

going to happen after she explains that Krogstad lent her the money. Kristine says she will talk to Krogstad. We begin to see a change in Nora as she starts the Tarantella, dancing as if her *life depended on it*. Krogstad has left a letter for them but Nora pleads with Torvald so he doesn't open it.

## Act Three Summary

Music is heard from the apartment upstairs. Christine sits on the sofa, reading a book.. Krogstad shows up and wonders why she's asked him to talk. Evidently, in the past she dumped him abruptly for the man she married. She tells him she had to do it because the man had money and she had to support her family. Krogstad tells her that ever since she left him, he's been a like a man lost at sea on a wreck. Christine admits that she feels the same way and suggests that these two shipwrecks get together. Krogstad declares that he'll demand his letter back. Christine tells him not to. She thinks all the lies in the Helmer house need to come to light. Nora and Torvald come back from the party. Nora complains that she doesn't want to leave the party so early. They notice Christine, and greet her. She tells them that she dropped by to see Nora's costume. Christine takes her leave. Rank stops in. He spent the day doing medical research and has found something for sure. Torvald asks Rank what he'll dress as for next year's masquerade. Rank replies that he will be invisible. Torvald goes to the mailbox. He notices that someone had been trying to pick the lock. One of Nora's hairpins is jammed in it. Nora blames it on the children. He tells her that sometimes he wishes she were in terrible trouble so that he could save her. Nora tells him he should read his mail. Torvald bellows in the next room. He bursts in and asks if Krogstad's letter is true. She confirms that it is, and begs him to not try and save her. Torvald makes no mention of trying to save her. Instead, he rips into his wife, saying she's just as disgusting as her father was. A maid enters with a letter for Nora. Torvald grabs it and reads. The letter is from Krogstad. It says that he's had a happy turn in his life and that he's ashamed that he tried to blackmail them. Torvald tells Nora that he forgives her. He goes on to say that he loves her even more now, having forgiven her from the bottom of his heart. It as if his possession of her has grown even greater. He tells her not to worry; he'll continue to guide her through life as if she was a child. Nora accuses Torvald and her father of doing her wrong. She says that they both treated her like a doll. She says she's leaving him and the children. She has a duty to herself that she's never fulfilled. She exits. Torvald laments the emptiness of the room. Hope flares up in him. We hear the sound of a door slamming shut.

## The New Drama

During the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, there was a gathering insistence that art should follow science in a more *'realistic investigation of the physical world'*, thereby joining the *March of Progress*. By the 1890s, *the New Drama* was identified with 'realism'. Émile Zola had argued in 1873 that playwrights should be scientists too, *"realistically"* and tough-mindedly examining in the lab of the stage the physical operation of human society and consciousness.

From the 70s on, Ibsen, with his microscopic dissection of modern Norwegian society and individual personality, had shown how best to do it in a dramatic form.

But the *"realism"* of an art based on illusion, as is drama, was immediately challenged, even by some of those playwrights labeled as 'realists'- Ibsen fused realism with symbolism and flirted with expressionism. Many artists argued that art's approach to reality would only be through illusion- a play, for example, was *'playing' with reality*.

## Marriage in the Victorian Era

## The Rules:

- Victorians were encouraged to marry within the same class. They would marry up, but to marry down meant marrying beneath yourself.
- An unmarried woman could inherit money and property after the age of 21, but once married, all control would revert to her husband. A woman could not have a will for her own personal possessions; since the control was in her husband's power, he could distribute her property in any way he liked, even to his illegitimate children (if he had any).
- Women married because they had a lack of options; they were not formally educated, and were only instructed in domestic duties. They needed someone to support them, and were encouraged to marry and have children.

Victorian marriage was a social and financial contract from which it was assumed both parties would benefit.

## Marriage and Social Realism:

Social realism as a dramatic form, by definition, suggests that the marriage presented is a reflection of conditions in society for both men and women. The domestic imagery of the mise en scene at the beginning of both plays suggests a realistic portrayal of marriage, observed through the 'fourth wall'. In addition, the naturalistic dialogue allows the relationships to present a microcosm of society at large.

## A Woman's Place is in the House

### A Woman's Qualities

To get ready for courtship and marriage, a girl was groomed like a racehorse. In addition to being able to sing, play an instrument and speak a little French or Italian. They were also expected to be innocent, virtuous, biddable, dutiful and ignorant of intellectual opinion- Jimmy accuses Alison of being this.

Whether married or single, all Victorian women were expected to be **weak and helpless**, a fragile delicate flower incapable of making decision beyond selecting the menu and ensuring her many children were taught moral values. A gentlewoman ensured that the home was a place of comfort for her husband and family from the stresses of industrial Britain.

A woman's prime use was to **bear a large family** and to maintain a smooth family atmosphere where a man need not bother himself about domestic matters. He assumed his house would run smoothly so he could get on with making money.

Yet change was happening everywhere. Many women adopted the tailor made garment that showed their more serious concern to be **recognised as thinking beings** with much to offer society beyond being a social asset for her husband.

Reform was in the air as intellectual female thinkers began to state their case. Many joined the **Fabian society**, a group of non-revolutionary thinking socialists. Others sought reform for more practical dress, better education, the right to take up paid work if they wished and better employment prospects if they were poorly paid women. Most importantly, brave

- Beginning of a demand for **women's rights**
- Rise of **industrialisation** and **trade unions**
- Extension of **rationality and reason** from science to the arts
- Darwin's *Origin of the Species* (1859)
- Emergence of **capital (money)** as **power**

## The Hysterical Female

Victorian society emphasised **female purity** and supported the idea of the “*true woman*” as wife, mother and keeper of the home. In Victorian society, the home was the basis of morality and a sanctuary free from the corruption of the city. As guardian of the home and family, women were believed to be **more emotional, dependent and gentle by nature**. This perception of femininity led to the popular conclusion that women were more susceptible to disease and illness, and was the basis for diagnosis of **insanity** in many female patients in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Any rejection of gendered ideas was often dismissed as **‘hysteria’**. With so little, power, control and independence, depression, anxiety and stress were common among Victorian women struggling to cope with a static existence under the thumb of strict gender ideals and unyielding patriarchy.

Characterised by **nervous, eccentric and erratic behaviour** (as viewed by men), the epidemiology of hysteria eluded medical explanation in the Victorian era. For hysterical women and their families, the **asylum** offered a convenient and socially acceptable excuse for inappropriate and potentially scandalous behaviour. In contrast to the “*true woman*” was the “*fallen woman*”, the term used to describe women- usually of the lower classes, mostly prostitutes- who had strayed from the cult of true womanhood by giving into seduction and sin. The plight was closely associated with the anonymity granted by the city, which left women vulnerable to temptation alone and outside the protection of the home.

## Victorian Women and Asylum Reform

A woman who rebelled against Victorian domesticity risked being declared **insane** and committed to an asylum. This was usually at her **husband or father's request**, and she generally had no right to contest or appeal. This cornerstone of Victorian psychiatry claimed **male dominance was therapeutic**. The doctor ruled the asylum like a father ruled his family.

The spread of asylums between 1800 and 1900 enabled a few women to be heard in politics. **Elizabeth Packard** won freedom after being confined to an asylum by her husband. **Dorothea Dix** lobbied successfully for public asylums throughout the US and UK.

## Hysteria and Psychoanalysis

Most Victorian physicians claimed women were more susceptible to nervous breakdown and neurasthenia. The classic “*female malady*” was **hysteria**. The most commonly prescribed treatment for an unmarried woman showing signs of hysteria was to **find a husband**.

## Feminism and Change

Many women's lives in the **1950s and 1960s** were still organised around Victorian stereotypes of the loving mother and dutiful housewife. **Jimmy rejects the weak female**

Wollstonecraft, who Ibsen would have likely read, decried, *“the prevailing opinion, that women were created rather to feel than reason, and that all the power they obtain, must be obtained by their charms and weaknesses”*. It is possible the Ibsen created Nora from this.

In Torvald's eyes, Nora is nothing more than a silly *“squirrel”* and a *“little skylark”* (diminutives), whose thoughts are non-sensical and typical to any other woman's. Her father handed her to her husband who treated her like a valued possession. This is best depicted by her self-realisation and awakening towards the end of the play;

*“[Daddy] used to call me his doll-child, and he played with me the way I used to play with my dolls. And when... Daddy handed me over to you, you arranged everything according to your taste, and I adapted my taste to yours.”*

Alison is similar to Nora in this way, as she adopts Jimmy's beliefs and doesn't challenge them.

Ibsen's depiction of the weak and docile woman brings to mind Wollstonecraft's essay, which argues that women are taught since infancy to have the *“softness of temper, outward obedience and scrupulous attention”* which would paint them as an ideal woman. Once accompanied by the gift of beauty, these attributes will ensure them the protection of a man (their main purpose was to marry and bear children). Moreover, Wollstonecraft stresses that men try to secure the good conduct of a woman by reducing her to a state of innocence and childhood:

*“Children, I grant, should be innocent; but when the epithet is applied to men, or women, it is but a civil term of weakness.”*

This is evident in Torvald's treating Nora like a child. He forbids her to eat macaroons, he makes her dress up for him, dance for him and recite for him. On the other hand, he also treats her like a sexual object that he fantasises about. At parties, he keeps away and steals glances at her, pretending the two are secretly engaged. This is in line with the Victorian fantasy of making women into pure objects. He is so possessive about her to the extent that he refuses to share her with her female friends, e.g. Mrs Linde.

John Stuart Mill, an influential philosopher, wrote in his essay, *“The Subjection of Women”*, that women were, *“wholly under the rule of men and each, in private, being under the obligation of obedience to the man with who she has associated her identity”*. Nora represents women in society; Mill's statement is displayed through how Nora surrenders herself to the stereotype of a 19<sup>th</sup> century housewife, and how she allows her husband to shape her into the image he wishes her to be; *“If only you knew what expenses we larks and squirrels have, Torvald”*.

## Ibsen and the Well-Made Play

*“A plan is to a play what it is to a house”* – Ernest Legouvé

- 1830s- Eugène Scribe created a new model of dramatic structure; the pièce bien-faite (well-made play), based on the playwright's ability to tell a dramatic story while generalising the maximum interest and excitement in the audience.
- Following Aristotle, the well-made play emphasised action over character.