An Analysis of Three London Productions of

A Doll's House by Henrik Ibsen

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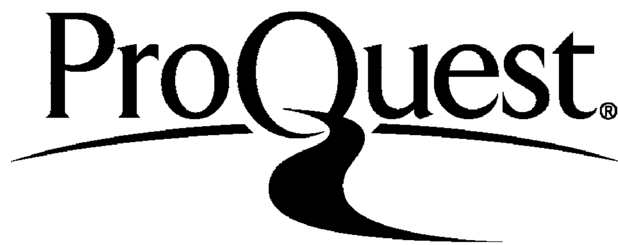

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Abstract

This is an analysis of three major productions of A Doll's House produced in London. The first was in 1889, the second in 1930 and the third in 1973. Each has been staged at a time when the feminist movement was particularly topical and consequently interpretation of the play was to a varying extent prejudiced.

The first of these productions coincided with major changes both in the theatre and in attitudes towards women's role in society. In the closing years of the nineteenth century, J.T. Grein's interest in forming an independent theatre which would not be subject to the restrictions imposed through censorship by the Lord Chamberlain was reflected in the theatre generally. In the case of the feminist movement, Parliament had already passed the Married Women's Property Acts and there was pressure to give an even greater degree of independence to women generally. The Suffrage Movement was in its infancy but nevertheless it was beginning to make its presence felt.

Both of these changing factors in society were considerably increased by 1930, when the second production to be discussed in this thesis was staged. Women had finally been given the right to vote (1928) and were now seeking equal pay. Grein's Independent Theatre had been established and later foundered, but in its place came the Cosmopolitan Theatre, and it was this company which produced the 1930 production.

Finally, when the production which was to be staged in London in 1973 had its genesis in New York, the American feminist movement, led by Betty Frieden, had become extremely powerful and increasingly influential. Some of its leading exponents were invited guests at the opening performance. The London audience were not as vociferous as the American. Nevertheless, the actress playing Nora, Claire Bloom, was at the heart of discussion. Furthermore, she had played Nora and Hedda Gabler, both plays being produced interchangeably in America, and some of Hedda's abrasive or unemotional personality seems to have influenced her performance as Nora.

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Introduction

The overall aim of this thesis is to examine, as far as possible, what was heard and seen in three different productions of A Doll's House, roughly forty years apart, and by comparison to see what light is thrown (a) on the play itself and (b) on the theatre and audience expectations of the time. My main attention is all the while given (naturally enough) to Nora.

Of necessity, the evidence available varies: for 1889, I have had to rely on printed sources (reviews, biographies, etc.) AND also on the play script in the British Library; for 1930 on similar sources (though the text used was printed) AND also on the memory of Gwen Ffrangcon-Davies; for 1973 I have been able to interview a number of the persons involved: Christopher Hampton (whose dramatisation of the translated text was used), Patrick Garland (director), John Bury (set designer), Colin Blakeley (who played the role of Torvald) and Peter Woodthorpe (who played Krogstad).

Thus, in using different kinds of evidence, I am aware both of the weaknesses here (evidence not strictly comparable) but also of the intriguing discrepancies - even contradictions - between types of evidence (for example, Gwen Ffrangcon-Davies' memory of what she was doing as opposed to reviews of her performance; or Colin Blakeley's notion of Torvald as opposed to what reviewers saw).

In Chapter One, I shall examine the text, in translation, in order to define, where possible, those areas where ambiguity arises or where, for other reasons, meaning is not entirely apparent. This definitive chapter will form the foundation upon which the subsequent three chapters are based.

In Chapter Two, I shall examine the 1889 production, starting with William Archer's version (I use the word 'version' advisedly and my reason for doing so will be made apparent at the appropriate moment);

further, I shall examine evidence of overall impact of the production and individual actors' interpretations. My sources here include the writings of contemporary critics such as G.B. Shaw, Charles and William Archer, as well as those of those in the acting profession at the time. I shall include evidence drawn from the writings of not only Janet Achurch (the actress who played Nora at this time) but also Elisabeth Robins, an equally famous actress.

In Chapter Three, I shall examine the 1930 production. Here, the translation of William Archer was used and this will be comparable with that used in 1889 and consequently less time will be spent on its significance. A major source of evidence for this section of the thesis is the actress Gwen Ffrangcon-Davies, to whom I was fortunately able to speak. Her memory of the production, in which she played Nora, seems remarkably sharp, despite her advanced years. A slight change in emphasis, from the point of view of actors, will be considered as part of the evidence upon which I shall draw in this chapter and which relates in particular to more general changes in the theatre and within contemporary society.

In Chapter Four, it will be the 1973 production that I shall examine. A different translation (by Elaine Gregoire) was adapted by Christopher Hampton for the production and I shall discuss this version, more particularly in the light of a conversation I held with Mr. Hampton. Other sources include further conversations with the director (Patrick Garland), set designer (John Bury) and members of the cast.

In conclusion, I shall consider the overall impact of each production and attempt to account for contemporary interpretations of the play.

Chapter One: *A Doll's House*: Problems of Interpretation

A Doll's House is a play open to varying interpretations. Furthermore, each new production is in itself a new interpretation. There are two kinds of interpretation: in the study and on stage. In this thesis, I intend to examine three productions, representative of different periods of English theatre and society. This examination is aimed at showing how the play has opened up different possibilities to different generations of translators, producers, actresses, actors and other relevant contributors. It is important to realise that different audiences not only saw different actions, mimicry and so forth (and this is a play which, as many critics have pointed out, depends a great deal on its visual effects), but also heard quite different words spoken. Consequently, I have paid special attention to the translations used on each occasion.[1]

In this chapter, I shall examine the text as closely as possible (using the translation by James McFarlane, in Volume V The Oxford Ibsen, but in consultation with Professor Inga-Stina Ewbank as to readings in the original), in order to see how different interpretations, ambiguities and even conflicting opinions may arise. I shall proceed by way of an analysis of the text's presentation of Nora's character, which involves the way she is presented through her "environment", which in its turn also involves other characters. An examination of these will, therefore, be included where significant.

Nora is presented initially through the "environment" of her home and marriage, a context which, in terms of human and other factors, can be seen as a controlling or an imprisoning device, a shaping, sheltering structure or a suffocating prison. However, the concept of environment can be seen in a wider context, that of contemporary society which, in the second half of the nineteenth century, was still male-dominated; this

[1] Rather than write a history of the criticism of the play (which, up to the date his volume appeared, is summarised in The Oxford Ibsen, vol.V), I have concentrated on the text itself, and the problems of interpretation which it poses.

is the obvious reason for Nora's "crime": as Mrs. Linde says, "a wife can't borrow without her husband's consent" (p.214). Thus, Nora needs to find a way round this contemporary legal obstacle. As Professor McFarlane has stated, the Helmer household is "a microcosm of the prevailing male-dominated society at large" (p.9).

In the opening scene, our first impression of Nora is a visual one with a strong implication of extravagance. The initial stage direction says: "Nora....is carrying lots of parcels....". She gives the porter a tip and then: "....continues to laugh quietly and happily to herself as she takes off her things. She takes a bag of macaroons out of her pocket and eats one or two.." (p.201).

Ibsen's use of symbolic devices has been frequently discussed and not the least important is his use, here, of sweets. Current studies in psychology, concerned more specifically with obesity, link sweet-eating with oral satisfaction, the need for comfort or reassurance which goes back to early childhood and a pattern of events which involved sweets being used as a means of rewarding or comforting a young child.[2] John Northam has commented on the significance of moments when Nora eats macaroons; initially, Ibsen uses the gesture to tell us something of importance about Nora's character: "It is a childish one; it goes in awe of authority; it is willing to deceive".[3] The second occasion is later in the same act (p.219) when she immediately offers one to Dr. Rank. Northam suggests this move is illustrative of a "feeling of confidence".[4] This is, however, ambiguous; the moment follows Nora's learning that Krogstad is in Torvald's study, talking to him. She clearly has no idea at this time that the two men already know each other and her fear of what their conversation might reveal can be easily imagined. A generation later, she would probably have lit a cigarette here. However, Nora has temporarily found a means of comfort; as the stage direction indicates, a moment earlier, she has been "lost in her own thoughts" (p. 219). Either the possibility of a disastrous outcome of Krogstad's and Torvald's conversation has been sugar-coated by the comforting macaroon, or Northam's suggestion is correct. Possibly, the former is a more interesting reading in terms of an indicator to Nora's feelings. Northam refers to the later incident, at the end of Act 2, when Nora suggests she and Torvald have "champagne flowing until dawn....and more macaroons, Hélène...lots of them, for once in a while" (p.260). This, says Northam, is part of Nora's self-

assertion: "She must force her husband to submit his will to hers and the sweets are the symbol...this open demand on the usually inflexible refuser of sweets presents us with the desperate state of Nora's mind".[5]

Here again is an ambiguity. Nora could be seen as desperately forcing her husband to submit his will to hers. This interpretation would fit into a larger, complementary context, with Nora as a woman set upon female emancipation. Alternatively, the macaroons could symbolise Nora's equally desperate need for comfort, reassurance - a placebo. The moment follows the "tarantella" scene and is shared, significantly, not only by Torvald but also by Dr. Rank. All through his earlier drafts and the preliminary notes, Ibsen insisted on including the character of a doctor, although earlier the characterisation was underdeveloped and for some time the doctor remained nameless.[6] It is reasonable to assume, therefore, that it is his medical profession, i.e. his potentially diagnostic, soothing and curative properties which were important to Ibsen and, in the earlier scene, when Nora feels the need to coat her unpleasant situation with sugar, it is surely significant that yet again Ibsen links the action with Dr. Rank by making Nora share the macaroons with him (pp.219-20). Immediately after, she gains new confidence: "Really, I am so happy...". She has the ability, at that moment, to assert her personality, her individuality and freedom of speech to swear at Torvald, as she tells Mrs. Linde and Dr. Rank. But it is a short-lived moment. She still has a guilty feeling directly concerned with her past connection with Krogstad and all that it entailed, which in turn is related to her promise to Torvald not to eat macaroons. Of course, it is possible to interpret Nora's words: "Really, I am so happy..." as being rather like whistling to keep her spirits up, another kind of self-comfort, which changes the emphasis rather and suggests that she is still very frightened and that the macaroons were eaten thoughtlessly. However, when Dr. Rank encourages her to suit the action to the words: "Say it! Here he is!" she hides the bag of sweets and says: "Ssh! Sh!" (p.220). As Northam has said, the habit of eating macaroons revealed at the beginning of the play is very illustrative of Nora's use of authority, but it can also

be seen as a symbol of her need for comfort and solace. The same can be said of the stove - it provides symbolic as well as physical warmth.

Ibsen's opening stage directions present us with three symbolic sources of comfort: the stove, Nora's bag of macaroons and a rocking-chair. We notice that "a fire burns in the stove" (p.201), reinforcing the initial impression that Nora's domestic environment is a sheltering, cosy one. The fire, of course, serves a realistic purpose too; how could there not be a fire in December? The opening words between Torvald and Nora imply, on her part, an extravagant nature, partly through her own words and actions, partly through Torvald's words, particularly when he calls her his "spendthrift", a word which in the English translation is a paradox in itself. The original word is "spillefugl", introducing the bird image from the start. A problem arises in Torvald's use of the pet-name "squirrel", which implies one who hoards rather than spends. One assumes that he isn't aware of the implications of the image, which is no doubt significant in itself. The problem is, if Torvald himself isn't sure about Nora's behaviour, how can we possibly understand her?

Ambiguity arises in Nora's attitude towards others; her attitude generally towards "strangers" seems on the face of it rather indifferent: "...Then? Who cares about them? They are only strangers!" (p.202). This view is reinforced during her subsequent conversation with Krogstad when she apparently tries to threaten him (p.224) and in fact he is temporarily forced to change tactics: "Mrs. Helmer, will you have the goodness to use your influence on my behalf?" Furthermore, Nora is relatively cold when Krogstad refers to his tragic past: "I believe I've heard something of the sort...."(p.225); and she is completely "lost in her own thoughts" (stage direction, p.219) when Dr. Rank and Mrs. Linde are discussing contemporary social sickness. She even laughs:

> Dr. Rank What are you laughing at? Do you know in fact what society is?
>
> Nora What do I care about your silly old society?

We have to decide whether to accept Nora's words at their face value and see her as a rather self-centred person or look for meaning underlying the words. Is she so desperately caught up in her self-woven web of deceit that she can no longer hear or perceive others' needs or conditions?

Or has she indeed ever thought of others?

Further ambiguity arises in her attitude towards Mrs. Linde; during their first conversation (p.208), Nora learns that her old friend has had an unhappy life so far, and she begins to show some sympathy towards her. However, it is short-lived and Nora keeps returning to the topic of her own good fortune: "I won't be selfish today. I must think only about your affairs today. But there's just one thing I really must tell you..." and she proceeds to talk in delighted fashion about Torvald's promotion and what it means in terms of her future happiness. It can be argued that Ibsen is choosing this moment to give the audience further information about the Helmers and their background, but since he has had other opportunities, both earlier and later in the act, to do so, his objective in this episode can hardly be merely expository, since it serves to emphasise Mrs. Linde's personal predicament by contrast.

Considerable interest has always been shown by critics in the "stockings" scene, where Nora's attitude towards Dr. Rank is clearly open to widely differing interpretations. Most people agree that Nora's first reaction to Dr. Rank's opening words is based on the false premise that he knows about her "crime":

> Nora (catching at his arm) What have you found out? Dr. Rank, you must tell me!
>
> Rank I'm slowly sinking. There's nothing to be done about it.
>
> Nora (with a sigh of relief) Oh, it's you you're...?
>
> Rank Who else? (p.245)

There are no comparable stage directions in the dialogue which immediately follows, so we only have the actual words spoken to go by. With delightful irony, Ibsen gives Rank the imagery of finance and economic disaster to describe his physical condition:

> These last few days I've made a careful analysis of my internal economy. Bankrupt! (p.245)

When he is "absolutely certain of the worst", however, even words will not serve to communicate the final bad news. He (and Ibsen) employs the symbol of a black cross on a visiting card (an interestingly similar device to that used by Robert Louis Stevenson in Treasure Island, where

Blind Pew places a black spot in the hand of the man who is about to be killed).[11] Dr. Rank tells Nora this is how he will communicate with her. Nora's reaction - again, remember, no stage directions are provided at this point to guide our interpretation - seems ambivalent:

> Nora Really, you are being quite absurd today. And here was I hoping you would be in a thoroughly good mood. (p.245)

Is she indifferent to his condition? Or just extremely preoccupied with her own predicament? Rank's next words lead to further ambiguity:

> Rank With death staring me in the face? Why should I suffer for another man's sins? What justic isthere in that? Somewhere, somehow, every single family must be suffering some such cruel retribution...

Nora interrupts him here, as the punctuation shows:

> Nora (stopping up her ears) Rubbish! Do cheer up!

Does she stop him because she feels so sorry for him that she wants to express her sympathy and distract his thoughts? Or is she remembering what Torvald said in Act 1:

> Torvald A fog of lies like that in a household, and it spreads disease and infection to every part of it. Every breath the children take in that kind of house is reeking with evil germs (p.233).

In Ibsen's thematic discussion of hereditary evil, there are further implications for Nora. Several times, reference is made to her father's irresponsible character and the possibility that she may have inherited some of his characteristics:

> Torvald Just like your father. Always on the look-out for money, wherever you can lay your hands on it; but as soon as you've got it, it just seems to slip through your fingers. You never seem to know what you've done with it. Well, one must accept you as you are. It's in the blood. Oh, yes, it is, Nora. That sort of thing is hereditary. (p.205)

And in Act 3:

> Torvald ...all your father's irresponsible ways are coming out in you. No religion, no morals, no sense of duty...(p.276)

And again, in Act 2, when Nora refers to an unfavourable newspaper report

about her father, Helmer says:

Torvald ....Your father's professional conduct was not entirely above suspicion....(p.242)

This hereditary factor seems to control Nora's behaviour towards Dr. Rank in the following piece of dialogue:

Rank Yes, really, the whole thing's nothing but a huge joke. My poor innocent spine must do penance for my father's gay subaltern life.

Nora (by the table, left) Wasn't he rather partial to asparagus and pâté de foie gras?

Rank Yes, he was. And truffles.

Nora Truffles, yes. And oysters too, I believe?

Rank Yes, oysters, oysters, of course.

Nora And all the port and champagne that goes with them. It does seem a pity all those delicious things should attack the spine.

Rank Especially when they attack a poor spine that never had any fun out of them.

Nora Yes, that is an awful pity.

Rank (looks at her sharply) Hm...

Nora (after a pause) Why did you smile?

Rank No, it was you who laughed.

Nora No, it was you who smiled, Dr. Rank!

Rank (getting up) You are a bigger rascal than I thought you were.

Nora I feel full of mischief today.

Rank So it seems. (p.246)

The dialogue here can be interpreted in widely differing ways. It is extremely emotive, each character matching the other's words, rather like the moves in a game of chess, and then building up tension in them. It is almost sexual in its potency. (One can perhaps discern one of the influences on Pinter from this section of dialogue, with its short interchanges full of implicit sexuality) In another sense, the dialogue can be seen as simply "small talk", a friendly, informal chat between friends. Furthermore, it isn't explicit which of the two actually smiles - or laughs - first. We might infer that Nora's thoughts

have proceeded along the following path as signposted:

A. She has just realised that her "crime" of forgery is being used by Krogstad as a means of blackmail.

B. She has inherited her father's tendencies.

C. Since she personally gained no reward from her behaviour, she is being made to suffer for what her father was, or did, just as Dr. Rank is.

D. And this milestone is reached when Nora laughs, which in turn follows the reference to "all these delicious things" attacking "a poor spine that never had any fun out of them" - It's time Nora got some fun out of life herself.

The major iss ue now is, what does Nora want? Dr. Rank's comment, to the effect that Nora is a "bigger rascal" supports Nora's behaviour, to some extent. Thus, it could be argued that she has much to think about, even this early on in the scene, so that the fact that her behaviour towards Dr. Rank seems possibly unsympathetic can be explained and seen as preoccupation over a personal threat. Alternatively, it could be argued that, having realised she may now have to pay for her crime, a crime from which she personally gained nothing, she has decided that she might as well drop any inhibitions she has and enjoy herself.

Two other significant events occur in this scene which could cause ambiguity: i) Nora's teasing Dr. Rank with her "flesh-coloured" stockings; ii) her reaction when Dr. Rank tells her he loves her. In (i), Weigand suggests that here Nora, not even yet fully aware of Dr. Rank's physical condition and annoyed that his mood doesn't match the one most appropriate to her pending request for financial help, is doing little more than simply flirting with Rank.[7] On the other hand, however, Northam sees Nora showing "great strength of character",[8] since her attitude, that of laughing, is making "light fun out of the fatal self-indulgence of Rank's father" and generally being "flippant during a [illegible]t for life". Weigand sees Nora as a romantic character, to the point of sentimentality; she has a "vivid imagination" which outruns "her sense of fact". Rank rather spoils the whole thing, it might be said, following the moment when Nora "hits him lightly across the ears with the stockings", by letting himself be incensed into a confession of love. This leads into the second cause of ambiguity, that of Nora's reaction to this confession:

Rank (bending towards her) Nora....do you think he's the o[illegible]y one who ....?

Nora (stiffening slightly) Who...?

Rank Who wouldn't gladly give his life for your sake?

Nora (sadly) Oh! (p.248)

The adverbial stage direction is a partial cause of ambiguity. The original is "tungt",[9] which literally means "heavily", with the implication of "sadly" but less exclusively so, especially as "stiffening slightly", i.e. the former stage direction, is in the original "med et lett rykk", which means with a slight - or light - jump. It can be inferred that Nora's behaviour here, then, is rather that of slight surprise followed by sadness, presumably at Dr. Rank's plight, but also possibly because now (that he has declared his love) she cannot ask him for the money. Alternatively, Weigand has suggested that Nora is sad because her "partner" - i.e. Rank - disgusts her by bungling her play-acting role. But the ambiguity here is merely an extension of the earlier one, that we are never sure how much Nora cares about other people, and how much of her concern is for herself.

A predominant feature of Nora's personality is that of extravagance, but the text itself provides a broader defintion of the word than usual. Nora not only distributes presents and money, she also distributes extravagant gestures, as in the case of the "stockings" scene with Dr. Rank. A similar instance occurs when she greets her children in the first act; during the effervescent conversation, the stage directions tell us:

> Nora takes off the children's coats and hats and throws them down anywhere. (p.222)

The ensuing game of hide-and-seek acquires a spectator: not only the audience but Krogstad, too, looks on. This is one of the changes Ibsen made from his earlier drafts.[10] Krogstad is making his second appearance in the play and thus the audience has had a brief opportunity of evaluating him. On the first occasion, we see both Mrs. Linde and Nora react quite strongly when he enters:

Krogstad (in the doorway) It 's me, Mrs. Helmer.
(Mrs. Linde starts, then turns away to the window).
Nora (excited, takes a step towards him and speaks in a low voice) You? What is it? What do you want to talk to my husband about? (217)

Krogstad explains that his visit is only concerned with "routine business matters....Absolutely nothing else". The ensuing stage direction significantly makes Nora shut the hall door behind thim; then she walks across and sees to the stove. If we accept that Nora's behaviour is both physically and psychologically representative of her need to shut Krogstad out and seek warmth and comfort, our reaction to Krogstad's second appearance, while Nora is enjoying a game of hide-and-seek with her children is to some extent predetermined by Ibsen. Perhaps even the game itself suggests a temporary need for Nora to hide, as clearly Krogstad is doing the seeking.

Interestingly, in both scenes, there arrives a moment when Nora closes a door. In the first, it is behind Krogstad, where she is putting a kind of safety barrier between herself and him; in the second, the stage directions tell us:

She leads the children into the room, left, and shuts the door after them; tense and uneasy. (p. 223)

Doors are an obvious device; they are defence barriers, like shields, operating on a dual basis. Here, for example, Nora has in one instance used a door to protect herself from Krogstad and in another to shield her children, as a consequence of which she is forced to shut herself in with him. This is interesting since it can suggest either the action of a protective mother, prepared to deal alone with the potential source of harm to her offspring, or it can on a more superficial level mean simply that Nora doesn't wish to discuss "business" in the presence of her children. This is implicitly reinforced by Krogstad's request: "I want a word with you" (p.223). Ultimately, of course, Nora uses the front door as a means to break out of her home environment, if one sees it as a means of imprisonment, or alternatively as a new entrance somewhere else. Again, the gesture is one of extravagance - she slams the door - and it is at the same time the ultimate ambiguity.

Nils Krogstad is a most intriguing character. Ibsen did not really develop him far, but during the course of the play we learn a considerable amount about him, about his early and unhappy relationship with Kristine, his later unhappy marriage, his becoming a widower with "a lot of children" (p.217). He is a lawyer who does "a certain amount of business on the side" (p.217); he has know Torvald "from our student days" (p. 225). Like Kristine, he has known povery and unhappiness:

> I had to do something, and I think I can say I haven't been one of the worst. But now I have to get out of it. My sons are growing up; for their sake I must try and win back what respectability I can. That job in the Bank was like the first step on the ladder for me. And now your husband wants to kick me off the ladder again, back into the mud. (p.226)

He and Nora are in a situation of mutual dislike, it would seem, with perhaps the stronger feeling being in Nora. He finds it hard to believe that Nora had no knowledge that she had committed a crime:

> But did it never strike you that this was fraudulent? (p.228)

Again, Nora reveals a lack of interest in his plight:

> That wouldn't have meant anything to me. Why should I worry about you? I couldn't stand you, not when you insisted on going through with all those cold-blooded formalities, knowing all the time what a critical state my husband was in. (p.229)

Krogstad now realises, apparently for the first time, that Nora did not recognise her crime. Furthermore, he can equate her action with his own, both being illegal:

> Mrs. Helmer, it's quite clear you still haven't the faintest idea what it is you've committed. But let me tell you, my own offence was no more and no worse than that, and it ruined my entire reputation.

It must seem unfair to him that, as a consequence of his early crime, he has been severely punished and his family, presumably, has suffered too, whereas Nora, having committed more or less the same crime, hasn't suffered at all. Further, she and her family are now happy and financ-

ically secure.

There are other parallels to be drawn. When Nora hints at suicide, Krogstad replies that he had thought of it, too, but "I didn't have the courage" (p.253).

When Nora admits that she does not think she has the courage either, Ibsen tells us, in a stage direction, that Krogstad is "relieved" (p.253). A few moments earlier, after he has just arrived to tell Nora of his dismissal, he says, at first, that he has come only

> ... to see how things stood, Mrs. Helmer. I've been thinking about you all day. Even a mere money-lender, a hack journalist, a - well, even somebody like me - has a bit of what you might call feeling (p.252).

The speech is reminiscent of Shylock's words, "Do we not bleed?" in its attempt to show equality in terms of humanity, if not in terms of social hierarchy. However, Krogstad soon dispels any atmosphere of bonhomie he may have aroused by making it clear that his motives in thinking of Nora "all day" and then coming to see her are far from philanthropic.

Krogstad is undoubtedly an interesting character but, perhaps because Ibsen has drawn him less fully than others, he tends to be almost two-dimensional. It is because our view of him is limited that incomplete, or narrowly biased interpretations are presented on stage.

Krogstad appears three times in the play, once in each act. In his first appearance, we learn of Nora's earlier crime and to some extent something of his background. This appearance is, however, important, since this is the first and major chance for the audience to form an opinion of him. If that opinion is that Krogstad is an evil man, menacing Nora and indeed blackmailing her, the audience will readily sympathise with Nora and form a dislike of him. In this case, that impression will remain when he makes his second appearance. Earlier in this chapter, I referred to the moment when Nora is playing a game of hide-and-seek with her children as Krogstad arrives. The point then was that the sight of Nora, i.e. the protective mother, playing with her children in, at first, a happy, joyful atmosphere, seems threatened when we see Krogstad watching, presumably, in the shadows. Ibsen's stage direction tells us it is "tense and uneasy" (p.223). By sheer contrast, between happy young innocence and a shadowy, menacing figure,

the atmosphere can be heightened. But it depends mostly on the interpretation given of Krogstad's character.

A further problem occurs with his third appearance. This is the moment when he and Kristine re-discover each other and we learn of the unhappiness each has suffered. It is almost a sub-plot within the play, but still in embryo form. If Krogstad has been presented, earlier, as an evil man, it will be hard to accept the apparent change in him. It would seem far more satisfactory to see him as simply another human being, driven to extremes through necessity. There may also be a case for seeing him as the predecessor of Lovborg in Hedda Gabler,[11] another man who seems to have suffered considerably in his earlier life and who became what Dr. Rank calls "a moral incurable".

In the main scene between Krogstad and Mrs. Linde, Ibsen develops both characters considerably and Kristine becomes more than just Nora's confidante: she moves into a role we have encountered before in Ibsen, that of the well-meaning, sincere idealist.[12] She it is who tries to persuade Nora to tell Torvald about her "crime". However, she is also a realist, which does seem somewhat paradoxical. She is, in part, a functional character, in that she is used to provide background information about Nora's childhood and to make the telling comment:

> Nora, Nora, haven't you learnt any sense yet? At school, you used to be an awful spendthrift (p.209).

In the role of confidante, she is used by Ibsen to provide a convincing listener for the purposes of exposition. Her life has been almost the opposite to Nora's; she did not marry for love but in order to help provide for crippled mother and brothers. Her husband has died, leaving her penniless and furthermore she has never really known happiness or financial stability.

Obviously, her character isn't as fully developed as that of Nora's, but we can accept her on her own terms, to some extent. For example, she says she has become bitter (p.211) and selfish, but in our terms, she is the epitome of unselfishness; after all, she has given up the chance of a potentially happy marriage with Krogstad in order to provide for her family. Because she is a realist, and experienced in the ways of the outside world - which in a way she almost symbolises - she fairly logically assesses Dr. Rank's attachment to Nora and mistakenly

identifies him as the "rich old gentleman" of Nora's dreams. She has had "a fair amount" of experience of business (p.221) and clearly knows how to go about earning money, unlike Nora. It is ultimately her idea to "rescue" Nora: "Krogstad must ask for his letter back, unread" (p.297) and she acts upon the words, reflecting the very practical nature she has. Only once does she reveal to Nora more than a passing acquaintanceship with Krogstad and it comes at this moment: "There was a time when he would have done anything for me" (p.256).

Ibsen has allowed hints of such a relationship earlier, but this is the first moment that a closer attachment is described. Nora says only "He!" but there are no other clues about her reaction to this news. Here is another possible point of comparison; Kristine is always very ready and willing to listen to Nora's problems and to be concerned on her behalf. However, when the right moment offers Nora the chance to return this favour, she apparently ignores it. We may then assume that either she is overwhelmed by her own desperate situation or that she simply doesn't want to know about other people's problems.

This is exactly the same situation as that in which we see her relationship with Dr. Rank, and it is hard to resist the temptation to accept the second alternative when one recalls her earlier words: "What do I care about your silly old society?" (p.219) and, in reply to Torvald's "But what about the people I'd borrowed from?" Nora says, "Them! Who cares about them! They're only strangers" (p.202).

Finally, Mrs. Linde shows sensitivity as well as experience of the world and society when she first meets Dr. Rank. He talks of "people" who go round "sniffing out cases of moral corruption" and criticises a society where the morally crippled are nursed. Mrs. Linde replies: "Yet surely it's the sick who most need to be brought in" (p.219).

Perhaps because of the absence of conclusive evidence in the text, one can sense apparently conflicting traits in Mrs. Linde and in particular I am thinking of the final moments of the scene between her and Krogstad, when she changes her mind about Krogstad reclaiming the letter unread from Torvald:

> ....it's quite incredible the things I've witnessed in this house in the last twenty-four hours. Helmer must know everything. This unhappy secret must come out (p.266).

Clearly, how Mrs. Linde will strike an audience must depend a very great deal on the director's, and the actress's, interpretation of a text

which hints at, rather than develops her character.

A further dominant feature of Nora's personality is love, specifically love for Torvald at first and for her children; even earlier, we infer, for her father. One of her most positive actions is personally to decorate the Christmas tree and organise the buying of presents, to which she has clearly given a lot of time and thought. She describes her children to Kristine proudly and lovingly and this attitude is reinforced by the way she plays with them. (Or are they, too, dolls?)

In order to save Torvald's life, she has borrowed money from Krogstad by forging her father's signature and has spent time and effort seeking ways of repaying that money. She is proud of the way this has been done, as her words to Kristine show:

> Nora You're just like the rest of them. You all think I'm useless when it comes to anything really serious....I too have something to be proud and happy about. I was the one who saved Torvald's life (p.213)

A few moments later, she explains how she earned some of the money and a further ambiguity arises here:

> ...it was tremendous fun all the same, sitting there working and earning money like that. It was almost like being a man (p.216)

The ambiguity lies in Nora's motive; she could be seen as being envious of a man's ability to go out to work and earn his living, not having to hide his motivation because it is part of his role in society, unlike that of women. Alternatively, Nora could be enjoying the pure novelty of her situation, as a game, performing a series of specific tasks for which specific fees will be paid. In this situation, an end product, of a very tangible nature, is available and part of a specific purpose; for a woman in Nora's situation, this is fulfilling and satisfying. The two motives are not necessarily mutually exclusive, but the interpretation will be a question of emphasis.

Much of the total impact of the play depends on how Nora's relationship with Torvald is presented and this, in turn, depends on how his character is seen. As in the case of Nora, different interpretations can arise from the text. Torvald, according to Weigand, can be seen

by Nora to be "her husband-hero" who will "shoulder the responsibility for her indiscretion"[13], that is, of course, until she learns otherwise; the audience can however see him as wearing "moral drapery"[14], as a "smug, conceited philistine of actual fact"[15]. Torvald is heard, only, and not seen, by the audience at the beginning of the play. Like Mr. Bennet in Pride and Prejudice, he has a study, a room to which he can escape and shut himself away from outer problems. The stage directions imply Nora's respect for this convention - or, ambiguously, her fear in connection with her husband; having popped "one or two" macaroons into her mouth, she "walks stealthily across and listens at her husband's door"...and then "She begins humming again". Torvald hears her, from his room of confinement:

Helmer (in his study) Is that my little skylark chirruping out there? (p.201)

One immediate interpretation here is that Torvald is himself living in a restricted environment, while Nora is "out there", i.e. carefree or carelessly free and happily "humming" in a bird-like manner. Again, a door separates the two environments. However, ambiguity arises in the ensuing dialogue; Torvald can be seen in a dual role: i) he is Nora's protector or ii) he imprisons her. The text can be used to reinforce either interpretation.

In the first interpretation, Torvald warns Nora of the possible future outcome if they borrow money and then he, i.e. the "breadwinner", is either injured or even killed. It is Torvald who provides the money and Nora has to accept her role as passive recipient, whose sole source of income apparently is her husband:

Torvald (...takes out his wallet) Nora, what do you think I've got here?

Nora (quickly, turning round) Money!

Torvald There! (He hands her some notes) Good heavens, I know only too well how Christmas runs away with the housekeeping.

Nora (counts) Ten, twenty, thirty, forty. Oh thank you, thank you, Torvald! This will see me quite a long way.

Torvald Yes, it will have to (p.213).

Nora sees Torvald, it could be argued, in the role of protector inasmuch as she firmly believes that, if he were to find out about her "crime", he would accept the blame himself; the "miracle". Moreover, this could be seen as a reciprocal relationship, since earlier Nora had helped to save his life by finding enough money to take him away when he was seriously ill: thus, she was protecting him.

However, Torvald can also be seen in the role of imprisoner, in that as her husband he was a means of preventing from being part of general society; marriage and a home, could, at some stages and in some societies, mean a life of near-isolation to women. It has been suggested that Nora is afraid of Torvald's anger We learn in Act Two that Torvald had earlier been a source of help and comfort to Nora and her father at a time of need:

> Nora ...I honestly think they would have had him (i.e. her father) dismissed if the Ministry hadn't sent you down to investigate, and you hadn't been so kind and helpful (p.242).

Torvald dislikes anything that is ugly, as we learn from more than one character; Dr. Rank says he doesn't want Helmer near him when he is about to die:

> Rank ...Helmer is a sensitive soul; he loathes anything that's ugly. I don't want him visiting me...on no account must he. I won't have it. I'll lock the door on him (p.245).

Furthermore, he objects to Mrs. Linde's knitting which "just can't help being ugly" (p.268).

Torvald relies to a great extent upon Nora's powers as a source of entertainment; in fact, the previous Christmas, when she locked herself away ostensibly to make Christmas surprises, he "never felt so bored in all my life" (p.206). That this "entertainment" is not a mutual conversation is indicated by the fact that Nora cannot talk to her husband as freely as she can to Dr. Rank in some ways; her friendship with Kristine, for example, was not known about by Torvald but it was by Dr. Rank. It seems that a different need is satisfied by Dr. Rank:

> Nora When I was a girl at home, I loved Daddy best, of course. But I also thought it great fun if I could slip into the Maids' room. For one thing they never preached at me. And they always talked about such exciting things.
>
> Rank Aha! So it's their role I've taken over!

Nora (jumps up and crosses to him) Oh, my dear, kind Dr. Rank, I didn't mean that at all. But you can see how it's a bit with Torvald as it was with Daddy...(p.250).

By inference, we may assume that Nora feels Torvald "preaches" at her and this idea reinforces the second interpretation, Torvald as imprisoner. He restricts her life in several ways, including, it could be argued, preventing her from experiencing reality: he loathes anything unpleasant or ugly, so such things must be avoided. He is possessive about her, using constantly the possessive adjectival "my": Nora is "my precious little singing bird", "my squirrel", etc.

Through jealousy or sheer indifference, perhaps an indifference which hints at possessiveness, even jealousy, implicitly, he removes at least some aspect of her past; he doesn't want to know about her former life or friends as represented by Kristine. He clearly has nothing but dislike for her father. When he eventually reads the damning letter from Krogstad, his immediate reaction is to stop Nora rushing out of the room and to demand whether the letter is true. When Nora tells him it is, she adds: "I loved you more than anything else in the world" (p.275). Torvald dismisses her words as being "paltry excuses", locks the front door and demands that she "give an account of herself" (p.275). It has been said[16] that Torvald does not know what the audience knows about the circumstances of Nora's forgery. However, apart from his demand that Nora "stop play-acting" and "give an account of "herself, he does not really ask her why she did it. He is clearly intent on the apparent horror of the "crime" and its effect upon him. He sees that society might consider him an accomplice and he lays the major part of the blame on characteristics which, he says, Nora has inherited from her father. In his furious tirade, Torvald says:

> ...Quiet! All your father's irresponsible ways are coming out in you. No religion, no morals, no sense of duty...Oh, this is my punishment for turning a blind eye to him (p.276).

Considering that when Nora does attempt to say something, presumably to account for her actions, Torvald orders her to be silent, he clearly does not want to hear her side of the matter. His speeches are extremely long and focus more or less exclusively on the possible effects upon

himself. In referring back to Nora's father, he is implicitly saying that unpleasant things existed or stemmed from the past, that he has always tried to evade them by "turning a blind eye". He shows no interest or concern in Nora's possible motive and perhaps this dislike of past events has always been in him and could be connected with the fact that Nora has never told him about her friends, such as Kristine. Nora sees the reason as being jealousy, but one might argue that, for Torvald, the past means something bad, perhaps irretrievably so, and certainly something to be identified with ugliness.

Their relationship is hard to define; on the one hand, we are presented with a husband who seems in some ways weak and in need of protection himself. Nora and his doctors had decided not to tell him how ill he was, so Nora had the problem of finding enough money and persuading him to take the necessary trip south. Furthermore, although he cannot accept Nora's crime of forgery and deception at first, once he knows it can be covered up, i.e. that the general public need not know about it and he need not feel obliged to shoulder the responsibility, he "forgives" her. This can be seen as a sign of weakness: his "best conscience is not to leave 't undone, but keep ' unknown".[17]

On the whole, Torvald has been seen (critically) very negatively. Consequently, my main objective here is to suggest that the text can also support a subtler interpretation, one which is fairer and more many-sided. In this, Weigand's comments are useful in putting Torvald's point-of-view:

> Torvald does not know what we know about the circumstances of Nora's forgery! For seven years he has been viewing that trip in an altogether different light. At the time when he was suffering from a breakdown, the result of overwork and financial worry, his flighty, pleasure-loving squirrel of a wife had set herself on spending a year in Italy like other wives of her social station; she had wept and prayed to make him borrow the funds, and his inability to indulge her had aggravated his miseries, when suddenly her father's gift had put the means of gratifying her wish within his reach. Fancy the shock of his learning now, from a blackmailer's pen,

by what methods she had secured her year abroad.[18]
It is not really surprising that Torvald's first reaction, when Nora tells him about the affair, is based on a purely subjective response; he does not know initially why she did it, nor has he any idea of how much she has suffered. Perhaps much of his behaviour is due to a conflict arising from a personal ideology; he says he cannot tolerate deception:

> I quite literally feel physically sick in the presence of such people (p.233).

If we accept that his love for Nora is quite genuine, the sudden realisation that she has been deceiving him, i.e. providing him with reasons to feel "sick", the conflict he feels would be painful. We also see how Nora makes use of his love for her, manipulating him when it is convenient.

It is quite obvious that the text supports a more complex reading of Torvald than the mere "male chauvinism" which has often - particularly in recent years - been attributed to him.

Possibly the most interesting scene from a visual point of view is the tarantella scene, when Nora is determined to prevent Torvald leaving the room and finding Krogstad's letter. Her motive is clear. She must hold his entire attention and over a period of some twenty-four hours. As he taught her the dance, his personal reputation as a "tutor" and coach can be used by Nora, so she dances badly enough to need his help again. The scene shows her skill in controlling Torvald by a favourite device of hers: a piece of play-acting. There is a choice of interpretations here. First, Nora actually loses control during the course of her dancing, in which case our sympathies can remain with her, since she would seem to be helpless. Then text supports this theory:

> <u>Torvald</u> Not so fast! Not so fast!
> <u>Nora</u> I can't help it.
> <u>Torvald</u> Not so wild, Nora!
> <u>Nora</u> This is how it has to be (p.258).

Then a stage direction states that Nora "<u>dances more and more wildly. Helmer stands by the stove giving her repeated directions as she dances; she does not seem to hear them. Her hair comes undone and falls about</u>

her shoulders. she pays no attention and goes on dancing.

As a dance of death, the tarantella acquires a symbolic power in its own right. The scene loses more than most in reading, since as an example of theatrical genius at work, it is far more vividly alive in performance, with the addition of music, rhythmic movement and consequently vitality. Like Dr. Rank's announcement of impending death as represented by the marked calling card, it communicates far more powerfully than words could do. Furthermore, our attention is focussed even more sharply on Nora when, as in the earlier scene where she is playing with her children as Krogstad arrives, Ibsen brings a spectator on stage to watch her. This time it is Mrs. Linde who stands "as though spell-bound" watching her from the doorway. Torvald sees the moment as "sheer madness" and Rank warns him: "I shouldn't cross her".

A second interpretation, however, would reinforce the idea that Nora does not actually lose control; that on the contrary, she allows herself to dance thus, the more effectively to hold Torvald's attention. This is strangely reinforced by the moves Torvald makes in a kind of reverse action: at the beginning of the scene, he is by the door and about to go out of the room; then, he stops, agrees to sit at the piano and play for Nora. Finally, when she really has complete control of his attention, he actively relinquishes the piano-playing, the better to direct Nora. Ibsen says in his stage direction that Nora "does not seem to hear" the instructions being given by Torvald, a comment which lends itself to either interpretation. Nora is subsequently quite coherent in what she says: "See what fun we are having, Kristine" and "Yes, you see how necessary it is". Speaking directly to Torvald, she presses home her advantage:

> You must go on coaching me right up to the
> last minutes...You mustn't think about any-
> thing else but me until after tomorrow...
> ..mustn't open any letters..mustn't touch
> the letter-box (p.259).

Her final coup de grace is: "We don't want anything horrid coming between us until this is all over". We know full well by now, having been carefully prepared by comments from several characters, that Torvald

dislikes unpleasant things, so it would not be too difficult to see why "horrid" things would be enough of a deterrent.

The character of Dr. Rank almost acts as a catalyst on events. When Dr. Rank's fateful visiting card is found by Torvald, the scene which ensues between husband and wife is most revealing. Each character ironically says one thing and then the opposite; for example, Torvald suddenly declares: "Many's the time I wish you were threatened by some terrible danger so I could risk everything, body and soul, for your sake" (p.274). Soon after, when called upon to do more or less just this, when he learns of Nora's crime, Torvald cannot live up to his boast. Similarly, Nora says: "When it has to happen, it's best that it should happen without words"; then, when Torvald reads Krogstad's letter, Nora does not simply slip quietly out of the house, either to commit suicide or to leave home. She is stopped by Torvald and tries lots of "words"; it could be argued that Nora really does mis-time her exit and genuinely means to avoid Torvald. The crucial question remains: why does Nora leave Torvald? Her motivation seems to be the discovery that she is now "living with a stranger" (p.295). Torvald asks her to wait until the following morning; rather naively, he asks:

> Couldn't we go on living here like brother and sister?

There is no naivete in Nora's reply:

> You know very well that wouldn't work.

She is more realistic now and the near-solemnity of the final scene reveals her as a rather different woman from the earlier Nora. This is made explicit by Ibsen in two lines of dialogue:

> Torvald....You've changed your things?
> Nora (in her everyday dress) Yes, Torvald, I've changed (p.279).

The conversation that follows leads up to the end of the play and much of the meaning will relate to interpretations of both characters formed earlier; one may respond by sympathising with either character accordingly, or with neither. All depends upon the direction and the

acting now, and this is the final ambiguity provided by Ibsen. Interestingly, one's final interpretation will be inevitably decided mainly by whether one is reading the play or sitting in an auditorium and watching it being staged.

This is partly because printed lines have to follow a certain order if the reader is going to be able to understand them. Thus, while the final words spoken are those of Torvald: "Nora! Nora! Empty! She's gone! Goodbye! The miracle of miracles...?" they are followed by a stage direction: The heavy sound of a door being slammed is heard from below (p.286). As a consequence, the reader "hears" the door slamming after Torvald speaks. However, in production, both could happen simultaneously or Torvald's words could be spoken after the sound of the door. The order is important; the reader or spectator will leave the play with which ever of these two dramatic events took place last being the predominant factor in terms of meaning. If Torvald speaks of "miracles" in a hopeful manner (the stage direction runs: "with sudden hope"), and this speech is then followed by the door-slam, the first is nullified by the second. The reverse would apply if the door-slam preceded the words. However, if it were possible, through extremely careful timing, to make both occur simultaneously, the play would end on a note of doubt, of uncertainty or, h as has been the case throughout, of ambiguity.

Dr. Rank acts almost as a catalyst to final events. The climax of the play is signalled when he calls on them, just after the fancy dress ball, and rather inopportunely as far as Torvald is concerned. Torvald is in an extremely excited mood and clearly intends to make love to Nora as soon as possible. Nora, in turn, tries to fend him off - she has just told Kristine: "Now I know what's to be done" (p.268). Nothing more explicit is revealed to the audience, but her words, together with her evasive behaviour with Torvald in the following moments, adds a certain tension to the scene. Torvald reaches a point of fierce emotion, but again it is ambiguous:

> Nora Go away, Torvald! Please leave me alone.
> I won't have it.
> Torvald What's this? It's just your little game, isn't it, my little Nora. Won't! Won't! Am I not your husband? (p.270).

We do not really know whether he is speaking in anger, frustration or generous amusement; he has drunk a considerable amount of champagne, we are told, and this would influence his mood strongly. It is at this moment that Dr. Rank chooses to call and further tension is developed if his knock at the door interrupts Torvald's words, as Ibsen's own punctuation indicates that it should.

The scene is very erotic, with Torvald's speeches about watching her, pretending that they are not married but secret lovers; and his showing her off to Mrs. Linde. Clearly the entry of Dr. Rank, and then the reading of the letter, come in on an atmosphere where Torvald was all set to enjoy - in every sense of the word - Nora; and clearly this scene tells a lot, both about their relationship generally and about his frustration when events overtake his desires.

As I have already pointed out (p.9, above), Dr. Rank is importand for two reasons; the first is that of his profession. Ibsen always intended to include a doctor but it wasn't until comparatively late in the development of the plot that he gave him the name of Rank. Consequently, one may safely assume it was his symbolic value rather than anything else which was of prime importance.[19]

Secondly, we are told that he has been a friend of the family's for many years and that he had been Torvald's best friend as a boy, as well as being "a good friend" of Nora's (p. 238). Consequently, we expect him to be the same age, more or less, as Torvald. His inherited disease, spinal consumption, has affected his health "from his childhood" and, as Nora tells Mrs. Linde, "...his father was a horrible man, who used to have mistresses and things like that..". Presumably, syphilis is being discussed but to be explicit would have been unthinkable in terms of public - i.e. on stage - presentation at the time. He would appear to be a very truthful man, perhaps even to the point of bluntness, if Nora's words are to be taken at face value:

> Mrs. Linde But, tell me - is he really genuine? What I mean is: doesn't he sometimes rather turn on the charm?
> Nora No, on the contrary (p.238).

He is fairly rich but this has only been so in recent years (after, at any rate, Nora's borrowing money from Krogstad). He represents in some respects a critic of society for, as he tells Mrs. Linde, he disapproves of the way "people ..go rushing round.." and then, when they have found a "case", instal him or her in "nice, well-paid jobs where they can keep them under observation. Sound, decent people have to be content to stay out in the cold" (p.219).

He is a doctor and consequently knows about suffering, disease and pain. Nevertheless, he feels life at any price is very much worth living:

> Nora Come, come, Doctor Rank. You are quite as keen to live as anybody.
>
> Dr. Rank Quite keen, yes. Miserable as I am, I'm quite ready to let things drag on as long as possible. (p.218)

If we can accept Dr. Rank as a likeable character and not, as could well be the case, a self-pitying, morbid old man, his love for Nora is important in that it makes Nora more worthy of our sympathy, just as if we see Krogstad as an unpleasant character, his behaviour towards Nora encourages us to sympathise with her.

Why does he wait so long before telling Nora of his love? Presumably this is because such an admission would make his frequent visits to the house impossible, or at least embarrassing for Nora. Why, then, does he change his mind and tell her? He says, "I swore to myself you would know before I went. I'll never have a better opportunity" (p.248). During this scene, "it begins to grow dark" and this is clearly intended to hint at the shadow of death hanging over Dr. Rank's head. I believe the reason Dr. Rank decides to tell Nora of his love at that moment is contained within his words: "Well, Nora! Now you know. And now you know too that you can confide in me as in nobody else" (p.248).

In other words, he is trying to make it easier for Nora to confide in him. Of course, it has the opposite effect. One assumes that this is the moment of greatest darkness on stage, for Nora orders the maid to bring in a lamp. Just as the fluctuating mood of anxiety and apparent apparent gaiety, when Nora flirts with Dr. Rank and they begin

to enjoy the friendship, develops into a very serious declaration of love, so the action has taken an interesting course; at first, we are likely to sympathise with Nora to varying extents and understand her motive in what she says to the doctor. Then, again to varying extents, we share her surprise when he declares his love.

Much of the ambiguity of the play, then, lies in the minor characters as well as in Nora's attitude towards them. One major problem lies with her treatment of her children: does she ultimately abandon them, putting herself and her own needs first and denying her maternal instinct - which perhaps does not even exist? Or does she leave them for their own good, because she feels she might be a bad influence on them? Is her own individual personality of paramount importance? It has been suggested frequently by Ibsen that heredity accounts for much of the bad in people, but what of the influence of environment? A mother-child relationship is two-way: it influences both mother and child and each is entitled to its individuality. The text seems to emphasise that, once Nora is convinced that her children will be cared for, financially by her husband and in all other respects by her own former nurse, Anne Marie, she owes herself the right to be free and develop her own personality in terms of a wider environment than that which has imprisoned her for so long. It is a question of a familiar dilemma: one's duty to one's self as opposed to one's duty to others. Nora herself realises her needs:

> I must take steps to educate myself...If I'm ever to reach any understanding of myself and the things around me, I must learn to stand alone (p.281).

This serious view of Nora is hard to reconcile with the fact that she has hitherto enjoyed playing games. Presumably, though, we are to see this last scene as the end of all games. There are frequent illustrations of this child-like characteristic earlier in the play. She clearly enjoys making secret Christmas preparations, what Torvald refers to as her "Christmas secrets" (p.203), though ironically the biggest "Christmas secret" of all took place behind locked doors, with the work Nora did in order to pay Krogstad. Nora tells Kristine of a favourite day-dream:

> I used to sit here and pretend that some rich old
> gentleman had fallen in love with me....(p.216).

Ibsen's depiction of Nora with her children in Act One shows her thoroughly at home in children's games; she calls them "my sweet little baby-doll" and "my pretty little dollies". As she herself later realises, she is treating the children in the same way that she was brought up by her father and later treated by her husband (and we see here the point of the game scene - hide-and-seek - in Act One):

> ....our home has never been anything but a play-room.
> I have been your doll-wife, just as at home I was
> Daddy's doll-child (p.280).

Here, she is blaming her father and Torvald for what she is, but has she herself no control over this? Perhaps not, given her society. John Berger says:

> To be born a woman has been to be born, within
> an allotted and confined space, into the keeping
> of men.[20]

The physical presence of children in the play is important. For one thing, the relationship between them and Nora can be reinforced. An audience, moreover, is more likely to sympathise with Nora, when she seems to be protecting the children from Krogstad, if the children are actually there, present on the stage. They can reinforce the child-like quality in Nora's personality and emphasise the magnitude of her decision to leave at the end. However, there is a dilemma that directors face concerning children in plays. Quite often, the Helmer children are omitted from productions, as in the case of the 1973 production in London. This is mainly because many actors dislike working with them,[21] or perhaps resent the effect they may have on an audience, either good or bad; another reason is that they are sometimes unpredictable and may not be able to keep within the role adopted, or will perhaps forget lines.

The problem of the play is the problem of Nora; but as I have tried to indicate this involves also all the other characters. I shall now proceed to examine how three different London productions of A Doll's House have dealt with this and other problems raised in this chapter.

Chapter Two: The 1889 Production of

A Doll's House

In this chapter, I shall examine the first professional production of A Doll's House in London, on June 7th, 1889, at the Novelty Theatre. This was not the first stage appearance of Nora, however, since she had earlier appeared in Breaking a Butterfly, in 1884 and at the Princes Theatre. This was an extremely free adaptation of the play and was the work of Henry Arthur Jones and Henry Herman.

The role of women in society rapidly drew attention towards the end of the nineteenth century. The Victorian middle-class ideal has been described by Patricia Stubbs:

> They (women) became custodians of the moral conscience, the repository of all virtue, and as such were obliged to live apart from the sordid everyday cares of material life. Returning home from the pressures of the real world, economic man was supposedly soothed and elevated by the spirituality, virtue and domestic charm of his wife. Ideally, she should be a companion who will raise the tone of his mind from low anxieties and vulgar cares. She must lead his thoughts to expatiate or repose on those subjects which convey a feeling of identity with a higher state of existence beyond his present life. The knowledge that they were providing a refuge from the outside world was supposed to adequately compensate women for their total exclusion from work and public life.[1]

This attitude was, however, changing, even before the turn of the century; equal rights, both legal and political, were being demanded, and this included those of married women. When a woman married, all her money and possessions - even her children - automatically belonged to the husband. This was changed by the Married Women's Property Act in 1882, when women were allowed by law to keep their own earnings and to own property. However, they were still not entitled to vote in parliamentary elections.

A short while later, Mrs. Emmeline Pankhurst founded the Women's Social and Political Union, which set out to organise public demonstrations in favour of women's suffrage. These were often of an extremely violent kind and this could be said to illustrate just how strongly women felt.

However, it is not my intention to deal with the women's rights movement as such - others have done so, very fully.[2] But there were other, relevant changes taking place in England. There was an increasing restlessness in the theatre; one reason was that drama seemed not to be keeping in step with social and intellectual development in the country. There was talk of a national theatre and here William Archer was one of the prime agitators. Concurrent with the need for a new drama was an equally strong pressure to stop, or at least to broaden, censorship. A prime figure in this was J.T. Grein, who had witnessed the genesis of the Théâtre Libre in Paris and wanted to see something of the same kind in London. The growing interest in the theatre was encouraged also by Shaw and, perhaps significantly, Edward Aveling and Eleanor Marx, whose relationship became firmly established by 1884.[3] They were in the habit of giving semi-public play readings on Sunday afternoons and it was on one such day that the first performance of A Doll's House in London took place. In December, 1885, Eleanor Marx wrote to her friend Havelock Ellis, telling him that there was to be a reading of Nora at her place in Great Russell Street on the evening of 15th January:

> I feel I must do something to make people understand our Ibsen a little more than they do, and I know by experience that a play read to them often affects people more than when read by themselves.[4]

The first English translation of the play had been made in 1882 by Henrietta Frances Lord, under the title Nora. It was this translation that was used by the play-reading group. Eleanor read Nora, Edward Aveling Torvald, Shaw was Krogstad and May Morris read Kristine. Between that date and 1888, no mention seems to have been made of a professional production. Then, at the beginning of 1889, as Charles Archer wrote:

> ...a scheme was started for the subscription performance of A Doll's House, the most famous

> and successful of the modern prose plays. The scheme came to nothing for the time; but a young actress of high talent and ambition, Janet Achurch, and her husband, Charles Charrington, stepped into the breach. Determined to produce the play, and finding the existing translation hopeless for stage purposes, they applied to (William) Archer for a playable text, and found him more than willing not only to supply what they wanted, but also to stand by them with rede and deed in the staging of the production.[5]

Just who initiated the scheme, I have been unable to discover; however, it seems highly probable that the Avelings and J.T. Grein were closely involved. What is interesting is that Archer had not himself translated the play at that time; consequently, he adapted the translation by Frances Lord. As he explained in the translated text he published in 1889:

> A few pages omitted, for the sake of compression, from the version produced at the Novelty Theatre, have been scrupulously restored. Otherwise the text of that version is almost literally adhered to. I have to express my obligations, in the first place, to the previous rendering of the play by Miss Frances Lord[6], which afforded many suggestions; in the second place to Miss Janet Achurch and Mr. Charles Charrington, who gave me most valuable assistance in revising my original draft.[7, 8]

It may therefore be justifiably inferred that Archer based his initial version on Miss Lord's, which was published on an unknown date the previous year. Archer's own translation was published at some stage within the last months of 1889. The actual play script was submitted to the Lord Chamberlain in April, 1889, and is now preserved at the British Museum.[9] By comparing this manuscript with the text of the play which Ibsen published in 1879, one can clearly see that Archer was involved in more than just adapting Miss Lord's translation:

> on my heels or my head, I must send you a line to tell you how *Et Dukkehjem* is getting on. I am wasting any amount of time over the rehearsals; but there are always little things in which I can put them straight.[10]

The cutting or omitting of lines from plays is often carried out by directors when staging them; it is an acceptable and sometimes necessary practice. However, in this particular case Archer's choice of omissions tend to bias the interpretation. It may be recalled that "a few pages (were)..omitted...from the version produced at the Novelty Theatre". These omissions are readily traceable by means of comparison between the play manuscript submitted to the Lord Chamberlain and Archer's own translation later that year. Ultimately, of course, the omissions must be seen in relation to Ibsen's original.

The script from which Archer worked initially seems to have been the Frances Lord translation, which was of a complete text. Similarly, Archer's own translation is a complete text. The area in which the omissions occur is that of the Lord Chamberlain's manuscript and this reinforces Archer's comment in the introduction to his own translation. I have been unable to trace a prompt copy and therefore rely on the submitted script and this document, in itself, is interesting.

The major areas of omission and translation differences concern points about Nora's personality, which would obviously be reflected in her actions and shed light on her behaviour in certain situations, and about her relationship with other characters, notably Torvald. All of the characters may be seen in a different light according to what they actually say - or do not say - when translations vary or sections of dialogue are omitted.

Omitted passages include points illustrating Nora's knowledge of and concern for Torvald's everyday problems; some of the conversation between her and Mrs. Linde, when Nora raises the point about Torvald's integrity, is omitted. Even more significant is the omission of the passage where Torvald teases Nora about her efforts, the previous Christmas, to make surprise decorations; the audience learns from this moment that Torvald was unable to amuse himself in her absence: "I never felt so bored in all my life"[11].

Since later we need to know how Nora accounted to Torvald for her absence while secretly earning the money needed to repay Krogstad, this omission seems hard to justify. The deletion, furthermore, removes the vision one has of a Nora who is prepared to work hard and to repay her debt and this is particularly significant in a period when women found it extremely difficult to find ways and means of earning money. Furthermore, it presumably prevented Nora from taking her usual active part in making the family Christmas preparations and this is one of her chief sources of pleasure, we infer. Self-denial is not a characteristic we would expect to find in her.

Furthermore, Ibsen's imagery related to Nora's apparently frugal or thrifty nature - more specifically the term "squirrel" - is simplified; Torvald calls her "my little lark" and "pretty song-bird" in the play script. (It is interesting, and rather puzzling, that the "squirrel" imagery is used in both the Lord and later Archer translations. This suggests that in the B.M. manuscript at least one other person was involved, presumably one or both of the Charringtons). Facets of Nora's personality suffer in other ways through omissions. For instance, in the first act, when Nora shows Torvald the presents she has bought for their children, she reveals pleasure at the low cost; this reinforces the notion of frugality implied in the nickname "squirrel":

> ...come here and see all I have been buying. And so cheap! Look, here is a new suit for Ivar, and a little sword. Here are a little horse and a trumpet for Bob. And here are a doll and a cradle for Emmy.[12]

Although, in terms of content, this speech is similar to Archer's (later) translation, the following lines were omitted in the play script:

> ...They're (i.e. the doll and cradle) only common; but they're good enough for her to pull to pieces. And dress-stuffs and kerchiefs for the servants. I ought to have got something better for old Anna.[13]

The omitted lines suggest a practical nature and one that has consideration for others, including the family servants. In the same way, her words to Kristine, showing concern for her situation as well as

admiration for what her friend has had to give up in order to care for her mother and brothers, were omitted. In the original, an ambiguity exists here, for Nora's words concerning Kristine's need for "a little holiday" not only suggest true consideration of her plight, but also that Nora perhaps lacks either insight or common sense: how could Mrs. Linde possibly afford such a thing? But as a consequence of these omissions, the audience is left with the simple and somewhat boastful remark:

> Come over here. Yes, Kristine, I took have something to be proud and glad of.... (BM MS 1.10).

Clement Scott, drama critic of The Daily Telegraph and leader of the attack against Ibsen in 1889, accused Nora of being "illogical. ...fractious". Further omissions and alterations by Archer help to account for this estimation of her character. Consider the moment when Nora explains to Kristine the importance of having to keep the extent of Torvald's illness from him. The following passage occurs in the play script:

> Do you think I didn't try diplomacy first, I begged and prayed for a trip abroad on my own account. I pleaded my own state of health and told him it was his duty not to thwart me, and then I hinted that he could borrow the money... (BM MS 1.12).

Archer's translation is slightly different:

> Do you think I didn't try diplomacy first? I told him how I longed to have a trip abroad, like other young wives; I wept and prayed. I said he ought to think of my condition, and not to thwart me; and then I hinted that he could borrow the money. (W.A. p. 26).

Here is McFarlane's version of the same passage:

> Do you think I didn't try talking him into it first? I wept, I pleaded. I told him he ought to show some consideration for my condition and let me have a bit of my own way. And then I suggested he might take out a loan... (p. 214).

There is a considerable difference between the verbal broadside attack given, according to the play script, with the emotive words "duty" and "thwart" (neither of which have any direct source in the Norwegian original) as powerful ammunition, and that of McFarlane, where Nora's account starts her persuasive tactics gently and gradually builds up her argument with logic and intelligence. She does not use the ultimate weapon, her pregnancy and the possibility of borrowing money, until no other alternative remains. However, the first version does exemplify Archer's use of phraseology, idiom, etc., rather than omissions as such. Archer's "my own state of health" is surely a prudish omission of any direct reference to pregnancy - just as the 1891 production in London of Hedda Gabler did not refer overtly to her pregnancy. Another difference occurs in the use of the verb "pray" as opposed to "plead"; the former, with its associations of an act of worship, is more exalted (or perhaps, here, hysterical?), whereas the latter is more human in its quality of requesting something. By using "pray" both in the BM MS and his own translation, Archer adds a further meaning to Nora's actions: the somewhat melodramatic quality raises Nora out of normal, every day life into an unnatural and consequently unconvincing sphere. She is moved out of our reach and we thus find her almost impossible to understand or sympathise with.

A further omission which removes the element of intelligence - or perhaps simply common sense - occurs in Act Two, when Mrs. Linde suggests that Nora might have borrowed the necessary money from Dr. Rank. Nora is horrified:

> Nora No, I give you my word. It would never have occurred to me, for one moment....Anyway, he didn't have the money to lend, then. He didn't inherit it till later.
>
> Mrs. Linde Just as well for you, I'd say, my dear Nora.
>
> Nora No, it would never have occured to me to ask Dr. Rank. (p.239).

Archer's version is:

> Nora [No, I assure you. It never for a moment occurred to me...Besides, at that time he had nothing to lend; he came into his property afterwards.
>
> Mrs. Linden Well, I believe that was lucky for you, Nora dear.]
>
> Nora No, really, it would never have struck me to ask Dr. Rank... And yet I'm certain that if I did... (W.A. p.70).

The BM MS version is:

Nora No, I should never have dreamt of asking Dr.Rank.
However, I am certain that if I did... (BM MS 2.5).

The section of Archer's version between brackets is omitted altogether in the BM MS; this omission suppresses the element of shrewd calculation in Nora and the later scene reinforces the implication that Nora is now considering something that she had earlier considered impractical. Furthermore, the meaning of Mrs. Linde's omitted words is unclear: in what way was this "lucky" for Nora?

Other subtle changes are brought about in Nora's character by such differences or omissions. An example occurs when Nora refers to her own attractiveness; the original Norwegian is:

Når man ser så vidt tiltrekkende ut som jeg...
When one looks as reasonable attractive as I

The BM MS version is: When one is so attractive as I.. (BM MS 1.11).
Archer's version is: When one is so attractive as I am... (W.A. p.26).
McFarlane: Anyone as reasonably attractive as I am...(p.214)

The contruction of the original phrase is closer to Archer's, but he has omitted the "så vidt" ("as reasonably"). Consequently, what was a simple acknowledgement of fact becomes a declaration motivated by vanity. (However, McFarlane, to produce a better English idiom, has had to be somewhat free with the original.)

The Nora of Ibsen's text, far from being only the self-centred creature seen in one interpretation, is possibly also a considerate and warm person. Archer's adaptation - and he did not change this in his own translation - tends to preclude this possibility. Nora's comment to Kristine, on hearing of her independence since the death of her mother, is:

Hvor du må føle deg lett..
How you must feel relieved...

The versions of both Archer and the BM MS are:

How free your life must feel... . (W.A. p.21).

McFarlane: What a relief you must find it...(p.211)

Archer's and the BM MS versions suggest an envious reaction, with its emphasis upon freedom, whereas it seems more likely that Ibsen's Norais sympathetically seeing Kristine's situation as being less demanding following a struggle to keep her mother, brothers and herself alive.

Translation is clearly not an easy matter; the slightest change in the selected English word can have a remarkable effect on the meaning of the text. On more than once occasion, Archer opts for the verb "to leave", to denote Nora's action, in each instant suggesting a deliberate action of deserting one's duty. The following two comparisons of translations illustrate the point:

1. Nora to Anne-Marie, Act II:
   (Original) Og hvis de små ingen en men hadde
   (Literally) And if the little ones had no-one else
   EM MS: And if my little ones were left...(EM MS 2.p.2)
   Archer: And kif my little ones had nobody else..(W.A. p.65)
   McFarlane: And if my little ones ha only had you...(p. 236)

In this example, Archer's own printed version is close to the original, and clearly represents a decision made after the stage adaptation. Thus, the 1889 audience presumably received a version hinting at Nora's possible intention to "leave".

2. Krogstad to Nora, Act II:
   (Original) hvis De skulle tenke på å løpe fra hus og hjem..
   (Literally) if you should be thinking of running from house and home...
   EM MS & Archer: if you should think of leaving your husband and children... (EM MS 2.18, W.A.p.94)
   McFarlane: if you happen to be thinking of running away...(p.253)

Here, Archer left the play script translation as it was, with its emphasis on Nora's "leaving" her family, in the sense of abandoning them. However, McFarlane's version is more like the original, more vague; Nora isn't necessarily deserting her husband and children but, perhaps more ambiguously, running away, escaping from something.

Archer's choice of verb sometimes again slants the meaning. Nora, telling Mrs. Linde how, with Torvald gravely ill and her first child about to be born, she was unable to go and look after her dying father, uses the following phrase:

Original: Å, det er det tungeste jeg har opplevet siden jeg ble gift

Literally: Oh, it is the heaviest/saddest thing I have experienced since I was married

Archer's version (and again, he did not change this in his own translation) is: Oh, that's the hardest thing I have had to bear since my marriage (BM MS 1.8, W.A.p,19).

"I have had to bear" does not convey the same attitude in the speaker as "I have experienced": "to bear" contains an implication of carrying a burden or heavy load and could be interpreted as a sense of martyrdom, or self- pity, in Nora. Did Ibsen really intend this? McFarlane's version, incidentally, introduces an element of passiveness in Nora which is not in the original:

Oh, that's the saddest thing that has happened to me in all my married life. (p.210)

The further one explores such differences, the more one can see that a rather narrow, pre-determined picture of Nora's character was presented to the 1889 audience, and I intend to develop this point later.

Again, a choice of noun can be important, as in the discussion between Torvald about Krogstad's earlier offence:

(Original): <u>Torvald</u> Men gen en kan moralsk reise seg igjen hvis han åpent bekjenner sin brøde og utstår sin straff.

Literally: Many a man can morally redeem himself if he openly confesses his guilt and takes his punishment.

<u>Nora</u> Straff?

Literally: Punishment?

BM MS: <u>Torvald</u> Many a man can retrieve his character if he owns his crime and takes the consequences.

<u>Nora</u> Crime! (BM MS 1.30)

<u>Archer</u> <u>Torvald</u> Many a man can retrieve his character, if he owns his crime and takes the punishment.

<u>Nora</u> Punishment-? (W.A. p.59)

McFarlane: Torvald Then a man might be able to redeem himself, if he honestly confessed his guilt and took his punishment.

Nora Punishment? (p.232)

It can bee seen that the major differences between the playscript and Archer are, first, the change from the word "consequences" to "punishment" and, secondly, that while in the former version, Nora picks up and repeats the word "crime", in the latter she repeats the word "punishment". Similarly, McFarlane gives Nora the word "punishment" to repeat and both of the two later versions are literally close to the original "straff". In these two renderings, one can see Nora's prime concern with the thought of her own punishment and possibly with the punishment she has already had to bear, together with what her family will have to suffer. In the playscript, however, the emphasis is on the word "crime", together with its stark exclamation mark (as against the question mark of the original). It is as if Nora cannot conceive of having committed such a thing - the word (and concept) never occurred to her. In any case, the idea of committing a crime, with all its related social and moral connotations, is extremely powerful and would further contribute to an atmosphere of melodrama. Since one of Ibsen's main objectives was surely to present his audience with reality, this is clearly unhelpful and undesirable.

Another area of interest lies in the relationship between Nora and Torvald, particularly as it develops during the final scene. Again, I would like to draw attention to that interesting verb "leave", with its significantly different connotations. It occurs in the dialogue between Nora and Torvald, when Nora tells Torvald what she now plans to do. In his own translation, Archer retained the rendering used in the playscript:

Nora I must try to gain experience, Torvald.

Torvald To forsake your home, your husband and your children!

(BM MS 3.20, W.A.pp.146/7).

McFarlane's version is: I must set about getting experience, Torvald.

Torvald And leave your home, your husband and your children? (p.282)

Archer substitutes the emotive verb "forsake" for "leave", both here and a few moments later: "You are clear and certain enough to forsake husband and children" (HH HS 3.21, W.A.p.149). In both cases, Ibsen uses the verb "forlate", which means "leave"; it could be stretched to mean "forsake", but that is not the tone of Torvald's language. Consequently, Archer makes the situation more melodramatic. There are so many occurences of this nature that one is forced to the conclusion that the play-script version changed Ibsen's original to such an extent that it is hardly surprising the 1889 audience, with its influential individual members, reacted in the way that they did. But this is a point I shall return to.

Victorian audiences were shown Nora's attitude through Torvald's blinkered vision and his membership of the then dominant male sex is emphasised beyond Ibsen's intentions. Every time the translator has the choice, Archer - and here again, he kept the same rendering as that in the play script - used "man" where McFarlane was to use "one" or, as in the following exchange, "nobody":

> Torvald I would gladly toil day and night for you, Nora, enduring all manner of sorrow and distress. But nobody sacrifices his honour for the one he loves.
>
> Nora Hundreds and thousands of women have. (p.284)

The original is: Men der er ingen som ofrer sin ære for den man elsker.

> Literally: But there is no-one who sacrifices his honour for the one one(he) loves.

(This sounds inelegant but it emphasises the neutrality of the "one").

> Nora Det har hundrede tusen kvinner gjort.

Literally: That have hundreds of thousands of women done.

In the play script, "no-one" becomes "no man", and Nora's "hundreds of thousands" to "millions". Given the contemporary feminist attitude which London's first Nora was to apply to the role, the stress would have been on the word "women", to produce an even more marked contrast between the sexes. Ibsen's stress is also on "women", but there isn't the verbal over-emphasis added by Archer. The difference between the original "hundreds of thousands" and Archer's

"millions" is presumably intended to provide extra emphasis, but the exaggeration adds yet another touch of melodrama. (This particular line of Nora's evoked possibly the strongest reaction of all, certainly in the 1889 and, later, the 1973 productions, but I shall return to the point later).

What of Nora's final act of departure? In Chapter One of this thesis, I discussed the significance of the closing moments and the slamming of the front door (c/f Page 29 above). The actual slam, as Nora leaves the house, must be one of the most powerful dramatic gestures ever conceived, and is readily preceived to be available for a melodramatic gesture. The point when Nora leaves the stage and then returns with her outdoor clothes is translated by both Archer and McFarlane in a similar manner.

The original is: Dess visserе må det skje.

Literally: All the more reason why it must happen

Archer: The more reason for the thing to happen (W.A.p.153)

McFarlane: All the more reason why it must be done (p.285).

Between Archer's later translation and the play script, there is only one difference: the word "thing" is underlined in ink on the typed script. Furthermore, it is the only occasion in the entire script where any alteration or addition has been made in ink, so clearly it was intended to be significant. Why should "thing" bear such weight for whoever it was that made the change? What Nora is referring to is the fact that she and Torvald must be separated, partly so that he may himself have a chance to grow, a chance he may only have if he has his "doll" taken away. Ibsen's original has the non-committal "happen", not even the active "be done" of Mc.Farlane's version and this perhaps suggests a fatalistic attitude on Nora's behalf.

Nora's motives for leaving are almost the greatest ambiguity of all. The original, at this point, suggests that Nora's gesutre or departing is two-fold in its intentions to allow both of them to find their individual selves and become whole, emotionally helathy and mature people. The final stage direction in the play script reads: A door is heard to shut heavily.

In McFarlane, it is: <u>The heavy sound of a door being slammed is heard from below.</u>

In Archer's later translation, it is: <u>From below is heard the reverberation of a heavy door closing.</u>

The original is: <u>nedenfra høres drønnet av en port som slås i lås.</u>

Literally: <u>from below is heard the heavy sound of a street door which is being slammed.</u>

The McFarlane translation is closer to the original and the idea of a violent action is reiterated by the use of both "heavy sound" and "slammed", whereas the play script confines itself to one forceful action: the door is "shut heavily". Archer's own interpretation is interesting, for he manages to combine both the force of a "heavy door closing" and even greater emphasis on the action by prolonging it with "reverberation". In view of other evidence, it seems strange that the play script satisfied those concerned, when presumably the doubly violent interpretation was as accessible to them as it was to others, later on. (But then they could rely on <u>doing</u> it, producing the sound, whereas Archer's printed text assumed primarily a <u>reader</u>.)[13]

An example of almost ridiculous regard for the conventional sense of decorum occurs in the play script version of Krogstad's words to Nora, when he is dissuading her from committing suicide by drowning:

Original: Under isen kanskje? Ned i det kolde, kullsorte vann? Og så til våren flyte opp, stygg, ukjennelig med avfalt hår..

Literally: Under the ice perhaps? Down into the cold, coal-black water? And then, when spring comes, float up, ugly, unrecognisable, with your hair fallen out...

In the play script: Under the ice, perhaps, down in the cold, black water. And next Spring, to come up again, ugly, dishevelled, unrecognisable. (BM Ms 2.20)

Archer noticeably amended this: Under the ice, perhaps? Down into the cold, black water? And next spring to come up

again, hairless, unrecognisable. The euphemism - "dishevelled" - did not come from the Frances Lord translation. On this particular occasion, the play script is different from both the Lord and Archer versions; the Lord rendering is: And then next spring be fished up on the short, ugly, unrecognisable, with your hair fallen out...." [14]

McFarlane's version is: Under the ice, maybe? Down in the cold black water? Then being washed up in the spring, bloated, hairless, unrecognisable.. (p.254)

A problem arises when a particular word, in one language, has more than one meaning in another. An example of this occurs towards the end of the play:

Original: Je vil ikke se de små.

Literally: I don't want to see the little ones.

The play script: I will not see the children. (BM MS 3.23)

Archer: No, I won't go to the children. (W.A.p.153)

McFarlane: I don't want to see the children. (p.285)

Norwegian has no alternative "don't want" or "will not"; "vil ikke" can mean either. Consequently, the original here is more ambiguous. Basically, the play script and McFarlane are saying the same thing - that Nora does not wish to see the children, whereas Archer translates it more simply into not intending to see them, although there is an implication here that she may wish to do so, nevertheless.

Similarly, a few moments later, Torvald asks Nora if he may write to her. In the original text, she replies:

Nei - aldri. Det får du ikke lov til.

Literally: No - never. You mustn't do it.

However, "I won't let you" is undoubtedly more idiomatic. Grammatically, though, it falsifies the tone, as it makes Nora ('I') the subject whereas in the original, it is the 'du' (you) and 'that' (initial 'Det') which are the operative pronouns. The play script version is: No, never, you must not. (BM MS 3.24) Archer retained this translation. However, McFarlane varied it by saying: No, never. I won't let you. (p.286)

Some years later, a reference to Archer's handing of scripts was made anonymously in a published article:

> I had seen Ibsen cut to the bone by Mr. Archer......Mr Archer declares that the cuts were little ones...I am not quite convinced of the accuracy of Mr. Archer's memory but I hope he is right, as nothing could strengthen my case more than a demonstration that the cuts which made such an astounding difference were in mere bulk so trifling that it is disingenuous of me to call them cuts at all. The impression produced on me was that about half the first act had been omitted and that the play never really got on its legs after this act of mayhem.[15]

The writer was referring, in fact, to a production of The Wild Duck, but his initial remark may well be significant as far as A Doll's House is concerned. Clearly this play was not cut so heavily, but the fact remains that, through both omission and slanted details of translation, it was a text which had moved some way from Ibsen's original.

I shall now move on to a discussion of the staging of the play, including references to actors as well as those in the audience. Where relevant or specifically helpful to understanding of what was seen and heard, I shall include further references to the play script.

As I said at the beginning of this chapter (c/f pp.37/8), Charles Charrington and his wife Janet Achurch decided to stage A Doll's House, but didn't have enough money. The events leading up to the production are described in the following extract from Shaw's Collected Letters:

> To produce it, the Charringtons had obtained funds for a week's engagement at the Novelty Theatre by signing with Williamson, Garner and Musgrove for two years at £25 a week, and had then mortgaged their salary. Although their Ibsen experiment brought them instant acclaim, they were unable to delay their departure for Australia and the production was withdrawn on June 29th.[16]

In the context of increased awareness of feminism, and an era of change in the theatre, the immediate public reaction to the play in performance is fairly predictable. Clement Scott, a leading theatre critic of the day, described Nora as the "child-wife" who..

> ...gambols like a kitten and munches her macaroons; she fibs and forges. The sensual and egotistical husband treats his Nora exactly like the spoilt baby that she is. The doctor discusses hereditary ailments with coarse frankness and enlarges on the virtues of truffles and oysters. The dramatic letter tumbles into the letter-box, whilst the distracted wife dances her celebrated tarantella and, absolutely true to the original, the baby wife, who has suddenly and miraculously developed into a thinking woman, leaves her home, breaks her marriage oath, refuses to forgive her husband, abandons her innocent children and becomes absolutely inhuman, simply because she discovers her husband is an egotist and that she has been a petted little fool.[17]

Clement Scott was only one voice out of many, too well-known to require further exemplification, who denounced Ibsen through the production of A Doll's House.[18] The contemporary actress Elisabeth Robins was also amongst the audience, and saw the performance through professional eyes:

> The unstagey effect of the whole play (and that must have owed much to Charles Charrington) made it, to eyes that first saw it in 1889, less like a play than like a personal meeting - with people and issues that seized us and held us and wouldn't let us go.[19]

The important thing to note here is the contrast between this view and Scott's. Both were looking *for* (and so, *at*) quite different things. The second extract is part of a lecture given before the Royal Society of Arts, under the auspices of the British Drama League, in March, 1928. Consequently, Miss Robins had had forty years in which to consider and perhaps alter her earlier view of Ibsen. However, the actual performance had clearly left a strong imprint on her memory at a time when she too was seeking to bring about a progressive movement in British drama. Above all, she was to act in Ibsen[20] and to write about her work in his plays. Further, she was later, in the 1890's, to become a leading women's suffrage instigator, to the extent of writing, as well as producing and acting in her own play, *Votes for Women*. It would seem most probable that she sympathised very much with what Janet Achurch was

trying to achieve in the field of women's acting.

The 'unstagey effect' was probably all the more striking in that contemporary audiences were used to more elaborate and even extravagant scenic effects. The sheer naturalism of Ibsen would thus, through mere contrast, have had greater impact and possibly alienating effect; audiences were used to seeing splendid scenery and costumes, so the new drama would have seemed a poor and drab relation. Shaw discusses the new movement away from melodrama in his appendix to the 1891 edition of <u>The Quintessence of Ibsenism</u>, in which he foresaw that future dramatists would be largely influenced by Ibsen; he also puts the Ibsen actresses on the time in the context of a radically changing theatre:

> The women who first ventured upon playing Ibsen heroines were young actresses whose ability had not been fully tested and whose technical apprenticeships were far from complete. Miss Janet Achurch...had not been long enough on the stage to secure a unanimous admission of her genius, though it was of the most irrestible and irrepressible.[21]

Further insight into Janet Achurch's personality is provided here too:

> Miss Elisabeth Robins and Miss Marion Lea ...were, like Miss Achurch...juniors in their profession. All ...were products of the modern movement for the higher education of women, literate, in touch with advanced thoughts, and coming by natural predilection on the stage from outside the theatrical class, in contradistinction to the senior generation of inveterately sentimental actresses, schooled in the old fashion if at all, born into their profession quite out of the political and social movement around them - in short, intellectually naive to the last degree... the old technique breaks down in the new theatre... some of the attempts (to stage Ibsen characters) already made have been so grotesque that at present, when one of the more specifically Ibsenian parts has to be plied, it is actually safer to entrust it to a novice than to a competent and experienced actress.

What Shaw is saying suggests that contemporary attitudes towards the art of acting were too artificial and stereotyped; Ibsenian people are much closer to what we ourselves are like. Consequently, only relatively young, less experienced actresses would be able to display this simplicity.

Apart from Elizabeth Robins, Shaw was among the audience on that particular occasion. Furthermore, he saw the production again three days later and immediately afterwards he wrote to Archer:

> I noticed a good many shortcomings tonight that escaped me before, and that ought to be remedied somehow. The cardinal one is that the situation in the second act is not made clear. The audience does not understand her (Nora's) idea that Helmer will take the forgery on himself. When she exclaims 'He will do it', they don't know what it means. In several places, the piece wants playing up...I am alive to the necessity of perfect diction when an attempt is made of realism in the pitch of conversation. I was in the fourth row of the pit, which is not unreasonably far back, but I lost several lines, and was conscious of a great relief when they spoke out or made their words tell. One unfortunate pittite at last cried out respectfully but imploringly: 'Speak up', and my sympathies were entirely with him. One of the scenes which needs to be brought out is that between Nora and the nurse. Mrs. Linde ...is fading into nothing; and I have come to the conclusion that Krogstad is bad...they are all relapsing into their ordinary stage tricks now that they are at their ease and the strain of the first night is off. Miss Achurch actually bowed to the applause on her entrance, a proceeding which so ruined the illusion - she was the only one who did it - that I have resorted to the "last device" of a coward, an anonymous letter, begging her not to do it again. If she shows it to you - Mum![22]

Shaw's letter comes very close to representing the atmosphere in the auditorium; the comment about Janet Achurch's bowing to the audience shows that clearly she was only too obviously performing rather than acting. One might even say that she expected the audience to watch and admire her performance, rather than attempt to be Nora and interpret her character with honesty and realism.

Janet Achurch was undoubtedly the focal point of the production. In the role of Nora, she received adulation from audience and critics alike. The consensus of opinion was that she gave a powerful performance as an actress despite the doubtful quality of the play; she made her reputation from the role. Clement Scott's analysis of the final scene gives some interesting insight into her performance:

> Nora...determines to cap his (i.e. Helmer's) egotism with her selfishness...Pardon she will not grant, humiliation she will not recognise..The frivolous butterfly..the spoilted plaything...exchanged playfulness for preaching. She forgets all about the eight years' happy married life, forgets the nest of the little bird , forgets her duty, her very instinct as a mother, forgets her responsibilities...It is all self, self, self!....a mass of aggregate conceit and self-sufficience, who leaves her home and deserts her friendless children because she has herself to look after...why should women be bored with the love of their children when they have themselves to study? And so Nora goes out, delivers up her wedding-ring without a sigh, quits her children without a kiss and bangs the door![23]

It seems clear that, since only basically two factors were involved in the portrayal of Nora - Janet Achurch and the words she said, coupled with her stage movements - Clement Scott's reaction must have been based on these, but also on his own prejudices (or, at least, it may have been affected by them).

That Miss Achurch took her career very seriously is reinforced by Shaw's comments:

> ...Miss Janet Achurch...made for herself the opportunity of 'creating' Nora Helmer in England by placing herself in the position virtually of actress-manageress.[24]

Shaw was discussing the problem facing nineteenth century actresses who had yet to acquire the right to tackle any role they wanted without having to remain attached to an actor-manager as "leading-lady" and thus "forfeiting all chance of creating any of the fascinating women's parts which come at intervals of two years from the Ibsen mint."

This may partly account for Miss Achurch's determination to take on the role of Nora and also shed some light on her approach to the part. It was clearly a challenge in a world where women could not normally dominate on stage, yet here was a golden opportunity, the central figure in a controversial new play by a controversial dramatist. It is possible to argue that Miss Achurch took on what she saw as Nora's "cause", in an age when female emancipation was increasingly the topic in all levels of society, and used it to draw attention to her particular talent. If so,

she would want to make the character she portrayed as flamboyant and controversial as possible, as Elizabeth Robins did two years later, when she came to play Hedda Gabler.

It is appropriate at this point to say something about Miss Achurch's background. She was born in Manchester, in 1864, and came from a family with a strong theatrical history. Charles Charrington was her second husband, and she toured the country with him, playing mostly Shakespearean roles but also acting in farce and melodrama.[25] In June, 1888, at the Olympic Theatre, she played Hester Prynne in her husband's production of <u>The Scarlet Letter</u>, an adaptation of Hawthorne's novel made by Edward Aveling.

G.B.Shaw's first meeting with Janet Achurch was at the <u>Doll's House</u> celebration dinner in the saloon of the Novelty Theatre, on June 16th, when he sat next to her and afterwards noted in his diary: "Interesting young woman". On June 17th he wrote to her:

> Just imagine how old and hackneyed one gets at this sort of thing, and then imagine the effect of being suddenly magnetised, irradiated, transported, fired, rejuvenated and bewitched by a wild and glorious young woman who, fortified against all reprisals by a prior attachment, simply amused herself by ruthless and careless manslaughter...[26]

Miss Achurch had apparently little sympathy or respect for censorship laws in England, as the following event shows. In 1899, she wanted to take a major part in the play <u>La Tentation</u>, by Octave Feuillet. The censor would only pass the play for staging if the words "I sinned but intention" were introduced into her dialogue. (The plot concerns a married woman who had been guilty of an indiscretion in her early life.) Janet Achurch agreed to this condition, but every night during the performance she remarked confidentially to the orchestra conductor: "I sinned but in intention".

She seems to have had a fiery, impetuous and impatient personality. Herbert Swears, in his (mostly) autobiographical <u>When All's Said and Done</u>, refers to an occasion when he worked with her; he was played the part of the priest in Gilbert Murray's <u>Andromache</u>:

> My first entrance was made from a rostrum backstage and in order to reach it, I had to climb a ladder. What with long robes...my movements were severely hampered. My extreme deliberation exasperated Janet Achurch who followed behind; 'Hurry up, for God's sake, you damned old misery!' she growled.
>
> She was a brilliant actress but physically it has to be admitted, she was unsuited to the part (of Helen, Queen of Sparta) and the audience seemed to find the repeated references to her great beauty slightly disconcerting.[27]

Though very conscious of her theatricality (c/f p.54, above), Janet Achurch may in one sense have hardly been acting at all - she was perhaps being herself on stage. When she appeared again as Nora, at the Globe in 1897, Archer wrote:

> Many people thought that Miss Achurch's performance in last week's revival...by the Independent Theatre was the finest she had ever given. Perhaps it was, but I must own to a rooted prejudice in favour of the old Nora, the Nora of 1889...in the last act, there were some admirable passages in which the Nora of the Novelty lived again. In the first act, at the moment when Nora realises that Krogstad has discovered the forgery, I thought...but surely my ears deceived me - that Miss Achurch gave a long, low whistle. Seriously, the thing seems impossible, and I shall be more relieved than surprised to learn that I was mistaken. If not - if Miss Achurch has deliberately selected that method of interpreting Nora's emotion - let me beg her to reconsider the point.[28]

Clearly, Archer is uncertain about Nora's "long, low whistle", but not so much that he decided to ignore it. Other personality traits in Janet Achurch can be seen to confirm the probability that what Archer heard was indeed a "long, low whistle" and give further, significant insight into her interpretation of the part of Nora and its consequent meaning for that 1889 audience. Archer went on to say:

> In the old days (i.e. the 1889 production), Nora's first scene with Krogstad had a wonderful naivete: her youthful unsympathetic contempt for him, her certainty that his effort to make a serious business of the forgery was mere vulgarity, her utter repudiation of the notion that there could be any comparison between his case and hers, were expressed to perfection...Helmer's "squirrel" still dances blithely, sings unmercifully and wears reckless garments at which the modish occupants of the stalls stare in scandal and consternation (and which, by the way, are impossible for a snobbish bank manager's wife).[49]

By the process of comparison, we may infer that the 1889 production depicted Nora as feeling "youthful contempt" for Krogstad, dancing "blithely", singing "unmercifully" and dressing in "reckless garments". All of these descriptions together give a remarkable picture of Janet Achurch as Nora, an 1889 woman of her time - or perhaps ahead of her time - flaunting convention and extremely selfish. It is hard to see how the text could reinforce such an interpretation entirely.

Shortly after the one week run, she was interviewed for a magazine, and described the tremendous strain involved in playing the part:

> It is the hardest part I have ever played. Nora is never off the stage for a single moment during the whole of the first and second acts, and in the third act she is only absent for five minutes. The part is heavier than that of Hamlet and to go through it eight times a week is too great a strain....We had a morning performance every Wednesday and Saturday.[29]

The production was later taken on tour to Australia, so Janet Achurch had plenty of time to become accustomed to the part.

> After Nora, I think on the whole I prefer Lady Macbeth. But Nora is a wonderful conception into the realisation of which one can throw one's whole soul...Ibsen leaves one to form their own idea as to the sequel of his play. It is left an interrogation which everyone can answer as he pleases. I think she will come back after a time and try again the experiment of living with Helmer. But it will fail. That man is impossible, utterly impossible. She did right to leave him.

Miss Achurch was asked about her views on Nora leaving her children. She disapproved, but added:

> ....you should remember that it was partly for the sake of the children she went away. She felt herself so utterly unworthy of undertaking their education, and she left them in the hands of a very good nurse...the moral is plain enough. For men the play can hardly be accused of being anything but good. To open their eyes to the consequences of ignoring the moral and intellectual nature of the human being with whom they have allied themselves is surely excellent. For the women, if I may judge from the letters I have received, it has been also useful, nor do I think that it will tend, as some say, to more easy divorce and reckless abandonment of home. What it ought to do is to make them much less reckless about marrying, but by showing that a plunge into matrimony in the mere fever of taste or common interest in the

> a serious work of art, is to prepare for yourself
> a terrible awakening.

Clearly, Janet Achurch was an intelligent woman and much of what she said concerning women and marriage is still relevant today. However, her portrayal of Nora seems to have been a curious mixture of melodrama, social comment and feminism. There is consequently a strong argument to suggest that the Nora of 1889 was presented through rather prejudiced eyes.

Janet Achurch may well have been England's first woman producer. In 1889, she took over the management of the Novelty Theatre and apparently "sought to offer at matinees, some plays not popular enough to meet the demands of audiences who went to the theatre in the evening..."[30] A playbill of Sydney Olivier's Mrs. Maxwell's Marriage - "a domestic drama in four acts" - bears the statement:

> "... produced under the direction of Janet Achurch".[31]

Other than the well-known partnership of Elizabeth Robins and Marion Lea over the production of Hedda Gabler, in 1891, there appears to be no evidence of any earlier or contemporary women producers. It could be concluded that Janet Achurch was something of a pioneer in this field; it follows that her interest in the theatre was an unusually dominant one for her period.

Later, following the short-lived success of Grein's Independent Theatre (and I shall return to this in the next chapter), Janet Achurch was closely associated with the Stage Society, established in 1899. Allardyce Nicoll refers to this and also to "Janet Achurch's Independent Theatre Company", which produced G.B.Shaw's Candida on provincial tours in 1897. Again, this is a play with a strong female protagonist which, one would assume, would appeal to Janet Achurch.

Having considered as closely as possible Janet Achurch's thoughts about the character of Nora, it would be helpful, at this stage, to look further at her through the eyes of one or two members of that 1889 audience. Earlier (c/f p.52 above), I mentioned Elisabeth Robins, later (1891) to play Hedda Gabler, who was clearly strongly influenced by Janet Achurch's performance:

> ...at least three actresses: Janet Achurch, Marion Lea and myself, plus I don't know how many more,...were to be affected by that day's happening. I do not know whether I had ever heard Ibsen's name till the afternoon when I went with my friend Marion Lea to see her friend act A Doll's House.
>
> I cannot think such an experience was ever ushered in with so little warning. There was not a hint in the pokey, dingy theatre, in the sparse, rather dingy audience, that we were on the threshold of an event that was to change to many lives and literatures. The Nora of that day must have been one of the earliest exceptions - she was the first I ever saw - to the rule that an actress invariably comes on in new clothes, unless she is playing a beggar. This Nora, with her home-made fur cap on her fair hair, wore the clothes of Ibsen's Nora, almost shabby with a touch of prettiness.
>
> I never knew before or since anybody strike so surely the note of gaiety and homeliness as Janet Achurch did in that first scene. You saw her biting into one of the forbidden macaroons, white teeth flashing, blue eyes full of roguery, her entire wesen inviting you to share that confidence in life that was so near shipwreck.[32]

The picture she thus creates of Nora seems remarkably close to Ibsen's idea of her - at least as far as one can judge. The home-made fur cap combines two qualities which one would expect her to possess: economy (it's cheaper to make one's own clothes) and warm, soft femininity. Again the image of the squirrel is reflected here and one can see what a very apt comparison Ibsen was making between her and the frugal but warm, vital creature. It is, of course, hard to see how anyone could tell that the cap was home-made, but the idea behind the thought is valuable in itself. However, the description does not entirely match what William Archer said (c/f p. 57 above) concerning Janet Achurch's "reckless garments". This will not be the only instance of conflicting views on the same occasion and I shall return to this later.

The Novelty Theatre production appeared at the height of the British stage's actor-manager period. Charles Charrington was both actor in A Doll's House and, nominally, manager - although, as I have just suggested, there is evidence to suggest that this was either undertaken by Janet Achurch or handled in partnership. Whoever it was, however, he or she had complete control over the staging itself. With presumably complete freedom to take any role which appealed to him, Mr. Charrington chose to play Dr. Rank, a part in which Shaw, at any rate, thought..."photographically, you look too young to inspire confidence as a medical man, though you look responsible enough on the stage.."[33] In his letter to Charles Charrington, several years later, Shaw, while discussing the possibility of Charrington played Morell in Candida, felt there was a serious danger of miscasting:

> The Doll's House was all right when you played Rank the Unfortunate. It was all wrong when you played Helmer the Smug and Self-Satisfied. Now Morell is really nothing but Helmer getting fair play.

Charrington took on the role of Helmer when the production toured Australia immediately after London. Originally, Torvald was played by Herbert Waring, a better known actor then.

There are three reasons why Charrington seems particularly important in any discussion of London's first production of the play. Firstly, as co-producer with Janet Achurch, his wife, he managed, despite tremendous financial difficulties, actually to stage the play; secondly, as manager, during the days when artistic directors had not even been dreamed of, he came closest to seeing his own interpretation produced - or, at any rate, his and his wife's interpretation, assuming they agreed; thirdly, his quality and talent as an actor affected the way Dr. Rank came over to the audience. Unfortunately, there is little evidence specifically on the first two, other than is what is reflected generally.

However, there are some eye-witness accounts of his ability as an actor. In his book of reminiscences, Herbert Swears recalls the following:

> Charles Charrington was a poorish actor with a passion for the stage. He would rather have starved as an actor than made a fortune in any other way. He did in fact relinquish a valuebàe appointment in India to join the profession. He had plenty of intelligence but a pernickety way of talking. Thus 'Nihilist' would become 'Nye-hill-east' on his lips. His elocutionary method was the precurser of the Oxford accent, and we all know how tiresome that can be...[34]

Further insight into Charrington's performance as Rank can be gained from Shaw's Our Theatre in the Nineties, where the author, having just seen a production of the play at the Globe Theatre, May 10th, 1897, makes some interesting comparisons; the production shared the same cast, in the main, as the 1889 production.

> Dr. Rank, too, with his rickets and his scrofula, no longer an example, like Herod, of the wrath of God, or a curiosity to be stared at as villagers stare at a sheep with two heads...Mr. Charrington's Rank, always an admirable performance, is now better than ever. But it is also sterner and harder to bear. He has very perceptibly increased the horror of the part by a few touches which bring and keep his despair and doom more vividly before the audience, and he no longer sotens his final exit by the sentimental business of snatching Nora's handkerchief.[35]

The moment to which Shaw is evidently referring is the one captured by the photograph in Appendix p109 (no. 5) It would appear that Charrington took this opportunity to "snatch" Nora's handkerchief, presumably immediately after the point at which the photograph was taken, and when Rank is taking his final farewell of Nora and Helmer in the knowledge that he hasn't much longer to live.

Another source which provides insight into Charrington's portrayal of Rank occurs in Clement Scott's unsigned review of the production, in The Daily Telegraph:

> The doctor discusses his hereditary ailments with coarse frankness, and enlarges on the virtues of truffles and oysters...[36]

The character of Dr. Rank was severely affected by William Archer's alterations to the play script. The following extract occurs only in Archer's translation and not in the BM MS:

> ...Miserable
> ...I don't know whether, in your part of the country, you have people who go grubbing and sniffing around in search of moral rottenness - and then. when they have found a "case", don't rest till they have got their man into some good

The scene which one might expect to attract attention, often known as the "tarantella" scene, drew some interesting comments. Elizabeth Robins evidently enjoyed the scene, though her opinion changed later:

> ...I didn't even feel on that first occasion, as I did later, that the Tarantella dance was, from the point of view of the theatre, somehow a mistake.[39]

In a letter to Charrington, Shaw refers to a collection of photographs of the production which belonged to Archer, some of which were included in the published translation of the play:

> ...the photographs published, though not ill-selected, are not those I would have chosen. Archer has a frameful on his wall. One of them, Nora holding the tambourine aloft, has a touch of the woman at her completest and noblest.[40,41]

this complete incomprehension of Nora's feelings at this particular moment does, I feel, capture the mood and tone of the 1889 production.

References to Chapter Two

1. Patricia Stubbs, Women and Fiction (London, 1979), pp.6-7
2. There are numerous books on the subject of feminism. Examples include Constance Rover, Women's Suffrage and Party Politics in Britain (London, 1967), J.S.Mill, The Subjection of Women (London, 1869), Betty Friedan, The Feminine Mystique (New York, 1964), Sheila Rowbotham, Woman's Consciousness, Man's World (London, 1973)etc.
3. Edward Aveling was already married, although separated from his wife. In 1884, he and Eleanor Marx established a home together. Further information can be found in Eleanor Marx: VolII The Crowded Years 1884-98 (Yvonne Knapp) Lpndon, 1976.
4. Ibid. p, 103.
5. Charles Archer, William Archer (London, 1931), p.167.
6. Henrik Ibsen, Nora (translated by Henrietta Frances Lord, London, 1882).
7. It is perhaps unfortunate that when Frances Lord's translation, was published, William Archer was less than flattering in his comments. In Academy, 6th January 1883, and an article called Two Dramas by Ibsen, Archer accused Miss Lord of having "neither a perfect knowledge of Norwegian nor a thorough mastery of English, so that she has perpetrated several mistranslations, while she fails throughout to reproduce the crispness and spontaneity of the dialogue".
8. (From the introduction of) A Doll's House (translated by William Archer, London, 1889).
9. Department of Manuscripts, No. 109.
10. William Archer, in a letter to his brother Charles, dated May 31st 1889.
11. The Oxford Ibsen V, 206.
12. Archer's translation is similar to the British Museum playscript. This passage occurs on P.3, in the first act of the latter and from now on I shall use the abbreviation BM MS, followed by the number of the act and the page. This is necessary as each act is separately paginated.
12. Archer's published translation (London, 1889), p.7. From now on, I shall use the abbreviation 'W.A.' and will in fact be using the reprinted version of this translation, published as part of The Works of Henrik Ibsen, 12 vols., V. vll, p.7, since the original edition is out of print.
13. A comparatively minor difference in translation occurs in the scene between Torvald and Mrs. Linde. According to the BM MS, Mrs. Linde is advised by Torvald to take up "crochet".. "because it's so much prettier. Look now! You hold the crochet work in the left hand so, and then work the needle with the right hand in a long, easy curve, don't you? (3.6) Both Archer and McFarlane give the rendering of "embroidery", which is clearly what Ibsen intended. In any case, there is nothing particularly graceful in the art of crochet, whereas embroidery could be seen to be so, and this matters inasmuch as Torvald dislikes anything ugly and therefore, one assumes, likes beautiful things around him.
14. Frances Lord translation, p. 74.

15. Unsigned article in The Nation (London, September,1919),p.129.
16. Daniel H. Laurence, ed., Shaw's Collected Letters, 1874-97, (London, 1965), pp.215-6)
17. Clement Scott, a review of A Doll's House, The Daily Telegraph, (London, June, 1889).
18. Forthe most readily available collection of reviews and reactions, see Ibsen: The Critical Heritage, ed. Michael Egan (London, 1972).
19. Elisabeth Robins, Ibsen and the Actress (London, 1928).
20. Miss Robins was the first Hedda Gabler on the London stage (1891).
21. G.B. Shaw, The Quintessence of Ibsenism (London, 1922).
38. Shaw's Collected Letters, p. 214.
39 G.B.Shaw, Theatre (London, July 1889), pp. 19-22.
24. G.B.Shaw, Shaw on the Theatre, ed. E.J.West (London, 1958) p,52.
25. Who's Who in the Theatre, (London, 1947).
26. Shaw: Collected Letters pp. 215-6.
27. Herbert Swears, When All's Said and Done (London, 1937).
28. William Archer, The Manchester Guardian (1897).
29. Janet Achurch interview
30. Allardyce Nicoll, English Drama 1900-1930 (London, 1973),pp.51-2.
31. British Library ofRegister of Playbills and Programmes. Play produced at the Prince of Wales Theatre, January, 1900.
32. Ibsen and the Actress, pp. 10-11.
33. Shaw: Collected Letters.
34. When All's Said and Done.
35. G.B.Shaw, Our Theatre in the Nineties, Vol.1, p.132.
36. Clement Scott review, The Daily Telegraph.
37. Ibsen and the Actress
38. R.K. Hervey, The Theatre (London, 1889), pp.40-41.
39. Ibsen and the Actress.
40. Shaw: Collected Letters.
41. c/f Appendix, Photograph no.

Chepor Three: the 1930 Production of
A Doll's House

The second production of A Doll's House I have chosen to examine is the one staged in 1930. This particular period is interesting in several ways; firstly, it's approximately half-way between the first production in London and the 1973 production, which I had previously decided to study. Secondly, the actress who played the part of Nora, Gwen Ffrangcon-Davies, was very willing to discuss the part with me; furthermore, she has a phenomenal memory and it seemed probable that she would be able to provide a reasonable amount of first-hand material. Thirdly, it was a year reasonably far from any possible influences of either the First or the Second world wars. (A cast list is provided on p. .)

From the turn of the century onward, the suffrage movement had gained momentum and attention focussed even more widely on the role of women in society. A major world war, followed by the general strike of 1926, a rapidly growing, wider interest in literature and the arts, these and other sociological factors influenced society and consequently those members who provided audiences for the 1930 production of A Doll's House.

Among the major milestones leading up to the point in the twentieth century is the enfranchisement of women, in 1928; shortly after, Virginia Woolf's A Room of One's Own was published and drew attention to women in the literary world, both as characters within fiction and as writers. She makes a particularly pertinent comment:

> No age can ever have been as stridently sex-conscious as our own...the Suffrage campaign was no doubt to blame. It must have roused in men an extraordinary desire for self-assertion; it must have made them lay an emphasis upon their own sex and its characteristics which they would not have troubled to think about had they not been challenged.[1]

A similar idea occurs in Patricia Stubbs' "Women and Fiction, who goes on to discuss what she calls the "new woman":

> ...women who had either won or were fighting for a degree of equality and personal freedom.[2]

Once women were given the right to vote in parliamentary elections,

their next move was to demand equality in terms of wages. "Equal Pay for Equal Work" became a popular slogan. Before this, however, a new law was passed that removed the presumption that a woman who committed a crime in her husband's presence did so under his coercion and this meant that women were now legally recognised as morally responsible persons. There is an obvious relationship between this and Nora's situation in *A Doll's House*. Attitudes towards marriage also changed and again this has significance for Nora's and Torvald's marriage. Thus, the Victorian idea of marriage, involving the "holiest of duties" was no longer extant and Torvald's attitude would be considered extremely outmoded, one to which few contemporaries (of the 1930's, that is) could relate.

Earlier, I referred to the innovatory work of J.T. Grein, both at the turn of the century and even later.[3] His was not the first of what have been called the "new wave of independent theatres";[4] others sprang up in France (the Théâtre Libre of Parish) and Germany (the Freie Bühne of Berlin), and between them the organisations brought more and more Ibsen plays before the public. As many as ten were produced in London during 1928 only.[5] The increase reflected a new interest in Ibsen's work as people began to perceive the relevance of it to their ways of life and their problems.

Grein was later to found the Cosmopolitan Theatre, in fact at the end of 1929. The company opened at the Arts Theatre and the enterprise included the production of several European plays, some of which were performed in their original language. It was at the Arts Theatre that *A Doll's House* was first staged in 1930; after three weeks, however, the production moved to the Criterion and two new actors replaced those in the roles of Dr. Rank and Krogstad.

It would appear to be certain that the translation used for this production was Archer's. According to one source of information, the text had a "conspicuous freshness in the English translation, certain variations having been made in Archer's text which justify themselves throughout and particularly the ease that has been given to the first act".[6]

Another critic refers to "those half-century old words that express even in these cocktail-drinking days of female independence the

point of view of women".[7] The critic here tells us two things: first, that the now familiar relationship between the play and women in society was clearly evident to the public; second, that the language is being seen as out-of-date and to some extent being devalued as a consequence. Clearly, however, the play is being interpreted as a discussion of female independence, still relevant in 1930.

Another obvious reference to alterations in the script was made by the literary critic Ivor Brown:

> A little judicious massage has been applied to the stiff and muscular English of William Archer.[8]

However, some at least of Ibsen's imagery remained intact, since another critic wrote:

> I do wish that such lines as "my little squirrel" could be adapted into English phrases of affection. To my mind, to call a girl a squirrel is a shade more offensive than calling a man a rabbit.[9]

Here, as in the earlier example, Ibsen's language is being questioned; this time, the critic has either missed the significance of the image or chosen to ignore it. Deans presumably spoke for many people and it is consequently hardly surprising that Ibsen was misunderstood in London at this time.

A further, rather oblique, reference to the textual modifications describes "the shedding of time-honoured incrustations of speech and manner".[10] Perhaps, however, this refers more to the way in which the actors spoke, rather than what they said, whether it be accurately translated lines in the Archer manner or in any form of adaption of those lines.

The production included the actual appearance of the Helmer children; however, no-one evidently felt strongly enough to comment on this, other than a brief reference to the actors' names. The words of critic Harris Deans are significant:

> I have seen one or two Noras, but happily for me, I forget easily....Ibsen on the stage has always disappointed me. I visualised his characters on the stage as much more normal persons than those I finally saw.[11]

This suggests quite strongly that producers and/or actors tended to present Ibsen characters as artificial, false, "larger-than-life" people. It is perhaps not surprising that a dramatist whose created human beings were mostly depicted as theatrically unreal should have aroused mixed reactions.

I shall now move on to a discussion of the role of Nora as seen and played in 1930. Gwen Ffrangcon-Davies still has very positive views on Nora, whom she played at both the Arts and the Criterion Theatres:

> Women were not treated as individuals in the past. Nora went from one father-figure to another and any ideas she had of her own were discounted. Even the experience of childbirth, which you would have thought might have shaken her up a bit - well, you had none of that sort of relationship. So she lived very much a doll's existence. It doesn't occur to her that doing things on the sly is dishonest; Torvald getting very ill and the possibility that he is going to die shakes her into a sort of adulthood, but she's still very immature. It never occurs to her that forgery is wrong - her husband's life is paramount. When she's faced with paying back the money, she steals, lies, lives a life of deception. She cherishes her secret until she confides in her friend Kristine - three absolutely awful days of crucifixion. Just imagine what she must have felt like, lying sleepless beside Torvald for three nights...the feverish and hysterical state of mind.[12]

There is a clear awareness here of the humanity of a character. Miss Ffrangcon-Davies is (and was) acutely concerned at the plight Nora is in and her thoughts about the character seem to have been reflected in her performance. Generally, critics enjoyed her lively yet child-like naivete in the early scenes, which conveyed a gradual awareness of the effects of experience, of living in a wider social context than she had occupied at first.

A major difficulty confronting the actress at this time, according to critics, was how much of the depth of character revealed by Nora at the end of the play should be implied during the early scenes:

> One of the chief problems that confront the actress who is to play this part is how to reconcile the pretty imbecile of the first two acts with the rational human being of the last.[13]

And another:

> The early Nora is a fluttering, silly child; it is necessary that this aspect of her should be emphasised for the sake of contrast with what is to follow, but Nora's main actions at this time carry their own

emphasis, and to dandle them - and particularly her begging for money - with overmuch prettiness is to be in danger of letting Nora's character swing too far from the truth that is to come.[14]

If any sense of character growth or change is to be revealed to the audience, the actress playing Nora must, as the second critic has said, show her to be a frivolous, even immature woman at the beginning of the play (and selfish she remains, one may say). Nevertheless, if she is to be realistic and credible to the audience, some hint of potential depths is essential. Another critic commented that Gwen Ffrangcon-Davies..

> ...can never help giving the impression of intelligence, which informs every expression and gesture in her remarkable range, but she did not manage to make us feel that Nora's intelligence was in abeyance.[15]

However, the same critic felt that she gave "an impression of dormant powers in the earlier Nora".

What is being said here is that there is a difference between intelligence and "dormant powers" and that this is evident in the way Miss Ffrangcon-Davies behaved on stage; at first, he refers to the actress "giving the impression of intelligence" and then that she was unable to show "Nora's intelligence...in abeyance". One assumes that he is able to differentiate between the two; if not, the remarks rather contradict each other. A further piece of evidence occurs in a review by Harris Deans:

> ..a petted and spoiled darling to sit on one's knees and be fed with lollipops (though it is true the egregious Torvald refused her the sweetmeats for fear they spoilt her teeth!). Miss Ffrangcon-Davies played her on these lines for the first act, with just now and then a glimpse of something harder, or if you will, finer beneath the surface. Here was the very baby-faced, featherbrained woman who would do almost anything to avoid a scene with her husband. Yet the woman who sat for long nights earning money by copying, without her husband's knowledge, was also there.

It would seem that the essential child-like playfulness in Nora, during the early moments of the play, was clearly presented by Gwen Ffrangcon-Davies, with some implication of the innate ability to change and develop a personality of greater depth. The actress herself feels that the manner in which Nora apparently changes is unrealistic

> I have always felt that such a transformation could not happen instantly. Any woman who has loved and idolised her children as Nora does can't actually go away and in less than a quarter of an hour, say, "I'm not coming back". I do not think that any psychologist would admit that this could happen so quickly. She might have found she was going to live with Kristine for a while.

This comment suggests that Miss Ffrangcon-Davies is not fully aware of, or has forgotten, the underlying conflict in Nora and here I would refer back to my opening chapter and the discussion of the relationship between Nora and her children. (c/f p.32) If Nora were to do as Miss Ffrangcon-Davies suggests and stay with Mrs. Linde for a while, she would only be shelving the problem rather than confronting it. It is also implicit in Miss Ffrangcon-Davies' words that Nora herself would suffer by leaving her children; the actress herself does not regard Nora's action as that of abandoning her children. There is an interesting comparison to be made here between Miss Ffrangcon-Davies' view and that of Janet Achurch (c/f p.58). While the former feels that Nora couldn't leave her children for very long, the latter disapproves of the act on but believes it to be carried out on moral grounds: Nora feels "unworthy of undertaking their education".

Like Janet Achurch, Gwen Ffrangcon-Davies played several Shakespearean roles, including Ophelia in the Haymarket Theatre production of Hamlet. She also played the title role of Sudermann's Magda in the original German. This production was part of Grein's policy of bringing to the London stage a wide variety of interesting plays from as many different places as possible and retaining them in their original languages. W.A. Darlington, in a review of Hamlet, said:

> Miss Gwen Ffrangcon-Davies's Ophelia was chiefly notable for a brilliantly played mad scene.[21]

(Unfortunately, no comment was made on the fact that Herbert Waring (who played the part of Torvald in the 1889 production - c/f p.) played Polonius in the same production.

A few days later, Mr. Darlington reviewed Miss Ffrangcon-Davies' other contemporary performances:

> She has played Ibsen's Nora, Shakespeare's Ophelia and Sudermann's Magda at intervals so short that she obviously must have been rehearsing the three parts simultaneously...Her Nora was first-rate; her Ophelia, though not specially outstanding in the earlier partof

> the play, worked up to a superbly handled mad scene; and if her Magda is not quite so fine an achievement as the other two, that is because she refused to theatricalise the part. The fact is, Magda is not so much a real character as an excuse for a famous actress to let herself rip. This woman is not alive in the sense in which Nora and Ophelia are alive; consequently, if you bring her quietly to life and make her real, as Miss Ffrangcon-Davies did yesterday, you simply underline the fact that Sudermann as a dramatist is not in the same rank as Shakespeare and Ibsen.[18]

The most significant comment here suggests that Miss Ffrangcon-Davies was probably rehearsing Ophelia and Nora simultaneously, and the scene which drew the most attention, from the critics' viewpoint, is what they called the "mad scene" in Hamlet. It might be worth bearing in mind, also, that she played Lady Macbeth only a few weeks earlier. (Unfortunately, as this was a production by the Oxford University Dramatic Society, there is no critical comment of it in the national press - so far as I have been able to ascertain.) There are obvious points of comparison between these three important theatrical ladies. Perhaps the most interesting one is that each experiences violent emotional upheavals; but whereas Lady Macbeth reacts by walking, and talking, in her sleep, and Ophelia has her mad scenes, followed by death by drowning, Nora at her most highly emotional moment reacts by dancing the tarantella in a frenzied manner. (I shall return to the discussion of this scene later. See p. below) It is conceivable that Miss Ffrangcon-Davies brought something of both Shakespearean ladies into the interpretation of Nora. (Again, this is a point which will be taken up later, in the discussion of the 1973 production.)

The actor who played Torvald, Henry Oscar, also directed the production. He had had a fairly impressive career, which led to his becoming drama director of E.N.S.A. in the years between 1939 and 1945, and thus responsible for all the dramatic entertainment in the armed forces; later, he became more interested in film work and finally took over the sound effects department at the B.B.C. Despite this, however, surprisingly little information is available about him. He is mentioned briefly in Who's Who in the Theatre as having played a number of important roles. His performance as Torvald was appreciated by the critics:

> Henry Oscar was an excellent Torvald...(This is) a difficult part. It is almost impossible to speak some of the lines without getting a laugh from some of the Torvalds in the audience - for the greater

> the Torvald, the more sublimely one is unconscious of the fact. Yet he did make this smug, hypocritical prig a likeable person.[19]

Another critic saw Torvald as "that archetype of all prigs" but had the impression that "he had not been able to bring himself to believe Krogstad".[20] This is a most interesting comment and, since Torvald and Krogstad never meet during the course of the play, on-stage at any rate (for they do meet off-stage), it must be assumed that the critic is referring to that moment towards the end, when Torvald receives and reads Krogstad's letter. But if he doesn't believe Krogstad, as is implied by the reviewer, it makes nonsense of the ending: he would presumably discount anything said about Nora in the letter and that would be the end. Of course, it is possible that the critic is merely referring to Krogstad's past "crime", but this isn't made at all clear.

A further passing but significant comment about Torvald is:

> (Henry Oscar) makes too much at first of Torvald's uxorious tricks...

It is the choice of adjective "uxorious" that is so striking; clearly, the critic is saying that Torvald is excessively fond of his wife and that the actor puts too much emphasis on this at the beginning of the play. In this case, the audience would receive the impression that Torvald , to some extent, allows Nora to dominate him - at least, during the early scenes. It is rather difficult to reconcile this view with that of Harris Deans' "petted and spoiled darling"[16] which also occurred during the early part of the play. However, it may be that Nora was able to dominate Torvald by the use of guiles and child-like tricks, and this is not altogether improbable.

Miss Ffrangcon-Davies sees Torvald quite clearly:

> He's a very successful bank manager, absolutely conventional, very dully laying down the law but with a charming manner. Such a nice man. I think he should always be allowed his share of charm.

In my first chapter, I discussed the different ways in which Torvald might be seen by an audience; more specifically, I referred to the ambiguity of this character; is he imprisoner or protector to Nora? (The apparently non-existent relationship, other than that of blood, between Torvald and the children, does not seem to have

aroused any interest in directors, actors or critics.) Harris Deans clearly went to watch the play with clear-cut preconceptions about Torvald, to whom he refers in his review as "this smug hypocritical prig".[16] The Times critic had similar preconceptions; for him, Torvald was in fact "that archetype of all prigs".[20] Miss Ffrangcon-Davies sees - and saw - him as "absolutely conventional, very dull, laying down the law", but she also felt that he should be given something to soften this impression - "his share of charm". There should also, surely, be an element of self-pride, pomposity, something at any rate to which Nora could appeal. How else would she know that an appeal for his help in rehearsing her tarantella would be so successful? Although the 1930 conception of Torvald seems to be generally that of a rather dull, unimaginative man, the notion of a "prig" does at least comply with this idea of self-pride.

It seems fairly evident that Henry Oscar played Torvald in a rather conventional, possibly even boring manner and perhaps it is this rather passive, or even negative approach which, by its contrast with Gwen Ffrangcon-Davies' rather likeable, intelligent potrayal of Nora, played a major part in the overall impact of the production. Here, too, was a fine example of what Patricia Stubbs called "the new woman" (c/f p.66 and reference). Once again, not only did Ibsen's play contribute to the increasingly influential literature and drama of the period, it in turn was influenced by the social context in which it was seen.

The production began at the Arts Theatre and later moved to the Criterion, where different actors took over the roles of Krogstad and Dr. Rank. I shall first discuss the role of Krogstad.

Frederick Lloyd drew very little of the critics' attention, in the Arts Theatre production, compared with his successor, Henry Hallatt, at the Criterion. Lloyd had, in fact, played Krogstad earlier, in 1925. A somewhat surprising comment was made, by the critic of Stage, about the performance:

> Mr. Lloyd is notably good and truly convincing in the scenes of explanation of Nora's legal position.[21]

Despite an exhaustive search, I have been able to find few comments about Lloyd in the 1930 production; these include "..a cast-iron Krogstad"[20] and "..a genuinely impressive Krogstad" . Probably the more significant comment of the two is the first, which suggests a strong, impassive and quite cold man, which cannot be entirely supported by the text. As I have suggested earlier (see p.), the lines spoken by Krogstad which seem to condemn him as a heartless blackmailer are offset by other lines and also by reference to his past suffering. One would assume that the 1930 production played the second aspect down and put more emphasis on the first part. The fact that the character was virtually ignored, when played by Lloyd, suggests that the performance was in itself insignificant, neither very good nor very bad. However, Henry Hallatt took over the role at the Criterion Theatre and the critics took much more notice of him:

> ....Nils Krogstad made a dark and sinister man indeed... played with menacing impressiveness by Mr. Hallatt.[20]

> ..(Hallatt) endows Krogstad with a Satanic,basso-profundo..exotic and sinister Krogstad.

I have found only two critics who appear to have thought more carefully about him:

> It is customary ...to make Krogstad resemble the evil genius of Bolshevism, but, after all, he is only a clerk in trouble.

Another commented that Mr. Hallatt "had the air of a Demon King" [2] while a further saw him, as presented by Henry Hallatt, as "..a sinister yet surprisingly human Nils Krogstad" played "in a quietly forceful manner".[2] (It is rare indeed to find Krogstad being given his full name. Christian names have a softening effect but this is rarely applied to Krogstad). The comment "surprisingly human" says much about general opinion of the character. Miss Ffrangcon-Davies didn't remember very much about him:

> He's obviously very much the villain of the piece, a recurring figure in Ibsen. Obviously, he has a point of view, but he's mainly there as part of Ibsen's jig-saw puzzle: cause and effect, a brilliant social tract.

Hallatt had acted in various other plays, most frequently as unpleasant characters, what one might call "villains". Among his roles at this time were Blind Pew in Treasure Island (R.L.Stevenson), Karl Marx in Space Time Inn and, immediately prior to A Doll's House, Henry Frankenstein.

> Mr. Henry Hallatt acted with great conviction as Frankenstein, the young scientist who created a man in his own image and it was a pleasure to see a melodramatic part acted for all it was worth.

It seems apparent that at least some members of the 1930 society were beginning to think more carefully about Krogstad; he had now become "surprisingly human" and "quietly forceful". Already, though, what is now commonly called type-casting had affected Henry Hallatt, at least; thus, when he came to play the role of Krogstad, his associations with unpleasant characters came with him.

The first of the two actors to play Dr. Rank in the 1930 production was Harcourt Williams, subsequently a very well-known actor. One critic commented that he brought "grace and tenderness" to the part, while another declared:

> ...Mr. Harcourt Williams saves that pathological sentimentalist, Dr. Rank, from being a bore..

Williams played the role of Dr. Rank in at least three productions and so there are reviews spanning several years of his performances. The character of Dr. Rank rarely seems to attract much of the critics' attention, but there are some pertinent comments:

> Harcourt Williams...plays Dr. Rank with his usual touch of queer quality...

> ..Mr. H.Harcourt Williams in his poignantly pathetic assumption of the man dying of consumption of the spine...Rank's avowal of love long repressed..

> Harcourt Williams ..gives dignity and a touch of horror to the part...

(These comments refer to the 1925 production at the Playhouse)

> ..a finely drawn sketch exhibited by Mr. Harcourt Williams with sensitive restraint....

> ...Mr. Harcourt Williams, as Rank, imparted gleams of fantasy to the moribund man's picture of the black hat that would make him invisible.

The actor who played Dr. Rank at the Criterion Theatre was Vernon Sylvaine, and the critics rather favoured him:

> (Vernon Sylvaine as) the tragic Dr. Rank...brings pathos to a part which somehow or other is undisturbingly drawn..

Interestingly, another critic saw that the manner in which Henry Hallatt played Krogstad strongly influenced Vernon Sylvaine's performance:

> ..Mr. Vernon Sylvaine, perhaps by sheer force of contrast, seeks to play Dr. Rank a shade too quietly.

An interesting implication of this comment is that, in the inter-relationship between characters, when one starts to dominate, the other is in danger of being suppressed. In this case, it could mean that in the "stockings" scene, Nora controls or rather dominates Dr. Rank and this I find disturbing. It would mean that Dr. Rank's stature as a man would be diminished and his declaration of love would border on the ridiculous. It would be more acceptable at some times than others; for instance, during Nora's tarantella, Dr. Rank is little more than a spectator and almost all of our attention is focussed on Nora and on Torvald's reactions. But generally such submission or subservience in Dr. Rank in any consistent way would not be convincing. Nevertheless, it would not be difficult to see him as a stereotyped, mournful victim perhaps encountered in melodrama; self-pity would not be out of place in this interpretation, which does agree with his earlier counterpart in 1889. On the other hand, it would be inappropriate to interpret him as a rather strong character, since this could contribute to the weight of goodness against the apparent menace of Krogstad, thus making Nora seem even more vulnerable. A certain amount of balance is required.

Gwen Ffrangcon-Davies sees Dr. Rank as "a very sad and tragic man who has inherited an awful disease. He can't even tell her what it is".

A further significant point is made in the review printed in The Daily Telegraph, where it is stated that Vernon Sylvaine's performance is "in a mannered and too emphatic style that jars in such quiet company." This seems to suggest that Sylvaine's acting style was rather over-stated, whereas the others were quietly realistic. In turn, this would reinforce the idea of Dr. Rank's being only a spectator in the lives of the Helmers; he is an outsider, perhaps even an intruder. However, the 1930 Dr. Rank does not appear to have been very closely related to his 1889 counterpart.

I now wish briefly to discuss the reactions, through available evidence, to three major scenes in the play, as performed in 1930. The first is that often called "the stockings scene". Nora's intentions here, as Gwen Ffrangcon-Davies sees it, were rooted in her personality:

> There is in her a childish quality; a lot of women have this - I know it from my own experience - a love of adulation by men and being desired. It's what happens at first with Rank, but she would never intend to let it go too far. There's no question of her going to bed with him. She's just teasing him with the silk stockings. When he declares himself, her upbringing is shocked. She has a moral code about being Torvald's wife but no moral code about money.

A change in public opinion about propriety and dress was noted by one critic:

> ....these days of short skirts, the once presumably risky scene of Nora's showing Rank her silk stockings has lost its old effect, and hence Mr. Sylvaine could make less of this than of the big black hat passage which foreshadows Rank's retirement into seclusion to die like a stricken animal.[28]

One senses a strange absence, in this version of the scene, of any concern, or preoccupation about Krogstad, blackmail and money within Nora. This is a woman who seems to live for the moment alone, and is apparently quite capable of mentally shelving her earlier anxiety.

The critics were surprisingly not particularly interested in the "tarantella" scene, which suggests that it had little if any impact on the audience. The words of Miss Ffrangcon-Davies do shed some light here:

> I think it's a very theatrical scene. She will do anything, play on his sexual vanity; she doesn't give a damn about the tarantella. She's made up her mind to kill herself and there's no hope for her. The excitement and hysteria build up until the end of the second act and the scene between Kristine and Krogstad. Then we think it's going to be all right. Then - it's as if she's on a bucket of ice. The heated feverishness of the Tarantella has to make a powerful contrast with this. I was never trained as a dancer; still, Nora's only an amateur too. But it was difficult in my costume, a long dress, slight bustle and tight corsets.

The obvious dilemma here for any director is which to give precedence to, clothes suitable for the scene and which will allow the maximum amount of freedom of movement, if the actress is to appear quite uninhibited, or a dress which conforms to the social period. One can readily sympathise with Miss Ffrangcon-Davies.

> The Tarantella is at the back of her mind as the crisis arises; she thinks, 'anything to keep Torvald from looking at his letters, that feverish dance. Cold, cold', she says, and "never to see the children again". The tarantella scene was very difficult to play. The only think I could do with it was to rationalise it.

Since the dance itself is intended to be an outward sign of inner hysteria, whether deliberately feigned by Nora to draw Torvald's attention to her or a true representation of her rising feelings of panic, the last thing one would imagine possible would be a 'rationalisation'. However, Miss Ffrangcon-Davies continued:

> She's a little hysterical but the whole thing was to focus Torvald's attention on her. She's quite controlled enough to formulate the plan, by fair means or foul. The dance is always under her control; it's a deliberate device to make Torvald concentrate all his attention on her.

If this was how the scene was staged, it clearly did not concentrate the audience's (or at least the dramatic critics') attention on the dance and its significance.

The final scene in the 1930 production drew several interesting comments. One of these refers to Henry Oscar's performance as Torvald:

> Mr. Oscar..(gives) a steady, consistent study of Torvald that fails to carry persuasion only in in the extravagant pomposity that Ibsen has imposed on the discovery scene, and Miss Ffrangcon-Davies ...Nora with a beautiful control of emotion and reason to a superb third act.[29]

The main point in this comment is the reference to what the critics calls Ibsen's "extravagant pomposity". This implies that any weakness on the part of the actor playing Torvald is due to the language in the script and not to the actor. Torvald is undoubtedly a little pompous; surely, he must be expected to react with characteristically inflated language?

A further point worth noting is that clearly Miss Ffrangcon-Davies was able to project the illusion that, not only was emotion present, but also that she was in control of it. However, the words of another critic suggest that the control was overdone and there was little sense of inner conflict:

> Nora's apologia before departing should lift the play on to the plane less of rational persuasion than to one of histrionic exaltation.[25]

The criticism is reinforced by the words of another critic:

> The finale is taken very quietly and here, perhaps, Nora does actually dominate too little.[30]

However, yet another critic has a somewhat different point of view:

> Her final confronting of Torvald, her firmness, her restraint, her suggestion of a new vision and new courage, of a womanhood that is born again, give to her performance...brilliant actuality.[29]

It seems hard to reconcile two such opposing views and one is reminded of the subjectivity of dramatic criticism. At times one might be inclined to think that members of an audience see and hear what they want to see and expect to, rather than what they actually do perceive. Miss Ffrangcon-Davies remembers the final moments of the play well:

> It's heart-breaking that instead of the noble hero changing, the miracle that she longs for and dreads at the same time, the feet of clay crumble under him and he becomes what he really is, a petty bourgeouis.

Given these thoughts, it is easy to imagine Nora, in those final moments, behaving very differently from the way she behaved at the beginning; she has received a shock, in that the man she has married and has lived with for eight years is not the man she thought he was. Since her whole world revolved around Torvald and her home and marriage, this would be a shattering experience and it is quite probable that she would seem to mature quickly, behave in a subdued or at least a little sobered manner, a marked contrast from the child-like creature of the earl y part of the play.

Yet Miss Ffrangcon-Davies' words do not really relate very closely to what the critics seem to have seen. The discrepancy may be due to a memory lapse, on her part, or - and again, this is a point that is relevant to the 1973 production and I shall return to it later - there may be a difference between her interpretations of the role and the way she expressed that interpretation on stage.

References to Chapter Three

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2. Patricia Stubbs, Women and Fiction (London, 1979),p.54
3. c/f Chapter 2 (p.37) above.
4. M.Bradbury and J.W.McFarlane, Modernism (London, 1976), p.500.
5. The Oxford Ibsen, V, 487.
6. The Times, 21st March 1930
7. Stage of the Day (review), The Illustrated Sporting and Daily News, Harris Deans, 21st March 1930.
8. The Observer, 23rd March 1030.
9. Harris Deans.
10. Ivor Brown, The Observer (23rd March, 1930.
11. Illustrated Sporting and Dramatic News, Harris Deans, 26th April 1930.
12. Private conversation with Gwen Ffrangcon-Davies, Mrach 1981. Her memory of the production is impressively detailed. I used shorthand in taking down her account and therefore have been able to record her words verbatim.
13. W.A.Darlington, The Daily Telegraph, 21st March, 1930.
14. (Unsigned article) The Times, 21st March 1930.
15. W.A.Darlington.
16. Harris Deans, Illustrated Sporting and Dramatic News, 26th April 1930.
17. W.A.Darlington, The Daily Telegraph, 23rd April 1930.
18. Ibid. 28th April, 1930.
19. Harris Deans.
20. (Unsigned) The Times, March 21st 1930.
21. (Unsigned) The Stage, 26th November 1925.
22. W.A.Darlington.
23. Harris Dens
24. Era, February, 1930.
25. The Observer.
26. Sthe Stage, March 22nd 1930½
27. Theatre World, December 1925.
28. The Stage, April 1930
29. The Times, 21st March 1930
30. Ivor Brown

Chapter Four: The 1973 production of

A Doll's House

> position, where they can keep a watch upon him. Men with a clean bill of health they leave out in the cold. (W.A. p.34)

Rank seems to have lost his symbolic value here, for this speech reflects his function as diagnoser of social ills.

Another eye-witness at the first performance, one to whom I have already referred, was Elisabeth Robins and she had the following to say about Charles Charrington's performance:

> Never, in all his days (had he) played anything so well as that funereal figure. He gave Rank a creepy uncanniness that goes creeping over me even in memory. There was death and the grave in his long dull-coloured face. In the early part of the play Nora's warm bright confidence splintering against that tombstone of a man gave one a chill.[37]

A contemporary periodical, The Illustrated Sporting and Dramatic News, printed a series of cartoons following the production; one of these shows Dr. Rank puffing mournfully at a cigar. The caption describes him as "The dying doctor" (c/f appendix). The contrast between such a person and the, apparently, vivacious and almost coquettish Nora only serves to make her seem even more cruel and callous.

Herbert Waring played Torvald and of his performance it was said:

> Mr. Herbert Waring had completely grasped the idea of Helmer's character and reproduced with life-like fidelity the pitiful Philistinism of the man...[38]

If one looks at the photograph of him as he appeared on the stage (c/f appendix p.106), one can see that the strait-laced sombre suit and frock-coat illustrate effectively the severe, unsmiling and unloving Helmer. Yet this is the man who can call his wife his "little lark" and who can rejoice in the new luxury of financial security. Helmer, like Dr. Rank, seems to have been somewhat unfairly portrayed in the 1889 production; one finds it hard to see why the vivacious Nora was attracted to him in the first place. Was this, then, an arranged marriage? As Shaw saw him, he was played by Charrington as "the Smug and Self-Satisfied"; then as played by Herbert Waring, he seems to have been the archetypal Victorian tyrannical male.

For a further opinion of the production, I have included copies of caricatures of the cast, as printed in The Illustrated Sporting and Dramatic News (June, 1889) [c/f pp. 112-114].

In this chapter, I shall discuss the 1973 production of A Doll's House, a major event in the theatre of London, with several famous actors and theatrical specialists concerned. It opened at the Criterion Theatre in February, 1973, but in fact the production had had its genesis in New York, where it opened in January, 1971. It was the second choice in a scheme to "cross-cast" two plays as vehicles for Claire Bloom. The impressario Hillard Elkins was at that time married to Claire Bloom and it had already been decided that Hedda Gabler should be the main production. Patrick Garland was asked to direct it and also to select a second play. Aware of the increasing interest in the United States of feminism, he chose A Doll's House as being, in his own words, "peculiarly apposite".[1] To those involved in the production, the play seemed, I am told, remarkably and totally modern, as fresh as if it had only just been written. After its success in America, the production was brought to London, using the same set, costumes, script, props etc. Claire Bloom was the only member of the cast to remain with the production, but Patrick Garland continued to direct the play. Thus it is appropriate to continue this section of my thesis with further details of the New York production.

John Bury, now chief set designer at the National Theatre, was asked to design the set and, although he had never worked before with Patrick Garland, the two men had compatible views about the play, Mr. Garland merely saying that he wanted a "straight revival" production, by which he meant not out of its original period. The design of the sets was left entirely in John Bury's hands.

Mr. Bury had the unusual problem of planning a set for a converted Greek orthodox church, in the initial American production, and this meant that the stage had an arch which was unusually deep: i.e. the apse at the back curved towards the rear of the stage. Thus, the final set was comparatively narrow but deep, whereas in London, the Criterion Theatre stage is the conventional proscenium, quite wide but not very deep. The set merely had to be condensed in terms of depth and slightly widened for the London production (Mr. Bury very kindly drew two diagrams to illustrate this and these are to be found in the appendix on p. 115). There were no other significant problems in the transferral of the set and production to the London stage and consequently the remainder of this discussion will concern the production as London audiences saw it in 1973.

John Bury[2] started with the basic points of the set: five doors. Of these, the most important were two in the middle of the stage: to the left a door leading to Torvald's study, through which it would be possible to see a desk, comfortable chair and a green lamp; to the right of the centre, the door leading into the hall and, beyond that, a view of the front door, which had to have a letter-box which is clearly visible. The overall impression presented to the audience had to be that of a very comfortable home, a little threadbare in places, such as the carpet and curtains, but a well-cared for home. Tablecloths were "like Granny's": white and beautifully ironed but slightly yellowed at the edges. The principle here was that Nora is revealed to be a home-loving, frugal "squirrel", compatible with Ibsen's original metaphor. In keeping with the period and original setting, John Bury chose Norwegian panelling for the walls, a point noted by London critics as "an admirably weathered, mottled pinewood set".[3] With the addition of a "log fire", rocking-chair and foot-stool, a comfortable sofa and a piano, an overall impression of warmth, comfort, an appreciation of the finer things of life was aimed for. This illustrates the interpretation of Nora's and Torvald's home as apparently secure, unthreatened and reasonably financially secure.

Lighting was specifically important since no daylight scenes were involved. It was decided that even at the beginning of Act Two, which is set during the day, since midwinter in Norway means little daylight at all, lamps would be necessary and these were controlled so that lighting, even of a realistic kind, could be brightened or dimmed according to Ibsen's original stage directions. An obvious example of this occurs when Rank tells Nora of his impending death, in Act Two:

> <u>Dr. Rank is outside, hanging up his fur coat. It is beginning to get dark.</u>[4]

During the course of Act One, Nora decorates the Christmas tree. Again adhering to the theme of imaginative frugality, as being as realistic as possible, a number of various kinds of hand-made decorations were used: bundles of straw dolls, artificial flowers and coloured candles (these were never lit). Holly was the main form of Christmas decoration used in the set; Christmas presents were wrapped in plain green and red paper. A further point about the carpet was that it had to be reasonably light-weight, and furniture standing on it very easily moved, for before Claire Bloom went into

her tarantella dance, she, together with the actors playing the parts of Torvald and Dr. Rank, push the furniture to one side and roll up the carpet. This means that the action in the original stage direction, describing Helmer about to leave the room at a highly tense moment, when Nora is playing for time while Kristine tries to find Krogstad, had to be considerably lengthened. In turn, the dramatic action is broken to make possible the rolling up of the carpet. This was a difficult decision for Patrick Garland; on the one hand, the carpet was an essential contribution to the atmosphere of a warm and secure home; on the other hand, in order to achieve a strong contrast, to show Nora dancing the tarantella as wildly and emotionally unstable a fashion as possible, the carpet had to be removed, or it would have muffled sound and consequently weakened the overall impact. The decision received critical approval since Claire Bloom's performance in this scene revealed a "Viking madness".[5]

Mr. Garland felt that audience reaction produced an enormous difference between the American and English performances. In Washington, when passionate feminists filled the front stalls, the general atmosphere was one of electric excitement. The audience saw the play as a discussion of "live" issue and when Nora, in response to Torvald's:

> I'd gladly work day and night for you, Nora...put up with any suffering or hardship for your sake. But no-one would sacrifice his honour, even for love.

replies:

> Millions of women have...[6]

most of the audience shouted: "Right on!" It was Mr. Elkins's idea to offer free seats, on the opening night of <u>A Doll's House</u>, to Betty Friedan and some of her friends, leading members of the feminist movement in the United States, and it was these members of the audience, I am told, who led the vigorous response at this juncture.

Mr. Garland made no changes in the production when it transferred to London; he continues to see the play as being an exploration of love and marriage, and about a woman finding her independence. However, London critics saw Claire Bloom's portrayal of Nora as extremely cool, if not cold-hearted occasionally.[7] As one might expect, a director's interpretation of a character may not always be realised in actual performance. While Patrick Garland sees Nora as a "very sexy woman, who uses sex to deceive and exercise power",

English critical reaction to Nora was that she was a woman with "doll-like qualities" and a "brittle hysteria that underlies her domestic subordination".[6]

American critics, reviewing the production in New York, generally liked Claire Bloom's portrayal of Nora; mostly, they felt, there was throughout an "indication of an intelligence with-held". This Nora was "faintly alienated from the outset", which paved the way for the ending.[7] This interpretation predictably changed Nora's relationship with other characters; she seemed "indifferent to her children...obtuse about her friend Kristine's personal problems...horrendously cold-blooded about the devoted Dr. Rank... He announces his impending death and she scarcely looks up from her sewing. He makes a gesture of love towards her, a gesture that has to be disinterested because he will never see her again (This isn't true, actually, as he is present throughout the 'tarantella' scene and just before the play's climax), and she recoils as though he had proposed, perhaps, another forgery. Clipping the butterfly's wings leaves us with something of a dragonfly. Or are we merely being given a bit of "Hedda" ahead of time?'

This final comment is noteworthy: Claire Bloom was playing Nora and Hedda in consecutive performances. The idea of a woman who is "indifferent" towards children, "obtuse" about other people's problems, "horrendously cold-blooded" when she is the object of a man's love, and generally "alienated" from her surroundings fits the character of Hedda rather well. It is surely possible that some of Claire Bloom's interpretation slipped into the role of Nora, although I have been unable to find any firm evidence to support this idea.

In an interview, Miss Bloom did in fact compare the two roles herself:

> Nora is an entirely feminine woman, and the one thing she and Torvald had in common was a terribly happy sex life. That was the one thing that kept them happy and jumping around all the time. Hedda, on the other hand, was destroyed before the play began. I've spoken to a psychoanalyst about her and I think she's terribly frigid - and basically a homosexual.[8]

Miss Bloom added that her husband, Hillard Elkins, felt that the casts of both plays were "interchangeable". Much of the interview focussed on Miss Bloom's attitude towards the feminist movement, some aspects of which she is generally in favour of. Unlike some of her predecessors, Miss Bloom feels that "acting is the only profession where there is no sex discrimination. I've been earning a living in it since I was fourteen and I've never been discriminated against".

The interview continued with some remarks by Miss Bloom in reference to her earlier marriage with actor Rod Steiger. It was suggested that there might have been something of the "doll-wife life of Nora" in her marriage to him:

> Every woman has played this game, to one degree or another and it's a very shameful game, for both husband and wife. I had a tremendous horror as a child of being a housewife and nothing else. You must never do anything that you don't want to do.

Miss Bloom said her personal ambition had always been to play "Nora, Hedda and Miss Julie: now I don't know whether I'll ever be able to do Miss Julie. That would be hard to follow after Hedda. Hedda's the kind of person you don't get out of your system very easily".

Some significant points emerge in the light of this interview. If one puts together Miss Bloom's own words about her feelings for the character of Hedda with her memory of a childjood antipathy towards a future not unlike that of Nora's role as a housewife, and then considers the remark made by a critic on the unusually cool, "alienated" interpretation of Nora received by the audience, one can infer that, yet again, as happened in London in 1889 and 1930, the character of Nora would be mainly associated with the same issue: women's emancipation.

A major difference between the American and London productions was the casting and consequent change of interpretation of Torvald. This in turn is reflected in the relationship between Nora and Torvald which, in New York, seems to have been somewhat turbulent:

> Torvald has only to go to the mailbox (I'm going to see if there's any mail'), slit open the first letter to hand, and the fat is in the fire. In the current production....Nora is on the floor, having been hurled there by a vigorous spouse who, it turns out, is willing to risk nothing.[9]

Colin Blakely took over the role of Torvald in London. Mr. Irving Wardle, critic of The Times, described his portrayal of Torvald as a "warm, rugged home-builder" who "almost makes you imagine another Nora on stage: a childish beauty full of pretty tricks whom he can shower with grateful compliments, or playfully spank when he catches her eating sweets".[10] This description is reminiscent of the comment concerning Henry Oscar's portrayal of Torvald, in 1930, when he was described as "uxorious" (c/f p. 73) It seems that Claire Bloom's was not the Nora which Colin Blakely's performance premissed; the two were acting on different premisses, from different interpretations.

Mr. Wardle had more to say:

> Thanks partly to Christopher Hampton's sharp job on the text, Helmer also has the chance to make fun of himself ("Do not disturb!" he bawls through his study door). And until the final crack-up, he seems a confident and even original man: a bank manager with enough energy to keep things buzzing at home, with little quirks of temperament (like his obsessive tirade on Kristine's knitting: "something Chinese about it"), which makes his reactions continuously interesting and unexpected.

Colin Blakely has evidently added a further facet to Torvald's character; he is a man, here, with a sense of humour, a gentle man who shows his love for Nora in subtler, almost teasing affection. The ambiguity of his role as either imprisoner or protector remains, with the addition of a degree of intelligence and the capacity, implicit in Irving Wardle's words, for self-knowledge. This, however, does not really lead to a logical conclusion, for such a man, surely, would react differently to Nora's behaviour finally. One feels he would not act in such a selfish manner upon first learning of the Krogstad incident. Would he really accuse Nora of having "destroyed all my happiness"? (Hampton, p.80) In these first moments of discovery, Torvald reveals himself as somewhat selfish, apparently, although we must remember that he knew nothing of Nora's motives and only see the crime she has committed without its alleviating motive (c/f p. 25, above).

B.A.Young, in The Financial Times review, saw in Colin Blakely's interpretation of Torvald...

> ...pathos...a solid, kindly,teddy-bear of a business man with his correspondence in one room and his ludicrous zoological nicknames and silly talk about moral infection in another. The sad thing about Torvald is that he

> believes all the time that he is being loving and generous when he is only being uxorious; and when he finally finds out his terrible mistake his anguish is desperate and desperately portrayed by Mr. Blakely who tore my heart apart when his face crumpled up before us like a disappointed child's."

Mr. Young's view of Torvald corresponds with what Colin Blakely himself feels:

> Torvald is a product of his time, a bourgeois businessman. Yes, he's hypocritical to some extent. He's very possessive and jealous, a middle-class man lacking in integrity. There are no flaws that he can see in himself. Also, he's blinkered - he could be led by the nose for a long time; if Rank and Nora had been having an affair right under his nose, he wouldn't have noticed.

Ibsen's text certainly reinforces this interpretation and it goes some way to complement what has gone before in this production. Now we are being presented with a Torvald who is rather shallow in outlook. But is this interpretation possible if, earlier, we have been presented with a man of some intelligence? I believe so, for Nora can be accepted as potentially intelligent in the early stages of the play and in this case the same must be true of Torvald, the real difference being that Ibsen allows her to wake up, intellectually, to begin to grow, whereas Torvald remains in a state of stasis.

A curious discrepancy of opinion occurs between those primarily concerned with Torvald's character. Patrick Garland feels that his final words are "full of hope; there is tenderness and understanding. The play has an optimistic ending. Torvald, in the last act, changes". However, Colin Blakely feels very differently:

> He is chastened at the end, shocked, but will not, or cannot, change. In the last part of the play, he begins to glimpse slight moments of enlightenment, but these are brief flashes of hope. Whether he'd have the strength of character to change, I don't know. He'd have to have a hurried re-assessment. The play is really <u>his</u> tragedy, not Nora's.
>
> The final door-slam is crucial. We had a problem in production there. We couldn't get the right sound; we tried wooden doors, metal ones; eventually we somehow achieved the right one - it had to sound hollow. After all, it's really Ibsen closing the door on the tragic Torvald, his empty existence and his inability to do anything about it.[12]

This view is compatible with that of Christopher Hampton, who adapted Hélène Grégoire's literal translation for the production:

> The final effect of the play upon the audience should be that one understands Nora must leave him, but at the same time feels for the human suffering of both of them. Colin was quite shaken at the end.[13]

Michael Billington, in his review, provides the impressions received by at least one member of the audience; Torvald, as played by Colin Blakely, was "no suburban ninny but a man of genuine passion who cannot bear the thought of his carefully planned future being blown sky-high: he treats Nora as a doll, a squirrel, a "spend-swift", but he is also a man who knows how to put on a smooth public face to people like Rank and Mrs. Linde.[3]

Irving Wardle felt that "the root problem for any modern production lies in the casting of Torvald Helmer....How could a spirit girl like Nora have spent eight years with that pompous little lawyer?"[1]

Colin Blakely sees him as being shaped by "laws of good behaviour rather than morality...

> He would give Nora anything she wanted but not if it showed him up publicly in a poor light. He would sacrifice her for his reputation. Reputation was one of the rocks of a man's life.
>
> The play is both funny and tragic; it has lots of humour, which sets the mood early on and establishes the apparent happiness and joyfulness of their marriage.[12]

Dr. Rank was portrayed by Anton Rodgers, who "converts Rank from the dark shadow behind the sunlit household into a jovial house-guest unmarked by any sign of death".[10] Earlier, in my discussion of the set as designed by John Bury, I referred to a point about the use of the rocking-chair. Mr. Bury said that Rank used the rocking-chair more than anyone else and most of the time when he was on stage. Since he was quite able to help Torvald move the furniture and roll up the carpet in preparation for Nora's dance, the audience were shown that Dr. Rank's illness had not weakened him physically. Therefore, one assumes that his frequent use of the rocking-chair suggested that he was at ease, feeling cosy and at home with them.

Mr. Blakely feels quite strongly that there should be sympathy for everyone in the play, including Krogstad. "He is always played as a nasty, evil blackmailer. I should have liked to have seen him tried as a kind of man who has no other way to go, regarding what he's done".[12]

The role was taken by Peter Woodthorpe, who saw Krogstad in clear-cut "black and white" terms:

> He's a realist. He is deeply bitter and is only blackmailing Nora out of despair - after all, the earlier part of his involvement with her was simply a matter of business. He was in the business of lending money. It is only later that he seems to change and becomes a blackmailer; he has been trying for ages to become a respectable citizen. Now, apparently a stranger is about to push him out of his job and deprive him of this potential means of achieving respectability. It becomes even worse when he realises that th same person is the woman who spurned him many years ago and left him to a life of unhappy, loveless marriage. No wonder he becomes bitter. Now, his employer's wife has it in her power, as he sees it, to redress the balance and at the same time get revenge for him on the cause of the trouble - it's really Kristine he's angry with.[14]

All of this information about Krogstad's character lies securely within the text and provides any actor with the source of such strength of knowledge. Yet, no matter how much Mr. Woodthorpe sympathises with Krogstad, those who saw the production did not feel this interpretation was evident, so far as I have been able to ascertain. One critic saw him as "a vicious, vengeful social reject whose life of chronic misfortune is symbolised by his down-turned mouth and sagging features".[3]

In Hampton's script, Kristine says: "...apparently he's dabbled in all sorts of different businesses". The key word here is "dabbled", in the original text, Ibsen used the verb "driver", which is (a) more purposeful, the word one would use of anyone engaged in running a business and (b) in the present tense ("he is engaged in many kinds of business, they say".) There is not necessarily any kind of moral asperson cast by the words alone; if this effect were desired by the director, it could be done effectively by the actress's tone; By using the verb "dabbled", Hampton produces a general air of superficiality where work is concerned, perhaps a "Jack of all trades". Interestingly, all three scripts show that Dr.Rank sees Krogstad as evil, "rotten to the core".

Another critic felt the combination of a new translation, the set and production

> ..helps me to overlook the way in which the machinery so often pokes through in what sometimes looks like a Victorian melodrama...the most obviously melodramatic part is given the most melodramatic performance. Peter Woodthorpe's Nils Krogstad looks and sounds like a stock villain foreclosing a mortgage as he threatens Nora with the exposure of her silly crime. Can Mr. Garland have asked him for a performance of this kind? It wouldn't have been wholly unjustifiable, I think; Krogstad as a character is not much more than a piece of dramatic mech-

> anism, and it would be fair to treat him as part of the setting.[12]

Peter Woodthorpe, like his predecessors in this role, has played a number of stock villainous characters, both before and since the 1973 production and it seems probable that he himself at some stage in his career accepted a tendency to be "type-cast" and took over the role of Krogstad with preconceptions based on his own expectations of roles generally being offered to him.

Hampton's translation offers some evidence to support Peter Woodthorpe's (received) interpretation. Krogstad "works at the bank" according to McFarlane, but according to Hampton he holds "a minor post". In other words, Hampton has diminished Krogstad's importance. Furthermore, when Krogstad tells Nora he has called to see Torvald "on routine dull business", according to Hampton Nora says: "Then would you be so good as to use the business entrance" (Hampton, p.21). McFarlane's version gives her the line: "Well, then, please go into his study" (McFarlane, V,217). In the former case, Nora is clearly delivering a condescending, authoritarian message, indicating to everyone that she feels Krogstad is socially inferior. This reinforces Krogstad's earlier comment about having "a minor post"; the social difference between them is emphasised.

The stage directions which follow also vary; in McFarlane she "nods impassively", whereas in Hampton she "nods indifferently to him", and here again Hampton is reinforcing the idea of Nora's apparent superiority over Krogstad. Her next move is to close "the door leading to the hall" (Hampton) and in McFarlane she "shuts the hall door behind him". Hampton's version gives no indication of how Krogstad leaves the stage, whereas in McFarlane he clearly exits through the hall door since Nora then closes it "behind him". It must depend, of course, how the rooms are to be seen as disposed off the set.

The final character of significance in the play is Kristine, played in 1973 by Stephanie Bidmead. She was seen by critics as "fascinating", presenting "a neutrally spinsterish confidante of marked seniority" to Nora.[11] On the other hand, another critic saw her thus:

> Kristine seems to be a difficult character, for she spends most of her time on the stage concealing her true emotions and Stephanie Bidmead, I thought, concealed hers a little too much; when she tells Nora that she has no-one to live for

> any longer, it may be true or it may not, but either way she should be trying to persuade Nora of her misery.[4]

I have chosen to make references to Christopher Hampton's version of the script, where relevant, in discussions of individual roles or stage events. There remains, however, the need to discuss the translation as a whole. As I have mentioned, Mr. Hampton worked from a literal translation by Hélène Grégoire. He does not speak Norwegian but does speak German and is able to read Ibsen with the aid of a dictionary. Mr. Hampton is only too aware of the current controversy over which person should handle plays in translation: a linguist or a dramatist.

He began by ignoring all available translations so that he would be working solely from the literal one. The resulting script retains much of the imagery in the original. Nora is Helmer's pet "squirrel", as well as his "lark". What is more interesting, however, is that the play's underlying theme of individual freedom is brought to the fore much earlier in the 1973 version, in Torvald's speech to Nora about borrowed money. There is some justification in the original text:

> Tagen gjeld! Aldri la ne! Det kommer noe ufritt, og altså noe uskjønt, over det hjem som grunnes på lån og gjeld.

Literally: No debts! Never borrow! There comes something unfree and therefore also something unbeautiful over that home which is founded on borrowing and debt.

The notion of freedom (in the strictly untranslatable adjective 'unfree') is there in the original, but Hampton's version gives further emphasis to the notion:

> Helmer Neither a borrower or a lender be! There's no freedom in a house that's built on borrowing and debt; it becomes ugly.

In this way, Hampton tries to give the audience an unexpected piece of information: i.e. Helmer is at least a well-read man, since he is able to quote from Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, apparently at random. However, one might also say that, by association, it gives him a Polonian tinge, which is the translator's contribution. However, the point arises from translation and is quite clearly not in the original.

The image of Nora as a "spend-thrift" arises in McFarlane's translation and is translated from "spillefugl" and this, in turn, Hampton translates as "spendswift", quite a clever neologism which continues the imagery of fluttering birds, encapsulating in one word

Nora's extravagant habits in a rather neat pun, as does the original word itself.

Nora's moral code shows in her following speech to some extent:

> ...being a lawyer is such an insecure life, specially if you don't want to get involved in anything dishonest and underhand. Which of course Torvald didn't. And I absolutely agree with him. (Hampton, p.13)

The phrase "dishonest and underhand" is not said as directly as this in the original; Nora does not even name what a lawyer might get involved with:

Original: med andre forretninger enn de som er fine og smukke

Literally: ..with other kinds of business than those which are clean.

Ibsen, by his choice of words for Nora here seems to point out her utter unfamiliarity with any kind of business at all: she speaks of transactions as if they were clothes, or flowers. Thus the original shows how very naive and unworldly Nora is and this comment on her is lost in translation. Nora's opinion of Torvald's personality is expressed in two different ways:

First, McFarlane: Torvald is a man with a good deal of pride (McFarlane V,p.215)

Hampton: ...a terrible blow to Torvald's masculine self-esteem. (Hampton, p.19)

The original has: Torvald med sin mandige selvfølelse

Literally: Torvald with his manly sense of self.

The syntax of Hampton's version, which employs the adjective "masculine", emphasises Torvald's masculinity much more than McFarlane's version; it thereby makes a strong distinction between men and women, a distinction, it could be argued, that does not occur in McFarlane.

Hampton goes on to state that Krogstad is a lawyer (c/f Rank's words, Hampton, p. 23), a point not made in McFarlane.

The way in which the first scene between Krogstad and Nora is played affects their relationship. For instance, Krogstad can be seen to bully Nora, frighten her into a state of near-hysteria. On the other hand, she might be the more dominant of the two. Much depends on what each says. Thus, a change of meaning occurs with two different translations here, when Krogstad, having made Nora confess she forged her father's signature, says,

> ...But you were cheating me...(Hampton, p.34)

In McFarlane, the line is:

> ...But did it never strike you that this was fraudulent? (McFarlane V p. 228)

The original is: Men tenkte de da ikke på at det var et bedrageri imot meg -?

Literally: But did you not realise that it was a piece of fraud towards me?

Thus, McFarlane is closer to the original.

Krogstad uses more emotive words in Hampton. For instance, he says:

> I realise it can't be very pleasant for your friend to be pushed together with me. And now I realise who's responsible for hounding me out. (Hampton, p.30)

McFarlane: I can quite see that this friend of yours isn't particularly anxious to bump up against me. And I can also see now whom I can thank for being given the sack. (McFarlane V p. 225)

In the original: jeg skjonner godt at det ikke kan være Deres veninne behagelig å otsette seg for å støte sammen med meg: og jeg skjønner nu ogsa hvem jeg kan takke for at jeg skal jages vekk.

Literally: I understand very well that it can't be pleasant for your friend to be exposed to running into me; and I now also understand whom I can thank for the fact that I am to be hounded out.

Here, Hampton's version is closer than McFarlane's to the original.

Generally, Torvald seems more possessive towards Nora in McFarlane than in Hampton. The pronoun "my" occurs more frequently. An interesting example occurs when Nora has asked Torvald to help her prepare for the party:

> Aha! So my impulsive little woman is asking for somebody to come to her rescue, eh? (McFarlane, V p.323)

In Hampton, he says: What! A stubborn little girl like you appealing for a saviour? (Hampton, p.37)

Originally: Aha, er den lille egensindige ute og søker en redningsmann?

Literally: Aha, is the little stubborn one out looking for someone to save her?

Thus, Hampton is more literal. However, McFarlane contributes to the meaning: in his version, Nora is the property of Torvald - "my.. woman"; she is also "impulsive", unlike Hampton's "stubborn little girl". It could be argued that "impulsive" contains an element of warmth, unlike "stubborn". And there is surely a marked difference between "a little girl" and "a little woman"; the former is somewhat patronising, or at least paternal, whereas the latter, by being a colloquialism, means "wife". Thus, Hampton's Torvald treats Nora in the role of father-daughter, whereas McFarlane's Torvald sees her as his helpless wife awaiting "somebody to come to her rescue".

Torvald is no saviour here, unlike Hampton's version. Like Archer, Hampton uses the words "crime" and "punishment" (Hampton,p. 37) when Torvald is describing Krogstad's past, but McFarlane uses "guilt". (McFarlane, V, p.232)

Nora is treated more objectively by Anne-Marie in Hampton than she is in McFarlane. In the latter, Anne-Marie uses the possessive "my" three times within a few lines: Nora becomes "my Nora". In Hampton, however, she remains simply "Nora" (Hampton, p.41) In fact, here again McFarlane has contributed further to the meaning; in his version, Nora seems to belong to Anne-Marie as well as to Torvald, and earlier her father.

The "stockings scene" is handled more ambiguously by Hampton than by McFarlane. When Nora realises that Dr. Rank is concerned about his own problem - i.e. that fact that he will die soon - she says:

...(sighing with relief) Oh, that's it, you...
(Hampton p.50)

In McFarlane: (with a sigh of relief) Oh, it's *you* you're..?
(McFarlane V p.245)

Originally: (or Er det dem-?
Literally: Is it you...?

(Obviously one would have to emphasise "dem" - i.e. 'you' - so McFarlane's italics are justified.) McFarlane's version, like the original, states explicitly that a person is directly concerned, even which person, unlike the more generalised "that's it". There is a distinct change of meaning in the translations of a stage direction. In McFarlane, Nora is "looking at him anxiously" (245) but in Hampton, she is "seeing the fear in his eyes". (Hampton,p.51) The first version gives Nora the state of anxiety; the second allows her to recognise the similar state of fear in Dr. Rank. Here, McFarlane is accurate:

Original: (ser angst på ham)
Literally: (looks in anguish at him)

Here, it seems that Hampton's version is based on a misunderstanding of the original (maybe the translator took it to mean "sees anguish in him" - which it does not).

A further change of meaning occurs when Kristine, talking to Nora, refers to her past friendship with Krogstad:

Mrs. Linde There was a time when he would have done anything for me.
Nora Him! (McFarlane V p.256)

But in Hampton, it is:

Mrs. Linde There was a time when he would have done anything for me.

Nora What? (Hampton, p. 61)

Here obviously, the difference lies in Nora's word. In McFarlane, her surprised comment shows that the main cause of her surprise is that it should be Krogstad to whom Kristine is referring in a rather romantic context. In Hampton, though, Nora is questioning the whole statement and we can therefore not be sure which part has surprised her. McFarlane is the more accurate here.

It is conceivable that she would find it hard to imagine anyone loving Kristine and one inevitably recalls a similar moment in Hedda Gabler, when Hedda becomes aware of Lovborg's feelings towards Thea. This point becomes even more significant when one remembers that the actress playing Nora in 1973 was also playing Hedda: here, some of Hedda's coldness acting as a veneer on Nora would have removed much of her warmth and humanity.

During the final scene, when Torvald has opened and read Krogstad's letter, he angrily turns on Nora to demand an explanation. The moment comes when Nora realizes he does not intend to take the blame for her offence. Torvald says:

Do you realize what you've done? Answer me! Do You?

Nora (Looking at him intently, her expression hardening)

Yes, I'm beginning to realise exactly what I've done. (Hampton, p.79)

McFarlane: Torvald: Do you understand what you have done? Answer me! Do you understand?
Nora (looking fixedly at him, her face hardening) Yes, now I'm really beginning to understand (McFarlane V p, 275)

Originally: Torvald: ...forstår du hva du har gjort? svar meg! Forstår du det?
Nora: (ser ufravendt pa ham og sier med et stivnende uttrykk) Ja, nu begynner jeg a forstå det til bunns.

Literally: Torvald:..Do you understand what you have done? Answer me! Do you understand it?
Nora: (looks steadily at him and says, with a hardening expression) Yes, now I am beginning to understand it.

("It" in the Norwegian idiom, "forstå"/understand has an object ('det'/it) - but the vagueness of meaning is much more like McFarlane's reading than Hampton's.) The first translation (i.e. Hampton) loses the ambiguity of the second, which allows the audience to see that Nora can be expressing something which doesn't

necessarily from the answer Torvald expects: i.e. Nora is saying (a), "Yes, I realise I have committed an awful crime and as a result your reputation may be damaged", but also (b), "I realise you have no intention of taking the blame for me, and furthermore you aren't the loving, kind and sincere person I always thought you were".

A further distinction arises later on in this scene, when Nora explains to Torvald why she is leaving:

> I have to think things out for myself, and get things clear (McFarlane V, 275).

But in Hampton:

> I want to think everything out for myself and make my own decisions (Hampton p.87).

Originally: Jeg må selv tenke over de ting, og se å få rede på dem.

Literally: I must think these things out for myself and try to get them straight.

Although both "want" and "have" can imply forcefulness, the original equivalent of "must" is clearly weightier than either. But Hampton's version goes a stage further, in that not only does he lose the vagueness of the original, he implies something extremely purposeful; the word "decisions" is significant but misleading.

Generally, Hampton's version of the text omits much of the original ambiguity and this, together with the suggestion that some of Hedda Gabler's abrasive personality may have rubbed off onto Nora as Claire Bloom was playing both roles, implies that the Nora of 1973 became ultimately a more positive woman, probably losing any warmth built into her character by Ibsen.

Furthermore, there is a marked difference between the way the production ended the play, with Torvald in tears after Nora has gone, speaking the final words: "The most wonderful miracle..." (Hampton, p.91), and the way Miss Bloom interpreted the scene:

> In that last scene, the most wonderful miracle happens. Two grown human souls come together and recognise each other and meet as themselves, as totally honest and free souls. That's the miracle.[8]

Claire Bloom's words support what Patrick Garland said:

> There is tenderness and understanding. The play has an optimistic ending. Torvald in the

last act changes.

However, I have found no other evidence to support this view of the 1973 ending. Colin Blakely felt Torvald was:

> ..chastened at the end, shocked, but will not, or cannot, change. In the last part of the play, he begins to glimpse slight moments of enlightenment, but these are brief flashes of hope. Whether he'd have the strength of character to change, I don't know. He'd have to have a hurried re-assessment. The play is really *his* play, a tragedy, not Nora's.[12]

It does not seem possible for *A Doll's House* to be dissociated from the idea of female emancipation, whether it be the suffragette movement, at the turn of the century, or the Women's Lib. movement of the nineteen-seventies. At least two critics, in 1973, brought the idea back again. Michael Billington, after point out that the play had been ignored "by the London theatre for twenty years", thinks that the play contains the theme of the "awakening of the female spirit" and has "a resonant topicality". The second critic is Irving Wardle, who referred to the "Women's Lib ticket on which this revival doubtless got into the West End".

It seems to me, however, that in 1973, the play, in a sense, moved on a step further, Having unintentionally brought to the stage a discussion of female emancipation, the last of the three productions showed the audience the possible psychological effects upon *man*.

References to Chapter Four

1. Private conversation with Patrick Garland, 1981.
2. Private conversation with John Bury, 1981.
3. Michael Billington, The Guardian, 21st February, 1973.
4. Henrik Ibsen, A Doll's House, translated by Helene Gregoire, adapted by Christopher Hampton (London, 1972), p.49. From now on, I shall use the abbreviation 'Hampton', followed by the relevant page number, in brackets, after the quotation.
5. B.A. Young, The Financial Times
6. c/f conclusion, p.103 below
7. Walter Kerr, critic, The New York Times, (January 24th, 1971), p11.
8. The New York Times, interview by Judy Klemesned (February, 1971).
9. Walter Kerr.
10. Irving Wardle, The Times, 21st February 1973.
11. B.A. Young, The Financial Times, February, 1973.
12. Private conversation with Colin Blakely, 1980.
13. Private conversation with Christopher Hampton, 1981.
14. Private conversation with Peter Woodthorpe.

Conclusion

Ibsen once denied that any of his works, let alone A Doll's House, had been written with the Women's Rights movement in mind. Perhaps, then, he had been thinking about the condition of woman in society as an individual; perhaps the idea of emancipation remained at a sub-conscious level of his mind.

Certainly, when English theatre lovers decided to stage the play, it was drawn to their attention at a time when the suffragette movement was growing. Probably, general interest in the movement added to the interest in the play, almost coincidentally.

The same may be said of the two later productions, but while each version reflected current trends in society, especially with attitudes towards women, other, wider issues - more generally human - have been involved

In 1889, the violent reactions of critics was partly due to the way Janet Achurch portrayed Nora; in her turn, Miss Achurch was using the play to further her personal ambitions within the theatre. Nora's treatment of people, including her husband and children, was shown as cold and shocking - but its impact brought Janet Achurch the fame she wanted.

By 1930, theatre-goers generally were thinking more profoundly about Nora. It was accepted that, during the course of the play, she changed. Furthermore, the play was almost used as a form of education: this is what life used to be like for women before the days of emancipation. In retrospect, it seems to me that the 1930 production was very much a performance, rather than an attempt to portray real people in everyday life. Audiences craved entertainment, novelty.

In 1973, the production brought a different attitude towards Torvald and with increased emphasis on his situation, after Nora has left him, it became perhaps an essay about the future. How can man's social status remain unchanged if woman's status is raised? Thus, we are forced to see Nora in a different light. Is this, then, a play about an individual's right to freedom? If so, surely this is what Ibsen was aiming for when he wrote the play.

Cast Lists

1889 Production

Nora	Janet Achurch
Torvald	Herbert Waring
Dr. Rank	Charles Charrington
Krogstad	Royce Carleton.
Kristine	Gertrude Warden

1930 Production

Nora	Gwen Frangcon-Davies
Torvald	Henry Oscar
Dr. Rank	Harcourt Williams / Vernon Sylvaine
Krogstad	Frederick Lloyd / Henry Hallett
Kristine	Mary Barton

1973 Production

Nora	Claire Bloom
Torvald	Colin Blakely
Dr. Rank	Anton Rodgers
Krogstad	Peter Woodthorpe
Kristine	Stephanie Bidmead

(1)

Part of Archer's collection:

Nora and Helmer (Miss Achurch and Mr. Waring)
NORA: Now I'll tell you how we ought to manage, Torvald. As soon as Christmas is over.....

Nora and Rank (Mr. Charrington).
NORA: Do you think they won't fit me?
RANK: I can't possibly have any valid opinions on that point.

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③

Nora and Krogstad (Mr. Royce Carleton)

<u>KROGSTAD:</u> You haven't the courage either, have you?

<u>NORA:</u> I haven't, I haven't.

(4)

Nora and Mrs. Linden (Miss Gertrude Warden)

NORA: After all, there's something glorious in waiting for the miracle!

Doctor Rank (Mr. Charrington)

RANK: Sleep well - and thanks for the light.

Nora (in her Capri costume).

HELMER: Take off that cloak - take it off, I say!

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MISS JANET ACHURCH.

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NORA.

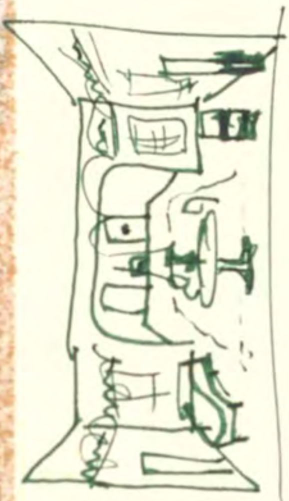
FAMILY JARS.

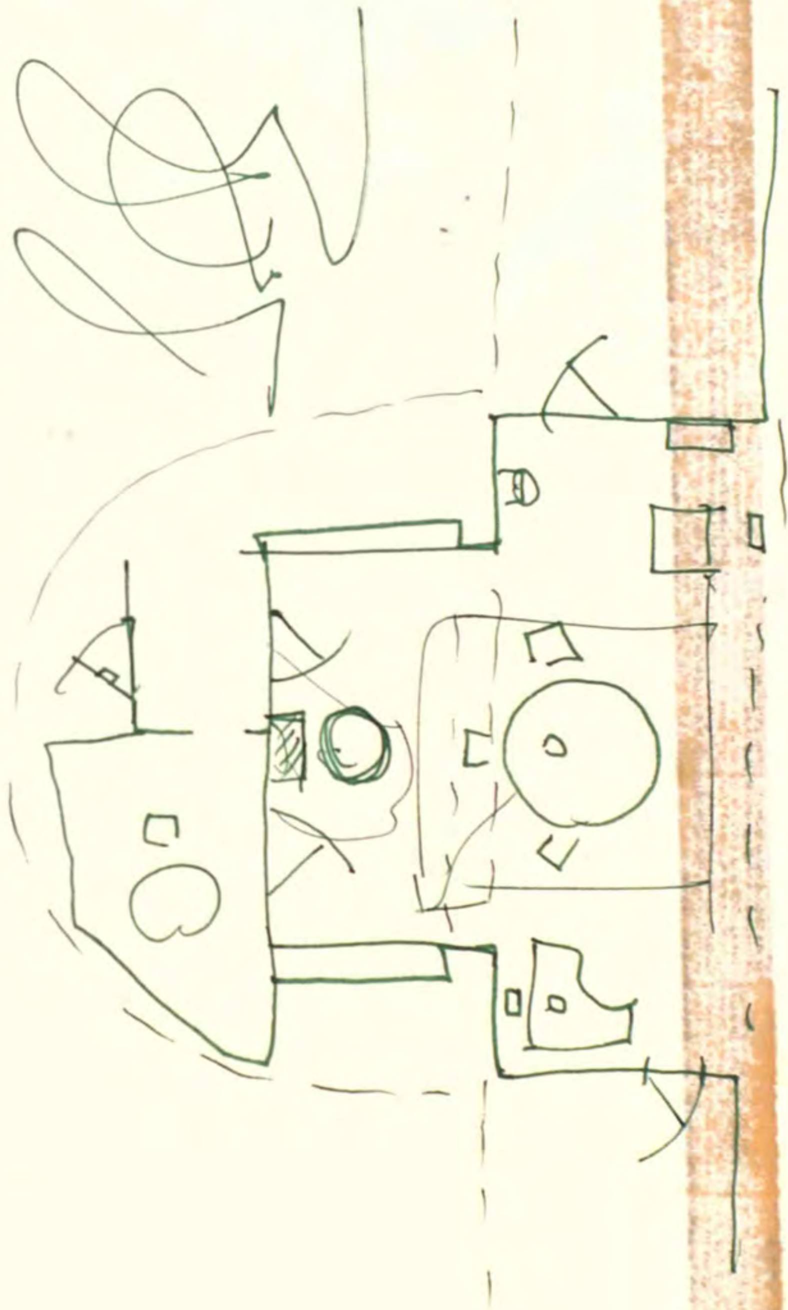
MR ROYCE
CARLETON
KROGSTAD.

MISS
GERTRUDE
WARDEN.
MRS LINDEN

THE DYING DOCTOR.

115.





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