

# Stylistic Analysis of Characters in Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House*: Masculinity and Supremacy vs. Femininity and Helplessness<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

*A Doll's House* brought about the disillusionment of many men and women in the 19<sup>th</sup> century with its unique probing of the dynamics of married life as well as its uncompromising critique of a society that did not respect the freedom of human beings. Drawing on the works of stylisticians like Jeffries and Mills as well as using stylistic tools including endearments and sexist language, modality, and negation, this study aimed to analyze Helmer's and Nora's language. This research clarifies Nora's doll-like status at home and sheds some light on the strategies her husband adopts to maintain a kind of husband-doll relationship. Findings show that Nora sometimes acts like a doll on purpose to achieve her goals without posing any threat to Helmer's authority at home. Helmer seems to dote on Nora; he does not respect her as an equally respectable human being.

**Keywords:** *A Doll's House*; Drama; Stylistics; Endearments; Sexist Language; Negation; Modality

## 1. Introduction

Henrik Ibsen is known for his tendency to shock his audience by what can be called a predilection for disillusionment. The Norwegian playwright created works that came to be called *realistic problem plays*. Ibsen did not wish to contribute to the old conventions of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Norwegian stage by writing unrealistic plays that often masked the reality which the society on the whole was grappling with. Instead, Ibsen tried to portray reality as it really was.

Many socialists and feminists "have always praised *A Doll's House* as a breakthrough for women's rights" (Moi, 2016. p. 279). They have considered this

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play as a feminist play, and Callens (1998) mentions that feminists have voiced their concerns regarding how women are portrayed and he believes historical changes of the time concerning male dominance. But there are other critics like Templeton (2016) who believes this play does not present Nora as a truly feminist character. Templeton (2016) writes, “all female or no woman at all, Nora loses either way. Frivolous, deceitful, or unwomanly, she qualifies neither as a heroine nor as a spokeswoman for feminism (p. 30). On the other hand, other critics have mentioned their ideas about masculinity. Connell (2005), for example, explains that in modern era the term *masculinity* connects behavior with the type of individual, and this means that an “unmasculine” person would behave in a different manner to a masculine person, one example of behavior is “conciliatory rather than dominating” (pp. 67-68). Also, she explains that masculinity only exists in relation to femininity.

In his plays, Ibsen does not intend to extend the illusions of his characters. Rather, he masterfully conjures a situation that brings about the disillusionment of a character. From the point of view of the 19<sup>th</sup> century audience in Norway, he could be called outspoken or even outrageous when it came to matters of family and the relationship between men and women. His plays are revolutionary in terms of both social and sexual. Among such plays is *A Doll's House* (1958), with its shattering effect on the audience's notions of married life and the conventional feminine role. Forough (1959) regards *A Doll's House* as a crucial work in promoting women's rights movement in that it invites women to take part in the arena of social life.

*A Doll's House* mainly revolves around the life of a married woman called Nora. She is immensely admired by her husband, Helmer, who provides a comfortable home for her. Later in the play, we find out that years ago Helmer was struck by an illness that would have finished him off, had he not travelled to Italy for a better climate. Also, we understand that it was Nora who provided the money necessary for such an expensive journey. We learn that she forged her father's signature and with the help of Krogstad, a fellow employee at Helmer's office, raised a loan that saved her whole family from ruin. Nora spends the following years working day in, day out—though stealthily—to pay off her debt. However, through a series of unfortunate circumstances, her secret is let out, and Helmer's reaction is so far from what she anticipated that, for the first time in her life, she has to re-examine her status as a daughter, wife, and mother.

The play that can be regarded as a turning point in the conventional theater “honors the vitality of the human spirit in men and women” (Durbach, as cited in Burt, 2008, p. 60). *A Doll's House* marks a kind of sexual rebellion once Nora shuts the door on her marriage—a marriage that has been built on the old ideals of a patriarchal society. *A Doll's House*, first, premiered in Copenhagen on December 21, 1879. Ibsen recorded his first sketches of the play in his journal under the title “*Notes*

for a Modern Tragedy,” “the wife in the play ends by having no idea what is right and what is wrong; natural feelings on the one hand and belief in the authority on the other lead her to utter distraction . . .” (as cited in Burt, 2008, p. 62). Scott refers to Ibsen’s style as an “unlovely creed” and remarks:

How it could ever be possible for any woman with the maternal instinct fully developed to desert her children because her pride has been wounded, are points that may be very clear to the Ibsenites, but they require a considerable amount of argument to convince the commonsense playgoer. (as cited in Egan, 1972, p. 6)

What Scott regards as a wounded pride is more like a wounded spirit in a play that honors the spirit and vitality of any human being. It is Nora’s selfhood that is being stifled in her marriage to Helmer. Her attempts at being her true self are thwarted in her doll’s house, both as a young maiden in her father’s house and as a married woman. In addition, what is regarded as Nora’s *maternal instinct* leads to a kind of essentialism that has plagued women for quite a while.

When traits such as devoted, caring, and loving come to be associated with women under the rubric of maternal instinct, it is implied that a mother *naturally* cares for her child the way a father does not, or perhaps, he does but to a lesser extent. All the same, devotional love is ascribed to the mother because such a thing is instinctive and taken for granted to be already there. Nevertheless, Brannon notes, “research indicates that . . . the concept of maternal instinct has no support as a biologically based explanation for care giving, and both men and women have similar emotions related to nurturing” (as cited in Tyson, 2006, p. 110).

What is important here is to avoid categorizing on the basis of the conventions of society. Brannon claims that, as a result of this social programming, men and women respond differently when it comes to emotional encounters of any kind because they think they are supposed to. As a result, although the so-called “maternal instinct” (as cited in Tyson, 2006, p. 111) is essentially the same thing in both men and women, its outward manifestation finds its prominence in women.

The first reactions to *A Doll’s House* were shock, horror, disbelief, and the press particularly frowned at it as *improbable* for reasons that were put rather strongly by Scott earlier. Also, this disbelief can be seen in the way others received the play; for instance, *The Daily News* wrote about Nora, “in spite of Ibsen or any other theorist, it may be confidently asserted that no women who ever breathed would do any such thing” (as cited in Egan, 1972, p. 7).

Nora’s departure announced by the slamming of the door reverberated through the ages for quite a long time. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it was particularly

unsettling to the audience as well as the critics because they saw it as an attack on the very institution of marriage. For these viewers, “Nora became a monster, an unnatural woman, a Victorian Medea capable of deserting home, husband and children in search of a special ideal—the indulgence of self” (Egan, 1972, p. 7).

Ibsen himself saw this play as a “nutidstragedien,” meaning “the tragedy of the contemporary age (as cited in McFarlane, 1994, p. 75), possibly because of the unresolved conflicts between the married couple and Nora’s departure for an uncertain future on her own. However, the play does leave open the possibility of a discovery of the self and the true meaning of freedom. Nora embarks alone on a quest for her identity and seeks a new meaning for reality because for Ibsen, “truth is something individual and subjective” (pp. 72-73). One has to set out for the journey of self-discovery preferably alone if he or she wants to come out of the fog and see the clear light of the day.

## 2. Methodology

According to Jeffries (2010), stylistics is a subdiscipline of linguistics that can be divided into two major categories: literary and linguistic. This study uses stylistic tools to study the language of the characters in order to probe the male-female relationships. Masculinity, supremacy, femininity, and helplessness are used to connect the stylistic aspect of the research with the literary aspect and conclusions are made when stylistics are applied to the play.

In this study, we are concerned with literary stylistic analysis that draws upon linguistic models to explain certain literary effects. For this analysis, the researcher uses Mill’s (1995) study on endearments and sexist language, as well as Jeffries’s (2010) work in modality and negation. But before going on, a brief introduction on these terms is needed.

Endearments are words such as *babe*, *honey*, or *sweetie* that are used to show affection. However, such words can also be loaded with negative connotations that aim to please at the same time that they demean the addressee. Modality refers to a speaker’s attitude about a situation or how he or she wishes it to be. For instance, in the sentence “I wish you had told me the truth,” the word *wish* has a modal meaning in that it shows what the situation is like at the same time as it opens up the possibility for an alternative that is the one the speaker desires.

Modality can be epistemic, boulomaic, or deontic: The first one indicates certainty and likelihood as in “Their marriage won’t last long,” the second one shows desirability as in “I wish you would stop arguing with your brother,” and the last one implies obligation as in “You should talk to your father first.” Note that these

categories are not clear-cut and can overlap. Jeffries (2010, p. 118) proposes four categories for modal meaning:

1. Lexical verbs: *wish, hope*
2. Modal adverbs: *of course, possibly*
3. Modal adjectives: *certain, possible*
4. Conditional structures: *if. . .*

Negation in a language occurs when the absence of something is noted. For instance, in the sentence “There’s a lack of commitment on your part,” the word *lack* indicates the absence of what is desired, namely commitment. According to Jeffries (2010), such structures create *nonexistent versions of the world* or hypothetical realities, which implicitly tell the reader about what the situation could/should/would have been. Sexist language is noted for its discriminatory treatment of men and women to the exclusion of one sex. Some feminists claim that there is an underlying pattern in most languages that perpetuates the belief that “male” is positive whereas “female” is negative, and such a misconception is taken for granted by many language users (Cameron, 1998, p. 10). These elements are dealt with in detail later.

Through these linguistic elements and the analysis, we can better understand the literary effects of the language of the characters and make deductions as to Nora’s position in the play. Nora can be considered either as a happy housewife heroine—to use Friedan’s phrase (1974)—or as a monster, a “Medea,” terms that indicate the common 19<sup>th</sup> century ideology regarding women. In this ideology, women are either passive angels or active monsters. Those women who stay at home and do indoors, listen to their husbands, make foods, and so on are considered as angels, whereas any woman who is doing social activities, has a job, and is active outdoors like men is considered as a monster woman.

Helmer keeps reminding Nora of her “sacred duties,” duties that entail a woman’s submission and compliance with her husband’s wishes. Yet, Nora is quite adamant about leaving her home in order to begin what Friedan (1974) calls a “passionate journey” (p. 73). Friedan (1974) remarks that a woman’s search for an identity, other than the one defined for her by the patriarchal male, has received derogatory treatment by those who argue that such wayward women are “neurotic victims of penis envy” (p. 73). Also, we can see this attitude in Helmer when he describes Nora’s decision as *shocking, unheard of, blind, foolish, and delirious*.

### 3. Discussion

#### 3.1. Endearments

Helmer's attitude towards his wife is affectionate, but in a manner more appropriate in treating a doll. Though it is obvious from the beginning of the play that he dotes on Nora, one cannot help but feel that their relationship is not one of mutual understanding; rather, it is similar to how a child might play with his or her toys. Helmer keeps addressing Nora the way one might talk to a small child of fragile disposition. Consider the following examples taken from Helmer's conversations with Nora: "Is that my little lark twittering out there?" (p. 3), "Is it my little squirrel scurrying around?" (p. 3), "Has my little spendthrift been wasting money again?" (p. 4), "the same little featherbrain" (p. 4), "you extravagant little person" (p. 5), "my little skylark must not droop her wings" (p. 4), "my precious little singing bird" (p. 30), and "I took my charming little Capri maiden—my capricious little Capri maiden, I should say—on my arm . . ." (p. 56).

Words such as *little*, *skylark*, and *squirrel* might, at first glance, be construed as terms of endearment; however, they are not ideologically innocent. That is to say, they reflect the speaker's attitude regarding the equality between men and women in terms of intelligence and mental power. Mills (1995) suggests that such terms indicate a kind of "equivalence between women and cute small animals" (p. 89). She, further, explains that though these terms are sometimes used by women when talking to men, they are usually in the context of parent-child relationship or used by older women for younger men, but they still refer to women more frequently and are, thus, indicative of "asymmetric patriarchal power relations" (p. 89).

In addition, the use of endearments is connected with name-calling or what Jeffries (2010) categorizes as *naming* and *describing*. Naming gives the speaker the power to describe the world in his or her own subjective way. Take these examples from Jeffries (p. 20):

1. *He lived in a Victorian terraced house with original features.* Or,
2. *He lived in a museum.*

Whereas the first sentence has a tone of approval and admiration, the second one is pejorative and shows the speaker's disapproval of the lack of modern features (Jeffries, 2010). As you have seen, naming, more often than not, is a matter of ideological or strategic choice on the part of the speaker. To get back to the main discussion, Helmer's choice of words indicates the way he views his wife. Words such as *squirrel*, *skylark*, or *little person* show that he regards his wife as an object of pleasure, as a plaything who must "twitter" and "scurry around" while he makes sure

of her safety and well-being. The terms that refer to animals show that Nora is fragile, diminutive, and in need of protection.

Also, Helmer's choice of nouns is metaphorical. The metaphors shed light on his mindset regarding his wife. In other words, when Helmer calls Nora "skylark" or "squirrel," the underlying assumption is that he sees analogies between his wife and these animals in terms of their small, delicate stature. Such language is rooted in the patriarchal system of thought that was dominant in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. A woman was encouraged to play her part as the angel in the house, to act as a "squirrel" that kept "twittering" around her husband and children.

Thus, Helmer's language indicates intimacy at the same time that it helps him maintain his superiority to Nora and acts as a supervisor to her needs, as is clear in this sentence: "Do you know, Nora, I have often wished that you might be threatened by some great danger, so that I might risk my life's blood, and everything, for your sake" (p. 61). What is more, he wishes to keep their relationship the way it is. Let us consider this sentence: "I would not wish you to be anything but just who you are, my sweet little skylark" (p. 6). Only, she is not really a skylark. She would not admit it herself, but her desire to spread her skylark wings gradually builds up to the breaking point at the end of the play.

### 3.2. Modality

Nora uses modal words more frequently than Helmer. Some of her modality choices, somehow, undermine the force of her speech as well as set up hypothetical alternatives to the real situation. Put it in another way, these modal words reflect Nora's opinion about what the situation is or what she wishes it to be. If we accept that Nora is a doll in a doll's house, modality seems a rather convincing way for her to voice her opinions mildly without sounding too assertive, especially when talking to Helmer. Take the following examples from Nora's speech:

1. *I don't suppose I should* care whether I owed money or not (p. 4). (epistemic)
2. [To Helmer] *I should not* think of going against your wishes (p. 6). (epistemic)
3. I told [Torvald] how much *I should* love to travel abroad . . . (p. 14). (boulomaic)
4. Sometimes one has a tiny little bit of influence, *I should hope* (p. 22). (boulomaic)
5. [To Mrs. Linde] You *ought not to* be so superior (p. 12). (deontic)
6. I told [Torvald] that he *ought to* remember the condition I was in, and that he *ought to* be kind and indulgent to me . . . (p. 14) (deontic and boulomaic)
7. I even hinted that [Torvald] *might* raise a loan . . . (p. 14). (deontic)
8. . . . when my dancing and dressing-up and reciting have palled on [Torvald]; then, it *may be* a good thing to have something in reserve . . . (p. 14). (epistemic)

9. NORA: *If* your little squirrel *were to* ask you for something very, very prettily—? (epistemic)
- HELMER: What then?
- NORA: Would you do it?
- HEMER: I should like to hear what it is, first.
- NORA: Your squirrel *would* run about and do all her tricks *if you would* be nice, and do what she wants. (epistemic)
- HELMER: Speak plainly.
- NORA: Your skylark *would* chirp about in every room, with her son rising and falling—[. . .]
- I *would* play the fairy and dance for you in the moonlight, Torvald. (p. 35). (epistemic)
10. NORA (playing with his coat buttons, and without raising her eyes to his): *If* you really want to give me something, you *might*—you *might*. (boulomaic)
- HELMER: Well, out with it!
- NORA (speaking quickly): You *might* give me money Torvald. Only, just as much as you can afford . . . (p. 5). (boulomaic)

Let us compare Nora's lengthy sentences with Helmer's curt replies: "What then?," "Speak plainly," and "out with it!" Nora beats about the bush, uses cheerful and childlike language, claps her hands, plays with Helmer's coat buttons, and does not look him straight in the eyes. She does not say, "Please give me some money" or "I really need a vacation"; instead, she puts it as mildly as she can, as politely, and as submissively as Helmer would find befitting of a little skylark. Modality choices and indirectness are like strategies on Nora's part to be docile at the same time as she voices her thoughts and feelings without jeopardizing the husband-doll relationship in her family.

Jeffries and McIntyre (2011) contends that modality reflects the interpersonal aspect of a language because the speaker can channel her opinion through her modal choices, thus communicating to the listener her perceptions, desires, or expectations. Jeffries (2010) makes a distinction between modal assertion and its categorical version and points out that even the strongest form of modality weakens the force of a proposition. For instance, in example # 1, Nora said, "I don't care whether I owe money or not," she would sound very assertive and confident. Also, this applies to examples # 3-7 which suggest that Nora *wishes* to be taken more seriously—by her husband, her friends, and acquaintances, as someone who can be



consulted and depended upon in critical situations. Yet, she does not claim what is her due; she simply wishes to be taken seriously.

In example # 8, we can sense Nora's foreboding that, sooner or later, Helmer is going to find out that her dancing and singing are just the pleasant exterior of a woman who has been role-playing for the greater part of her life. Nora might be thinking that, someday in the future, she can no longer keep the appearance of a happy housewife who lives in a perfect doll's house. Examples # 9 and 10 show how Nora herself contributes to maintaining the facade of her doll's house at the same time that she is being manipulative towards her husband.

We could say that in example # 2, Nora's sentence is rather dubious because its mild epistemic meaning does not promise that she will always abide by Helmer's rules and ethics. There is an underlying tone to this sentence that is the possibility that Nora likes secretly violating the strict codes of conduct set by Helmer. Example # 2 indicates what we will find later in the play that Nora takes pride in procuring the means to save her husband without his knowledge. She tells her friend, Mrs. Linde, that she, too, has something "to be proud and glad of," that "I was the one who found the money," and "It was I who saved Torvald's life" (pp. 12-13).

Finally, Nora admits that although her debt to Krogstad made her miserable, she took pleasure in the fact that she was the one who steered the family in the time of crisis, "it was a tremendous pleasure to sit there working and earning money. *It was like being a man* [my emphasis]" (p. 15). Also, Forough (1959) postulates that although Nora is scared of the ramifications of such covert actions, she secretly enjoys having committed them. Such a point reminds us of the beginning of the first scene, when Nora hides the packet of macaroons. Helmer has forbidden her to eat sweet things because he does not want her to ruin her teeth, but she takes pleasure in flouting the rules every now and then. This might suggest that she will not remain a doll forever.

### 3.3. *Negating*

Like modality, negation is a way of setting up a hypothetical reality that makes it possible for the speaker to show her feelings about the actual situation. Stylisticians study negation under the rubric of "negative polarity" (Norgaard et al., 2010, p. 128), which refers to the choice between negative or positive alternatives. For more examples, let us take a look at Nora's language:

1. They all think that I am *incapable* of anything really serious (p. 12).
2. [Torvald] said I was *thoughtless* (p. 14).
3. I have *no* influence (p. 22).

4. I am *not* as silly as he thinks (p.26).
5. Is a daughter *not* to be allowed to spare her dying father anxiety and care? Is a wife *not* to be allowed to save her husband's life? (p. 26).

The negation in the above examples is significant in that it evokes an alternative reality that is more desired by Nora. She is frustrated because no matter what she does to prove her wisdom and skill, she is still *incapable*, *silly*, and *thoughtless* in Helmer's eyes. Based on these sentences, we could deduce that:

- Nora is disappointed about the low opinions others have about her capacity as a woman.
- She is upset that she can get what she wants or somehow influence Torvald, *only* when she is "scurrying around" and acting like a doll.
- She feels the injustice of a social system that strictly defines familial duties for women and men in discriminatory ways.

Also, negation establishes a kind of polyphony in the text. In other words, negation is a technique to encode "different voices or viewpoints in the text" (Norgaard, 2010, p. 130). In the above examples, the word *incapable* sets up *capable* as the more desired alternative that Nora hopes for. Thus, in claiming that she has "no influence," Nora is telling us that she wishes to be more effective and have a more decisive role in Helmer's life. In example # 5, negation is an essential part of Nora's rhetorical questions as a way of conveying what she believes in "that instead of remaining passive, women must be allowed to take action when the situation calls for it. In this way, we can hear different voices of the same character" (Norgaard, 2010, p. 131).

### **3.4. Helmer's Sexist Language**

A language is sexist when it instills discriminatory biases against men or women, especially because such language presupposes that a certain way of looking at a particular sex is admissible. For more examples, we can look at the following extracts from Helmer's conversations with Nora. Here, we can see how sexism is reflected stylistically through ready-made phrases, nominalization, and prioritizing:

1. I am *man enough* to take everything upon myself (p. 38).
2. Almost everyone who has gone to the bad early in life has had a deceitful mother [...] It seems most commonly to be *the mother's influence* . . . (p. 29).
3. I shouldn't be a man if this *womanly helplessness* did not actually give you a double attractiveness in my eyes (p. 65).
4. You have no idea what *a true man's heart* is like, Nora (p. 65).

5. There is something so indescribably sweet and satisfying, to a *man*, in the knowledge that he has forgiven his wife—forgiven her freely, and with all his heart (p. 65).

Example # 1 could be classified in the category of ready-made phrases. In this group, we can find expressions like *old wives' tale* and *my grandpa is a bit of an old woman*, in which the language is sexist because of its pejorative treatment of women—a fact that is reinforced by presenting the information as if it were “the natural state of affairs” (Mills 1995, p. 98). In example # 1, the phrase *man enough* assumes that *man*, as an approving adjective, is the norm against which one's courage, strength, and commonsense are evaluated. Here, *man enough* is opposed to *womanly helplessness* and, therein, lies the sexism of Helmer's language. In this expression, *man* is a sexist label that suggests the hierarchy in a social setting in which men are accorded a higher status. Mills (1995) explains that in expressions such as this, *man* is not used as a “true generic,” but as a “gender-specific” (p. 66) term that has a fixed nature. The gender-specific nature of this term can be seen when we try to use the term to refer to females, for example, “man is a mammal which breastfeeds his young.” For many people, this sentence sounds strange because when the referent to the term *man* is female, it cannot be used generically.

In example # 2, sexism is inherent in the phrase *mother's influence* where the word *influence* is used as a noun. We could rephrase the sentence to “the popular belief is that a mother *influences* her children,” by using the word *influence* as a verb—a choice that will somehow undermine the force of the original sentence. Once a process (verb) is changed into a state (noun), a sentence is less likely to be questioned by the reader because a noun shows a state of affairs that is not as open to debate. According to Jeffries (2010), a noun like *invasion* is understood as a “presupposition,” whereas a verb like *to invade* is interpreted as a “proposition” (p. 21). As mentioned before, a presupposition is less likely to be refuted, whereas a proposition can be questioned and challenged. In the phrase *mother's influence*, it is assumed that a mother holds sway over her children—maybe to a greater extent than a father does. Thus, Helmer's underlying notion in example # 2 is that, first and foremost, it is the mother who determines children's upbringing, so if children go astray, the mother is to blame. And, this “seems most commonly true.”

We could look at examples # 3 and 4 from the standpoint of prioritizing. In this technique, which refers to the subordination of part(s) of a sentence to a main clause, the syntactic levels of a sentence are analyzed for ideological effects. Jeffries (2010) maintains that the information in a subordinate clause is not usually up for debate because subordination turns information into an assumption or presupposition, not a proposition.

- **Example # 3** (from the abovementioned examples)

Subject		Predicate		
I		shouldn't be	Complement a man . . .	
Subject		Predicate		
Modifier			Object 1	Object 2
Womanly	helplessness	did not give	you	a double...

The head noun in the subordinate clause is *helplessness* that has been modified by *womanly*—a term that refers to feminine traits, as opposed to *manly*, a masculine attribute. *Womanly* has a derogatory aspect, a feature studied by feminists as the “semantic derogation of women.” This derogation is found in binary categories of language, for example, *master/mistress*, *head/heart*, *man/woman*, and *bachelor/spinster* (Mills, 1995). *Womanly*, as a premodifier, only adds to the strength of the presupposition. The fact that *helplessness* is used in a subordinate clause takes the assumption of woman’s powerlessness into a lower syntactic level that is rather out of reach of the reader’s suspicion. So, the reader is not invited to question whether woman is really helpless or not. Yates, in his *Revolutionary Road*, writes, “if you wanted to do something absolutely honest, something true, it always turned out to be a thing that had to be done alone” (2008, originally published in 1961, p. 327).

- **Example # 4** (from the abovementioned examples)

S\	P	O <sup>1</sup>	C (level 2)	
you	have		no idea	what
M1	M2		S	P
true	man's		heart	is like

In example # 4, once again, we have a presupposition placed in a subordinate clause. The head noun in *a true man's heart* is *heart* that is modified by *true* and *man*. As mentioned earlier, *man* is a gender-specific noun that represents man’s experience as the norm. This is turned into an assumption with the help of other modifier *true*, so as to support the underlying message of the sentence, “A husband, by virtue of being a man, is capable of generous and magnanimous actions, especially when it comes to an errant wife.”

In example # 5, Helmer is being condescending enough to forgive his wife for having saved him. We can see the quintessential patriarchal male in Helmer when

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<sup>1</sup>S (subject), P (predicate), O (object), M (modifier), C (complement)

he addresses Nora as if she were a mischievous child who needs to be reprimanded. Helmer's language sounds axiomatic, especially because of the generic use of the article in "there is something sweet . . . to a man . . ." In this structure, the article *a* means "any," and so it indicates that the individual is the representative of the class. That is how the underlying message is generalized to *all* men and women.

What Helmer seems to be ignoring here is that Nora goes out to save her life because she wants to be more than a skylark. She yearns for an active existence and does not wish to be constantly associated with small helpless animals. Her acts of transgression, if we may call them so, are her way of objecting to the reductive definition that has been forced on her ever since she was a little girl. Nora is transferred safe and sound from her father's house to her husband's, a place that is conventionally believed to be a haven where woman eventually experiences her feminine fulfillment. Kuntz (as cited in Chong-Gossard, 2008) regrets this and maintains that women are constantly defined and redefined in the patriarchal society by the male members of the family. She mainly discusses this issue within the context of ancient Greece, but we can find that what she says is also applicable to the situation of women in the 19<sup>th</sup> century:

Women are defined by an irreversible progress from one man's home to another. Not a fixed place is theirs; they are always exiles and always suspect. A woman's place may be at home, but it is not her home and when she is introduced into it, she may bring a productive fertility or destruction. (pp. 7-8)

Nora's productive fertility keeps the house alive with three cheerful children. But once Krogstad's letter divulges her secret to Helmer, she turns from a *singing bird* into a *hypocrite* and a *criminal*. In Helmer's eyes, she is a deceitful woman who does not deserve to bring up the children because she has put everything, including Helmer's future, at stake with her *disgraceful behavior*. Nora becomes a destructive force and a bad influence inasmuch as she has defied her husband's wishes. This part of the play (Act III) unveils the mutability of Helmer's love for Nora, indicated by the abrupt change of nouns mentioned in the previous sentences. Such a major shift in Helmer's opinions of his wife, further, implies that so far he has been in love with a doll, not a human being capable of decisive actions. As Nora rightly mentions, "You have never loved me. You have only thought it pleasant to be in love with me" (p. 66).

#### 4. Conclusion

The stylistic analysis of *A Doll's House* illuminates the outcome of Helmer's and Nora's relationship by explaining the effects of certain conscious choices in

language. Put another way, in this play, stylistics equips us with the linguistic toolkit crucial to understanding the workings of a particular ideology, viz. masculine superiority, feminine helplessness, man's superior judgment and reasoning, woman's lack of common sense, repression of identity, and the reduction of woman to a series of roles such as daughter, wife and, ultimately, mother. In sum, stylistic analysis opens our eyes to the fact that our linguistic choices are almost never ideologically innocent.

From the study of endearments, we can infer that Helmer somehow tries to sugar-coat his low opinion of Nora's sense of judgment, her feminine thoughtlessness regarding the ways of the world, and her incapability to take care of herself. Helmer's sexist language suggests that he is a macho man who congratulates himself in his mental prowess, a capacity which, in his own eyes, gives him the right to direct Nora whenever she goes astray. These two stylistic elements are mainly discussed in relation to Helmer's language because he manipulates them to establish his own superiority in every respect. Modality and negation are particularly relevant to Nora's language because, as previously mentioned, she resorts to modal words to voice her opinions as mildly as possible without sounding assertive. Negation indicates that Nora is irritated at her own image as a helpless, thoughtless housewife.

Through stylistic analysis, it was shown that in the relationship between the two main characters of the play, Nora and Helmer, it was Helmer who had most of the supremacy. From the beginning of the play, near to the end of it, he could control Nora to the extent of his desire by manipulating her, through his words. Based on the analysis, it is concluded that the play adheres predominantly to masculine ideology.

Thus, pressure builds up inside a marriage that is not based on mutual understanding, but on one-sided views of superiority and dominance. Nora eventually comes to grips with the fact that in order to be a good wife or mother, she needs to understand her duties to herself first because, before everything else, she is a human being and if that part of her is stifled, her children are better-off without her. Nevertheless, Helmer, as the epitome of the patriarchal male, overrules Nora's decision to leave because "before all else, you are a wife and a mother" (p. 68).

Nora is no longer a doll in the play. Nora insists that she should stand alone if she is to find her new identity. She claims that as long as she remains in her doll's house with Helmer, she will not be able to respect her duties to herself. This iconic move has made it clear for many men and women that one should appreciate one's spirit and vitality because in that alone rests the true fulfillment. So, Nora departs for the journey of self-discovery by shutting the door on Helmer and everything he stands for.

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