

A DOLL'S HOUSE IN ONE ACT: ADAPTING IBSEN FOR EDUCATIONAL
THEATRE IN THE SECONDARY SCHOOL SETTING

THESIS

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By

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

One-act adaptations of full-length plays can be used by teachers to facilitate instructional units pertaining to drama and play production. If the teacher wishes to use a one-act adaptation and one is easily available, he/she may proceed. If one is not available, what should he/she then do? The teacher should consider adapting the play him/herself. Turning a full-length play into a one-act version is a recursive process that shares similarities with play analysis and play directing. If the teacher has studied basic concepts of play analysis and play directing, he/she can learn (through research, writing and revising, and reading and viewing adaptations of plays) to abridge a full-length play into a one-act version.

Why would a secondary school teacher of English or theatre want a one-act version of a full-length play, especially one, like Ibsen's A Doll's House, that can be easily read and understood by most students in its original full-length format? There are three primary reasons: available time for study, available time for performance, and student receptivity. In education, time is always a factor to consider whenever planning to undertake a unit of study or a special project. How much time will be allotted to the entire unit and how much to each portion of the unit? How much time can be devoted to the rehearsal process and how many performances can be scheduled? Is a production meant for participation in Texas's University Interscholastic League One-Act Play con-

test (UIL-OAP), which dictates that performances be no longer than forty minutes? In addition, the teacher must assess the students' abilities, skills, and interests. Whether or not the students are receptive to studying material in school largely determines their ultimate success or failure in digesting or mastering the material. For example, students in an eleventh grade Advanced Placement English class would be receptive to studying many challenging works of literature, most in their entirety, but students in an eleventh grade regular English class might count the glossy pages of Macbeth and ask "Do we have to read all of this? Can't we just watch the movie?" Often, the issues of available time and student receptivity collide: there is simply not enough time to study an unlimited number of full-length works of literature in their entirety in any class regardless of the level of receptivity of the students.

Ultimately, the teacher's goal is to whet the students' appetite for literature, theatre, and a lifetime of learning. If he/she believes that an abridged version of any work is appropriate for students and they will be receptive to studying the work and possibly be interested in reading and studying more, the use of the abridged work is justified. If he/she is able to use the abridged version to plant a seed of interest in the minds of the students, then use of the work serves a mighty purpose.

Although one-act adaptations of full-length plays are becoming more common, under certain circumstances a teacher (who may also be functioning as a director) might choose to adapt a play him/herself. At first the process may seem deceptively simple. One may think to oneself, "I'll just keep the important scenes." However, when one is adapting a well-written play, one soon comes to believe that every scene is important. And, in fact, every scene in a well-written play usually is important, so the teacher or director is still left with the task of reducing two and one-half hours' worth of text (the average running time of a full-length play presented to contemporary audiences) into

forty minutes' worth, knowing that not every scene can remain, nor can any scene remain in its entirety. How does one begin?

The writer of this thesis (referred to as "the writer" from this point forward) believes that a good way to begin is by acknowledging whether or not one is drawn to the play in some manner, whether it be personal, emotional, intellectual, or societal. If one is not drawn to the play, or if one does not feel compelled to take the play apart and digest it, it may be wise for the adapter to choose (if possible) another play he/she feels more strongly about. William Ball, author of A Sense of Direction, advocates that a director "believe in the general beauty of the play" (23) in order to prepare to direct and guide actors. According to Ball, "the universe should be revealed" (3-4) by a work of art. The two ideas were an inspiration for the writer as she worked to adapt A Doll's House. Ibsen's skill in depicting the dynamics of Nora and Helmer's relationship sheds light on the institution of marriage. As a married woman, the writer is easily drawn to both characters in a personal manner. In a societal manner the writer believes that Nora and Helmer are representative of all persons who struggle to achieve both individual respect and mutual understanding in relationships and in life in general.

After having made the decision to adapt A Doll's House, the writer began by re-reading the play purely for pleasure and without taking any notes. After having read the play, she set it aside for several days and let ideas about the play assert themselves. She then read the play a second time. During the second reading, she made notes both on the script itself and on a separate tablet. Any ideas, questions, or key lines of dialogue that asserted themselves were noted. After having completed the second reading, she again set the play and the notes aside for several days. She then adopted a decidedly "non-literary" approach to analyzing the play. She asked herself, "What is the play about?" The response was: It is a play about a man and woman who are married

and live in their home with three small children and two servants. Everything is fine; the home operates on a predictable routine and everyone seems to accept that and lives happily from day to day. However, the wife has a secret that she hopes the husband will never discover. So far, she has been able to keep the secret concealed. Suddenly, the only other person who knows the secret threatens to reveal it in a letter to the husband. The wife then has to fight a battle of will and wit with this person. Although she fears her husband's possible reactions, she believes that he will eventually rally to her defense. When he reads the letter he concludes that the wife has betrayed his trust and he refuses to defend her. When the wife realizes that she has misjudged her husband's degree of devotion to her, it causes her to reexamine the nature of their relationship. As a result, she decides to terminate their marriage.

The writer then asked herself, "Thematically, what is the play about?" The response was: "It is about trust, faith, love, self-sacrifice, deception, betrayal, survival, honesty, maturation, independence, and discovery." Although this approach may seem simple to the point of being worthless in terms of literary analysis, she learned that, for herself at least, it was expedient to begin with simple steps, continue with more complex steps, and conclude with simple steps. The method of asking, "what is the play about?" aided her during the adapting process by helping her determine which scenes and individual lines of dialogue were absolutely essential and must be kept.

In the process of adapting a play, scenes and lines are "cut" or deleted. Often teachers or directors will begin by marking out these scenes and lines in a script. However, when the writer began doing this with A Doll's House, the method frustrated her terribly. For the first time, Ibsen's skills as a playwright became evident to her. Every line of dialogue subtly and seamlessly propels both the plot and characters forward. Each line of dialogue is intricately woven into the lines preceding and following it. All lines

written could justifiably be kept in the adaptation. So, here again, two and one-half hours of text had to be condensed into forty minutes' worth. The solution for the writer was to begin thinking not "What must be cut?" but "What must be kept?" Some may argue that essentially there is no difference between the two approaches if the result is the same; cut what is not essential, leave what is essential, but she noticed that wording the approach differently caused her to think differently. It became a matter of keeping what was most beautiful, most suspenseful, and most forceful. Keeping the most suitable lines and scenes was less frustrating, and, in fact, more enjoyable, than deleting many other lines and scenes that were certainly just as good. By thinking about keeping text, the writer was more easily able to make decisions about key lines, scenes, and actions. She was then able constantly to ask, "What is the merit of keeping this line or this scene?" Essentially, every line kept must do one or more of the following: propel the plot forward, provoke the reaction of another character, or reveal the present state of mind or a change in a character.

The writer found that adapting a play in this manner was greatly facilitated by the use of Francis Hodge's method of play analysis described in his textbook, Play Directing: Analysis, Communication, and Style. Hodge's sections pertaining to dramatic action, tempo, and mood, were particularly useful because they helped the writer see more clearly how the playwright had constructed the script, and she could temporarily address the script as a structured piece of writing rather than an evocative work of art. This helped her select the lines and scenes that most succinctly progress the plot and characters.

Finally, the writer chose not to read other adaptations of A Doll's House before she began her own process of adapting the play. She believed that reading other authors' work might influence her decisions about key lines and scenes, and, therefore, decided

to begin her analysis and adaptation process completely afresh. As she surveyed translations, she sought to find one written in formal, standard English that did not have a contemporary tone which she believed to be incongruent with the play's given circumstances. She wanted the language to have a tone of formality which she believes is inherent in Ibsen's plays. The best choice among many was a public domain translation. (The public domain status of the text was confirmed through the Copyright Office of the Library of Congress.) The introduction, which is copyrighted, is written by Frank Wadleigh Chandler, but the author of the translation itself is not identified. The translation was published by the Macmillan Company in its Modern Readers' Series in 1927.

The complete process of adapting A Doll's House into a one-act play was a recursive process of reading, rereading, asking questions, and revising. The foundation of the adapting process was play analysis, which was later augmented with concepts of play directing, and was finally honed through play production in Texas' UIL-OAP competitions. The chapters that follow discuss in detail the steps of the process, and present Henrik Ibsen's A Doll's House in a one-act version developed by the writer. She believes that this process can be applied to the adaptation of other plays, and hopes that this thesis may be informative to anyone contemplating adapting a full-length play into a one-act version.

CHAPTER II

LANGUAGE

Perhaps the most critical preliminary aspect of adapting a play pertains to the playwright's intent. What main questions and ideas does the playwright present to the audience through the play, and in which topics or subject matter are the questions and ideas embedded? As readers and audience members, we know that Nora and Helmer are a married couple who face the usual and expected difficulties of married life: Will we have enough money to meet our expenses? How will we organize our daily lives? What are our hopes for our children, and what are our plans for the future? Beyond this, we know that Nora, Helmer, Christine, and Krogstad are all on a path (in some cases unwittingly) of self-discovery and self-actualization. Christine has learned that she can be self-sufficient, but that daily labor is joyless without a loved one with whom to share the toil and the profit. Further still, we sense that Ibsen is provoking us to ask ourselves how we might respond if placed in the same situations as the characters. How are we like the characters? What might our decisions be? Would our ideals cave to accommodate practicality or prudence? The writer believes that Ibsen's most fundamental intent is for the audience to engage in thought and examination, whether it be of self or society. Stella Adler, actor, teacher, and author of Stella Adler on Ibsen, Strindberg, and Chekhov, credits Ibsen with challenging the audience: "The play which cannot be argued is not a serious play. The argument concerns ideas that cannot be resolved. But

they can be discussed. Until Ibsen, the problems were settled by the playwright. Ibsen unsettles you. He challenges the spectator to think and discuss—and from the discussion—to learn who he [the spectator] really is” (9).

In A Doll’s House, the subject matter through which the audience is challenged is the issue of Nora’s forgery and the chain of events stemming from it. The question we are faced with is: “Are these characters justified in the actions they take throughout the play?” For each of us, the response will be different. Again Adler acknowledges Ibsen: “Each person is saying honestly what he believes to be the truth. There is no ‘solution.’ You cannot ‘win.’ You can only do what you think is right. Truth must be individual for each person—you can only represent yourself” (11). Arthur Miller wrote: “Instead of being well-made his [Ibsen’s] plays are true. That is the difference. They follow the psycho-moral dilemma, not the plot” (23). Therefore, an adaptation must present each character and his or her dilemma. Without each character, we would have only fragments of the play, and fragments of the question.

During the fall of 1998, the writer attended a UIL Theatre Superconference held at the University of Texas at Austin. Susan Zeder, Professor of Playwriting and Drama and Theatre for Youth at the University of Texas, conducted a workshop for UIL One-Act Play directors on the topic of cutting, adapting, and directing plays for the UIL-OAP competition. Concerning the language of a play, Zeder encouraged directors to “describe the style of the dialogue” (3). After following Zeder’s advice, the writer was convinced of its validity. In a scripted play (in contrast to a non-scripted performance such as a pantomime or ballet), the language is the vehicle for all other elements of the play. Therefore, a director must be sensitive to the language the playwright has chosen for the play, and must facilitate the effects of the language on the actors and the audience. When adapting a full-length play into a one-act version, care must be taken to

keep the style of language intact.

The language of A Doll's House is formal, containing few colloquialisms and no slang. The characters speak in complete, complex sentences, and there are few lines written as phrases, or even one-word questions or responses. Ibsen's chosen vocabulary (conveyed through the translator) is rich and provides color and texture to the characters, their actions, and the ideas presented by the playwright. Finally, the eloquent dialogue spoken by his characters communicates Ibsen's tone, which, the writer believes, is one of great respect toward the characters and the issues each is facing. Nora's response to Krogstad's threatening to expose her is an example: "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 the law; but I am certain that there must be laws permitting such things as that" (Mcmillan 31 [Act I]).

Language molds characters, and characters become dynamic through language. The characters in A Doll's House ascribe to the societal conventions of the period; formality is observed, even among friends. For example, Dr. Rank is addressed by his professional title, and Helmer objects not only to Krogstad's past criminal activity, but also his addressing Helmer by his first name, and assuming a "familiar tone" with him, despite the two formerly having been friends and classmates. The characters in the play are concerned with propriety, respectability, and stability. Both Krogstad and Helmer are intent on securing professional stations as well as salaries. Krogstad states: "I want to rehabilitate myself, Mrs. Helmer; I want to get on; and in that your husband must help me. I want to get into the bank again, in a higher position. Your husband must make a place for me" (Macmillan 56 [Act II]). The characters are circumspect and believe themselves to be sensible. None of this is a superficial façade; each character is in earnest. However, while living in the midst of this stiff social propriety Nora forges a

signature, Krogstad blackmails the Helmers, Christine urges Nora to inform Helmer of her forgery, Helmer rejects Nora, and Nora ultimately terminates her marriage.

Zeder also encouraged directors to determine what the “primary language” of the play might be, whether it be verbal, visual, or kinesthetic (3). Clearly the primary language of A Doll’s House is verbal. The characters are engaged in thought, and their actions are triggered by thought; they do not act impulsively. In fact, Helmer’s reaction to Krogstad’s letters is the only exception to this. Because Ibsen has created characters who are faced with social and personal dilemmas, the characters must think about their situations and their subsequent action. The language of an adaptation must support this. The adaptation must preserve character objectives and must do so by way of the characters’ cognitive thought, which is accomplished through the language. David Mamet, playwright and director, asserts: “The actor is onstage to communicate the play to the audience. . . . There are only lines upon a page. They are lines of dialogue meant to be said by the actor. When he or she says them simply, in an attempt to achieve an object more or less like that suggested by the author, the audience sees the illusion of a character upon the stage” (9).

The writer remembers a former professor, Dr. J. Peter Coulson, stating that translating a play is as much an art as writing a play. Again, the writer became convinced that Coulson’s statement was valid after she surveyed a number of translations and adaptations of A Doll’s House before she decided to use the Macmillan public domain translation. There are many English translations and adaptations of the play available in print, spanning from the early to the late 20th century. Among those surveyed by the writer were those translated by William Archer (1880), Eva LeGallienne (1951), Peter Watts (1965), Michael Meyer (1965), Rolfe Fjelde (1965) and Kenneth McLeish (1994), and those adapted by Christopher Hampton (1972) and Frank McGuinness (1997). Each

work shares similarities with the others, yet each is distinctly different.

In selecting a translation from which to form the one-act adaptation, the writer read each script looking for prose that was as precise and succinct as possible, without indirectly indicating the time period in which it was written. For example, the William Archer translation is easily identified as being a work from the Victorian era. Likewise, the Frank McGuinness adaptation is in many sections blatantly contemporary. The writer reasoned that the best full-length script would allow for the best one-act adaptation. During the process of selecting the translation, the writer examined and compared Nora's Act III monologue in which she explains to Helmer that she had expected him to react differently to Krogstad's letter. The writer noticed that this particular monologue varied significantly among the translations and adaptations, and was generally indicative of each author's style of language, which was evidenced by differences in vocabulary, syntax, and usage. The following are each author's versions of the monologue:

William Archer (1880)

Very likely. But you neither think nor talk like the man I can share my life with. When your terror was over—not for what threatened me, but for yourself—when there was nothing more to fear—then it seemed to you as though nothing had happened. I was your lark again, your doll, just as before—whom you would take twice as much care of in future, because she was so weak and fragile. Torvald—in that moment it burst upon me that I had been living here these eight years with a strange man, and had borne him three children. —Oh, I can't bear to think of it! I could tear myself to pieces!

Eva Le Galleinne (1951)

Perhaps. But you neither think nor talk like the man I want to share my life with. When you'd recovered from your fright—and you never thought of me, only of yourself—when you had nothing more to fear—you behaved as though none of this had happened. I was your little lark again, your little doll—whom you would have to guard more carefully than ever because she was so weak and frail. At that moment it suddenly dawned on me that I had been living here for eight years with a stranger and that I'd borne him three children. I can't bear to think about it! I

could tear myself to pieces!

Peter Watts (1965)

Perhaps...But you don't talk or think like the man I could bind myself to. When your first panic was over—not about what threatened me, but about what might happen to you—and when there was no more danger, then, as far as you were concerned, it was just as if nothing had happened at all. I was simply your little songbird, your doll, and from now on you would handle it more gently than ever because it was so delicate and fragile. At that moment, Torvald, I realized that for eight years I'd been living here with a strange man, and that I'd borne him three children. Oh, I can't bear to think of it—I could tear myself to little pieces.

Michael Meyer (1965)

That may be. But you neither think nor talk like the man I could share my life with. Once you'd got over your fright—and you weren't frightened of what might threaten me, but only of what threatened you—once the danger was past, then as far as you were concerned it was exactly as though nothing had happened. I was your little songbird just as before—your doll whom henceforth you would take particular care to protect from the world because she was so weak and fragile. Torvald, in that moment I realized that for eight years I had been living here with a complete stranger, and had borne him three children—! Oh, I can't bear to think of it! I could tear myself to pieces!

Rolf Fjelde (1965)

Perhaps. But you neither think nor talk like the man I could join myself to. When your big fright was over—and it wasn't from any threat against me, only for what might damage you—when all the danger was past, for you it was just as if nothing had happened. I was exactly the same, your little lark, your doll, that you'd have to handle with double care now that I'd turned out so brittle and frail. Torvald—in that instant it dawned on me that for eight years I'd been living here with a stranger, and that I'd even conceived three children—oh, I can't stand the thought of it! I could tear myself to bits!

Kenneth McLeish (1994)

Perhaps. But you're not talking or thinking like the husband I long for. As soon as you stopped panicking—not panicking for me, but for what might happen to you—when it was over, you behaved as if nothing at all had happened. So far as you were concerned, I went back to what I'd always been: your pet bird, your doll, which you'd now have to treat with extra care because I was fragile, breakable. That's when I realized, Torvald. For eight years I've lived with a stranger. Borne him three children. I can't bear it. I'd like to tear myself to pieces.

Christopher Hampton (1972)

Maybe. But you don't think or talk like the man I want to spend my life with. When you stopped being terrified—not about what threatened me, but about your own reputation—once you had nothing more to fear, then, as far as you were concerned, it was as if the whole thing had never happened. Everything was exactly as before, I was your little lark, your doll, from now on you'd be doubly careful looking after me, because I was so frail and delicate....At that moment, Torvald, I realized that I'd been living with a stranger for eight years, and that I'd had three children by him....I can't bear to think about it! I could tear myself to pieces.

Frank McGuinness (1997)

Be that as it may, but you don't think, or speak like a man I can share my life with. When you stopped being frightened, it was not of what was threatening me: you were frightened of what you had to face. When you stopped being frightened, it was as if nothing had happened. I was your little singing bird just like before. Your doll, that you would carry now with twice the care, since it was so weak and fragile. Torvald, at that moment, I realized I'd spent the last eight years of my life married to a total stranger and that I'd borne him three children...I can't bear to think of it. It tears me to pieces!

Macmillan public domain (1927)

Maybe. But you neither think nor talk like the man I could bind myself to. As soon as your fear was over—and it was not fear for what threatened me, but for what might happen to you—when the whole thing was past, as far as you were concerned it was exactly as if nothing at all had happened. Exactly as before, I was your little skylark, your doll, which you would in future treat with doubly gentle care, because it was so brittle and fragile. Torvald—it was then it dawned upon me that for eight years I had been living here with a strange man, and had borne him three children—. Oh, I can't bear to think of it! I could tear myself into little bits!

The Macmillan public domain script was the best choice for prose written in standard English. Its syntax and vocabulary are both clear and concise, and the work contains few archaic words or phrases. These attributes yield the translation remarkably adaptable because the throughline of action, constructed by the characters' lines, can remain intact even though scenes and lines are deleted, and some lines have been shortened or combined. Indeed, the work's economy of language is a paradox; it makes the

work more difficult to adapt because each line is so well integrated into the preceding and following, yet it makes the work easy to adapt because the throughline of action is constantly being propelled.

The one-act adaptation of A Doll's House presented by the writer is created for the purpose of performing and studying in the secondary school setting, and, as mentioned previously, participating in the UIL-OAP contest. It was the writer's objective that the adaptation preserve, as much as possible, the integrity of the full-length script. To achieve that objective, careful decisions were made concerning the retention of characters, plot points, and the original translator's vocabulary.

All principal characters (Nora, Helmer, Christine, Krogstad, and Dr. Rank) are retained, as well as the minor characters of Anne, the children's nursemaid, and Helen, the housemaid. The children have not been included because the many references made to them in the dialogue and the use of three oval silhouettes as set trim (UIL term: decorative items used to dress the scenery and stage) verbally and visually assert the children's presence in the play. The porter who delivers the Christmas tree is also deleted since in the adaptation the tree is already set in the parlor as the play opens. Besides the obvious character relationships between Nora and Helmer, and Nora and Krogstad, relationships between Nora and Christine and Nora and Dr. Rank are developed as well, so the adaptation has not just a skeleton, but a musculature as well.

The adaptation follows the major plot points of the full-length script and presents them in chronological order, which, for UIL-OAP is a requirement; scenes may not be split or rearranged. UIL makes the distinction between the terms "cutting" and "adaptation" on this point. For UIL purposes, a cutting makes no changes in characters and their gender, or in the chronological sequencing of scenes and lines. Adaptations, according to UIL, make more invasive changes to the original, and must be pre-

approved by the UIL-OAP play review committee, and often by the play's publisher, before they can be performed at a UIL-OAP contest. For publishing, however, the term "adaptation" applies to any change made to an original, including abridging the work. Therefore, this one act version of A Doll's House is a cutting for UIL, and an adaptation for publishing.

To further ensure the adaptation's integrity, no invasive changes were made to the original translator's syntax, and few changes to the vocabulary and phraseology were made. For example, in Act I Krogstad questions Nora about Christine's return to the community: "May I make so bold as to ask if it was a Mrs. Linde?" (26). Revised for the adaptation, the line now reads: "May I ask if it was a Mrs. Linde?", which retains the playwright's intent, but deletes the Victorian phrase "make so bold." Other words and phrases were automatically deleted when scenes were shortened. Those include Nora's description of Christine as being "plucky" for traveling a long distance alone, and Nora's justification to Dr. Rank for eating one of her contraband macaroons on the special occasion of Helmer's promotion at the bank: "But, bah!—once in a way-That's so, isn't it, Doctor Rank?" (22). The one deliberate change that was made in the translation was the reference to currency. The Macmillan translation refers to the British measurements of shillings and pounds. The decision was made to change that reference in the adaptation to the Norwegian measurements of ore and kroner. Thus, when Krogstad reminds Nora that he drew a note for "four thousand, eight hundred kroner" the language of the adaptation is in keeping with the setting of the play. Even though an audience member may not know exactly how much money that is, one knows that is it a significant amount and that a newly married couple may not have it easily at their disposal.

Finally, the play's theme, which is the idea that each person's primary responsibility is to one's self, is in no way altered or compromised in the adaptation. The primary

relationship in the play, that between Nora and Helmer, is still a major focus of the adaptation, yet the relationships between Nora and the other characters are given enough attention so that the audience can still travel with Nora on her path of self-discovery, and the adaptation can reach the climax of confrontation that Ibsen intended in his original script. Once again, the writer prefers to think in terms of what has been kept rather than what has been cut. Everything that is essential to the audience's understanding of the play and each of the characters has been kept. The adaptation is a streamlined version of the full-length original translation. Words are the primary language (Zeder), and characters are the predominant element (W. Ball) created by the playwright's use of language. The theme (W. Ball) is suggested by the characters' actions, which are spurred through language.

CHAPTER III

A. ADAPTING PROCESS: BASIC PLAY ANALYSIS AND PERCEPTIONS OF THE PLAY AS A WORK OF LITERATURE

A play is simultaneously a whole work of art that, when read or performed, sets into motion the innumerable reactions of the persons involved in its presentation, and it is also a sophisticated genre of writing that requires an exacting degree of precision both in its creation and its performance. Because of this dichotomy, the script must be approached from two perspectives: first, one must note his/her perceptions of the literature as a whole work; and second, one must analyze the components comprising the whole that make the play a genre that is unique among other forms of literature. After one has selected a play to adapt, discerned the playwright's intent, and studied the style of the dialogue, he/she may wish to continue analyzing the play as a piece of literature and then conclude the process by analyzing the play as it was structured for performance. He/she may then begin in earnest the process of selecting specific scenes and lines that will be retained or deleted for the adaptation.

Charles Jeffries is a former high school theatre director and now a UIL-OAP critic judge and independent theatre consultant based in San Antonio, Texas. In October of 1998, during a UIL Theatre Superconference held at the University of Texas at Austin, Jeffries conducted a workshop addressing style as it pertains to play production . Jeffries distributed a document titled "Styling the UIL One Act Play: What is it and

What do I Have to do Now?" Jeffries makes two major points concerning style and delineates certain styles of playwriting, acting, and play production. Jeffries states: "All plays have style, whether they fit neatly into a major category or not" (3), and "the acting, directing, and production styles should stem from the context of the play and the intent of the playwright" (3). From these statements one may deduce that style is inherent within the play itself, and that altering this style (whether in adapting a script, acting, or directing) though possible or even plausible, may not be preferable. Jeffries lists the various styles as follows:

Playwriting styles may be termed classical, neoclassical, romantic, realistic, naturalistic, symbolistic, expressionistic, epic, or absurd.

Acting styles may be termed classical or heroic, romantic, realistic, high comedy, low comedy, epic, or nonrealistic.

Production styles may be termed formalistic, romantic, realistic, naturalistic, impressionistic, symbolistic, theatrical or multimedia. (2)

Determining the style of the play and then remaining within the parameters of that style help the adapter as he/she prepares to construct the one-act version. A Doll's House is written in a realistic style, and, outside of experimentation, is probably best acted and produced in a realistic style. Jeffries's statements help keep the adapter focused on his/her task, which is to remain true to the playwright's intent, determine what the new version of the play should and should not be, and insure that the adaptation can facilitate the production of the play in an appropriate style.

Closely associated with the style of the script is the predominant element of the script. William Ball, author of A Sense of Direction, incorporates Aristotle's Poetics and lists five of the six elements of a play that, according to Ball, might be emphasized: plot, character, theme, spectacle, and language (27-28). Ball maintains that one of these elements is emphasized by the playwright. The director must determine which element

is emphasized for the purpose of conveying the playwright's intent and then emphasize that element in the production of the play. Ball cautions:

Many directors go into rehearsal without having decided on a predominant element. A director will find himself in trouble, for instance, when he has filled the stage with spectacle - wagons, elevators, scenery and flying pieces - only to realize that he is doing a play whose predominant element is language. In this case, the scenery overwhelms the language and the audience becomes the loser. . . . That is why I choose one predominant element and stick to it. . . . allowing a secondary element to mention itself gracefully, at appropriate moments. (27,30)

The predominant element of A Doll's House is its characters and their relationships to one another. Through the characters' relationships the secondary element of theme emerges. Ball, like Jeffries, proposes the idea that determining what a specific play is, and what it is not, is vital to a successful production. This is important for the adapter because it is his/her responsibility to create a version of the play based on the original script that has as much dramatic integrity as the original and that can be produced successfully.

A possible extension of the playwright's intent and the style of the production is what Jeffries has termed the "kind of meaning" (6) of the play. Jeffries prompts directors to ascertain the play's function as a piece of literature so that the production itself is true to the playwright's intent. Jeffries asks, "Does the play convey a moral? Is it propaganda? Does it state a problem or a theme? Is it a study of human behavior or an evaluation of life? Is it a story for its own sake?" (6). While the term "kind of meaning" is somewhat nebulous, the writer believes that Jeffries' suggestion is another useful tool at the adapter's disposal that may help him/her gain insights into the play, and thus create a concordant abridgement of the original.

A final concept to consider while analyzing the play as a whole work is that of forming a metaphor for the play. Ball reveals that he learned the technique after having

directed for many years, but that he has always used it since. He says: “We are looking for some object, picture, statement, photograph, sketch, or fabric that shall not only be like the production, but, in the director’s mind, shall be the production itself” (34).

Ball then lists examples: “Ah, Wilderness! by O’Neill is a ‘memory of Norman Rockwell’” and “The Bald Soprano by Ionesco is ‘a household of robots’” (34). Ball justifies his technique by saying: “The discipline of following one metaphor requires the director to unify his thoughts. Exercising great discipline in conforming to one metaphor tends to give the production visual unity, consistency, and power” (35).

One metaphor for A Doll’s House is the title itself, which suggests a world of make-believe where pretty dolls are dressed for tea and are posed precariously on fragile toy furniture; a world of pleasantries contrived and manipulated at the will of the doll’s owner. Another metaphor, devised and used by the writer, is “A Doll’s House is a dam that is about to burst.” Nora cannot stop Krogstad from threatening to inform Helmer of the borrowed money. Krogstad cannot prevent Helmer’s dismissing him from the bank. Rank cannot prevent his own imminent death, and Christine is busy pumping more water into the dam by trying to convince Nora that Helmer should be told about the borrowed money. Finally, Helmer is swept away in the deluge of Nora’s claim that he did not love her enough to sacrifice his honor for her and volunteer to accept responsibility for the forgery. The image of a dam suddenly giving way to the pressure of water that has slowly but steadily built up against it helped the writer focus on the effect that the adaptation must create.

Having formed one’s perceptions about the play as a whole, an adapter is now ready to take the play apart and analyze its components. As an undergraduate theatre student the writer learned various methods of play analysis, including the Aristotelian and that proposed by Francis Hodge in his text Play Directing: Communication, Analysis, and

Style. While the Aristotelian method is definitely appropriate, the writer believes that the Hodge method better serves the teacher who is functioning as a script adapter and director. The Hodge method is widely known and used, and is a guide for disassembling the play into its structural components as they apply to performance. The author's outline for analysis is divided into seven sections: given circumstances, dialogue, dramatic action, character, idea, tempos, and mood (58-59). Whether or not the adapter chooses to write the entire analysis for the original script as completely as Hodge advocates is a matter of personal discretion, though he/she should cover all the sections to some degree. Those pertaining to dramatic action, tempos, and moods can help the adapter see how a play is different from other forms of literature and is written specifically for performance. The method will aide the teacher in reassembling the pieces in a one-act format so that the adaptation can resemble the original (assuming that is the intent) just as the adaptation of A Doll's House resembles the full-length script.

What most distinguishes a play from other forms of literature is dramatic action. Plays are composed primarily of dramatic action, which is what characters do, or try to do in an attempt to get what they want. It is what occurs on stage. It is also what the audience will see and experience as being the play, which is as it should be, since one's understanding of a play should not be dependent on one's previously having read the play. Therefore, anyone abridging a play must carefully select which dramatic actions to include in a one-act version.

Hodge lists three steps for determining the dramatic action of a play. The writer followed these steps generally, but not precisely. As a preliminary measure, the script was marked for French scenes (noting the entrance or exit of each character). The name of each character in each scene was written in the margin. Turning then to Hodge, the three acts were marked for internal units and given titles (nominative phrases).

Afterward, each unit was summarized by recording what Hodge calls the “reciprocal action” (each action performed by one character prompts the reaction of another) of the characters. For example, the French scene in Act I in which Christine arrives unexpectedly at the Helmers’ home and talks at length with Nora is titled “Class Reunion.” The five internal units are titled: 1) “You Look...Older,” 2) “Let’s Catch Up,” 3) “Who’s Done Better?” 4) “Top That!” and 5) “I’ve Got a Secret.” The reciprocal action is recorded as: 1) Christine surprises Nora, and Nora welcomes Christine. 2) Nora questions Christine, and Christine listens to Nora. 3) Christine chides Nora, and Nora reproves Christine. 4) Christine offends Nora, and Nora rebukes Christine. 5) Christine scrutinizes Nora, and Nora convinces Christine. The writer can best describe the results of this method through imagery: The script became for her a river flowing over a long course that was at times swift and winding, sometimes deceptively placid, and sometimes tumultuous. With this image in mind, the writer was better able to think about the script being performed and how it should emerge and transform from moment to moment on stage.

Not surprisingly, the process of determining the dramatic action leads into the process of determining the tempos of the script. Hodge inserts an illustration directly on the outline to explain this concept and suggests that for each unit a rate of speed be named, which might be “fast, medium slow, or largo” (59). Using the Act I, Christine/Nora scene as an example, the tempos are: 1) medium, 2) quick, 3) medium 4) brisk, and 5) medium-slow. Again, this step is meant to aid the director putting a play into performance, but this step can help the adapter select scenes that will comprise a version that is itself a whole play, rather than a grouping of scenes. Otherwise, the temptation to select the most intense scenes of the play might overcome the adapter and the result might be a one-act that is performed on only one level of intensity. A perfor-

mance of that nature could ironically negate all the careful attention to language given by the playwright and ultimately warp the play.

Before discussing Hodge's section on mood, it is interesting to take into consideration David Ball's idea about mood, which he presents in his text, Backwards and Forwards: A Technical Manual for Reading Plays. Ball states that mood is a result of dramatic action, and that often directors, actors, and designers try too hard to create mood, which results in a muddled production. He writes: "Atmosphere is a generalized result, a consequence of specifics: Find the specifics and atmosphere will emerge" (86). So then, should the adapter or director attempt to discern mood? The writer believes that mood, like tone, is often a subtlety and therefore somewhat elusive. A production's mood may not seem overtly apparent to the audience, but lack of attention to mood can leave the production with an unfinished quality. A director may wish a particular scene to produce a certain mood, but he/she will ask actors to focus on their characters' objectives, not the mood, since mood is not an action that can be performed. Hodge asks directors to define a mood image for each unit in the play in this manner: "You therefore say to yourself, 'The mood in this unit it like (a/an)_____,'" (54). Using Hodge's phrase, the Act I Christine/Nora scene then becomes: 1) ...an awkward reunion, 2) ...schoolgirls chattering, 3) ...children comparing colored drawings, 4) ...schoolgirls bickering, and 5) ...schoolgirls telling secrets. These mood images will help the director and the adapter see how the play, like a river, flows through its designated course. The adapter can then judiciously select from this course the scenes that will faithfully represent the dramatic actions contained in the original script, and ensure that these scenes will tell the playwright's story, which will generate the appropriate tempos and moods.

Once the adapter has read and analyzed the play as a piece of literature, he/she is

then able to examine the script from a director's perspective and envision both the original and the adaptation as they might be performed on stage. At this point, the adapter will begin to make decisions about which characters, scenes, and lines will be retained or deleted. The decisions must reconcile the reverence toward the playwright's inviolate text and the adapter's and/or director's instincts about what must occur on stage to finally create a new version of the play that is whole and complete within itself.

B. ADAPTING PROCESS: PLAY CONSTRUCTION AND ANALYSIS FROM A DIRECTOR'S PERSPECTIVE

The adapter finally arrives at the point where h/she must decide which material from the original will be kept and which will be deleted. In order for the finished adaptation to stand alone as a complete play, the adapter must first extract a skeleton from the original. The skeleton must be constructed around the spine of the action, provide sufficient exposition, propel the plot and characters forward, and have sound dramatic structure. The adaptation should provide approximately thirty-five minutes of dialogue so that a production of the adaptation would run no longer than forty minutes. A forty-minute production can easily be read or performed in an academic class during the school day, and can be presented in Texas's UIL One-Act Play Contest.

Determining the spine of the action will help the adapter see the play in his/her mind as it might be performed on stage. Francis Hodge explains:

“Whose play it is” is a decision of major importance, and you can make this decision only by making the most personal and intensive examination of the action in a playscript and the characters that grow out of it. Once you know who will dominate and why, you can determine the specific line of action you want to emphasize and in this way declare the spine of your production. Each character will relate to this spine of action exactly as you intend him to relate to the principal character. You will now have a specific and personal way to tell the story of the play on the stage as you see it. (314)

For the writer, the spine of the action of A Doll's House originates in the previous action of the play, which is Nora's forging her father's signature on the bond to procure money through Krogstad. When the play opens, this previous action is in an inactive

state known as “stasis” (D. Ball 19). The stasis is interrupted by the inciting incident or “intrusion” (D. Ball 19); when Helmer contemplates dismissing Krogstad from his position in the bank, it prompts Krogstad to put pressure on Nora to persuade Helmer to retain Krogstad. From this point in the play, the action revolves around Nora. She must try to appease Krogstad, maneuver Helmer, and resist Christine’s appeal to inform Helmer of all that has taken place. The play is Nora’s, and all the characters in the play, even Anne, the nurse, relate to Nora, who is the central character. Therefore, all scenes in the adaptation must keep the attention focused on Nora, what she wants to do, and what stands in her way.

The adapter must first provide the audience with enough exposition so they can easily and quickly be brought into the world of the play. In Act I, Ibsen gives the audience a great deal of information about the characters and the previous action. If Ibsen’s exposition is summarized, it could be stated as:

- Helmer will assume a new, more lucrative position after Christmas.
- The family has been financially stressed until this point.
- Christine is Nora’s old friend who endured an unhappy marriage so she could help her family financially. She is now widowed and looking for work.
- Nora and her father have generally been considered by others to be spendthrifts
- Nora does things in a manner that will elicit Helmer’s approval.
- Nora clandestinely borrowed the money for Helmer’s life-saving trip to Italy.
- Nora has a tendency to lie.
- Rank, an unmarried physician, is Nora and Helmer’s closest friend.
- Krogstad is desperate to keep his job at the bank.
- Krogstad once committed a crime similar to Nora’s.
- Krogstad and Christine were once close.

David Ball notes that Ibsen is particularly good at presenting exposition in a manner that not only illuminates the past and present, but that also “propels present action” (42). The writer believes that the adapter should retain as much of the exposition as the play

and the audience need, but should get to the inciting incident and primary conflict as soon afterward as possible. Without doing so there will not be enough time for the conflict to develop.

In directing and in text analysis, the phrase “propel plot and characters forward” is often used. This phrase can be confusing because we can see that in a well-written play characters and their motives are always being revealed, and the plot is constantly unfolding. David Ball defines a “forward” as “anything that arouses interest in things yet to come” (45). Ball proceeds to explain: “Our attention is made keenest (by a skilled writer) where it needs to be keenest. This provides a reliable analytic method to discover what the playwright thinks important” (47). In order to propel the characters and the plot forward, the adapter’s goal must be to select the most salient forwards of the uncut play and be sure that they keep the audience’s attention on the spine of the play and the principal character. For example, the most salient forwards for A Doll’s House include the following in each of the three acts:

Act I

- references to Nora being a spendthrift
- Helmer’s line: “no debt, no borrowing” (5)
- Nora lying about the macaroons
- Nora manipulating Helmer to give Christine a job at the bank
- Krogstad pressuring Nora to persuade Helmer to keep Krogstad at the bank
- Krogstad relating the details of Nora’s forgery
- Krogstad’s parallel crime
- Helmer making immediate personnel changes at the bank
- Helmer’s opinion about Krogstad “deceiving his family and poisoning his children” (35).
- Helmer’s belief that a “deceitful mother” (35) will corrupt her children

Act II

- Nora asks Christine if she can get the bond back if she pays off the balance of the loan
- Helmer’s line stating he will “have both courage and strength if they are

needed" (46)

- Nora's line: "Oh for some help, some way out of it" (47).
- Rank expressing his desire to show his gratitude to the Helmers for their friendship
- Rank professing his love to Nora
- Krogstad telling Nora that he has written and will deliver a letter to Helmer telling all
- Helmer promising to delay working on bank business until after the Stenborgs' party

Act III

- Christine's line: "Nils, give me someone and something to work for" (66).
- Christine telling Krogstad that his letter should not be recalled
- Helmer's line: "Do you know, Nora, that I have often wished that you might be threatened by some great danger..." (77).
- Helmer's line: "What a horrible awakening..." (78).
- Krogstad's second letter forgiving the debt and returning the bond
- Nora's line "Sit down here Torvald..." (82).
- Nora telling Helmer that they have never understood one another
- Nora's explanation of her being a "doll-wife" and "doll-child" (83).
- Nora telling Helmer that she does not love him anymore
- Nora telling Helmer that their marriage is over
- Helmer's line: "...no man would sacrifice his honor for the one he loves..." (87).
- Nora's line: "It is a thing hundreds of thousands of women have done" (87).

Ball also calls our attention to what he terms "things theatrical" which are "all things that elicit strong audience response" (35). As with forwards, theatrical moments are important because "good playwrights put their most important material into their most theatrical moments" (36). For example, Krogstad threatening to tell Helmer about the loan and take Nora to court is an intense moment in Act I. After seeing this scene the audience knows exactly what Nora did and what Krogstad wants her to do for him. Later, the act concludes with Nora struggling to conceal her horror and disbelief as Helmer tells her: "Almost everyone who has gone to the bad early in life has had a deceitful mother" (35). After seeing these two scenes, the audience can begin to internalize the crisis that Nora is in, as well as perhaps empathize with the other characters

as well. Other significant theatrical moments include:

Act II

- Helmer summoning Helen, the maid, to deliver Krogstad's dismissal letter
- Rank expressing his feelings toward Nora
- Krogstad's letter lying in the letterbox
- Nora pleading with Helmer about practicing the Tarantella

Act III

- Helmer's reaction to Krogstad's first letter
- Helmer's line: "I am saved..." (80).
- Helmer's line: "Can you suppose I should ever think of such a thing as repudiating you..." (81).
- Nora leaving and shutting the door

Identifying the forwards and theatrical moments in a script can create a string of markers for the adapter to follow as h/she continues to create the adaptation. The next step is to check these markers and determine where the elements of dramatic structure lie among them. Lou-Ida Marsh, former theatre teacher and active UIL-OAP judge and clinician, has compiled several excellent documents that offer advice on the process of adapting and cutting full-length plays. One of these, "Down to Size: Cutting a Long Play for UIL-OAP Contest," includes a list of the elements of dramatic structure that should be present in an adaptation. Marsh encourages the adapter to provide "exposition, rising action (conflict), climax (point of no return), falling action, and closure (ending/solution)" (2,3). Marsh emphasizes that falling action and closure must be given as much attention as exposition and rising action. Development of these elements brings the play to a complete and well-paced ending that is "as theatrically effective as the opening" (3). In another document, "One Critic Judge's Thoughts on Adapting Literature for UIL One-Act Play," Marsh reminds those who are abridging plays to provide adequate contrast by including both "hilltops and valleys" (2) so the production will not simply be a series of the most intense moments of the script strung together. A

“valley” scene from A Doll’s House is the reconciliation scene between Christine and Krogstad. Although the scene is integral in several ways, its tempo and mood are slower and sweeter than most of the other scenes of the play and provide a contrast to the tension and urgency that are present in many of the scenes between Nora and the other principal characters. The scene between Nora and Anne is also an example. Nora seeks some form of reassurance from the one person who is not judgmental of her. Anne is like a mother to Nora, and the audience sees Nora receiving, even if briefly, what she and all humans need, which is to be heard and accepted without being counseled or corrected.

Once the adapter has extracted the basic structure of the play, h/she may wish to consider incorporating points put forth in Michael Shurtleff’s book Audition, which is summarized in a Texas Education Agency theatre curriculum document. Shurtleff encourages actors to “find the events”(2) in each scene they are in. The events can be characterized by confrontations and changes (not necessarily in that order). The adapter can use this concept to be sure h/she has included significant developments that propel both plot and character. A Doll’s House contains two main confrontations that produce two main changes in the four principal characters and the action taken by the characters. The first is Krogstad’s confrontation of Christine, who, in his opinion, “jilted” him as a fiancé for another man who was more financially stable. Christine explains her predicament and her regret. She then suggests that they resume their relationship and implies that they marry. Prompted by Christine’s faith in him, Krogstad returns Nora’s bond and no longer requires payment of the balance of the loan. The second is Helmer’s confrontation of Nora after he reads Krogstad’s first and second letters. His reactions cause Nora to acknowledge that she did not know her husband’s true character and that she is, in essence, “living with a strange man” (88). These two events in the play must be

included in the adaptation because the first influences the second. Without showing the relationship between Christine and Krogstad, the relationship between Helmer and Nora loses dimension and lacks contrast.

The skeleton of the adaptation is what allows the adaptation to become a separate play from the original. Once the skeleton has been constructed, the adapter may add flesh to the bones by selecting lines and scenes in which characters are revealed most fully. The combination of the bones and the flesh complete the process of forming a one-act play that is extracted directly from the original, but is a whole and complete play of its own.

C. ADAPTING PROCESS: CHARACTERS AND THEIR ACTIONS

Lines and scenes that illuminate characters can be found within the scenes that contain the forwards and theatrical moments. Again, one's goal is to select dialogue that relates directly to the spine of the action and allows the audience to see the characters attempting to achieve their objectives while facing obstacles. While the audience is witnessing characters attempting to achieve their objectives, the audience should also be given glimpses into various aspects of the characters' lives and relationships.

Each character in a play wants something during each scene h/she is in. The particular wants may change, but the fact that the characters want something does not change. William Ball observes: "Wants cause action. Wants cause conflict" (76). Determining the characters' wants is a reliable means of selecting dialogue for the adaptation because "a human being talks in order to get what he or she wants" (27). The scene in Act II between Nora and Rank illustrates this idea. The scene not only propels the plot, but also reveals personal information about the characters. Nora wants help solving her problem with Krogstad. Although she tells Christine in Act I that she would never have borrowed the money from Rank, she is now desperate and is about to ask Rank for the favor. Rank loves Nora but has never disclosed the fact, perhaps out of a sense of propriety, respect for the institution of marriage, or for his wish that Nora's marriage to Helmer (and her happiness) not be disrupted. When Nora asks for "a proof of [his] friendship" (50), Rank takes the opportunity to risk breaking his silence, not knowing how Nora will react. Nora is disconcerted by Rank's confession. Nevertheless, she

could take advantage of the situation to get what she wants. When Nora chooses not to take advantage of Rank, the audience sees a contrast to the Nora who lies and manipulates people and situations. In addition, Nora's discovery of Rank's true feelings changes the course of her actions and becomes a plot point in the play. Since Nora is no longer willing to ask Rank for money or assistance, she must abandon hope for assistance and continue to face Krogstad alone.

Additionally, one may wish to incorporate Ball's phrase for clarifying character objectives: "I [the character] want to (verb) the (receiver) to (desired response)" (79). Or, to cite Ball's example: "I want to ignite the crowd to riot" (79). Krogstad's objective might be phrased: "I want to corner Nora Helmer so she will control her husband and he will let me keep my job at the bank." Krogstad makes his objective clear, but what must also be noted is Krogstad's desire to provide his children with better opportunities in the future than he can now. It should also not be overlooked that his crime was "nothing more or nothing worse" (31) than Nora's. Knowing this about Krogstad makes his quest to regain respectability as honorable as Nora's mission to save her husband's life, though Krogstad's methods may be contemptible.

Knowing how the playwright uses characters in a script will aid the adapter in selecting scenes and dialogue involving that character. Susan Zeder recommends that playwrights and directors "identify the function of primary and secondary characters in a play" (2). The primary characters in A Doll's House are Nora and Helmer. The primary conflict and relationship of the play are between these two characters. Krogstad and Christine are secondary characters. However, the conflict and relationship between Nora and Helmer cannot evolve without Krogstad and Christine. Therefore, while Ibsen uses these two secondary characters to propel the plot, he also develops them as foils to Nora and Helmer by exposing significant differences between the two men and the two

women. Christine's perception in Act I that Nora is "a child" is largely accurate and fair. Even Nora's shouldering the burden of repaying the loan in installments does not compare with Christine's enduring a loveless marriage in order to support her mother and brothers, and working tirelessly to support herself after becoming a widow.

Krogstad is a man whose actions are prompted by the desire to provide for his children. Helmer is motivated by pride and an exaggerated sense of self-importance. Krogstad and Christine face difficulties that are no less significant than those facing Helmer and Nora. One could even argue that Krogstad and Christine's stakes are higher because each has already lost a great deal. Christine herself says: "A woman who has once sold herself for another's sake, doesn't do it a second time" (68).

Ibsen uses Rank in a similar manner. While the character communicates the idea that heredity influences individuals, he also provides several light-hearted and tender moments in the play, and serves as yet another contrast to Helmer. Rank's indulgence in the illicit macaroons makes Helmer look like a martinet who forbids his wife the simplest of pleasures. Likewise, Rank's jest that Christine will replace him as Nora's closest friend after his death reveals Rank's sincere affection toward Nora. Throughout the course of the play the audience may wonder what Nora's life might have been like had she married Rank instead of Helmer. Ibsen relates each of these characters to Nora, and through their relationship to her, Ibsen propels the plot and precipitates Nora's actions and reactions. This in turn develops cohesion between the characters and the spine of the action.

In Audition, Michael Shurtleff discusses the element of competition in characters' relationships. The main points presented in the book are condensed in a Texas Education Agency document titled "Character Discovery Process: Utilizing 'The 12 Guideposts' from Audition by Michael Shurtleff." The author encourages actors (when

performing) to emphasize competition between characters because “friendships and romances always contain competition” (2). The presence of competition may be subtle, but it is important. Had Nora not been competing with Christine to see who had made the greater sacrifice, Nora might never have told her about borrowing the money. Had Christine not known about the loan, she might never have discussed it with Krogstad. Even Nora’s conflict with Krogstad contains an undercurrent of competition; each is attempting to outwit the other while using Helmer as the pawn. Whether the relationship involves relatives, friends, or enemies, its nature is colored by competition.

Shurtleff continues by noting that characters often play games and engage in role playing. He asks: “What is the real-life game [the] character is playing? What roles [does h/she] have to play to win this game?” (2). Nora is busy playing games and engaging in role playing until the final scene of the play. When confronted by Krogstad, she poses as the powerless wife unable to influence her husband. At home with Helmer she scampers about as the “squirrel” in order to manipulate her husband in a manner that will not threaten or anger him. When the audience sees Nora at these moments, they see a woman who survives as she has learned to survive. The last scene of the play then becomes a scene about a woman whose life is about to change. She must now learn a new means of survival, which will be self-reliance.

Consider as well the idea that characters, like people, have professional, personal, and private lives. The writer was introduced to this idea by Sam Havens, a professor of playwriting at the University of St. Thomas in Houston. Havens spoke on the topic of playwriting at a TETA convention in Austin in 1993. Helmer, for example, divides his time between the bank and his home. Allowing the audience to see the man as bank manager, head of the household, and amorous husband enables those seeing the performance or reading the adaptation to view Helmer as a multi-dimensional character. The

same is true for Krogstad. His need for legitimate employment drives him to blackmail Nora and consequently to be vilified. Christine alone champions his “true character,” which ultimately prevails, as evidenced by his willingness to return Nora’s bond, relinquish his post at the bank, and resume his relationship with Christine.

Altogether, a playwright conveys his/her ideas through characters. Characters want to achieve their objectives, but face obstacles. Characters battling against obstacles create conflict. A playwright’s successive arrangement of conflicts comprises the spine of the action of the play. If the audience is to become interested in the playwright’s ideas, the audience must be enticed by the play’s characters. Showing the audience as many aspects of the characters’ lives as possible, while relating all scenes to the spine of the action and the central character will enable the adapter to create a one-act abridgement of an original script that retains the playwright’s intent and the integrity of the full-length play.

CHAPTER IV

A DOLL'S HOUSE

by

Henrik Ibsen

One-Act Adaptation by Helen Whetstone Martin

Torvald Helmer, manager of the local bank

Nora Helmer, his wife

Dr. Rank, a physician who is a friend of the Helmers

Christine Linde, Nora's friend

Nils Krogstad, former attorney, now bank clerk

Anne, nurse to the Helmer children

Helen, a housemaid

A DOLL'S HOUSE

SCENE 1

(The living room of the Helmers' apartment. It is Christmas Eve day. There is a French door unit secured to a 4x8 platform UC with steps leading from it to the living room floor. The illusion of a foyer is created by placing a three-fold flat US of the French door unit. In the foyer is a postal letter box which can easily be seen from the audience. Interior walls are suggested with an arrangement of two-fold and three-fold flats. At SR is a Christmas tree. At DR is a settee with an end table at its left arm. Immediately SR of the French doors is a pier table with Nora's needlework basket sitting on it. On SL is a writing desk with chair. On the desk are assorted papers, an ink well, a pen, a blotter, Helmer's pipe, and other miscellaneous items. Behind the desk UL are bookshelves created by pylons. Against the USL wall is a wine stand with two decanters and four snifters on a silver tray. A hat rack with Helmer's hat and coat on it stands to the left of the wine stand. At C is a bistro table with two chairs. A garland is draped above the French door. A wreath is hanging on the SL wall. A trio of silhouettes of the Helmer children hangs on the SR wall. Potted plants sit on top of the bookshelves and in the foyer. Off SL is Helmer's study. Off SR are the dining room and other interior rooms of the house. Beyond the French doors is the entrance to the apartment from the main hallway of the building. There is a separate entrance to Helmer's study from the street that is sometimes used by Rank and Krogstad.)

As the lights and music come up, Helmer is seated at the writing desk working on bank papers and Helen, the maid, is tidying the area around the settee and tree. Nora hums to herself as she enters. She is carrying a basket containing several wrapped gifts.)

NORA. *(Sets basket on bistro, removes hat and gloves and places them with handbag on pier. She tosses her cape onto the settee.)* Helen, be sure the children do not see the Christmas tree till this evening.

HELEN. Yes, ma'am. *(She picks up Nora's cape and exits into interior.)*

HELMER. Is that my little lark twittering? *(He continues working and does not look up.)*

NORA. Yes, it is! *(She reaches into basket and retrieves a small cookie tin which she places on pier.)*

HELMER. Is it my little squirrel bustling about?

NORA. Torvald, come and see what I have bought.

HELMER. Bought, did you say? Has my little spendthrift been wasting money again?

NORA. Torvald, this year we really can let ourselves go a little.

HELMER. Still, we can't spend money recklessly.

NORA. You are going to have a big salary and earn lots and lots of money.

HELMER. Yes, after the new year; but then it will be a whole quarter before the salary is due.

NORA. We can borrow till then.

HELMER. Nora, you know what I think about that. No debt, no borrowing.

NORA. As you please, Torvald. (*Sits on settee.*)

HELMER. (*Crosses to Nora.*) My little skylark must not droop her wings. Nora, what do you think I have got here? (*Reaches into breast pocket and hands her several bills.*)

NORA. Money! (*Counts money.*)

HELMER. There you are. Do you think I don't know what is needed for housekeeping at Christmas time?

NORA. Thank you, Torvald; that will keep me going for a long time.

HELMER. Indeed it must.

NORA. (*Takes him by the hand and crosses to bistro.*) But come and see what I have bought. And all so cheap! Look, here is a new suit for Ivar, and a sword; and a horse and a trumpet for Bob; and a doll and a dolly's bedstead for Emmy – they are very plain, but she will soon break them in pieces.

HELMER. And what is in this parcel? (*Takes box and shakes it.*)

NORA. No, no! You mustn't see that till this evening. (*Takes gift and returns it to the basket.*)

HELMER. Very well. But now tell me, what would you like for yourself?

NORA. If you really want to give me something, you might...

HELMER. Well, out with it!

NORA. You might give me money, Torvald. And then one of these days I will buy something with it. That is a very sensible plan, isn't it?

TORVALD. Indeed it is—if you were to save out of the money I give you, and then buy something for yourself. But if you spend it all on the house keeping and any number of unnecessary things, then I merely have to pay up again.

NORA. You haven't any idea how many expenses we skylarks and squirrels have Torvald. (*Crosses to SR of bistro and sits in chair.*)

HELMER. You always find some new way of wheedling money out of me. Still, one must take you as you are. Indeed, you can inherit these things, Nora. But, do you know, it strikes me that you are looking rather...uneasy today?

NORA. Do I?

HELMER. Has Miss Sweet-Tooth been breaking rules in town today?

NORA. No, I assure you, Torvald—

HELMER. Not been nibbling sweets?

NORA. No, Torvald, I should not think of going against your wishes.

HELMER. No, I am sure of that; besides, you gave me your word. Keep your little Christmas secrets to yourself, my darling. (*Takes her hand. She stands.*) They will all be revealed tonight when the Christmas tree is lit, no doubt. Nora, you can't think how I am looking forward to this evening. It is splendid to feel that one has a perfectly safe appointment, and a big enough income.

NORA. It's wonderful. (*A doorbell from hallway entrance rings.*) There's someone at the door. What a nuisance!

HELMER. (*Crosses to desk.*) If it is a caller, remember I am not at home.

SCENE 2

HELEN. (*Entering through French door.*) A lady to see you, ma'am, – a stranger.

NORA. Ask her to come in.

HELEN. The doctor came at the same time, sir.

HELMER. Did he go straight into my room?

HELEN. Yes, sir.

(Helmer exits into his study. Helen steps into foyer. Christine is wearing a cloak, hat and gloves. She is carrying her handbag and a small suitcase. She enters through French door and steps down into the living room while escorted by Helen, who then exits SR into the interior.)

CHRISTINE. How do you do, Nora? You don't recognize me, I suppose.

NORA. *(Pauses briefly.)* Christine! *(Crosses to Christine, embraces her.)* Is it really you?

CHRISTINE. Yes. *(Nora leads Christine to settee. They sit.)*

NORA. How you have altered, Christine!

CHRISTINE. In nine, ten long years...*(Christine removes her cloak and gloves.)*

NORA. My poor, dear Christine, do forgive me.

CHRISTINE. What do you mean, Nora?

NORA. You are a widow.

CHRISTINE. Yes.

NORA. I saw it in the papers. And he left you nothing?

CHRISTINE. Not even any sorrow or grief to live upon.

NORA. *(Pauses briefly.)* My husband has been made manager of the bank!

CHRISTINE. What good luck!

NORA. You know Torvald left his law office when we were married? There was no prospect of promotion there, and he had to try and earn more than before. But during the first year he overworked himself dreadfully. The doctors said it was necessary for him to go south.

CHRISTINE. You spent a whole year in Italy, didn't you?

NORA. Yes. It saved Torvald's life, but it cost a tremendous amount of money.

CHRISTINE. In emergencies like that it is lucky to have money.

NORA. I ought to tell you that we had it from Papa.

CHRISTINE. It was just about that time that he died...but your husband came back quite well?

NORA. As sound as a bell.

CHRISTINE. But – I thought your maid said the gentleman who arrived here just as I did was the doctor?

NORA. Yes, that was Dr. Rank, but he doesn't come here professionally. He is our dearest friend, and comes in at least once every day. Tell me, is it really true that you did not love your husband? Why did you marry him?

CHRISTINE. My mother was alive then, and was bedridden, and I had to provide for my two younger brothers; so I did not think I was justified in refusing his offer.

NORA. He was rich then?

CHRISTINE. I believe he was quite well off. But his business was a precarious one; when he died there was nothing left. I had to turn my hand to anything I could find—first a small shop, then a school, and so on. One must live, and so one becomes selfish. When you told me of the happy turn your fortunes have taken—I was delighted not so much on your account as on my own.

NORA. What do you mean? Oh, I understand. You mean that perhaps Torvald could get you something to do.

CHRISTINE. Yes.

NORA. Just leave it to me; I will broach the subject very cleverly.

CHRISTINE. How kind you are, Nora, to be so anxious to help me! You know so little of the burdens and troubles of life.

NORA. I – ? I know so little of them? (*Rises and crosses to bistro.*)

CHRISTINE. Small household cares and that sort of thing! You are a child, Nora.

NORA. (*Pauses.*) Christine, it was I who saved Torvald's life.

CHRISTINE. How? (*Rises and crosses to Nora.*)

NORA. I told you about our trip to Italy. Papa didn't give us the funds. It was I who procured the money.

CHRISTINE. But, Nora, how could you possibly do it? A wife cannot borrow without her husband's consent. Haven't you been a little bit imprudent?

NORA. Is it imprudent to save your husband's life?

CHRISTINE. Do you mean never to tell him about it?

NORA. Yes—someday, perhaps. (*Crosses to desk. Christine follows.*) This affair has caused me a lot of worry. Last winter I was lucky enough to get a lot of copying to do, (*Nora sits at desk.*) so I locked myself up and sat writing every evening until late at night. It was a tremendous pleasure to sit there working and earning money. It was like being a man. (*The doorbell rings. Nora rises.*)

CHRISTINE. There is the bell; perhaps I had better go. (*Crosses to settee.*)

NORA. Don't go. It is sure to be for Torvald.

SCENE 3

HELEN. (*Enters through French doors and crosses toward Nora.*) Excuse me, ma'am. There is a gentleman to see the master, and as the doctor is with him –

NORA. Who is it?

KROGSTAD. (*He has followed Helen and is now waiting in the frame of the French doors.*) It is I, Mrs. Helmer.

(*Christine glances at Krogstad, but then turns away and busies herself with her handbag and gloves.*)

NORA. What do you want to see my husband about?

KROGSTAD. Bank business...in a way. I have a small post in the bank, and I hear your husband is to be our chief now –

NORA. Be so good as to go into the study then.

(*Helen shows Krogstad the entrance to the study. Krogstad exits into study. Helen exits into interior.*)

CHRISTINE. Nora – who was that man?

NORA. A lawyer, of the name of Krogstad.

SCENE 4

RANK. (*Dr. Rank enters from study carrying his hat and coat. He walks with the aid of a cane. He pauses near wine stand.*) I beg your pardon; I am afraid I am disturbing you too.

NORA. No, not at all. (*Taking his hat and coat and setting them on bistro. She then takes Rank by the arm and leads him to settee.*) Dr. Rank, Mrs. Linde. (*Christine offers her hand to Rank, who takes it and bows slightly. Christine and Rank sit. Nora stands SL of the settee.*) Dr. Rank, what did Mr. Krogstad want to speak to Torvald about?

RANK. I have no idea; I only heard that it was something about the bank.

NORA. It's perfectly glorious to think that we have – that Torvald has so much power over so many people. (*Crosses to pier and gets cookie tin. She stands behind the settee and leans forward between Christine and Rank.*) Dr. Rank, what do you say to a macaroon?

RANK. What, macaroons? I thought they were forbidden here.

NORA. Yes, but these are some Christine gave me.

CHRISTINE. What! I – ?

NORA. Don't be alarmed! You couldn't know that Torvald had forbidden them. You must have one too, Christine.

SCENE 5

(*Helmer enters from study and removes a book from the bookshelf. Before Helmer notices, Nora places cookie tin on end table. Christine and Dr. Rank rise.*)

NORA. (*Crosses to Helmer.*) Torvald dear, have you got rid of him?

TORVALD. Yes, he has just gone.

NORA. (*Leading Helmer DS toward settee. Rank crosses US to wine stand and pours a drink. During the introduction he looks on.*) Let me introduce you. This is Christine, who has just come to town.

HELMER. Christine?

NORA. Mrs. Linde, dear; Christine Linde.

TORVALD. Of course. A school friend of my wife's, I presume?

CHRISTINE. Yes. *(She extends her hand, which Helmer accepts.)*

NORA. And just think, she has taken a long journey in order to see you.

HELMER. What do you mean?

CHRISTINE. No, really, I—

NORA. When she heard you had been appointed manager of the bank—the news was telegraphed, you know—she traveled here as quick as she could. Torvald, I am sure you will be able to do something for Christine, for my own sake, won't you?

HELMER. Have you had some experience of bookkeeping?

CHRISTINE. Yes, a fair amount.

HELMER. Well, it's very likely I may be able to find something for you. You have come at a fortunate moment, Mrs. Linde.

CHRISTINE. How am I to thank you?

TORVALD. There is no need. But today you must excuse me. *(He crosses to desk and collects papers, then crosses to hat rack and gathers hat and coat.)*

RANK. *(Sets glass down. Crosses to bistro to collect hat and coat.)* Wait a minute. I will come with you. *(Christine puts on cloak and gloves. Picks up suitcase and handbag.)*

NORA. Are you going too, Christine?

CHRISTINE. Yes, I must go and look for a room. Good-bye, Nora, and many thanks.

NORA. Good-bye for the present. Of course you will come back this evening. And you too, Dr. Rank.

(Christine and Rank add: "Thank you," and "Certainly," "Good-bye." Helmer opens French doors for Christine and Rank, who exit Helmer follows.)

SCENE 6

(Nora crosses to tree and adjusts decorations, etc. A moment later Krogstad appears at French doors. His overcoat is folded over his arm. He carries his hat.)

KROGSTAD. Excuse me, Mrs. Helmer...a word with you.

NORA. (*Startled, turning toward him.*) With me? It is not the first of the month yet.

KROGSTAD. This is something different. (*Stepping down into living room.*) I saw your husband going down the street – with a lady. May I ask if it was a Mrs. Linde?

NORA. It was.

KROGSTAD. She is a great friend of yours, isn't she?

NORA. She is. But I don't see –

KROGSTAD. I knew her too, once upon a time. Is Mrs. Linde to have an appointment in the bank?

NORA. Yes, and it was I who pleaded her cause.

KROGSTAD. I was right in what I thought, then.

NORA. Sometimes one has influence, I should hope. (*Crosses DC of bistro to desk.*) When anyone is in a subordinate position, Mr. Krogstad, one should be careful to avoid offending anyone who –

KROGSTAD. Who has influence?

NORA. (*Crosses SR to bistro. Arranges gifts in basket.*) Exactly.

KROGSTAD. (*Stepping in closer to bistro.*) Mrs. Helmer, you will be so good as to use your influence on my behalf.

NORA. What do you mean?

KROGSTAD. You will be so kind as to see that I am allowed to keep my subordinate position at the bank.

NORA. Who proposes to take your post away from you?

KROGSTAD. There is no necessity to keep up the pretense of ignorance.

NORA. But I assure you –

KROGSTAD. I should advise you to use your influence to prevent my dismissal.

NORA. But Mr. Krogstad, I have no influence.

KROGSTAD. I thought you said yourself just now –

NORA. What should make you think I have any influence of that kind with my husband?

KROGSTAD. Oh, I have known your husband from our student days. I don't suppose he is any more unassailable than other husbands.

NORA. (*Crosses to desk. Turns and faces Krogstad.*) I am not afraid of you any longer. As soon as the new year comes, I shall in a very short time be free of the whole thing.

KROGSTAD. (*Crosses UC and goes to her.*) Listen to me, Mrs. Helmer. Many years ago I was guilty of an indiscretion. The matter never came into court, but every way seemed to be closed to me after that. So I took to the business that you know of. Now my sons are growing up. For their sake I must try and win back as much respect as I can in the town. This post in the bank was the first step up for me – and now your husband is going to kick me down again into the mud.

NORA. But you must believe me, Mr. Krogstad; it is not in my power to help you at all.

KROGSTAD. Then it is because you haven't the will; but I have the means to compel you.

NORA. (*Crosses and stands behind the chair so the desk is between them.*) You don't mean that you will tell my husband that I owe you money?

KROGSTAD. Suppose I were to tell him?

NORA. It would put me in a horribly disagreeable position –

KROGSTAD. Only disagreeable?

NORA. Well, do it then! If my husband does get to know of it, of course he will at once pay you what is still owing, and we shall have nothing more to do with you.

KROGSTAD. Listen to me Mrs. Helmer. Either you have a very bad memory or you know very little of business. I shall be obliged to remind you of a few details. (*He sits in SL chair at bistro, sets hat down, and removes papers from breast pocket.*)

NORA. What do you mean?

KROGSTAD. When your husband was ill, you came to me to borrow four-thousand, eight-hundred kroner.

NORA. I didn't know anyone else to go to.

KROGSTAD. Now I promised to get the money on the security of a bond which I drew up.

NORA. Yes, which I signed.

KROGSTAD. But below your signature there were a few lines constituting your father a surety for the money; those lines your father should have signed.

NORA. Should? He did sign them.

KROGSTAD. Then I gave you the bond to send by post to your father. (*Stands and crosses to desk.*) And you naturally did so at once, because five or six days afterward you brought me the bond with your father's signature. And then I gave you the money. Tell me, Mrs. Helmer, can you by any chance remember what day your father died?

NORA. Papa died on the twenty-ninth of September.

KROGSTAD. That is correct; I have ascertained it for myself. And as that is so, there is a discrepancy which I cannot account for.

NORA. What discrepancy?

KROGSTAD. The discrepancy consists, Mrs. Helmer, in the fact that your father signed this bond three days after his death.

NORA. What do you mean? I don't understand –

KROGSTAD. Your father died on the twenty-ninth of September. But, look here; your father has dated his signature the second of October. It was your father himself who signed his name here?

NORA. No, it was not. It was I who wrote Papa's name.

KROGSTAD. Are you aware that is a dangerous confession? Mrs. Helmer, you evidently do not realize clearly what it is you have been guilty of. But I can assure you that my one false step, which lost me all my reputation, was nothing more or nothing worse than what you have done.

NORA. You? (*Crosses US of the bistro to settee.*) Do you ask me to believe that you were brave enough to run a risk to save your wife's life?

KROGSTAD. The law cares nothing about motives.

NORA. Then it must be a very foolish law.

KROGSTAD. Foolish or not, it is the law by which you will be judged, if I produce this paper in court.

NORA. I don't believe it. Is a daughter not to be allowed to spare her dying father anxiety and care? Is a wife not allowed to save her husband's life? I don't know much about the law; but I am certain that there must be laws permitting such thing as that.

KROGSTAD. (*Crosses US of the bistro to Nora.*) Do as you please. But let me tell you this—if I lose my position a second time, you shall lose yours with me. (*He picks up his hat from bistro and exits through French doors.*)

NORA. It's impossible. I did it for love's sake. (*Nora sits in SR chair at bistro.*)

SCENE 7

(*HELMER enters through French doors.*)

NORA. Oh! Are you back already?

HELMER. Yes. (*Crosses to desk and places papers on it, then to hat rack and places hat and coat on it.*) Has anyone been here?

NORA. Here? No.

HELMER. That is strange. I saw Krogstad going out of the gate.

NORA. Oh, yes, I forgot that he was here for a moment.

HELMER. (*Crossing UC to SR of bistro.*) Nora, I can see from your manner that he has been here begging you to say a good word for him.

NORA. Yes.

HELMER. And you were to appear to do it of your own accord; you were to conceal from me the fact of his having been here?

NORA. Yes, Torvald, but –

HELMER. My little song-bird must never do that again. No false notes. (*He returns to desk, sits, and begins working on papers.*)

NORA. (*Crosses to him and stands behind him with her arms around his shoulders.*) Are you very busy, Torvald? What are all those papers?

HELMER. Bank business.

NORA. Already?

HELMER. I must make use of the Christmas week to have everything in order for the new year.

NORA. Torvald...

HELMER. Yes?

NORA. I am looking forward tremendously to the fancy-dress ball at the Stenborgs' the day after tomorrow. (*She crosses to wine stand, pours a drink, and gives it to Helmer.*)

HELMER. And I am tremendously curious to see what you are going to surprise me with.

NORA. Couldn't you take me in hand and decide what I shall go as, and what sort of dress I shall wear?

HELMER. I shall think it over.

NORA. Torvald, was it really something very bad that this Krogstad was guilty of?

HELMER. He forged someone's name.

NORA. Isn't it possible that he was driven to do it by necessity? (*Crosses slowly to end table as Helmer speaks. Picks up cookie tin.*)

HELMER. Yes; or, as in so many cases, by imprudence. I am not so heartless as to condemn a man altogether because of a single false step. Many a man has been able to retrieve his character, if he has openly confessed his fault and taken his punishment.

NORA. Punishment—! (*She looks at cookie tin and sets it down on end table.*)

HELMER. But Krogstad did nothing of that sort; he got himself out of it by a cunning trick. Just think how a guilty man like that has to lie and play the hypocrite with everyone. And the children—that is the most terrible part of it all, Nora.

NORA. How?

HELMER. Because such an atmosphere of lies infects and poisons the whole life of a home. Almost everyone who has gone to the bad early in life has had a deceitful mother.

NORA. Why do you only say—mother?

HELMER. It seems most commonly to be the mother's influence, though naturally a bad father's would have the same result. This Krogstad has been poisoning his children with lies and dissimulation. *(Nora looks at silhouettes of her children.)* That is why I say he has lost all moral character. *(He rises, crosses to her.)* That is why my sweet little Nora must promise me not to plead his cause. Give me your hand on it. *(They clasp hands.)*

NORA. I have such a lot to do. *(Breaks away. Crosses to bistro and picks up basket and gifts.)*

HELMER. And I must try and read through some of these before dinner; and I must think about your costume, too. *(He crosses back to desk, collects pipe and papers, then exits into study.)*

(Nora lingers momentarily, then exits into interior of apartment. The lights dim and transition music is played. Helen enters from SR interior, crosses to desk, straightens miscellaneous items, then exits into study.)

SCENE 8

(It is the next day, which is Christmas Day. The music fades and the lights come up. Nora enters from interior carrying a tambourine that is trimmed with multi-colored ribbons. She begins pacing SR area while thinking aloud.)

NORA. No one will come today, Christmas Day, nor tomorrow either. *(She steps into foyer and checks letter box.)* No, nothing in the letter box.

ANNE. *(Entering from interior with the tarantella dress and sewing notions.)* At last I have found the box with the fancy dress. But it is in need of mending.

NORA. Thank you. Put it on the table. *(Anne sets dress on bistro, then begins to exit to interior. Nora calls after her.)* Anne, how are the children?

ANNE. *(Turning and going to Nora.)* The poor little souls are playing with their Christmas presents, but –

NORA. Do they ask for me?

ANNE. They are so accustomed to have their mamma with them.

NORA. Yes, but I shall not be able to be with them now as I was before.

ANNE. Young children easily get accustomed to anything.

NORA. Do you think they would forget their mother if she went away altogether?

ANNE. Went away?

NORA. Anne, how could you have the heart to put your own child out among strangers?

ANNE. I was obliged to, if I wanted to be little Nora's nurse.

NORA. Yes, but how could you be willing to do it?

ANNE. A poor girl who has got into trouble should be glad to.

NORA. Dear old Anne, you were a good mother to me when I was little.

ANNE. Little Nora had no other mother but me.

NORA. And if my little ones had no other mother, I am sure you would – what nonsense I am talking! Go in to them. *(Anne exits into interior. Nora crosses to bistro to examine dress.)*

SCENE 9

HELEN. *(Entering from US French door.)* Mrs. Linde is here, ma'am.

(Christine follows Helen into living room. Helen exits into interior. Christine removes cloak and sets it on settee with her handbag, gloves, and scarf.)

NORA. Oh, Christine. How good of you to come.

CHRISTINE. I heard you were asking for me.

NORA. Tomorrow evening there is to be a fancy-dress ball at the Stenborgs' who live above us, and Torvald wants me to dance the Tarantella that I learned at Capri. Here is the dress, but now it is all so torn, and I haven't any idea...

CHRISTINE. We will put that right.

NORA. It is nice of you.

CHRISTINE. *(Crossing to settee, sits.)* But I have completely forgotten to thank you for a delightful evening. Tell me, is Dr. Rank always as depressed as he was yesterday?

NORA. *(Follows Christine, stands at SL arm of settee.)* No; yesterday it was very

noticeable. I must tell you that he suffers from a very dangerous disease. He has consumption of the spine, poor creature. His father was a horrible man who committed all sorts of excesses, and that is why Dr. Rank was sickly from childhood. *(Helmer is heard whistling as he enters the apartment beyond the French doors.)* Christine! Torvald can't bear to see dressmaking going on. Let Anne help you.

CHRISTINE. *(Quickly bundles up the dress and sewing notions and exits into the interior.)* Certainly.

SCENE 10

(Helmer enters. Nora goes to him, kisses him on the cheek, and helps him remove his coat and hat. She places them on the hat rack.)

NORA. Torvald, dear.

HELMER. Was that the dressmaker? *(Crosses to desk and begins to take papers out of a satchel. He sits.)*

NORA. No, it was Christine; she is helping me to put my dress in order. I suppose you are going to do some work?

HELMER. Yes, I have just been into the bank.

NORA. Torvald?

HELMER. Yes?

NORA. *(She crosses to SR of the desk and kneels.)* If your little squirrel were to ask you for something...

HELMER. What then?

NORA. Your little squirrel would run about and do all her tricks if you would be nice, and do what she wants.

HELMER. You surely don't mean that request you made about Krogstad?

NORA. Yes, Torvald, I beg you.

HELMER. Have you the courage to open up that question again?

NORA. You must let Krogstad keep his post in the bank.

HELMER. My dear Nora, it is his post I have arranged Mrs. Linde to have.

NORA. (*She stands.*) Yes, you have been awfully kind about that, but you could just as well dismiss some other clerk instead of Krogstad.

HELMER. Nora, it is just by interceding for him that you make it impossible for me to keep him. It is already known at the bank that I mean to dismiss Krogstad. Is it to get about now that the new manager has changed his mind at his wife's bidding?

NORA. And what if it did?

HELMER. Do you suppose I am going to make myself ridiculous before my whole staff? And besides, there is one thing that makes it quite impossible for me to have Krogstad in the bank as long as I am manager.

NORA. (*Crosses to bistro.*) Whatever is that?

HELMER. (*He stands.*) I knew him when we were boys. He thinks it gives him the right to adopt a familiar tone with me. He would make my position at the bank intolerable.

NORA. Torvald, I don't believe you mean that.

HELMER. Don't you? Why not?

NORA. Because it is such a narrow-minded way of looking at things.

HELMER. Do you think I am narrow-minded?

NORA. (*Crosses to Helmer.*) No, just the opposite, dear, and it is exactly for that reason...

HELMER. It's the same thing! You say my point of view is narrow-minded, so I must be too. I must put an end to this. (*Crosses to desk, gets envelope.*)

NORA. What are you going to do?

HELMER. Settle it. Helen!

HELEN. (*Enters from interior.*) Yes, sir?

HELMER. (*Crossing to meet her in front of French doors.*) Take this letter, find a messenger, and tell him to deliver it. (*Crosses back to desk.*)

HELEN. Very well, sir.

NORA. Torvald, what was in that letter?

HELMER. Krogstad's dismissal.

NORA. Call her back, Torvald! (*Crosses to Helmer.*)

HELMER. (*Embracing Nora.*) My dear Nora, come what will, you may be sure I shall have both courage and strength if they are needed. You will see I am man enough to take everything upon myself.

NORA. You will never have to do that.

HELMER. Well, we will share it, Nora, as man and wife should. Now, you must go and play through the tarantella and practice with your tambourine. And when Rank comes, tell him where he will find me. (*Exits into study.*)

NORA. Oh, for some help, some way out of it.

SCENE 11

(*Dr. Rank enters through French doors.*)

RANK. Good day, Nora.

NORA. Dr. Rank...(Crossing to him.) you mustn't go in to Torvald now; I think he is busy with something.

RANK. And you?

NORA. (*Helping him with his hat and coat, placing them on bistro.*) Oh, you know very well I always have time for you.

RANK. Thank you. I shall make use of as much of it as I can.

NORA. (*Walking him to settee. They sit.*) What do you mean by that?

RANK. It is no use lying to one's self. Probably within a month I shall lie rotting in the churchyard.

NORA. Dear, dear, Dr. Rank...death mustn't take you away from Torvald and me.

RANK. It is a loss you will easily recover from. People form new ties. You are doing so already, I think.

NORA. You are jealous of Christine?

RANK. She will be my successor in this house—

NORA. Hush! She is in that room. (*Points to interior.*)

RANK. Today again? There, you see! (*Pauses.*) When I am sitting here, talking with you as intimately as this, I cannot imagine for a moment what would have become of me if I had never come into this house. And not to be able to leave behind the slightest token of one's gratitude.

NORA. Dr. Rank, if I asked you now for a proof of your friendship....It is something you must help me prevent. (*Pauses.*) You know how devotedly Torvald loves me; he would never for a moment hesitate to give his life for me.

RANK. Nora...do you think he is the only one?

NORA. (*Pauses.*) Dr. Rank, that really was horrid of you.

RANK. To have loved you as much as anyone else?

NORA. No, but to go and tell me so. You can do nothing for me now. Besides, I really don't need any help at all.

RANK. Perhaps I had better go. (*He rises, gets hat and coat, then exits through French doors. As Rank exits, Helen steps into foyer, then enters.*)

SCENE 12

(*Helen steps into living room.*)

HELEN. If you please, ma'am. (*She hands a note to Nora.*)

NORA. (*Takes note, reads it.*) Let him come in.

(*Helen crosses to French doors, shows Krogstad in, then exits. Krogstad stands in doorway. He is wearing his coat and carries his hat.*) What do you want of me?

KROGSTAD. An explanation.

NORA. (*Crosses toward him.*) I couldn't prevent it, Mr. Krogstad. I fought as hard as I could on your side, but it was no good. Think of my little children.

KROGSTAD. Have you and your husband thought of mine? I have a letter for your husband in my pocket. (*Pauses.*) I want to rehabilitate myself, Mrs. Helmer; I want to get on, and in that your husband must help me. I want to get into the bank again, in a higher position. Your husband must make a place for me.

NORA. That he will never do.

KROGSTAD. He will; I know him. He dare not protest. (*Stepping into living room.*)
And as soon as I am in there again, you will see! Within a year it will be Nils
Krogstad and not Torvald Helmer who manages the bank.

NORA. (*Crosses DS of bistro to desk.*) That's a thing you will never see!

KROGSTAD. (*Following Nora.*) Have you forgotten that it is I who have the keeping
of your reputation? When Helmer has had my letter, I shall expect a message from
him. And be sure you remember that it is your husband himself who has forced me
into such ways as this again. I will never forgive him for that. Good-bye, Mrs.
Helmer. (*Crosses US of bistro, through French doors, and drops letter into letter
box, then turns to look at Nora as he exits.*)

SCENE 13

(*Christine enters from interior and crosses to bistro.*)

CHRISTINE. There, I can't see anything more to mend.

NORA. Christine, come here. (*Christine sets dress and sewing notions on bistro. Nora
crosses UC, opens French door and points to letterbox.*) Do you see that letter?

CHRISTINE. Yes, I see it.

NORA. That letter is from Krogstad.

CHRISTINE. Nora, it was Krogstad who lent you the money!

NORA. Yes, and now Torvald will know all about it.

CHRISTINE. Believe me Nora, that's the best thing for both of you.

NORA. But I forged a name.

CHRISTINE. Good heavens! (*Looks toward letterbox.*) And your husband has the
key to the letterbox?

NORA. Yes, always.

CHRISTINE. I will go at once and see Krogstad. There was a time when he would
gladly do anything for my sake. (*Christine exits through French doors. Helmer
enters from study. Nora crosses toward him as he enters.*)

NORA. Torvald!

HELMER. (*Beginning to cross toward letterbox.*) I will just see if any letters have come.

NORA. (*Stopping him.*) Torvald! I can't dance the tarantella tomorrow night if I don't practice with you.

HELMER. Very well.

HELEN. (*Entering from interior.*) Dinner is served, ma'am.

(*Nora leads Torvald into interior. Helen remains, picks up dress and tambourine, then exits into interior. The lights dim and transition music is played.*)

SCENE 14

(*The day after Christmas. It is late evening. The lights are dim and music plays as Christine enters the living room. She removes her cloak, scarf, and gloves and sets them on settee. She looks around. Music fades out as Krogstad enters through French doors. He is wearing his overcoat and hat.*)

KROGSTAD. I found a note from you at home. What does this mean?

CHRISTINE. It is necessary that I should have a talk with you.

KROGSTAD. (*Stepping through French doors, removing hat.*) Can we two have anything to talk about?

CHRISTINE. You have never properly understood me.

KROGSTAD. (*Crossing DSL near desk.*) A heartless woman jilts a man when a more lucrative chance turns up.

CHRISTINE. Nils, it was only today that I learned it was your place I was going to take at the bank. I have learned to act prudently. Life, and hard, bitter necessity have taught me that.

KROGSTAD. And life has taught me not to believe in fine speeches.

CHRISTINE. Then life has taught you something very reasonable. But deeds you must believe in.

KROGSTAD. What do you mean by that?

CHRISTINE. I am quite alone in the world—my life is so dreadfully empty and I feel so forsaken. Nils, give me someone and something to work for. (*Extends her hand*

for Krogstad to accept.)

KROGSTAD. (*Crosses DS of bistro to Christine.*) And do you know what they think of me here?

CHRISTINE. Nils, I have faith in your real character—I can dare anything together with you.

KROGSTAD. Christine! Now I shall find a way to clear myself in the eyes of the world. (*Pauses.*) You are not aware of what steps I have taken in the matter of the Helmers.

CHRISTINE. Yes, I know all about that.

KROGSTAD. If I could only undo what I have done!

CHRISTINE. You cannot. Your letter is lying in the letterbox now.

KROGSTAD. (*Breaking away, crossing DC.*) Is that what this all means? You want to save your friend at any cost?

CHRISTINE. (*Crossing to Krogstad.*) Nils, a woman who has once sold herself for another's sake, doesn't do it a second time.

KROGSTAD. I will ask for my letter back.

CHRISTINE. No, Nils, you must not recall your letter. This unhappy secret must be disclosed; they must have a complete understanding between them.

KROGSTAD. Very well. I will wait for you below. (*Kisses her hand, exits through French doors.*)

SCENE 15

(Moments later, Helmer and Nora are heard coming into foyer from hallway of apartment building. They are returning from the Stenborgs' fancy-dress ball. Nora is wearing the Capri costume, a black shawl, and carrying the tambourine. Helmer is in evening attire. Nora is protesting while Helmer pulls her inside the living room. They do not notice Christine, who is standing near settee.)

NORA. I don't want to leave so early.

TORVALD. Not a single minute more, my sweet Nora. You know that was our agreement.

CHRISTINE. Good evening. (*Helmer releases Nora.*)

NORA. Christine! (*Sets shawl and tambourine on pier.*)

HELMER. You here, so late, Mrs. Linde?

CHRISTINE. Yes, you must excuse me; I was so anxious to see Nora in her dress.

HELMER. Yes, take a good look at her. I think she is worth looking at. (*Exits into study. Christine and Nora cross toward one another to stand SR of bistro.*)

CHRISTINE. I have had a talk with him. Nora, you must tell your husband. You have nothing to fear as far as Krogstad is concerned, but you must tell him.

NORA. I won't tell him.

CHRISTINE. Then the letter will.

NORA. Thank you, Christine. Now I know what I must do.

CHRISTINE. Good-night, Nora. (*Embraces Nora, then exits through French doors.*)

SCENE 16

HELMER. (*Returning from study.*) Ah! At last we have got rid of her. She is a frightful bore, that woman. (*Glancing at letterbox.*) Some letters have come. (*Helmer crosses to letter box, removes a small cluster of keys from vest pocket and unlocks letterbox. He removes three envelopes and steps back into living room as he speaks.*) Two cards, of Dr. Rank's. There is a black cross over the name. It looks as if he were announcing his own death.

NORA. It is just what he is doing.

HELMER. Do you know anything about it?

NORA. He means to shut himself up and die.

HELMER. My poor old friend. (*Embracing Nora.*) My darling wife, I don't feel as if I could hold you tight enough. 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.

NORA. (*Pushing away from him.*) Now you must read your letters, Torvald.

HELMER. No, not tonight. I want to be with you, my darling wife.

NORA. With the thought of your friend's death.

HELMER. You are right.

NORA. Good-night.

HELMER. Good-night. *(He kisses her on the cheek, then crosses US of bistro and exits into the study.)*

NORA. Good-bye, Torvald. *(She suddenly begins to panic. She dashes to pier and begins to gather her belongings but halts as she looks at silhouettes of the children. She touches the frame of the youngest child's silhouette.)*

SCENE 17

HELMER. *(From study.)* Nora! Nora! *(Enters with letter in hand. Crosses to Nora.)*
What is this? Do you know what is in this letter?

NORA. Yes, I know.

HELMER. *(Grabs Nora by the arms and shakes her.)* Is this true?

NORA. It is true. I have loved you above everything else –

HELMER. Oh, don't let us have any silly excuses.

NORA. Let me go! *(She frees herself and stumbles DC.)*

HELMER. What have you done? What a horrible awakening! All these eight years – she who was my joy and pride – a hypocrite, a liar – worse, a criminal! Now you have destroyed all my happiness. You have ruined all my future.

NORA. When I am out of the way, you will be free.

HELMER. What good would it do me if you were out of the way, as you say? He can make the affair known everywhere; and if he does, I may be falsely suspected of having been a party to your criminal action. *(The doorbell rings.)* Do you understand now what it is you have done for me?

ANNE. *(Enters from hallway through French door. She is in her robe and slippers.)* A letter for the mistress.

HELMER. *(Crossing toward her and taking it out of Helen's hand.)* Give it to me. *(Helen exits into interior.) (Reading.)* Yes, it is from him. I am saved!

NORA. And I?

HELMER. (*Still scanning letter.*) You too, of course; we are both saved. Look, he sends you your bond back. He says he regrets and laments – that a happy change in his life – never mind what he says! (*Crumples letter, tosses it to floor.*) We are saved, Nora! No one can do anything to you. My poor little Nora, I quite understand; you don't feel as if you could believe I have forgiven you.

NORA. Thank you for your forgiveness. (*Nora crosses to pier, gathers handbag, hat, and shawl.*)

HELMER. (*Crossing to desk, sets letter down. Continues to pace about in area.*) Can you suppose I should ever think of such a thing as repudiating you, or even reproaching you? There is something so sweet and satisfying, to a man, in the knowledge that he has forgiven his wife –

NORA. (*Crosses to chair SL of bistro, pulls it out from under table.*) Sit down here, Torvald. You and I have much to say to one another.

HELMER. Nora! I don't understand you. (*Crosses and sits in chair. Nora sits in chair SR of bistro.*)

NORA. That is just it; you don't understand me, and I have never understood you either – before tonight. Torvald this is a settling of accounts.

HELMER. What do you mean?

NORA. We have been married eight years. Does it not occur to you that this is the first time you and I, husband and wife, have had a serious conversation?

HELMER. But, Nora, would it have been any good to you?

NORA. I have been greatly wronged, Torvald – first by Papa and then by you.

HELMER. What! By us two, who have loved you better than anyone in the world?

NORA. When I was 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 doll-child, and he played with me just as I used to play with dolls. And when I came to live with you –

HELMER. What sort of expression is that to use about our marriage?

NORA. I mean that I was simply transferred from Papa's hands into yours. You arranged everything according to your own taste, and so I got the same taste as you

– or at least I pretended to, but our home has been nothing but a playroom. I have been your doll-wife, just as at home I was Papa's doll-child; and here the children have been my dolls.

HELMER. There is some truth to what you say. But for the future it shall be different. Playtime shall be over, and lesson time shall begin.

NORA. Torvald, you are not the man to educate me into being a proper wife for you. And how am I to bring up the children? I am not fit for the task. There is another task I must undertake first. I must try and educate myself – and that is why I am going to leave you now. (*She stands.*)

HELMER. What?

NORA. I must stand quite alone if I am to understand myself and everything about me.

HELMER. I won't allow it! I forbid you! (*He stands.*)

NORA. It is no use forbidding me anything any longer.

HELMER. And you don't consider what people will say? This is how you would neglect your most sacred duties.

NORA. I have other duties just as sacred.

HELMER. What duties could those be?

NORA. Duties to myself.

HELMER. You do not love me anymore. (*He sits.*)

NORA. No, that is just it.

HELMER. And can you tell me what it is I have done to forfeit your love?

NORA. Yes, it was tonight, when the wonderful thing did not happen.

HELMER. Explain yourself better – I don't understand you.

NORA. When Krogstad's letter was lying out there, never for a moment did I imagine that you would consent to accept this man's conditions. I was so absolutely certain that you would say to him: Publish the thing to the whole world. And when that was done –

HELMER. Yes, what then? When I had exposed my wife to shame and disgrace?

NORA. When that was done, I was so absolutely certain, you would come forward and take everything upon yourself, and say: I am the guilty one.

HELMER. Nora!

NORA. You mean that I would never have accepted such a sacrifice on your part? No, of course not. That was the wonderful thing which I hoped for and feared; and it was to prevent that, that I wanted to kill myself.

HELMER. I would gladly work night and day for you, Nora – bear sorrow and want for your sake. But no man would sacrifice his honor for the one he loves.

NORA. It is a thing hundreds of thousands of women have done.

HELMER. I have it in me to become a different man.

NORA. Perhaps – if your doll is taken away from you.

HELMER. But you are my wife, whatever becomes of you.

NORA. Here is your ring back. Give me mine.

HELMER. That too?

NORA. Now it is all over.

HELMER. Nora – can I never be anything more than a stranger to you?

NORA. Torvald, the most wonderful thing of all would have to happen.

HELMER. Tell me what that would be!

NORA. Both you and I would have to be so changed that – Oh, Torvald, I don't believe any longer in wonderful things happening.

(Music comes up slowly.)

HELMER. But I will believe in it. Tell me? So changed that – ?

NORA. That our life together would be a real wedlock. *(She crosses to pier and collects items, then turns and faces Helmer.)* Good-bye. *(Nora walks out through French doors. The sound of her footsteps fades. The main door of the building is heard as it is closed.)*

HELMER. Nora! Nora! The most wonderful thing of all – ?

(Nora's footsteps fade, then the main door to the apartment building is closed. Music and lights fade.)

End of play.

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VITA

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