CSULB THEATRE ARTS

INGMAR BERGMAN’S

NORA

Adapted and translated by
Frederick J. Marker
Based on
Ibsen’s A Doll’s House

DIRECTED BY
CHRISTOPHER SHAW

Location: Studio Theatre
General Admission: $17
Students/ Seniors/ Faculty/ Military: $14
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# Table of Contents

- **Important Information & Terminology**  
- **Character Breakdown/Synopsis**  
- **“Nevertheless, she persisted”**  
- **A (Condensed) History of Feminism**  
- **More on Gender Roles**  
- **Interviews**  
  - Christopher Shaw, Director  
  - Jessica Soza, Nora  
  - Caitlin Eby, Lighting Designer  
- **Classroom Activity**  
- **Discussion Questions**  
- **Additional Resources**  
- **South Coast Repertory**
Before We Begin...

Here’s a reference page on some terms, names, events, etc. that you will come across in this audience guide!

**Feminism:** the advocacy of women’s rights on the basis of equality of the sexes

**Misogyny:** dislike of, contempt for, or ingrained prejudice against women

**Patriarchy:** a system of society or government in which the father or eldest male is head of the family and descent is traced through the male line

- A system of society or government in which men hold the power and women are largely excluded from it

**Gender Roles:** A set of societal norms dictating the types of behaviors which are generally considered acceptable, appropriate, or desirable for people based on their actual or perceived sex or sexuality. Usually centered on the concepts of femininity or masculinity.

**Women’s Suffrage:** The right of women to vote in elections

**Henrik Ibsen:** a major 19th-century Norwegian playwright, theatre director, and poet. Often referred to as “the father of realism”; wrote *A Doll’s House* in 1879.

**A Doll’s House:** First premiered at the Royal Theatre in Copenhagen, Denmark in 1879; *Nora* is a stripped down adaptation of this play.

**Age of Majority:** the recognized threshold of adulthood declared in law; differs from country to country

- In Norwegian history: up until 1845, unmarried women were considered as minors (no matter how old) until the age of majority was set for both sexes as age 25, and women were no longer required to submit to a guardian after that age
- In the United States, many early laws were adopted from the English Common Law; in regards to age of majority, “By the common law, every person is, technically, an infant, until he is twenty one years old; and, in legal presumption, is not of sufficient discretion to contract an obligation at an earlier age”¹. Note the selected pronoun; it is unclear if the law differed for women (although we may assume that it was)

**Camila Collett (1813-1895):** A Norwegian writer, often referred to as the first Norwegian feminist

**Aasta Hansteen (1824-1908):** A Norwegian painter, writer, and early feminist.

¹ American Jurist, No. XXXIX, October, 1838
Character Breakdown

Nora Helmer

A dutiful and loving wife to Torvald and a mother. As the truth about Nora’s past begins to resurface, we see her eyes open to a world where she cannot truly be herself.

Torvald Helmer

Married to Nora, Torvald is a successful working man at the bank and is highly proud of his status earned by his achievements. Torvald greatly admires Nora yet treats her like a naïve child or doll.

Doctor Rank

A close friend to both Nora and Torvald. He suffers from a fatal illness, which may play a role in his views on the world and his lack of concern for the consequences of his actions. He is in love with Nora.

Mrs. Linde

Nora’s childhood friend who is recently widowed and seeking employment. She is Nora’s closest confidant, and her contrasting personality highlights some of Nora’s flaws.

Nils Krogstad

A working partner to Torvald at the bank. Krogstad knows of Nora’s secret past and takes advantage of the situation for his own self-serving purposes.

Synopsis

It is Christmastime at the Helmer household. Nora is preparing for a festive holiday with her husband, Torvald, who was just appointed to a management position at the bank. Whilst preparing, Nora is visited by an old friend, Mrs. Linde. Through their conversation, it is revealed that many years ago, Nora forged her ailing father’s signature to secure a large sum of money that was used to take Torvald on a trip to Italy when he himself was deathly ill. Now, as Nora’s skeletons are emerging from the closet, she must decide whether to tell her husband the truth or hide this scandalous secret from him.
“Nevertheless, she persisted”: Finding Nora in 2017

A Doll’s House, Henrik Ibsen’s landmark play of which Nora is an adaptation, was revolutionary when it first premiered in 1879, one hundred and thirty-eight years ago to be exact. No other playwright dared to talk about the roles and responsibilities of women in the way that Ibsen did. Although some progress had been made at the time (in legislation, the age of majority in Norway changed so that women would be free of a legal guardian at the age of twenty-five, and other prominent female voices such as Camilla Collett and Aasta Hansteen were also emerging), it took a man, Ibsen, to feel empowered to expose a world of inequity and oppression in the simplest of forms: a modern family.

So it should come as no surprise that women have continued to claim their independence through self-awakening as Nora did. The history of feminism and women’s rights is global and spans hundreds of years, leading up to today - March 8, 2017 marked 108 years since the first official observance of International Women’s Day. Women have played an important role in revolutionizing what it means to be engaged with society in 2017 in ways that perhaps have never been seen by the average consumer of news and information. Though exact numbers are impossible to obtain, many are confident that the Women’s March, which occurred around the world on January 20, 2017, was the largest single-day protest in American history.

So, where can we find Nora, well over a century after she slammed the door on her husband, Torvald?

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2 http://www.un.org/events/women/iwd/2008/history.shtml
Nora was seen by billions around the world in 2016 as Hillary Clinton became the first woman to run for President of the United States on a major party ticket. More recently, Nora was seen on the floor of the US Congress when Elizabeth Warren recited a letter from Coretta Scott King in testimony against Jeff Sessions’ confirmation as Attorney General. Nora has published books, such as when Malala Yousafzai shared her story with the world regarding her courageous fight to give girls across the globe access to education. Nora can often be seen in the UN, giving speeches like Emma Watson’s campaign for HeForShe. Perhaps most importantly, Nora’s strength was seen around the world in masses on January 20 as she marched with millions of other women.

“Nevertheless, she persisted”

During the confirmation hearings for Attorney General Jeff Sessions, on February 7, 2017, Senator Elizabeth Warren of Massachusetts took to the floor to read a letter, written by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s widowed wife, Coretta Scott King, as evidence to her voting against the confirmation. When Senate majority leader Mitch McConnell prohibited Sen. Warren from finishing the letter, women and men around the world reacted in solidarity against the silencing. The following day, McConnell defended his actions, claiming “She was warned. She was given an explanation. Nevertheless, she persisted.” That statement immediately and has since become a unifying creed amongst women who see themselves, in that moment and in their own personal lives, in Sen. Warren’s shoes. They persist.  

A (Very Condensed) History of Feminism & Women’s Rights

Here is a brief look at the history of feminism and women’s rights, specifically in the United States as well as in Nora’s homeland, Norway. If you wish to delve deeper into the feminist movements, there are countless sources available (see page 16 for more).

**UNITED STATES**

- **1848**

- **1919/1920**
  19th Amendment Is Voted On & Ratified; Giving Women the Right to Vote

- **1963**
  John F. Kennedy Signs Equal Pay Law After Passed by National Legislation

- **2016**
  Hillary Clinton Becomes First Female Presidential Candidate for a Major Political Party

**NORWAY**

- **1845**
  “Law of Vast Majority for Single Women”; Women Were No Longer Required to Have a Legal Guardian After the Age of 25

- **1910/1913**
  Universal Suffrage for All Municipal Elections/National Elections

- **1981**
  Gro Harlem Brundtland Becomes Norway’s First Female Prime Minister

- **2013**
  Erna Solberg Becomes Norway’s Second Female Prime Minister
A little more on gender roles...

It’s important.

How exactly do we see gender roles enforced through a patriarchal society?

*Gender roles emerge at a young age*

Think back to when you were a young child and you wanted McDonald’s for lunch. The server taking your order would ask, “Is the Happy Meal toy for a girl or a boy?”

Next time you are in a toy store or a department store with a toy section, see if you can spot the “pink aisle” and the “blue aisle.”

*It continues through school*

In addition to the stifling of individual expression, dress codes in schools enforce strict guidelines that create a sharp divide between how boys and girls are treated based on what they wear. These policies dictate what is ‘appropriate’ for students based on their gender, and often the ‘modesty’ that is pressured on young girls carries into adulthood. Men may also be punished for wearing makeup or having long hair.⁵

*The patriarchy is romanticized*

Young women everywhere dream of having their father walk them down the aisle at their wedding. However, many do not realize that this tradition dates back to a time when women were their father’s literal ‘property’ until they became married, at which time their father ‘gave them away,’ so the bride then became her husband’s property. In fact, the concept of marrying out of love is a fairly new practice.⁶

*It dominates the work place*

Although the Equal Pay Law was signed in 1963 by John F. Kennedy, white women nationwide still earn approximately 20% less than her white male counterparts.⁷ This gap widens when you look at non-white women and men. Plus, this wage gap debate is coupled with the debate of whether or not wives (especially those who have children) should hold careers at all. What effect do you think this has on both men and women? Do you know of a household where a woman makes more than her male partner does?

Do any of these sound familiar?

⁵ [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/soraya-chemaly/every-reason-your-schools_b_8147266.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/soraya-chemaly/every-reason-your-schools_b_8147266.html)
Interviews

Christopher Shaw, Director

Why is it important that audiences see Nora now? What do you hope is the big takeaway from this production?

I think the play reaches beyond Feminism (although there is certainly that theme and dynamic) to a broader view of gender roles and gender traps. What does it mean to live an authentic life, and not be trapped by the expectations of others and society?

Each individual should be free to identify themselves from their personal truth and live the life they wish to lead, and we should all support and respect that in them and in ourselves.

A Doll's House was written in the 1800’s, and Nora offers a more stripped down version. Text aside, what elements of the play do you think will resonate most with our twenty-first century audience, most of whom are millennials?

I think this speaks to a vibration in the more progressive community of millennials, in regards to living an authentic life, being true to yourself - and for those coming from the influence of more traditional values, I hope this might make them think differently. In an interview with actress and model Ruby Rose (Orange is the New Black) in Elle magazine, she speaks about -

“what it is like to have an identity that deviates from the status quo. Rose has long been vocal about the rigidity of the gender binary and gender roles, especially as they pertain to her own identity as gender fluid. People are talking about gender fluidity more and more now because once someone opens a door to something like that, people put their hands up and say, “That’s me! That’s my friend! That’s my sister! That’s my mom!”

Gender fluidity is not necessarily about sexuality or sexual preference - but in challenging traditional gender roles of man / woman, Rose says:

“Gender fluidity is not really feeling like you’re at one end of the spectrum or the other... For the most part, I definitely don’t identify as any gender. I’m not a guy; I don’t really feel like a woman, but obviously I was born one. So, I’m somewhere in the middle, which — in my perfect imagination — is like having the best of both sexes. I have a lot of characteristics that would normally be present in a guy and then less that would be present in a woman. But then sometimes I’ll put on a skirt — like today... The takeaway is that only you know who you were born to be, and you need to be free to be that person.” –
Many critics have cited that Nora (and A Doll’s House, for that matter) is really a tragic story about Torvald, and that in the end he suffers more so than his wife. Do you think this criticism challenges or takes away from the historical significance of Nora’s role in the early waves of feminism?

I don't think the play is a tragedy - it is Nora’s play, and what she does in the end is admirable, brave, progressive, moving and inspiring. I also don't think it is necessarily about Feminism, it is about one individual’s awakening and breaking free from an old way of identifying herself based in old patterns and traditional values that are a trap. She is lucky! She finds freedom in her courage to abandon that which blocks her from being true to herself and growing as a person. Her sacrifice is huge - to leave the security of her home and children. But she realizes the pain and grief attached to leaving and moving on is a step towards positive growth and becoming herself as opposed to living up to others idea of who she is supposed to be.

As for Torvald, he is most certainly also a victim of (male) gender roles and societal expectations, but has earned his situation in the end. I think his situation is simply the antithesis of Nora’s and should serve as a message that to cling to a concern of how others perceive you and to attempt to control others, possibly in the end you will suffer.

Jessica Soza, Nora

A Doll’s House, of which Nora is an adaptation, has a moment in the final scene that played an important role in ushering in an early wave of feminism. What do you think it is about Nora that makes her such an iconic female character in theatrical history?

I think the realization of self and breaking from societal norms becomes a quest that all human beings can be afraid to take. When we lose everything or realize we have nothing to lose, we are left to deal with ourselves. We then begin to discover what we are made of. I think Nora is finally brave enough to face the world on her own. Discover who she is. We owe that to ourselves but fear/ego keep us from taking that leap. I believe Nora takes that leap in a time period when it was not “allowed” and definitely unheard of.
How much of yourself do you see in Nora, or, how much of Nora do you see in you? How much of ‘Jessica’ do you bring to a role and allow the audience to see?

I bring my entire self to the role. It’s imperative as an actor to know the distinction of what Hugh O’Gorman calls the “daily self” and the “artistic self.” This has been the best discovery for me in my acting technique while studying here at CSULB. Alexandra Billings is also influential in reminding us we are always ourselves and not ourselves at the same time when in a role. The most important thing I’ve learned from Hugh is knowing when I am in imaginary circumstances or real circumstances. And what I’ve learned from Alex is how to be present in the thing that I’m in by listening and reacting. I don’t use any of my personal history, because I think that is dangerous for an actor and irrelevant to the world of the character but I know that as Jessica I can relate to a lot of what Nora is going through. I can imagine myself being in relationship with these people and living in these circumstances. That is how Nora comes to life through me.

What are you hoping audiences take away from this production of Nora?

I saw Ibsen’s A Dolls House in London on the West End and I left the theater incredibly moved and inspired, knowing I wanted to be an actor. I don’t expect people to leave feeling the way I did, but I do hope they are affected by this story. I hope they can relate to and sympathize with the characters. We are real people living a real life and this story was based on a real family that Ibsen knew. Sadly the real “Nora” was actually committed to a public asylum by her husband after her secret was revealed. After hearing this story Ibsen began work on A Doll’s House and in his notes he writes “A woman cannot be herself in modern society, with laws made by men and with prosecutors and judges who assess female conduct from a male standpoint.” I hope people see how far we have come and how we still must fight for what we have gained or have yet to gain.

Caitlin Eby- Lighting Designer

You have done a ton of interesting research when designing the lighting for Nora. Could you briefly describe what that process has been like, and perhaps highlight the importance of research for lighting designers – it’s not just about making sure the actors can be seen!

Providing visibility for the audience and the actors is always an important factor in a lighting design, to the point where it almost goes without saying between director and designer. More important, in terms of research and concept, is the emotional landscape of the play and how I can reinforce or juxtapose that with my lighting.

I started in a very realistic place with my lighting design for Nora by researching pictures of the sky in Norway, paintings from the 1800’s, studying the gaslight and oil fixtures used in Victorian homes, and by researching the exact arc of the sun over Christmas of 1879 in Oslo, Norway. I wanted my design to be grounded in the reality that the characters would be living in, and then the director and
I worked to abstract and strip down my research to its emotional truth, rather than its realistic one. When we found that the sun in Norway only rose to 7 degrees above the horizon, we thought it was a beautiful metaphor for Nora’s struggle throughout the play: a powerful celestial body, unable to reach its full potential because of the time and place. We thought it represented hope, but also a certain hopelessness, to have this low sun hanging in a sky of refreshing pale colors juxtaposed by the warm and almost stuffy colors of the gaslight fixtures that were used to light homes during this period.

**What exactly is the function of a cyc and a scrim, and how has the addition of these two elements enhanced your lighting design for this production?**

The approach to the cyc I’m using actually has three fabric elements: a white bounce will be hung just in front of the back wall of the theatre. About five feet or so in front of that will hang an ivory cyc, which hides the bounce from view of the audience. Most of the wash lights that I’m using to create the sky will actually be pointed upstage at the bounce, which then reflects that light back onto the cyc, lighting it from behind. The great thing about a bounce is that it really helps create soft, even fields of light by essentially doubling the amount of space the light has to travel and spreading it out more as it does so. It also allows me to put many of my lighting fixtures on the floor behind the cyc, providing the low angle of the Norwegian sun supported by my research while hiding the fixtures from the audience.

We will then hang the black scrim directly in front of the cyc. Scrims are “theatre magic” at its purest; when lit from the front they are opaque, but when lit from behind they become translucent. This allows me to choose when in the show we should have a sky and when we should have a black void, rather than being stuck with having to treat a big white piece of fabric on the stage the whole time. This was important to us because the emotional difference between the two, a wall of light versus complete emptiness, is profound — and a technique we want to use to heighten what is happening between the actors downstage.

Additionally, the use of these three pieces of fabric will help me truly layer light. I have wash lights pointed at the bounce, cloud textures pointing at the back of the cyc, and additional fixtures pointing at the scrim from the front and sides. My hope is that this layering will help me create a sky that feels like it has depth. It should have the emotional feeling of the sky in Norway, though it is abstracted by the reality of our Studio Theatre.

**What are you hoping the audience takes away from this production of Nora, and how do you see your lighting design fit in within this goal?**

My goal for any production is that the audience leaves thinking and questioning. I hope that this play paired with our approach to it will leave the audience thinking about misogyny, feminism, a
person’s potential, attaching a person’s worth solely to their physical appearance, domesticity, how the strict gender roles of the Victorian era impacted both men and women, and how these issues have changed (or haven’t) in our society today. The characters navigate all of these issues in an era where even the idea of them was absolutely taboo. My goal for the lighting design is to ground it in that era, but make it modern and relevant to today’s issues by allowing our actors to help me mold the design and use it to connect the audience with them as they go on this journey.

**Just in case you were wondering...**

**What exactly is a ‘cyc’ and a ‘scrim’?**

According to the encyclopedia, a cyclorama, or cyc, is a "background device employed to cover the back and sometimes the sides of the stage and used with special lighting to create the illusion of sky, open space, or great distance at the rear of the stage setting. Introduced early in the 20th century, a cyclorama usually forms a smoothly curving, concave wall at the rear of the stage. The cyclorama has a rough surface of plaster or canvas for diffuse light reflection and is painted white or light blue. The surface can then be illuminated with varying colors and intensities of light sky to simulate various times of day, seasons, and weather conditions. Images can also be projected onto the cyclorama surface to produce such effects as clouds or stars."

A scrim is “a special type of fabric that can be translucent, transparent, or opaque depending on how it’s lit; a sharkstooth scrim (as it’s often called) can be used to hide an object or character until a pivotal moment when the big reveal will have a dramatic impact. “Where did that guy come from?” the audience wonders. The answer: He was there all along. The trick is you just couldn’t see him.

A scrim will look opaque if everything behind it is in darkness, but shine a light back there and suddenly it’s almost transparent. (Okay, so it’s slightly more complicated than that—let’s give scenery and lighting designers their due.) You can even paint the scrim or project images onto it so it becomes a kind of translucent screen.

Since scrims are particularly useful when creating eye-popping special effects, it’s no surprise they turn up in a lot of big-budget Broadway shows. The design team for Ghost the Musical leaned heavily on a scrim to craft some truly dazzling visuals, like deceased characters walking through walls or ascending to heaven. Reportedly, to help conjure these incredible sights, a scrim was used across the front of the stage and half a dozen HD video projectors covered its entire width.” (source: http://dictionary.tdf.org/scrim/)
Classroom Activity

Ideally, this activity will take place before seeing *Nora*. The activity in its entirety should not take more than 10-15 minutes, but you may wish to allow time for reflection or discussion afterwards.

Below are a series of questions/scenarios. Physically respond to each question/scenario as to what extent they agree or disagree. This may be through an action such as, “Stand up if you agree”, or form a line across the room (i.e. left wall is ‘Strongly Agree’, right wall is ‘Strongly Disagree’). If you are doing this activity on your own, you can write down ‘Yes/No’ or ‘Agree/Disagree’ as your response. Please be aware that any and all options are choices and there is no correct or incorrect answer!

- People assume I am athletic
- I have been in a classroom where one gender was favored over the other
- People assume I can fix a car
- I believe that a young girl needs to be watched more closely than a young boy
- I have role models of my same gender
- I am usually expected to cook or clean
- My family expects me to get married
- I feel that it is OK for girls to play with trucks
- I feel that it is OK for boys to play with dolls
- I often receive compliments on my looks; hair, clothing, etc.
- I often receive compliments on my achievements; job, grades, etc.
- If I had a baby, I would feel pressured to return to work ASAP
- I have been discouraged to pursue a certain career because of my gender
- I find that the way I often act is different from others of my same gender
- I feel that it is OK for girls to wear blue
- I feel that it is OK for boys to wear pink
- I have been told to change what I was wearing in school or work
- I like being my gender
Discussion Questions

Pre-Show

1. Describe a time in your life when you took a great risk for someone you loved.
2. Reflect on a strong female presence in your life. This can be a relative, friend, teacher, mentor, etc. What was it about her that left an indelible mark on your life?
3. Talk about a time when you were stereotyped based on your gender. Were you told you couldn’t play a specific sport or you wouldn’t succeed in a certain career because you are a girl? Were you expected to ‘man up’ during a difficult time in your life, simply because you are a boy?
4. Are there certain things in life you assume will transpire or you will partake in based on your gender (get married, raise a family, make less money than your partner, etc.)?
5. In our interview with director Christopher Shaw, he states “I also don't think [Nora] is necessarily a play about feminism, it is about one individual’s awakening and breaking free from an old way of identifying herself based in old patterns and traditional values that are a trap”. Do you agree with his statement? What differences can you identify between feminism and Shaw’s explanation of the play?

Post-Show (SPOILERS AHEAD!)

1. Were Nora’s actions at the end of the play justifiable? Why or why not? If you were in her position, would you have made the same decision as she did?
   a. FOLLOW UP: Would your opinion or decision change if there were no children involved? How does this change (or lack of change) of opinion motivate your thoughts on the role of the mother? What if Torvald was the one who walked out?
2. Ingmar Bergman, whose adaptation of A Doll’s House you have recently seen, stated in an interview that Torvald is the true tragic character, and that he is crushed by the “aggression and brutality” of his wife, Nora. To what extent do you agree or disagree with this statement? If Torvald Helmer is really the tragic character in this play, why do you think Bergman chose to title this play ‘Nora’?
3. How did the other characters in the play (Dr. Rank, Krogstad, and Mrs. Linde) enforce Nora and Torvald’s experiences in their roles as a woman and as a man? In what ways did these characters prevent them from truly being their true selves?
4. How did the technical elements of the play – sets, costumes, lighting, and sound – enhance your experience of watching Nora? What did you think was unique in the design choices made for this production?
Additional Resources

On-Campus

- Women’s & Gender Equity Center ~ http://web.csulb.edu/divisions/students/wrc/
- Not Alone @ The Beach ~ http://web.csulb.edu/divisions/students/wrc/natb/

Off-Campus

- Women Shelter of Long Beach ~ http://www.womenshelterlb.org/

Nation & World -Wide

- YWCA ~ http://www.ywca.org/
- The Good Men Project ~ https://goodmenproject.com/
- HeForShe ~ http://www.heforshe.org/en
- The American Association of University Women ~ http://www.aauw.org/

For your reading/listening/viewing pleasure...

- ‘The Mask You Live In’ documentary; dir. Jennifer Siebel Newsom
- ‘Miss Representation’ documentary; dir. Jennifer Siebel Newsom

Both of these documentaries are part of The Representation Project; check out their website: therepresentationproject.org to watch the trailer (Both are available on Netflix)

- ‘Bad Feminist’ by Roxanne Gay
  - ISBN: 0062282719
- ‘Sister Outsider’ by Audre Lorde
  - ISBN: 1580911862
- ‘Men Explain Things to Me’ by Rebecca Solnit
  - ISBN: 1608464660
Nora’s story doesn’t stop here...

In the final scene of Ibsen’s classic A Doll’s House, Nora makes the shocking decision to leave her husband and children. A door slams. The curtain falls on a stunned audience. Lucas Hnath continues Nora’s story in this intriguing play with a decidedly modern perspective. Fifteen years have passed when there’s a knock on that same door. Why is Nora back—and what will her return mean to those she left behind? For tickets and more information, visit www.scr.org.

Find out more at: http://www.scr.org/calendar/view?id=8569