the plot, he opts for his protagonist to bravely face them. Using the discussion in lieu of the well-made play’s expected *scène à faire*, exposes this conventional dramatic presentation as a sterile mode lacking the ability to portray realities, and allows for the realism of ideas in his own play.

Hnath has the presentation ready-made by Ibsen. The complications that arise in the plot, are again faced bravely by Nora rather than being unrealistically resolved, and much of the same motifs in the prequel continue effectively in his play. Still, Hnath adds his own touches. The device of the discussion is not restricted to the very end, but actually forms the whole make-up of his play, thus enabling him to provide a panoramic picture of the characters' viewpoints regarding Nora's choices and the consequences therein. That the characters all make well-grounded arguments shows that they are more realistically and compassionately depicted than in Ibsen where all them, except Nora, are types of the well-made play.

The continuity in the two plays is not restricted to the form, for it is also seen in the content. This is valid because the themes initiated by Ibsen are still contentious to this day. Denouncing society's collective moral frailty, Ibsen's iconoclasm does not spare any ideological construct that falls within the scope of his play. Hnath is gentler in his depiction than the forceful Ibsen, as he gives voice to different outlooks in the discussions, portraying understandable and relatable reasons behind the objections raised against Nora's leaving her family to find herself. Whereas Ibsen scatters hints that all are subject to stale and oppressive ruling ideologies, focusing more on the resulting wrongs dealt women like Nora, Hnath more clearly shows the negative effect of these ideologies on all the characters, regardless of their outlooks, as seen in their resulting insecurities. This leads to an exchange of recriminations which, in turn, show that there is no escaping familial ties, and that there is still much to be done in the struggle for bettering social standards and practices. This is in line with Ibsen's belief that a person is a product of his surroundings, and that he is always haunted by the past, leading back to the naturalist concepts of heredity and environment.

Notes

1. The plot of *Ghosts* involves the extramarital sexual transgressions of the late Captain Alving, resulting in his affliction with syphilis, a sexually transmitted disease, and in his passing it on to his son Oswald, tragically leading to the son's loss of his mental capabilities. Based on his pleas, his mother, Mrs. Alving, contemplates putting an end to his life to spare him the suffering. When her husband was still alive, Mrs. Alving, the protagonist of the play, had sought refuge and love with Pastor Manders; the latter, however, sticking to his concepts of gender-assigned marital roles, had made her go back to her deviant husband. Hence the ensuing tragedy of Mrs. Alving's wasted life and of her son's illness, all the while maintaining the façade of respectability. The play thus aptly illustrates what Shaw (1891) sees as Ibsen's 'thesis that the real slavery of today is slavery to ideals of virtue'.

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