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ENSLAVEMENT IN IBSEN'S *A DOLL HOUSE* & *GHOSTS*

HIDAYA IBRAHIM HASHIM, Dr. HALA SALIH MOHAMMEDNUR

English Language Department  
Neelain University, Khartoum, Sudan

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ABSTRACT

This paper's main focus is on the theme of Women Enslavement in Henrik Ibsen sequel *A Doll House* and *Ghosts*. It examines the three female characters of D H (Nora, Mrs. Linde and Nurse Anne) and Mrs. Alving of *Ghosts*, highlighting with evidence the type of enslavement beholding each. Illustrating how the women were subjugated thereby presenting their tolerance in the face of an unjust society. Starting with Nora and how the way she was brought up led to her abandoning everything behind in search of her 'self', second we have Christine Linde who sacrificed her love for her family's welfare, and Anne-Marie who gave up her daughter to support her living. Moving on to Helen Alving of *Ghosts* and how the rigidity of her upbringing made her conform to the false ideals of society's expectation to reap the fruits of a tragic end. Concluding with why was Ibsen so adamant on educating women and allowing them freedom of thought.

**Key Words:** Ibsen, Monetary Enslavement, Self-indulgence, Duty Enslavement.

1. Introduction

Henrik Ibsen, [born March 20, 1828, Skien, —died May 23, 1906, Oslo], is a major Norwegian playwright of the late 19th century. "Ibsen's influential career is full of enigmas and contradictions. He began with historical dramas, looking to the past, and yet he would become the herald of modern drama." (N A, V2, unit 1)

Ibsen developing from the historical romantic playwright became one of the founders of modern drama. Through his strict meticulous thought he introduced to the European stage a new order of moral analysis. With the 'fourth wall' penetrating dialogue, and the realistic performance he portrayed a grim picture of the times. He shocked his audience into awareness through targeting the bourgeois society with his work. His problem plays and unique character creation made him versatile and popular. Ibsen's genius worked in a strange manner. Rejected and violently resented, upon introduction, Ibsen's work stood the test of time. One hundred fifty years later its performance is still running. He ranks second only to Shakespeare.

Ibsen plays

Ibsen wrote in continuation and advised his readers to read them in sequence. Despite the fact that his plays were 'dismembered' by critics into four –give or take one- phases, there is a streak of visible magnet

(a truth-seeker) that will show in one of his character. Ibsen's first attempt *Catiline* (1850) was anonymously published and got no recognition. *When We Dead Awaken* (*Nårvidødevaagner*) (1899) was his last play. In between he wrote 23 plays through which he had left an eternal print in the literary canon and everlasting theatrical conventions. Our major concern in this study is the sequel containing *A Doll House* (1879) and *Ghosts* (1881).

## 2. Aim of the Paper:

The aim of this paper is to dissect two of Ibsen's plays and highlight the female characters projection of how women were enslaved in his plays. Because he was pursuing an awakening and awareness of a grave misconduct in society and he used the degrading status of women as an eye opener. When the shock bypassed, recognition dawned and change surfaced in faltering footsteps. So, it has been about 140 years since Ibsen tackled the chains, are they broken?

## 3. Questions of the Paper:

This paper has three questions that the researcher aims to answer:

- What sort of enslavement is Ibsen portraying?
- How does Ibsen develop the theme of enslavement in his plays?
- Why did Ibsen insist on raising public awareness of this issue?

## 4. Methodology:

The researcher adopted a close-reading method to achieve a complete comprehension of the texts to further enable a good analytical disclosure. A focus on the change in women status on the social map before Ibsen's '*A Doll House*' is introduced and after it in '*Ghosts*' and how the shackles of society's expectation are still holding them back.

That was achieved by a thorough reading of other plays plus the author's comprehensive life and works, an additional four volumes by other authors on his life and work, several journal articles and performance reviews.

Hence, it's a qualitative research with an analytical descriptive approach. The subjects of the study are Ibsen's female characters in "*A Doll House*" and "*Ghosts*". Multiple readings of the primary texts are carried out to enable an effective interpretation. Following the archival data collection -and giving it a once over- was obtaining the specific theories relating and linking the thesis variables.

In spite the Norwegian's place in the literary world and his achievements as a great playwright he seems to lack recognition in Sudan. Which means a noticeable absence of studies about him is detected. Although that acted as encouragement for the researcher it foreshadowed deficiency in resources. Two factors aided in the progress of the study; an opportunity to spent significant amount of time at International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM) library and Google Books.

As for the critical analysis, it was only logical to use what best befitted the purpose of the paper. Hence Clayton Hamilton's (1917) simple definition: Any drama which depicts a conflict between individual character and social environment may appropriately be described as a social drama, whether it casts its emphasis on the side of society or on the side of the individual. Social critic branches from Critical theory on which Max Horkheimer (1982) stated that a theory is described as critical insofar as it seeks "*to liberate human beings from the circumstances that enslave them.*" (p.244) Thus, it is only natural that Critical theory lies at the base of this paper. Critical Theory stream of thought, stresses the reflective assessment and critique of the interaction between society's culture and the conventions of its members.

**Prologue:** The complex feminine entity is constant in all of Ibsen's authorship. He realized, early on, that women's support is indispensable to the prosperity of a community. Ibsen observed and understood the unjust social view of HER. He drew a fine portrait of his female characters illustrating the living conditions for

the women of the time. Thus, through the characterization of the females in his plays he painted a shockingly clear picture of society's failings.

The focus of this Chapter will be on the theme of Enslavement. A synthesis of the female characters in both *A Doll House* and *Ghosts* will follow, exploring and presenting each case individually.

**Enslavement:** to enslave someone is to force that person to work for no pay, to obey commands and to lose his/her freedom. *Enslave* comes from the 'make into' prefix, *en-*, and *slave*, "the person who is the property of another". (vocabulary.com)

Thus, slavery refers to a condition in which individuals are owned by others; who control their lives. Slavery had previously existed throughout history, in many times and most places. It is a less common deed nowadays, but unfortunately it still happens. The word *enslave* is often used instead to avoid the use of dehumanized language.

Figuratively it is applied to describe something that takes over a person's freedom to make choices in some way; i.e. women in the late eighteenth and nineteenth century. Hence, Ibsen's employment of women to indicate his disdain of society did not come out of nothing. Nineteenth century females were subjugated by the 'all superior male'. As will be presented, different types of women enslavement are displayed in his plays.

#### Writings on the Topic:

Among many, there are two nineteenth century prominent texts concerning the status of women status among which is servitude to men; John Stuart Mill's *The Subjection of Women* (1869) and Johann Jakob Bachofen's *Das Mutterrecht* (1861) [*Mother Right* 2006].

**Das Mutterrecht** (1861) [*Mother Right* 2006] by Johann Jakob Bachofen (1815-1887) was the seminal document in the nineteenth century concerning the role of women in ancient societies. Bachofen documented that motherhood is the source of human society, religion, morality, and decency in societies world over. He concluded by connecting ancient mother right with Christianity. His theory of cultural evolution incited a virtual 'mother-mania' among ethnologists, social philosophers, and even writers.

**The Subjection of Women** (1869) John Stuart Mill (1806-1873) attacks the argument that women are naturally worse at some things than men and should, therefore, be discouraged or forbidden from doing them. He says that we simply don't know what women are capable of, because we have never let them try – one cannot make an authoritative statement without evidence. We can't stop women from trying things because they might not be able to do them. An argument based on speculative physiology is just that, speculation.

What is interesting though is a study conducted by a scholar on Henrik Ibsen stating that he [Ibsen] shares theory of Mill regarding women. Although the matter is entirely opposite; according to Brandes, he did not like John Stuart Mill's book on the woman question:

In answer to Mill's statement that he owed the best in his writings to his wife, Ibsen said, "Only fancy what it would be to read Hegel or Krause with the idea that it was quite uncertain whether we were following the thoughts of Mr. or of Mrs. Hegel, of Mr. or of Mrs. Krause". (Brandes, *Creative Spirits*, p.389)

#### 5. Women Enslavement in Ibsen's *A Doll House*

Nora was chiefly enthralled to money and self-indulgence. The theme of money appears within the first lines uttered by the protagonist: "How much?" (Ibsen, 1879, Act I). The importance of money is portrayed stark clear upon the curtain opening foreshadowing its influential impact on the whole play. The theme of money develops in the theme of monetary enslavement.

The theme of money directly affects the actions and reactions of Nora's character; as Hardwick (1974) puts it "Nora is enthralled by the power and freedom of money available only to men." (p.18) Further ascertaining this point is Nora herself when confiding in her friend: "Many a time I was desperately tired; but all the same it was a tremendous pleasure to sit there working and earning money. It was like being a man." (Ibsen, 1879, Act I)

Moreover, Nora generously tips the delivery boy with the extra change, enhancing the image of plenty. This moment completely contrasts as it replays itself in the spectator/reader's mind upon its introduction to the character Torvald, Nora's husband, as he questions Nora's use of money:

**Nora:** ... [Puts the bag of macaroons into her pocket and wipes her mouth.] Come in here, Torvald, and see what I have bought.

**Helmer:** Don't disturb me. [A little later, he opens the door and looks into the room, pen in hand.] Bought, did you say? All these things? Has my little spendthrift been wasting money again? (ibid, Act I)

The joyous atmosphere she was producing is somehow shattered. It is shown that the couple is immediately at odds in regards to financial matters. Nora feels a great freedom to spend money due to Torvald's anticipated salary raise. She was looking forward to Christmas and festivities with the anticipated salary rise in mind wanted to let herself go a little:

**Nora:** Yes, Torvald, we may be a wee bit more reckless now, mayn't we? Just a tiny wee bit! You are going to have a big salary and earn lots and lots of money.

**Helmer:** Yes, after the New Year; but then it will be a whole quarter before the salary is due. (ibid, Act I)

Nora's mainstream of thought is not shared. Torvald is weary of spending money that is yet to come and made it clear through stating the three months (a whole quarter) duration ahead. Nora offhandedly mentions that they could borrow if need be. The discussion takes a turn towards monetary loans which is completely against Torvald's nature:

**Nora:** Pooh! we can borrow until then.

**Helmer:** Nora! [Goes up to her and takes her playfully by the ear.] The same little featherhead! Suppose, now, that I borrowed fifty pounds today, and you spent it all in the Christmas week, and then on New Year's Eve a slate fell on my head and killed me, and— (ibid, Act I)

The theme of Nora's bondage to money or monetary enslavement is further enhanced by her reaction to Torvald's heated objections to debt and frivolous spending. He was addressing her as if reprimanding a child. Thus, Nora follows the lead and sulks. His next move showed that he is well aware of her weakness towards money so he changes the tone and generously supplies her with forty extra dollars for 'household' expenses to restore the mood:

**Helmer** [following her]: Come, come, my little skylark must not droop her wings. What is this! Is my little squirrel out of temper? [Taking out his purse.] Nora, what do you think I have got here?

**Nora** [turning round quickly]: Money!

**Helmer:** There you are. [Gives her some money.] Do you think I don't know what a lot is wanted for housekeeping at Christmas-time? (ibid, Act I)

Ibsen gives further depth to Nora's monetary enslavement with the arrival of Nora's friend from school, Christine Linde. Christine is acquainted with Nora's extravagant use of money from their school days (as hinted in the dialogue) Nora is soon caught up in discussing her family's fortunate break despite an absence of ten years. It seems clear what kind of deal life has given each character. Which makes Nora's extended talk of her family's upcoming wealth kind of boastful but Ibsen meant to stress on its importance:

**Nora:** '...' He is to take up his work in the Bank at the New Year, and then he will have a big salary and lots of commissions. For the future we can live quite differently--we can do just as we like. I feel so relieved and so happy, Christine! It will be splendid to have heaps of money and not need to have any anxiety, won't it?

**Mrs. Linde:** Yes, anyhow I think it would be delightful to have what one needs.

**Nora:** No, not only what one needs, but heaps and heaps of money. (ibid, Act I)

Nora had no lack of resources growing up. As she was 'her father's doll' she was well provided. Thus when met by money issues for the first time, she strove for a solution. Nora was busting with pride and a sense of self-achievement. The image she projected as she revealed the source of her monetary salvation-as if on a pedestal-reflected how thrilled she was of her deed. She has taken a secret loan to provide for a trip to Italy to save her beloved Torvald's life:

**Nora:** Come here. [Pulls her down on the sofa beside her] Now I will show you that I too have something to be proud and glad of. It was I who saved Torvald's life.

**Mrs.Linde:** "Saved"? How? '...'

**Nora:** Papa didn't give us a shilling. It was I who procured the money.

**Mrs.Linde:** You? All that large sum?

**Nora:** Two hundred and fifty pounds. What do you think of that? (ibid, Act I)

So, Nora is not merely a 'spendthrift' after all. She was able and can sustain on her own, that is why she felt proud of her successful effort in saving Torvald's life. Her secret satisfied her self-indulgent nature; she can go on performing her 'doll' act as long as she is and fulfill the role entitled to her by society while he plays his in their perfect 'doll house' that is what she thought life was all about. Nora's secret joy came from knowing that 'her' small 'feet' can fill 'his' large 'shoes' if need be. That is where the enormous satisfaction welled:

**Nora:** Well, then I have found other ways of earning money. Last winter I was lucky enough to get a lot of copying to do; so I locked myself up and sat writing every evening until quite late at night. Many a time I was desperately tired; but all the same it was a tremendous pleasure to sit there working and earning money. It was like being a man. (ibid, Act I)

Due to her sheltered upbringing Nora's deed was mindless of the legal repercussions, hence, the devastating outcome. Hardwick comments: "[Nora] has got herself into a mess on behalf of those she loves and she is proud of her steady, if unconventional efforts to extricate herself" (p.40). Nora is profoundly satisfied, but it is nevertheless an illegal action. When Krogstad came bearing threats her great fear was from Torvald's sense of humiliation upon discovering that 'she' was the one who saved his life. She knew that will not sit well with ego. But Krogstad's next visit added to her worries, seeing how adamant he was to make her aware of her illegal position which will assuredly harm –may even ruin- her family's new prospect:

**Krogstad:** Your father died on the 29th of September. But, look here; your father has dated his signature the 2nd of October. It is a discrepancy, isn't it? [NORA is silent.] '...' It is a remarkable thing, too, that the words "2nd of October," as well as the year, are not written in your father's handwriting but in one that I think I know. '...' There is no harm in that. It all depends on the signature of the name; and that is genuine, I suppose, Mrs. Helmer? It was your father himself who signed his name here?

**Nora** [after a short pause, throws her head up and looks defiantly at him]: No, it was not. It was I that wrote papa's name. '...'

**Krogstad:** Mrs. Helmer, you evidently do not realise clearly what it is that you have been guilty of. (ibid, Act I)

Women in Ibsen's day were not permitted to borrow money without a man's approval (be that father, husband, brother) and the consequences of such actions were dire. Ibsen was aware of their unjust living conditions, he was quoted:

A woman cannot be herself in the society of the present day, which is an exclusively masculine society, with laws framed by men and with a judicial system that judges feminine conduct from a masculine point of view. (Ibsen, 1911, From Ibsen's Workshop)

Nora does not initially understand the ramifications of her deed according to the law and the eyes of society. It is as Ibsen himself wrote in his workshop of the play: "There are two kinds of spiritual law, two kinds of conscience, one in man and another, altogether different in woman." So Nora's feminine mind could not fathom or live by that of the male. So since they do not understand each other why should she be judged by it? Nora's obstinate conviction of her stance did not waver. She is still unable to comprehend a law that condemns a wife for saving her 'lawful' husband or –for that matter- a daughter for sparing her dying father:

**Krogstad:** The law cares nothing about motives.

**Nora:** Then it must be a very foolish law. (Ibsen, Act I)

Beneath all this confusion, a light pulp started to twinkle, and she needed to find out how to empower it. Nora had already known that she can provide for herself but thought that it was the way of the world that he gives and she solemnly takes. He acts as the dominant and she pleasantly plays the subordinate and they live happily ever after. Only to discover it was not so. Her whole being collapsed seemingly a mere fancy same as the 'wonderful thing'. So, she declined Torvald's belated helping hand, released from all sorts of subjugation stepped out to start afresh.

### Self-indulgence

From the monetary enslavement we move to look into a new theme which is 'self-indulgence'. Nora's self-indulgent nature presented itself when her free spirits were high. Her gay mood was in full flourish returning from Christmas shopping; in the first scene secretly nibbling the macaroons and wiping her mouth:

**Nora:** ... She is laughing to herself, as she takes off her hat and coat. She takes a packet of macaroons from her pocket and eats one or two; then goes cautiously to her husband's door and listens.] Yes, he is in. [Still humming, she goes to the table on the right.] ...

[Puts the bag of macaroons into her pocket and wipes her mouth.] Come in here, Torvald, and see what I have bought. (ibid, Act I)

Torvald forbade eating macaroons and as a wife Nora was to abide by her husband's ruling, as she said: "I should not think of going against your wishes." (ibid, Act I) But nonetheless she did. Unable to fight her craving, again she digs into her pocket only implicating her guest friend this time:

**Nora:**... [Takes the packet from her pocket.] Doctor Rank, what do you say to a macaroon?

**Rank:** What, macaroons? I thought they were forbidden here.

Nora: Yes, but these are some Christine gave me.

**Mrs.Linde:** What! I?--

**Nora:** Oh, well, don't be alarmed! You couldn't know that Torvald had forbidden them. I must tell you that he is afraid they will spoil my teeth. But, bah!--once in a way--That's so, isn't it, Doctor Rank? By your leave! [Puts a macaroon into his mouth.] You must have one too, Christine. And I shall have one, just a little one--or at most two. (ibid, Act II)

Another self-indulgent issue for Nora –if even subconsciously- is her looks. Perhaps it goes back the milieu where she was brought up, which encouraged her to watch her figure and enabled her to dress smartly. Also she is aware that Torvald loves her beauty and looks and that worked fine for her:

**Nora:** ... Whenever Torvald has given me money for new dresses and such things, I have never spent more than half of it; I have always bought the simplest and cheapest things. Thank Heaven, any

clothes look well on me, and so Torvald has never noticed it. But it was often very hard on me, Christine--because it is delightful to be really well dressed, isn't it? (ibid, Act I)

Their neighbors are having a fancy-dress ball and –according to Torvald- Nora is to go as the Neapolitan fisher-girl. She was looking for something that would show off her good looks and please her husband:

**Nora:** ... You will see tomorrow how charming I shall look.

**Nurse:** I am sure there will be no one at the ball so charming as you, ma'am. (ibid, Act II)

This fixation of looking her best at all times made her an easy prey for Krogstad. When he got her hint that she might take her own life in order to end this gruesome business with him; he painted an ugly picture. So both her husband reputation and beautiful image are to be distorted:

**Krogstad:** Under the ice, perhaps? Down into the cold, coal-black water? And then, in the spring, to float up to the surface, all horrible and unrecognizable, with your hair fallen out—(ibid, Act II)

The one conscious reason for her appearance care taking is Torvald's admiring eye. She was aware of his pride over her perfect looks (no sweets, extra cash for nice dresses). Eight years later she was still as gorgeous as the first time:

**Helmer:** And when we are leaving, and I am putting the shawl over your beautiful young shoulders-- on your lovely neck- ... When I watched the seductive figures of the Tarantella, my blood was on fire; ... (ibid, Act III)

One might conclude that good looks require an abundance of money or at least a modest income, thus it will boil down to the unbreakable chain of providence binding. At the end she grew out of it and went in search for that self in its true form.

#### **'One has to live'**

**Christine Linde** is Nora school mate who is also enslaved to money although in a different way. Mrs. Linde's monetary enslavement sprang from dire need, for as she said "one has to live" (Ibsen, Act II). Christine and Nora come from different social classes. But for Ibsen the theme stands despite any differences in class, it actually further enforces his dispute against the bourgeois. Economic laws were discriminatory against women because of that money was a big issue for Ibsen's female characters. They suffered a lot and some took extreme measures to provide for themselves.

Christine's deprivation pressed her into changing the course of her life. She was forced to put her feeling aside if she was to provide for her family:

**Nora:** ... Tell me, is it really true that you did not love your husband? Why did you marry him?

**Mrs. Linde:** My mother was alive then, and was bedridden and helpless, and I had to provide for my two younger brothers; so I did not think I was justified in refusing his offer. (ibid, Act I)

Ibsen's creation of Nora left nothing out here we have her 'foil' Christine Linde a fully developed individual contrary to Nora. Mrs. Linde sense of obligation caused her ordeal of abandoning her heart and marrying an elderly; who died leaving her nothing. However, her sacrifice mounted to nothing, for even the marital pledge did not secure her economic status, as her struggle continues:

**Nora:** It was very bad of me, Christine. Poor thing, how you must have suffered. And he left you nothing?

**Mrs. Linde:** No.

**Nora:** And no children?

**Mrs. Linde:** No.

**Nora:** Nothing at all, then.

**Mrs. Linde:** Not even any sorrow or grief to live upon. (ibid, Act I)

As they converse catching up on life's happenings in the last decade, Mrs. Linde's character is further highlighted; how life's hardship can affect and shape one's reaction towards certain things. Her remark on Nora's indulgence illuminates that suffering and long struggle with 'ends meet' made her treat everything matter of fact, it even –sometimes- left her lacking in manners:

**Mrs.Linde:** Yes, anyhow I think it would be delightful to have what one needs.

**Nora:** No, not only what one needs, but heaps and heaps of money.

**Mrs.Linde** [smiling]: Nora, Nora, haven't you learned sense yet? (ibid, Act I)

Economic hardship takes its toll on any living human and it will be double on those rejected by society. Mrs. Linde saw life's ugly face and it made her bitter and selfish to the point of being crass. Her response to Nora's suggestion of getting away and taking time off was bristle and uncalled for;

**Mrs.Linde** [walking to the window]: I have no father to give me money for a journey, Nora. '...'

**Mrs.Linde** [going up to her]: It is you that must not be angry with me, dear. The worst of a position like mine is that it makes one so bitter. No one to work for, and yet obliged to be always on the lookout for chances. One must live, and so one becomes selfish. When you told me of the happy turn your fortunes have taken--you will hardly believe it--I was delighted not so much on your account as on my own. (ibid, Act I)

Though independent, Christine was still captive for cash and companionship; as she concedes "to have someone to live for" (ibid, Act I) or as she conceded to Dr. Rank later on "one has to live" (ibid, Act II). Thus, one is pressed for any means of living, yet life is not worth living minus a partner.

#### **'A Poor Girl into Trouble'**

The last example for monetary enslavement in *A DollHouse* is Nurse Anne. She was pressed for mere survival as she had no means of providence for herself. She became an outcast of the society because she had a daughter out of wedlock. She had no other alternative but to give away her flesh and blood in order to secure a living. So she took the job as Nora's nurse and continued to do so with her off-springs. Even though the position's requirement deprived her (of her daughter) she felt compensated:

**Nora:** Nurse ... I have often wondered about--how could you have the heart to put your own child out among strangers?

**Nurse:** I was obliged to, if I wanted to be little Nora's nurse.

**Nora:** Yes, but how could you be willing to do it?

**Nurse:** What, when I was going to get such a good place by it? A poor girl who has got into trouble should be glad to. Besides, that wicked man didn't do a single thing for me. '...'

(ibid, Act II)

Being from the lower class Anne never thought twice over the position she was offered. Perhaps she is not fit for this enslavement theme altogether, but her case further culminates the needy position of the women.

#### **6.Duty Enslavement in *Ghosts***

"After Nora," Ibsen wrote, "Mrs. Alving had to come" (L & S, 1910. p. 208). Nora's door slamming created uproar worldwide. Before disturbance of the daring 'Doll' diminishes the public was in for another jolt. A challenging and enlightened female came bombing their doors Helen Alving of *Ghost*. She is the woman who stayed contrary to that who slammed the door, yet the censure she received was far worse.

In *Ghosts* we have three female Characters. Mrs. Alving, Regina and her deceased mother (Joana), who although she is not among the living her presence is felt through the whole play. Ibsen portrays the theme of duty enslavement through Helen Alving character.

Like the rest of Ibsen female characters Mrs. Alving had a rebellious nature. That instinctive human need acted as an incentive to her enlightenment and further provoked her emancipation. But internally, she was heavily shackled with society's conventions. The way she was raised and how women were looked upon played a major role in Mrs. Alving's decisions and the way she conducted her life. She was torn between the reality of her life and what society perceives as the norm. Until it was too late as Ibsen described:

"They say, that the book preaches Nihilism. Not at all. It is not concerned to preach anything whatsoever. It merely points to the ferment of Nihilism going on under the surface, at home as elsewhere. A Pastor Manders will always goad one or other Mrs. Alving to revolt. And just because she is a woman, she will, when once she has begun, go to the utmost extremes." (Ibsen, 1882, *Ghosts*, Intro)

Even though she rebelled her revolution did not erupt for she was enslaved. Chained and gaged by her rigid conformity to the socially accepted standards. The most binding of all was her sense of Duty; her duties as a wife, her duties as a mother, and above her duties to her family (not to scandalize them). Upon stage entrance she is met by her first duty; to act as the Lady of the mansion and provide for the guest:

**Mrs. Alving:** ... But where is your portmanteau?

**Manders:** [Quickly.] I left it down at the inn. ...

**Mrs. Alving:** [Suppressing a smile.] Are you really not to be persuaded, even now, to pass the night under my roof? (Ibsen, 1981, Act First)

It is to be noticed that during the whole conversation their points of views are clearly contradicted but Mrs. Alving concedes. Her retreatment does not imply an agreeable stance. No! She recoils remembering he is a Male and a Pastor and her duty is to follow his lead not the contrary. Another assumption is valid. That she might be sparing herself and following the Pastor's own preaching:

**Manders:** [Lowering his voice.] But one should not talk about it, Mrs. Alving. One is certainly not bound to account to everybody for what one reads and thinks within one's own four walls.

**Mrs. Alving:** Of course not; I quite agree with you. (ibid, Act First)

'Duty' dominates every breath Mrs. Alving takes let alone every movement. But that pressure is elevated around Oswald. He is as open minded as her and is under no obligation to hold back his opinions:

**Manders:** Yes, that is just what I say.

**Oswald:** But they may have a home for all that. And several of them have, as a matter of fact; and very pleasant, well-ordered homes they are, too.

[Mrs. Alving follows with breathless interest; nods, but says nothing.] (ibid, Act First)

A wife's duty is to endure her husband's follies for without him she is nothing; that was the doctrine. Taking her mother's and aunts advice –as would any dutiful daughter- she married the Chamberlain. Only to discover too late that they were not 'a match made in heaven' and she has to suffer the consequences because she has pledged 'for better or for worse till death do us part' as the 'good pastor' reminded her. She 'dutifully' did the preacher's bidding and lived what he later called 'a hidden abyss'. Mrs. Alving assured him that is exactly what he had sent her back for. He spluttered at how was it possible that such ghastly happenings were kept hidden:

**Mrs. Alving:** That has been my ceaseless struggle, day after day. After Oswald's birth, I thought Alving seemed to be a little better. But it did not last long. And then I had to struggle twice as hard, fighting

as though for life or death, so that nobody should know what sort of man my child's father was. And you know what power Alving had of winning people's hearts. '...'(ibid, Act First)

Mrs. Alving streak of rebellion was still alive though her revolutionary act was snuffed at its first bloom. That mutiny, which sprang from a youthful heart inflamed by love, got curbed by the strong hand of duty and blind compliance, when forced into submission and because conformity was bred into her bones; she tried to fulfill her end of the bargain the best way she could. But there is only so much one could take. Mrs. Alving continued, reminding the pastor that after their last unfavorable encounter he never set foot in the Chamberlain State till legal matters post his demise forced him to:

**Mrs. Alving:** ... But at last, Mr. Manders—for you must know the whole story—the most repulsive thing of all happened.

**Manders:** More repulsive than what you have told me? '...'

**Mrs. Alving:** Yes ... It was there [Pointing towards the first door on the right], in the dining-room ... I heard our housemaid come up from the garden, with water for those flowers. '...'

**Mrs. Alving:** Soon after, I heard Alving come in too. I heard him say something softly to her. ... I heard my own servant-maid whisper, "Let me go, Mr. Alving! Let me be!"

**Manders:** What unseemly levity on his part! '...'

**Mrs. Alving:** '... ' and that connection had consequences, '...'

**Manders:** [As though petrified.] Such things in this house! ...

**Mrs. Alving:** I had borne a great deal in this house. (ibid, Act First)

If a wife's duty is to appease and serve her husband at all times no matter he has done, then a mother's role have no boundaries. Motherly acts sometime border on sacrificial deeds. What Mrs. Alving did certainly falls under that category. No matter what Manders or Oswald himself believed, the price extracted from Mrs. Alving adherence to society's 'law and order' was over the top:

**Mrs. Alving:** I had to bear it for my little boy's sake. ... And so I took the reins into my own hand—the whole control—over him and everything else. ... It was then I sent Oswald away from home. He was nearly seven years old, and was beginning to observe and ask questions, as children do. That I could not bear. It seemed to me the child must be poisoned by merely breathing the air of this polluted home. That was why I sent him away... No one knows what that cost me.

**Manders:** You have indeed had a life of trial. (ibid, Act First)

After all the suffering she endured -to save face- for the sake of community ideals, regret is dawning on Mrs. Alving. Realizing the gravity of her deed, on not following her newly found 'will'; how she abandoned her 'autonomous learning' and blindly following her ancestor's 'teaching' destroyed all that was yet to come. Now as she sees how the past is swallowing the future; she is loathing the incompetence that held her back or as she called it 'cowardice'. The ties of duty that obscured her enlightened mind and dominated her emancipated will:

**Mrs. Alving:** Yes; in my superstitious awe for duty and the proprieties, I lied to my boy, year after year. Oh, what a coward—what a coward I have been! (ibid, Act Second)

She knew better. She had learned the truth on her own. When she searched the root of her defiant spirit she came to acknowledge the superficiality of ideals, and how it acted as society's cosmetic kit:

**Mrs. Alving:** Yes—when you forced me under the yoke of what you called duty and obligation; when you lauded as right and proper what my whole soul rebelled against as something loathsome. It was then that I began to look into the seams of your doctrines. (ibid, Act Second)

As daybreak neared so did Mrs. Alving's chains. With the emergence of truth at last she was liberated. The rigidity of her teaching erased her will. Hence, duly she was robbed of her 'joy of life' and caused the ruins of her husband by strangling him. Now she perceives it. Though it is too late:

**Mrs. Alving:** They had taught me a great deal about duties and so forth, which I went on obstinately believing in. Everything was marked out into duties—into my duties, and his duties, and—I am afraid I made his home intolerable for your poor father, Oswald. (ibid, Act Third)

## 7. Conclusion

Since *Ghosts* is taken as a response to those who were vehemently opposing *A Doll House*, a comparison between the two heroines shall arise. To set the discrepancy straight one should look at the environment in which they were brought up:

Nora was an orphan child who was raised by a wealthy man of the state. She was his 'play doll' and he brought a nurse to help him. He was a member of the bourgeois society who did not abide by the rules but set their own to be pursued. Hence, the ambience surrounding her was of secured freedom.

Helen, on the other hand, was raised by three ladies—her mother and two aunts. At the times, being a woman with no male guardian was not welcomed; so they ought to be extra careful about everything. For them to preserve their status in society they had to show some piety, with its rigidity in conduct follows. Growing up in such safeguarded habitat is guaranteed to produce the kind of restraint and blind accord one sees in Helen.

Ibsen's doctrine stood its ground and prevailed and triumphed over all opposing factors. His thought stream and sentiment was followed worldwide by his successors as well as his peers.

The 'Poet of the Nile' Hafez Ibrahim famous poem 'Knowledge' carries the sentiment to the dot:

'Mothers' are the land; (which if) well cultivated (with her birth-right intelligence and education) will prosper and produce an excellent crop (a wealth of good 'Generation'). So he presented dynamic and innovative portrayals of human beings who have transcended tradition and reshaped literary trends.

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