

# Gender Struggle over Ideological Power in Ibsen's *A Doll's House*

## LA LUTTE DES SEXES SUR LE POUVOIR IDEOLOGIQUE DANS MAISON DE POUPEE D'IBSEN

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**Abstract:** Ideological power in gender relations and its contradictions and conflicts are dealt with by different Western playwrights in different approaches. In Ibsen's *A Doll's House*, ideological elements are explored to reveal male misconception of women and causes that entail men's power. By analyzing gender relations in the form of power struggle, various conflicts between the male and the female are exposed to indicate the intensiveness of the gender struggle in winning over their control. Though men manipulate their power in an open way, women demonstrate their ideological strength with their forceful challenge of masculine power in a more tactful way, and deconstruct the traditional myths of gender roles.

**Key words:** gender struggle; ideological power; masculine power challenge

**Résumé:** Le pouvoir idéologique dans les relations de deux sexes, ses contradictions et ses conflits ont été traités par de différents dramaturges européens dans des approches différentes. Dans *Maison de poupée* d'Ibsen, les éléments idéologiques ont été épuisés pour révéler les idées fausses masculines vis-à-vis des femmes et les raisons pour lesquelles le pouvoir revient toujours aux hommes. En faisant des analyses sur les relations des deux sexes en forme de lutte de pouvoir, des conflits variés entre les hommes et les femmes ont été dévoilés pour indiquer l'intensité de la lutte des sexes dans le but de gagner le contrôle. Bien que les hommes manipulent leur pouvoir ouvertement, les femmes démontrent leur force idéologique dans une façon plus adroite et déconstruisent les mythes traditionnels sur les rôles des deux sexes.

**Mots-Clés:** lutte des sexes; pouvoir idéologique; pouvoir masculin, défi

## INTRODUCTION

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According to feminist criticism, the roots of prejudice against women have long been embedded in Western culture and ideology. Gender discrimination advocates such myths that the male is by nature superior, and the female inferior; and the one rules and the other is ruled. These myths of gender and race distort the relations between women and men. In a world of male dominance, men are endowed with power for political and socio-economic reasons, and they manipulate their power to control their opposites to satisfy their masculine desires. Because of this false assumption that males have more power than females, gender roles are defined accordingly. Since this assumption has been a traditional standard of ideology for centuries, women and men conform to the cultural ideas established for them by society, consciously or unconsciously, so much so that men find it hard to confront or accept any tendency of attack or sabotage to their absolute power. In order to keep the power, men try every means to build an absolute patriarchy of manhood, so that they can have a tight control of their opponents—women, politically, socially, economically, and sexually, both inside and outside their homes. They try to diminish female identity or role in the societal context by setting up an unfavourable image of females as ideologically submissive and dependent, that men are the subject or the absolute and that women are the Other—an object whose existence is defined and interpreted by the male, the dominant being in society. The consequences of this desire and practice of power for control are the tense relationship between the male and the female. As the voice for feminine emancipation in literary works arose in late 19th century and feminism reached its height in the 60s and 70s of the 20th century in Western world, male power has been strongly challenged by feminists for gender equality, namely, the equality for women. The conflicts of gender presented in literary works suggest the tendency of decline of the domain of male domination and the gaining of female power as “Feminism seeks to change the power relations between men and women that prevail under what in the late 1960s and the 1970s usually was called patriarchy, a term that referred to the (almost) complete domination of men in Western society (and beyond)” (Bertens, p. 96). During the process of men’s practice of masculine power, though they tasted tremendous sense of satisfaction and victory, they encountered strenuous counterattack from their female opponents, who fought against the negative stereotyping of female characters and succeeded partially in changing their image in literary works. The rise of feminism has turned the conflicts of gender into a power struggle between men and women, and the result of which is the upgrading of female ideology for freedom and equality and the gradual loss of masculine power of men, which is projected as the disillusion of men’s fantasy of domination over women reflected in modern Western drama.

## **1. STEREOTYPING OF GENDER ROLES**

According to Bertens, literary works are pervaded with ideology. So in order to get beyond a text’s ideological dimension we will have to begin with the cracks in its façade, with those sites where the text is not fully in control of itself. In order to expose a text’s ideology, interpretation must paradoxically focus on what the text does not say, on what the text represses rather than expresses. Ideology plays a crucial role in dealing with gender problem, because “ideology distorts reality in one way or another and falsely presents as natural and harmonious what is artificial and contradictory....If we succumb to ideology we live in an illusory world, in what in Marxism has often described as a state of false consciousness” (Bertens, p. 85). This is the real situation the male protagonist Torvald faces when he tries to deal with the opposite sex by projecting his ideological power on his opponent. Because of his “false consciousness”, or rather, his misconception of his own role and the role of women in society, his ignorance of the mentality of his counterpart, and his efforts to nurture and secure his masculine power over women initiate conflicts and make himself victimized.

Gender relation is discussed through the portrayal of struggle of ideological power between the men and the women. Ibsen’s *A Doll’s House* focuses on social and ideological aspects, through how women are perceived, especially in the context of social values and duties of both men and women as reflected through marriage. In *A Doll’s House*, men are seemingly in the dominant position, and they manipulate their power to control women in ideological sphere so that their own identity and social status may be retained and be acknowledged by the society. As exposed in *A Doll’s House*, men are in a financially and

ideologically superior position over women while women are kept in a subordinate position and are confined to their homes as they are not economically independent and have to rely on their husbands for support. What causes this situation to exist in the 19th-century Europe is the social context in which people held the notion that men were supposed to be responsible to their families and provide all the necessities that a family needed, while women were supposed to maintain their sacred duty of a good wife and mother. In the case of the male protagonist Helmer Torvald, his ideology is conditioned by social standards and his conception of manliness is based on man's social values. As a small bureaucrat in the 19th century Europe, Torvald has an honorable job, good salary, high social status and responsibilities, comfortable home, lovely children, and above all, a beautiful wife. It is these features of his identity that endows him with certain power both at home and in society. However, strongly influenced by the 19th-century European bureaucratic ideology, Torvald has very clear but narrow definition of a woman's role. It is Torvald's idea that women are inferior to men because women are less intelligent than men. He believes that the sacred duty of a woman is to be a good wife and mother while men's duty is to accomplish their fulfillment in society. He expects women to obey men and not argue with men's decisions, not only outside homes, but also inside homes, because, according to him, it is men that set up rules for women to abide by. Any breaking of rules is considered violation of men's dignity and power. He sees women as both child-like, helpless creatures detached from reality and totally dependent on men for support. His attitude towards his wife is a mixture of sense of possession and sexual passion. To him Nora is not equal to him for she is a woman and does not have the intelligence or competence to think as well as a man. It is Torvald's assumption that it is men's duty to guarantee that material wealth will render his wife "free from care", allowing her to play with her children, keep the house beautiful, and do everything the way that he likes. Torvald treats Nora like a child because that is how he manipulates her into thinking that she is an inferior creature who needs a strong man to lean on. When Torvald talks to Nora he talks about silly things; he never converses about anything serious. He insists that Nora should not work but stay home and raise the children. In the play, women are clearly defined an essentially subordinate role in relation to their men, whose property they legally and socially become. Torvald needs Nora to act the role of his beautiful and submissive "doll-wife" whom he can control ideologically. It's obvious that Torvald does not really know Nora or even really care to know her. All he cares is his manipulation of manly power that can bring him great psychological satisfaction.

## **2. MAN'S MANIPULATION OF MASCULINE POWER**

According to Kaufman, "power" is the key term when referring to hegemonic masculinities. The common feature of the dominant forms of contemporary masculinity is that manhood is equated with having some sort of power. In their relations with the females, Torvald manipulates his power over woman for control, playing the role of an oppressor to women.

Torvald's maneuver to demonstrate his ideological power can be found in every possible circumstance. His desire for power both at home and in society is what he cherishes. In order to possess and retain this power, he abides by the rules in society. He also sets up rules at home for his wife to follow. He wouldn't allow his wife to break the rules, which, to him, is an insult and sabotage to his manliness and his authority. He prevents his wife eating sweets and proportions his wife's expenditures on the household. Even the mailbox of his home is under his sole care. His newly appointed position as the manager of bank fulfills his desire and ensures him more power in social life that he has already exercised at home on his wife. Inevitably his feeling of importance strengthens his resolve of the manipulation of that power. Ironically, Nora, who play-acts to boost Torvald's masculinity by playing the little girl to please him and, who knows clearly of his husband's desire of power, can not conceal her excitement of her husband's attainment of social power, which she also manipulates to her own advantage: "It's perfectly glorious to think that we have –that Torvald has so much power over so many people" (Ibsen, p. 17). Under Torvald's masculine power, Nora is deprived of her identity and dignity and has to be conformable to her husband's ideology. She must keep secrets from Torvald, such as eating macaroons and borrowing the money from Krogstad, as she knows clearly that Torvald wouldn't bear to see his wife engaged in any deceitful actions, which, to him, are the source of all the evils at home that

would poison his children, because “Almost everyone who has gone to the bad early in life has had a deceitful mother” (Ibsen, p. 27). He believes in influential moral forces, and he perceives that women are responsible for the purity of the world through their influence in the home. His stress on the importance of decisions and the weight of morality reflects his abnormal mentality of patriarchy and masculinity. Another area in which Torvald makes Nora subservient to him is in financial aspect, which is illustrated when Nora states, “You might give me money, Torvald. Only just as much as you can afford; and then one of these days I’ll buy something with it” (Ibsen, p. 5). Thus, money is a pertinent symbol to represent Nora’s subservience to Torvald, and more generally the subservience of all women to men. His treatment of Mrs. Linde is another example of his demonstration of power. Of course Mrs. Linde’s well being is not what he really cares about. His arrangement of a position at his bank for Mrs. Linde is just a proof of his newfound power in the society and ensures him a sense of satisfaction as a man in a dominant position. When confronted with Nora’s pleas to change his mind about Krogstad’s dismissal, he tells her that he would hate to appear to have been influenced by his wife. “Do you suppose that I am going to make myself ridiculous before my whole staff, to let people think I am a man to be swayed by all sorts of outside influence?” (Ibsen, p. 35) However, on a closer look, we can find that his refusal of Krogstad’s demand for restoration to his job is a combination of demonstration of his power and fear of the threat to his newfound political power as he knows clearly the disposition of Krogstad. In reply to Nora’s pleading for Krogstad, Torvald discloses the true reason for wanting to get rid of him: “He would make my position at the bank perfectly unendurable.” (Ibsen, p. 35)

A strong sense of possession can be regarded as a revelation of Torvald’s desire of power over women. To him, his wife is just his property to show off in the public as a satisfaction for his hypocrisy, a plaything and a doll to play with as a pastime. His calling his wife a number of names throughout the play, including “little songbird”, “squirrel”, “lark”, “little featherhead”, “little skylark”, “little person”, and “little woman” signals Torvald’s belief that Nora is his. Torvald is extremely consistent about using the modifier “little” before the names usually followed by the possessive “my” when he calls Nora. Torvald’s chosen names for Nora reveal that he does not see her as an equal by any means; rather, Nora is at times predictable, a silly doll, and at times a captivating and exotic pet or animal, all created for him. Torvald makes his ideas clear to the audience in Act III when Nora teases his gaze at her, “Why shouldn’t I look at my dearest treasure?—at all the beauty that is mine, all my very own?” (Ibsen, p.55) Torvald has Nora perform the Tarantella before the ball because he wants her to leave a spellbinding effect on everyone at the dance. His wish is for everyone to admire her beauty and perfection and in effect be jealous of him. However, in all his ignorance, it is Nora who in her dramatic attempts gets Torvald to re-teach her the Tarantella dance by pretending as if she has forgotten it. Nora tries hard to have Torvald focus all of his attention on her so that her secret will not be observed.

It is noticeable that Torvald’s sexual nature in his feelings for Nora is exposed in the scene of the dance in Act III. “When I watched the seductive figures of the Tarantella, my blood was on fire; I could endure it no longer, ...” (Ibsen, p. 55). He drags her away from the ballroom right in the middle of the dance to gratify his sexual stimulation he has gained by her dance in the public regardless of Nora’s resistance, because Nora doesn’t “want to leave so early”. It can be referred that Torvald has been exercising his sexual power over Nora, but in this scene, his strong sexual desire for Nora is only met with refusal. It is certain that Torvald has a sense of recognition of what she is and welcomes it as part of the sexual roles they play, and his sexuality suggests Torvald’s strong passion for Nora.

From the above analysis, we can see that Torvald, as a matter of fact, plays the role of an oppressor to women. Out of his masculine orientation, he exerts every effort to sustain his control over women and manipulate his power both at home and in society, making women subjects of being oppressed and exploited, politically, socially, and economically. However, in his ignorance women’s awakening is on their way and women’s struggle for equality, freedom, and independence will greatly sabotage the patriarchal power and reverse the political and social roles of gender at home and in society.

### **3. WOMEN’S CHALLENGE TO MEN’S POWER**

Ideological power is reflected not only from the male characters in the plays, but the female characters also show their strong ideas about gender relationship, which is a demonstration of their challenge to masculine power. As Bertens points out: "Once the social and cultural restraints on women have been lifted, women will be as autonomous and self-determining as men" (Bertens, p. 101)

Though Nora is treated like a doll child first by her father and then by her husband and is never allowed to evolve as a person, beneath her twittering, girlish exterior is a woman who has the potential to be independent and forceful. Her first challenge to masculine power is her idea of her act to borrow money from Krogstad by forging her father's signature. She considers her decision moral and abuses the law as "foolish", a fault of the lawmakers who were surely men. When confronted with Krogstad, the money shark, she challenges the man's threat by stating out her understanding of her act that involves some moral standard, "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? I don't know much about law; but I am certain that there must be laws permitting such things as that. Have you no knowledge of such laws—you who are a lawyer? You must be a very poor lawyer, Mr. Krogstad" (Ibsen, p. 24).

Nora is naïve; it's her fantasy that her husband will take all the responsibility for her once the secret of her forgery is released. However, her fantasy breaks when Torvald refuses to shoulder the responsibility for her by informing her that "no man would sacrifice his honour for the one he loves" (Ibsen, p. 66). When Nora finally sees her husband as he is, her insights are devastating. It is her perception that hundreds of thousands of women would have sacrificed their honor for the sake of their husbands' well-being, just as she has done to save her husband's life by forgery. Her changing point of view is symbolized in the play by the tarantella. Nora is contemplating suicide at the time rather than letting Torvald take the blame for her action, and her dance is an embryo dance of death. Her uncontrolled movement forecasts her breaking free from Torvald. However, Torvald becomes livid and accuses Nora of never being a fit wife or mother. Upon Torvald's angry accusations, Nora comes to a sudden realization. This sudden awakening into a deeper and more meaningful comprehension of herself brings Nora to realize that she has lived her life in a doll's house, and she herself has been a prey of man's masculine power. She can no longer hold her resentment and states:

"When I lived at home with Papa, he told me his opinion about everything, and so I had the same opinions; and if I differed from him I concealed the fact, because he would not have liked it. He called me his little-doll child, and he played with me just as I used to play with my dolls. And when I came to live with you... I was simply transferred from Papa's hands into yours. You arranged everything according to your tastes, and so I got the same tastes as you—or else I pretended to. I'm really not quite sure which – I think sometimes the one and sometimes the other. When I look back on it, it seems to me I had been living here like a poor woman – just from hand to mouth. I've existed merely to perform tricks for you, Torvald. But you would have it. You and Papa have committed a great sin against me. It is your fault that I've made nothing of my life. ... But our home has been nothing but a playroom. I've been your doll-wife, just as at home I was Papa's doll-child; and here the children have been my dolls. I thought it great fun when you played with me, just as they thought it great fun when I played with them. That is what our marriage has been, Torvald" (Ibsen, p. 64).

This famous manifestation of her strong resentment of a woman towards patriarchy is no more than a mirror of the suppressed life of women under the patriarchal system in the 19th century Europe. Therefore, Nora has an epiphany about her life. She suddenly realizes that she has known nothing but what the men in her life have told her; she has not been able to live or even think for herself. It is then that she realizes how much she has been wronged, that she is only a plaything, a doll to Torvald. In her disillusionment she says, "You have never loved me. You have only thought it pleasant to be in love with me" (Ibsen, p. 63).

Now her resentment is not only directed against individual man, but the whole patriarchal system.

When Torvald tries to “awaken her conscience” by teaching her moral values, she retorts: “I am learning, too, that the law is quite another thing from what I supposed; but I find it impossible to convince myself that the law is right. According to it a woman has no right to spare her old dying father, or to save her husband’s life. I can’t believe that” (Ibsen, p 65). Her decision “I am going to see if I can make out who is right, the world or I” (Ibsen, p. 65) is one we can still recognize—a declaration of her strong will and resolution to fight against this male-dominated world. However, Nora knows clearly that there is almost no way out for a woman to fight against the male-dominated world and the patriarchal system single-handedly. Therefore she chooses her own way of fighting for the maintenance of her identity and dignity-- to leave her home and try her luck in the society, making the bewildered Torvald a rather sympathetic figure. For the first time in the play he experiences his inner conflicts when he confronts contradictions that force him to compromise in the gender relationships.

#### 4. WHO IS REALLY IN CONTROL?

According to Bertens, “Ideology is seen as such a strong presence in the text that we more or less have to break down its resistance to get at a truer picture of the reality the text pretends to present” (Bertens, p. 91). The truer picture of ideological struggle for power in *A Doll’s House* is the under-tone that the supposedly ideologically submissive and controlled objects are not really what the controllers think they are. Considering the power struggle between the males and the females in the play, here comes the question: who is really in control?

It is suggested in the play that the ideologically controlled characters, the females, would not easily reconcile themselves with the oppression from the patriarchal power. They have never given up their fight in the struggle for gender power. They are, as a matter of fact, more tactful and persistent in their resolution of winning over their share of power. To a certain extent, they are stronger in character and will power, with a deeper insight into their counterparts, causing their counterparts experience conflicts and contradictions as well as pain. It goes without saying that their manipulation of their power in their ideological struggle with males is more forceful and destructive to the males, who, as Kaufman points out:

“There is, in the lives of men, a strange combination of power and powerlessness, privilege and pain. Men enjoy social power and many forms of privilege by virtue of being male. But the way we have set up that world of power causes immense pain, isolation, and alienation not only for women but also for men. This is not to equate men’s pain with the systemic and systematic forms of women’s oppression. Rather, it is to say that men’s worldly power—as we sit in our homes or walk the street, apply ourselves at work or march through history—comes with a price for us. This combination of power and pain is the hidden story in the lives of men. This is men’s contradictory experience of power.” (Kaufman, p. 23)

*A Doll’s House* starts seemingly as far from realism as a play can get, with both Nora and Torvald being characterized almost stereotypically. Torvald plays the patriarchal male figure to his little-doll wife Nora, who really requires the guidance of a wise adult man to help her through life’s problems. However, Nora is by no means the stereotypical stay-at-home housewife. It is only with her husband that the façade continues, which is a revelation of a false mask of the pair’s relationship based on illusion. On the surface, the male protagonist Torvald is in control. However, though Torvald seems to have great power over everything, he is constantly in conflict with the world in which he displays his masculine power. His exercise of power brings him a conceited sense of manliness, but meanwhile, as his conception of manliness contradicts with reality, it is also a process of experience of pain and alienation.

Throughout the story, Nora gives the impression that she is in a submissive position in her relationship with her husband. With deeper analysis, we find that it is Nora who controls, exerting her

control over almost every thing, including her husband. "The Nora we have observed during the play has not seemed a passive creature wholly molded by others. Ibsen has depicted her as willingly playing the doll game to her own advantage" (Johnston, p. 161). In her role-playing with Torvald, Nora proves to be a much stronger person than her husband realizes; and although for much of the play Nora's desire of control remains hidden from her husband, she is the one who is getting her own way. The very beginning of the play reveals some of these traits when Nora exhibits her womanly charm to Torvald in exchange for money. Torvald is unable to resist her maneuver, and gives in to Nora's beauty. Besides, Nora, by her small tricks, knows exactly how to bring Torvald out from his study whenever it is necessary for her. Nora's superiority complex is also fully displayed when Nora and Mrs. Linde are discussing their lives upon her first visit. Nora completely monopolizes the conversation. She constantly tries to stay one step ahead of Mrs. Linde in a small power struggle over the issue as to whom has lived a harder life. Once Nora gets into her explanation of how she saved her husband, her sense of pride as being a savior of her husband's life is quite apparent.

It is tactful of Nora (though it is just her fantasy) to sustain her seemingly submissive role in her relationship with Torvald to achieve a harmonious balance in her domestic life and a perfect control of her realm. By concealing the secret of money-borrowing from her husband, she just keeps it as a means for her control over Torvald and manipulates it as a bet for her life in the future when she can no longer make use of her beauty to ensure an attraction to husband. On the other hand, she fancies she would become the equal of man in the male-dominated world, and it gives her a sense of being a businesswoman, just like her husband. She tells Mrs. Linde she has worked hard in order to pay the debt, and "it was a tremendous pleasure to sit there working and earning money. It was like being a man" (Ibsen, p. 14). This is the real reflection of her inner world other than what she tells Mrs. Linde about the concealment. She just wants others to know that she is not a superficial creature, but a strong woman who can handle the situation all alone, just like a man.

It is funny that, though Nora refuses to give Mrs. Linde a bed for the night, she sets out to help her to secure a position in Torvald's bank. Is it because all of a sudden she feels sympathetic towards Mrs. Linde's downfall? Of course not. A bed is not sufficient to prove her power over the dominance of her sphere. Besides, she would not allow any intrusion into the realm that is under her control. Mrs. Linde's request for a position just provides her a chance to demonstrate the power she possesses over her husband. She even displays her desire of control when she learns about the importance of her husband's new position as manager and "it's perfectly glorious to think that we have—that Torvald has so much power over so many people" (Ibsen, p. 17). This slip of the tongue fully reveals her psyche—desire of power just as a man possesses. How she longs to share her husband's power over people! How marvelous that "we have" so much power! Probably it is Nora's perception that women are no inferior to men in certain fields when women were endowed with the power that men have.

Nora is fully aware of her beauty and manipulates her sexual power over Torvald and over Dr. Rank to her own advantage in a perfect way. As mentioned above, Torvald feels a strong sexual attraction for Nora, which puts Nora in a much superior position in their sexual relationship which, admittedly, makes Torvald a rather pathetic victim in this sense. When Nora returns with Torvald from her triumphant dance, Torvald contemplates his wife's beauty, only to be shocked that she is unwilling to satisfy his sexual desire for her. "His indignation, and evident conviction that, as his wife, she has no right ever to refuse him, is a further insight into their relationship" (Gray, p. 50). As regards Dr. Rank, Nora seduces him out with his confession of his love for her but finds no interest in it and just accuses Dr. Rank of having ruined everything. "In order to return this relationship to the undisturbing background, therefore, Nora refuses Rank's offer of help and faces Krogstad alone" (Johnston, 153). It is so obvious that Nora maneuvers such a relationship with Rank tactfully and keeps everything under her own control. (Dr. Rank inherits his deadly illness from his father's indulgence, but can't we say that it is Nora who helps it to deteriorate with her torture of the emotion from him, making him a victim of her abnormal desire?) It is also obvious that Nora is really in control.

The conflicts of power struggle in *A Doll's House* have become more and more intense as the play progresses because of the gradual unfolding of the female's strength of control in the gender relationships and her struggle against the males' control. As a result, the male protagonists begin to lose their dominant position and fall into inner-doubts about their self-worth as men. The frustration of the

males' in their manipulation of ideological power is obvious: Torvald becomes confused about his role in the patriarchal domain he has painstakingly established.

## 5. MEN'S LOSS OF POWER

According to Kaufman, in a world dominated by men, the world of men is, by definition, a world of power. That power is a structured part of the economies and systems of political and social organization; it forms part of the core of religion, family, forms of play and intellectual life. On an individual level, much of what we associate with masculinity hinges on a man's capacity to exercise power and control. Men enjoy social power and many forms of privilege by virtue of being male.

Torvald lives in a world of men's power because of his privilege of political and economic position in the society that ensures him the capacity to exercise power and control over public and domestic life associated with women, especially his wife Nora. According to Kiberd, "Ibsen's account of the sufferings of couples who reject the stereotypes of masculinity and femininity, only to face more daunting social and personal problems in their attempt at an honest sexuality, seemed ... the central issue of the age" (Kiberd, p. 63). These "problems" derive not from their everyday domestic chores, but from their struggle for power of control in the ideological realm. This struggle is progressing under the façade of proper relationship between husband and wife in the first part of the play, but is involved in a series of conflicts between the characters and finally develops into a life-and-death struggle for their social and political role.

It seems that Torvald does not experience great inner conflicts during his confrontation with his opponents. But there are moments when he experiences great mental pain in his exercise of this power. As a newly appointed manager of the bank, Torvald enjoys prestige and political power outside his domestic life. But his unsuccessful dealing with his wife brings him fear and anxiety about his political life. When he reads Krogstad's letter and finds out his wife's secret, he senses great horror. His emotional outbreak to Nora "You have destroyed all my happiness. You have ruined all my future" (Ibsen, p. 60) is not a display of his power, but rather, a revelation of his weariness, and what's more, a proclamation of his ready surrender to his opponent in the power struggle. We can sense the gradual loss of masculine power from Torvald in this scene, bit by bit, until everything comes to a complete stop. When the second letter from Krogstad comes, "I (Torvald) scarcely have the courage to do it" (Ibsen, p. 61), which is a full display of his abnormal psyche of fear of losing the battle. Though self-conscience comes back to him when he finds the bond in the letter and is thrilled for being "saved", he is unaware of the tragic future awaiting him. As what he has been used to do, he wastes no time educating his wife and still remembering to display his masculine generosity to allow Nora stay in the house: "I have broad wings to shelter you under. How warm and cosy our home is, Nora. Here is shelter for you; here I will protect you like a hunted dove that I have saved from a hawk's claws; I will bring peace to your poor beating heart" (Ibsen, p. 62). I cannot help feeling sympathetic with such a pathetic figure of Torvald now, who still lives in his illusion of male dominance when he himself really needs some protection. What is more pathetic of him is his ignorance of the unfavourable situation he is conditioned. When Nora announces "I am going away from here now, at once" (Ibsen, p. 64), Torvald still struggles and clings to his masculine power: "I won't allow it! I forbid you!" (Ibsen, p. 64) and blames Nora for deserting her husband and children. But, believe it or not, as Kaufman states, "the challenge of feminism to men is one of dislodging the hegemonic masculine psyche. This is not a psychological interpretation of change because it is the social challenge to men's power and the actual reduction of men's social power that is the source of change." (Kaufman, p. 25).

As matter of fact, the process of the struggle of power is not as important as compared with the consequences it has brought to both the male and female characters. Considering the ending of the power struggle reflected in the play, men's lose of power is not without some tragic elements. Nora's final exit is a good example of feminism that challenges men's power and brings immense pain to men who are still ignorant of the loss of their power, which gives rise to men's bewilderment in face of reality—that despite their effort to safeguard the realm of men's absolute power over women, the strength of power

women display become more and more prominent. Torvald has fought vigorously a battle with their female counterparts in hope of achieving success in maintaining their masculine power and obtaining control over their counterparts. However, Torvald's practice of power does not help him to fulfill his perception towards reality, but makes him alienated from it.

## CONCLUSION

Ideological power embodied through gender relationships in *A Doll's House* helps people to reflect on the stereotyping of both men and women in literary works and have a new and rational perception of the gender roles in our modern world. The power struggle dramatized in *A Doll's House* initiates people to have a practical look on the implications of male dominance: the nature of Torvald's dominance is traditional as it is required by the society for him to maintain his dignity as a man as well as his social status. However, shattering of men's illusion of their ideological power over women brings about disaster to their physical and mental health and leads to their downfall. In *A Doll's House*, masculine power is lost as a result of female's ideological awakening, which suggests a new structure of society, and the message of equality between gender and race is also suggested. Though power struggle between men and women will continue in our modern world, it would be wise for men to have a correct conception of women in various fields of society. Without sensitive conception, men would not avoid their tragic fate induced from their exercise of masculine power. As Kaufman summarizes: "The assertion of power is also a response to fear and to the wounds we have experienced in the quest for power. Paradoxically, men are wounded by the very way we have learned to embody and exercise our power." (Kaufman, p. 25)

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