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## **The Return of the Repressed or the Uncanny in *A Dollhouse***

**Ebru UGUREL OZDEMIR**

Teaching Assistant  
Western Languages and Literatures Department,  
Aksaray University, Aksaray,  
Turkey.

**&**

**Melih KARAKUZU**

Associate Professor  
English Language and Literature Department,  
Erciyes University, Kayseri,  
Turkey.

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### **Abstract:**

The patriarchal ideology determines woman's existence as silent, passive, and obedient; however, the gender roles which are imposed upon women by phallographic societies are possible to be reversed by enabling women to experience "the return of the repressed". The sophistication of Ibsen's drama is based on his ability to ensure harmony between psychoanalysis and literature. Because the construction of gender and the performance of stereotype sex roles are considered the production of the unconscious, Ibsen, within *A Dollhouse*, does expose the subversive aspect of gender codes through the uncanny effect Nora exemplifies through disregarding her gender roles as a submissive wife and a devoted mother after awakening to the reality that her husband has regarded her just as a toy; as a doll without her own reason, decisions, and pleasures. As a consequence of the return of the repressed, Nora turns out to be a danger and a threat for the patriarchal power.

**Keywords:** Uncanny, Sigmund Freud, psychoanalysis, *A Dollhouse*, Henrik Ibsen, gender.

### **1. Introduction**

Based on his ability to portray and examine the characters from psychoanalytical perspective, Ibsen, regarded as "one of the minds that gave stimulus to Freud's imagination" (Brandell 54), is believed to have contributed much to the development of psychological drama. To vindicate the playwright's familiarity with psychoanalysis, Freud claims that Ibsen has the power to create his characters with an awareness that any psychoanalyst is required to have in order to examine and diagnose his patients. "Ibsen forces us to supplement the absent motives, says Freud; we must expand and fill in the author's hints in order to 'reconstruct'" (Møller 119). Thus, Ibsen is appreciated as the one who achieves to ensure harmony between psychoanalysis and

literature through the character types he creates and through the influence of the relationship between the past and the present events he fictionalizes in his scenarios. Accordingly, the ability to manifest the psychological tension between characterization and actions privileges the Norwegian playwright in the point of creating intentional complexity within the plays. Not only in *A Dollhouse* does Ibsen display changing character psychology, but he also establishes a bond between the past and the present psychology of individuals in his other plays. To illustrate, in *The Wild Duck*, a specific past event determines the present psychology of the characters: the reaction that Hjalmar shows against the wild duck is based on a memory that causes him to destroy his family. Therefore, the psychological analysis of the characters does reveal the cause-effect relationship between the events. In a similar vein, in *The Master Builder*, the divagation of Halvard Solness uncovers some psychological disorders he does experience; he becomes mentally depressed as a consequence of a wrong decision he takes, which later causes him to become estranged to his own identity. Accordingly, psychological drama, as Møller claims, presents a conflict between the conscious and the subconscious and from this conflict emerges a new discourse of masking or covering.

Psychoanalysis, as a theory of the intuitive forces and internal drives, presents psyche as an elusive part of the whole that shapes, (sometimes) misshapes, and reshapes human identity. In accordance with the purpose of psychoanalysis, Ibsen achieves to portray Nora's psyche in terms of the relationship between the subconscious and the conscious, and he reveals the fact that the conscious level of being is always under the influence of the other which is believed to have little or no power until it is recognized.

Although he does not refer to the uncanny in *A Dollhouse* explicitly, Ibsen illustrates the return of the repressed through the past and the present experiences of Nora. Based on the interpretation of the uncanny as a kind of epiphany, an awakening, and enlightenment about the censored identities, forgotten beliefs, and suppressed feelings, Ibsen reveals the influence of the repressed unconscious on character development, and he manifests the return of the repressed as an inevitable consequence of the revelation of unspoken secrets and hidden truths. In this context, Olsen and Kjøppe explain the psychoanalytic drama of Ibsen as follows:

Past events, which have become a heavy burden for one or more of the characters, are gradually exposed. The more the main protagonist attempts to adjust to the present behind an honorable facade, the more the past is revealed as a dangerous threat to this facade. The problem is always that the present is built on the past and the whole edifice might collapse if the lies and sins of the past are not exposed and reputed (Møller 114).

Interpreting gender norms and sexual differences, Ibsen makes use of psychoanalysis to explain the formation of subjectivity within the subconscious. Because gender roles are considered the products of the unconscious processes – both are the manifestations of the repeated behavior without any sense of questioning

its source or reality – individuals normalize and internalize them beyond question. In *A Dollhouse*, not only does Ibsen achieve to present the power of subconscious to shape gender roles, but he also challenges and subverts the patriarchal discourse. As a prominent figure of the nineteenth century literature, Ibsen, in *A Dollhouse*, presents both the social reality and the key to better the marginalized perception of women via the story arc he masterfully composes. Stated in other words, Ibsen speaks for the feminist movement of the age he lived: “Ibsen’s refusal of Woman allowed him to discover the socialization of sexual identity we now call “gender” and to investigate women as full moral beings struggling against the cultural norms that define and limit them” (Templeton xvi). In this regard, it is veridical to qualify him as “a world visionary” man (Bloom 142) who is able to reflect the perception of woman of the nineteenth century bourgeois society and the anti-masculine discourse through struggling against the epidemic masculinity which determines the stance of woman as passive and domestic on one side, and evil and dangerous on the other. Through his drama, Ibsen does expose the conditions which cause women to remain restricted and repressed within the house as a consequence of the suppressive forces of marriage, maternity, and family.

Portraying Nora initially as silent, passive, and ready to be manipulated by the male domain and afterwards as active, challenging, and smooth-spoken, Ibsen not only reveals the masculine perception of womanhood within a patriarchal society but he also offers ways to deconstruct the assumptions and definitions engraved in her subconscious. In other words, Ibsen achieves to subvert stereotypical femininity by creating the uncanny effect through the doll image Nora identifies herself with. “Repression for Ibsen was perhaps a response to instinctual anxiety, which led to the return of the repressed in the sublimation of art and was elaborated through archetype, symbol, intricate structure, and emotionally complex characters” (Dervin 193). Because she is considered lack of mental faculties, Nora is forced to internalize her role just as a doll in the hands of her husband; however, she does realize the uncanny effect of the doll on her identity after she achieves self-discovery. Metaphorically emphasizing female passivity and subjugation within the private domain, “doll”, in Ibsen’s plays, is used as the symbol of womanhood and of feminine stance. Little girls establish a bond with dolls as if they were real babies and they treat their dolls affectionately. To set an example, in *The Master Builder*, Alene Solness is pictured as a woman who acts like a child as an outcome of her excessive dedication to her pre-determined gender roles. Because of her lost sense of self, she changes into a passive and silent woman who always feels guilty and responsible for the things that are beyond her power. Therefore, upon remembering the fire she cries and laments for the dolls that were burnt – just like a little girl who regards her dolls as living babies – Alene establishes a bond with them as if they were her real children. The association of Alene with a little child and thus with a doll implies the real condition of woman in the private sphere: the doll represents her void existence and maternal concerns for her baby.

As a master of social-realist drama, Ibsen deals with the “woman” question, gender issue, and the subversion of the taboo roles in *A Dollhouse* through the portrayal of Nora; he achieves to construct “characters with a strategy of moral and social unmasking in mind” (Kittang 304). Although the collective unconscious has the power to make individuals internalize the roles cast for them by patriarchy, Ibsen does make use of the repressed unconscious for the purpose of characterizing Nora as the one who achieves to subvert the idealized female image and overturn the omnipotent male domain. Put it differently, Ibsen enables Nora to realize the norms she adopted beforehand as nothing more than the vehicles that indeed caused her to become estranged to her real identity.

## 2. Source of Gender Repression

Gender roles, as the agents of socialization, do legitimate the polarization between man and woman; patriarchal norms force woman to comply with stereotype femininity which indeed underestimates her subjectivity. Based on the unfounded assumptions concerning the evil and corporeal nature of woman, she has always been marginalized both in public and private spheres. “The history of human psyche”, observes Noddings, “teems with devils, demons, and witches, and women have long been associated with evil in the form of defilement” (10). In *A Dollhouse*, Ibsen does criticize historically codified and standardized gender norms. In other words, Ibsen is well aware of the fact that gender roles which are attributed to women are indeed the stereotypes of cultures that date back to the mythological documents in which woman is defined in the form of a virgin whose mouth is full of lies and whose mind is full of malignancy. According to the mythological tales, woman (Pandora) was first created as a punishment for men who did go against Zeus and she was made a representative woman of all her sex: liar, tempting, and wicked. Besides, Medusa, as another mythological figure, represents “woman” as seductive and ugly who is responsible for giving umbrage to Athena for her beauty and virginity. In accordance with the assumed female image of the patriarchal order, since ancient Greek civilization woman has been placed within the private sphere because of her assumed evil nature as tempting while man has been positioned in public as the representative of reason and authority. Thus, based on the assumption that woman is a corporeal entity without any sense of reason, the patriarchal ideology legitimates masculine right to marginalize and rule out the female sex.

Ibsen, in *A Dollhouse*, illustrates the repressed psyche of woman by portraying Nora as a submissive wife and a dedicated mother under masculine authority. Nora, under the influence of the assumptions concerning the wicked nature of woman, internalizes the idea that she has to be disciplined and controlled by Torvald. Because the psychological oppression leads her to normalize and repeat stereotype behavior patterns asserted by the masculine authority, Nora’s psyche is indoctrinated on the purpose of meeting the expectations of society and she is left to find her identity within the house through turning it into a home. Imprisoned within the house as a consequence of the learned helplessness (by virtue of marriage and family as the representations

of unity and dependence), Nora is coerced to normalize patriarchal imposition. However, the internalization of patriarchal norms and gender roles cause Nora to experience hysterics. She gets anxious by the time she envisages the catastrophe she would experience in the event that Torvald learned her cooperation with Krogstad. Just as she guessed, Nora gets exposed to critical judgments and accusations Torvald directs to her after he discovers the matter: he attacks her maternity and wifhood predicating on her wicked nature.

Religion, as one of the most powerful instruments of patriarchy, pictures woman as the source of evil as well: The Original Sin deems Eve responsible for the fall from the grace of God as a consequence of the act of eating the forbidden apple and causing Adam to commit the same sin. Based on such and many other unfounded allegations concerning her dangerous nature of existence, woman is regarded as a threat to be kept under the control of the male authority. On the purpose of containing Nora under male puissance, the ideology manipulates religion as an efficient instrument which enables Torvald to allocate her within the private domain: the house. In order to protect her from the potential evils she could stir up, Torvald, as the representation of patriarchy, patronizes Nora by determining the roles that she is supposed to perform under the name of religion as well as various instruments that serve for the patriarchal purpose. Based on the assumption that woman needs male protection because of her vulnerable nature, she is confined within the house on the pretext that it is the safest place for her. Furthermore, woman is withheld from the public affairs due to the judgment that she is considered lack of mental faculties. In such an oppressive and repressive order, Nora is conditioned to deal with domestic affairs such as childbearing, child caring, and the responsibilities that she must perform just for the pleasure of her husband. In other saying, the authority legitimates the oppression and marginalization of Nora through exploiting her religious sensibility for masculine benefit.

Serving for the patriarchal purposes, psychoanalytic theory does vindicate the phallogocentric worldview through which the oppression and repression of women are reinforced under the name of repetitive psychic structures rooted in infancy. The experiences gained during that period canalize girls and boys to distinctive gender patterns and roles. While girls normalize the portrayal of their subjectivities as domestic, passive, lack, and the “other”, boys, by contrast, learn to get autonomy and sense of self by inclining away from their mothers. In other words, boys awaken to the social reality that defines the absolute authority as “the father”: he represents the law and the public domain. Videlicet, during the socialization process, girls and boys are taught and dictated various (assumed) appropriate behaviors and dispositions in accordance with their sexes. Ibsen, in this context, does exemplify the repressed identities through the gender codes which categorize Nora and Torvald as the poles apart: While Nora is supposed to embrace her silenced stance in life and teach her children the patterns that define and direct their lives, Torvald enjoys the privilege the masculine order grants for his sex. In order to be accepted to the social belonging, Nora does convey the roles she has inherited from her (unmentioned) mother to her daughter as a principle to internalize, and she teaches “male chauvinism” to her

son as a divulgement of his vanity. Thus, Nora unintentionally serves for the purposes of the phallogentric discourse which forces her children to perform and repeat stereotype masculinity and femininity.

### 3. From Normalcy to the Uncanny in *A Dollhouse*

The uncanny, as a concept, was introduced by Freud in his 1919 essay as the sensation of disturbance after something familiar and known turns out to be unfamiliar and strange: “The complex relation between inside and outside, domestic and foreign, familiar and unfamiliar reflects both the paradoxical nature of the uncanny” (Lydenberg 1083). In this context, the setting of the play, the Helmers’ house, represents the uncanny. Although it is regarded as familiar and safe for the family members at the beginning of the play, it turns out to be frightening and unfamiliar for Nora soon after realizing that the house which she believed to be a shelter is indeed a territory for Helmer to exact the patriarchal sovereignty.

At the very beginning of the play, Nora is not aware of the fact that the house is a sort of prison which mediates her repression and oppression by Torvald. Thus, the initial atmosphere of the house from the perspective of Nora gives the impression of domestic security Nora devotes herself to. During the conversation with Mrs. Linde, Nora expresses her happiness in terms of being under the roof of the house with her children and husband. In other saying, Nora fools herself for feeling secure due to the assumption that she belongs to that house as the mere familiar place she is supposed to embrace. Although she seems to pity Mrs. Linde for her loneliness, Nora indeed represses her own despair and masks her isolation out through the happy family picture she draws in her mind: “To be able to be free from care, quite free from care; to be able to play and romp with the children; to be able to keep the house beautifully and have everything just as Torvald likes it!” (Act I 29). Ibsen portrays Nora from the perspective of critical realism of the nineteenth century social life and perception of marriage. The French Revolution and its results could not achieve liberty and equality for women; the value system of the Victorian society, sense of decency, and traditional thinking caused woman to be confined within the house and left her nothing concerning her real identity. In this regard, as a married woman, Nora is supposed to deal with her children, save them from external dangers, and maintain their innocence within the “house”.

As Mitchell states in *Women: The Longest Revolution* (1984), the female psychology is under the attack of psychoanalytic theory of Freud and Lacan besides many other instruments of the patriarchal ideology. Woman is oppressed and repressed not only in the public domain but also in the private sphere due to the quasi lack she is reckoned to be vulnerable to. In the pre-oedipal phase of development, the child does not have a sexual identity, and Freud explains this sexless existence of the child in terms of his/her perception of the mother as an object of desire for himself/herself. The libido, as Freud argues, is masculine; thus, during this stage all children are “little men”. However, in the Oedipal stage, both the girl and the boy develop a sense of

self which is independent from the mother image. For the girl, the object of desire shifts from feminine to masculine because she is instilled with the idea that her mother has been castrated. In order not to experience the same thing she learns to direct her attachment to the father as in the same manner that the boy's attachment to the mother comes to an end due to the castration anxiety projected by the father. In this sense, for Freud, the uncanny is related to the castration complex which is experienced during this phase. Because both the girl and the boy regard the mother and her organ as the source of punishment they tend towards the phallus which is indeed the representation of the father figure. In other words, children become estranged to the place they come from. In this regard, the female genital is the uncanny: the thing which is unknown and frightening despite the fact that it was the former home (heim) of all human beings:

Love is home-sickness"; and whenever a man dreams of a country and says to himself, while he is still dreaming: "this place is familiar to me, I've been here before." We may interpret the place as being his mother's genitals or her body [...] The unheimlich is what was once Heimlich, familiar; the prefix "un" ["un-"] is the token of repression (qtd. in Lydenberg 1077).

During the Oedipal phase of development, children begin to realize their gender roles for the purpose of learning how to familiarize and internalize the order that elevates man yet despises woman. As the victim of the patriarchal society, the mother influences the personality development of children in a negative way: because she has already normalized the patriarchal doctrines, the mother unavoidably maintains the system by teaching her children pre-established rules and gender roles she inherited from her mother. In this regard, Nora's initial normalization of the gender roles is illustrated with the scene in which she shows the Christmas gifts she bought for the children: "Look, here is a new suit for Ivar, and a sword; and a horse and a trumpet for Bob; and a doll and dolly's bedstead for Emmy" (Act I 12). The gender difference between man and woman is manifested via the objects Nora deems suitable for her children. For the sons Nora chooses sword and horse as the indicators of masculinity while for the daughter she decides on a doll and on a doll's house which precondition little girls for maternity and child care. Put it differently, while internalizing her gender roles Nora unavoidably prepares her daughter for a future as a devoted mother and a wife. No matter how troubled she is with the patriarchal norms, Nora, like almost all women, produces a generation which represents the mirror image of her sense of self.

Through the instruments which serve for the cultural unconscious, patriarchy does dictate gender differentiation as normal. To set an example, marriage conditions man as the head of the family and woman as the subservient and silent object serving for the masculine benefit, through which she is systematically silenced and her personality is disregarded. Because gender is the socially constructed norms masculine and feminine codes are determined by the ideological pressure of patriarchy. However, such conditioning of the sexes via the



gender codes reveals that individuals internalize the roles which are imposed upon their personalities and they are coerced to repress their true identities. In this context, the conversation between Mrs. Linde and Nora brings to light the fact that the latter normalizes her gender roles which indoctrinate the significance of having a husband and children as the source of happiness and existence for a woman. Therefore, when Mrs. Linde enlightens Nora about her life, the reaction Nora gives does illustrate the condition she is in:

Nora: Poor Christine, you are a widow [...] It was very bad of me, Christine. Poor thing, how you must have suffered. And he left you nothing?

Mrs. Linde: No.

Nora: And no children?

Mrs. Linde: No.

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Nora: So you are quite alone. How dreadfully sad that must be. I have three lovely children (Act I 17).

Albeit emanated as a theoretical concept of psychoanalysis, the uncanny is regarded as a discourse which does feature the principles feminist theory argues for. Put it differently, both the uncanny and the feminist theory represent a revolt against the system that creates and sustains gender codes for the purpose of marginalizing women within the domestic sphere. For feminist critics, family is regarded as one of the forceful instruments which legitimate the oppression of women by manipulating their psyches to submission. In this regard, “home”, which signifies the familiar and the private, is considered the principal cause that vindicates the oppression of women just the same way as Mitchell regards “family as the place in which the abased psychology of femininity is produced and the social and economic exploitation of women is [...] legitimated” (Johnson 2007 49).

Along with the family issue, the financial dependency of woman is also regarded as a significant issue that marginalizes and limits the power of woman. The society in which Helmer lives privileges men as active producers; therefore, he does act in a sense to claim possession on money. Nora, on the other hand, seems to accept the patriarchal norms that divest her of economic freedom. Exploited within the economic system and the business world, oppressed as a mother and a wife, objectified as a sexual embodiment, silenced, marginalized, and isolated from the external world, Nora is systematically forced to lose self-confidence. Because the ideology deifies Torvald both in private and public spheres, Nora is unable to treat herself as the

subject of her own life. Backed by patriarchy, Torvald always criticizes the way Nora spends money and he treats her as if she were a child: he believes that Nora does not know how to spend money, and thus, he regards her as a dissipater. Johnson states that “Ibsen supplies a strong “animal” identity to Nora” (110): He calls her “my little lark”, “my little squire”, “my little spendthrift”, “little featherhead”, “you extravagant little person”, “my dear little Nora”, “an odd little soul” (Act I). The titles with “little” echo the fact that he attempts to transform her into a little child or worse still into an inferior creature, and “my” as a possessive adjective signals that he naturalizes Nora as if she were one of his objects or possessions. Torvald believes that money represents masculinity and power; thus, he disaffirms Nora’s suggestion of borrowing money from others since it would cause him to fall from the power and lose his masculine stance in the society. The power Torvald does monopolize depends upon the financial status he has, and this makes him – he believes – masculine and a real man. Accordingly, his promotion at the bank, at the beginning of the play, indicates the relationship between money and masculinity: “That is like a woman! But seriously, Nora, you know what I think about that. No debt, no borrowing. There can be no freedom or beauty about a home life that depends on borrowing and debt” (Act I 11).

As a principal notion of psychoanalysis, the uncanny is regarded as “the return of the repressed”. In this regard, the uncanny is the representation of something that awakens the feeling of fright and anxiety which is experienced as a “crisis of the proper,” a “crisis of the natural,” a “commingling of the familiar and the unfamiliar,” a “strangeness of framing and borders, an experience of liminality,” fears of dismemberment or loss of body parts, or the sudden perception of aspects of the self as foreign” (Sandberg 18). In this context, maternity, regarded as one of the repressive factors of the unconscious, is imbedded in woman’s subconscious as a divine duty which she is supposed to perform beyond reproach. Likewise, for Nora, motherhood is initially a joyful responsibility; she always takes care of her children, plays with them, and calls them “sweet blessings”, and she reinforces her mother image delightedly by devoting herself to them. However, the pleasure Nora gets through dealing and playing with the children shifts immediately by the time Torvald tells her about Krogstad’s forgery, falsehood, and manipulations. Torvald’s anger against Krogstad provokes anxiety in Nora since she thinks that all Torvald told her about Krogstad indeed reveals her own guilt. From then on, Nora forbears from her children initially not to poison them as a guilty mother, next to rise to the challenge as a consequence of the return of the repressed:

Helmer: Just think how a guilty man like that has to lie and play the hypocrite with every one, how he has to wear a mask in the presence of those near and dear to him, even before his own life and children. And about 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. Each breath the children take in such a house is full of the germs of evil.

Nora: Are you sure of that?

Helmer: My dear, I have often seen it in the course of my life as a lawyer. Almost

everyone who has gone to the bad early in life has had a deceitful mother (Act I  
49).

The term uncanny, developed by Nicholas Royle, evolves into “a style of thinking and writing, of teaching that is synonymous with “deconstruction” (Masschelein 2). Stated in other words, the uncanny represents the questioning and the subversion of the instruments that serve under the ideology. In terms of gender and personality issues, psychoanalytic theory adopts a sort of dualistic approach by favoring men under all circumstances while underestimating women as imperfect embodiments. However, especially since the 1970s, with the impression that feminist movement created and with the shift from structuralism to poststructuralism, the uncanny has been interpreted from the deconstructive perspective by questioning and subverting the relationship between sex and gender. By the time Mrs. Linde criticizes Nora for her (alleged) imprudent way of life and the utter ignorance about the burdens of life, Nora needs to explain the fact that she is not a child and that she has done something to be proud of. However, the reality that she has saved the life of Torvald by taking on debt makes her guilty and unfair even in the eyes of Mrs. Linde who has also accepted standardized ideals and roles cast for women by patriarchy. Mrs. Linde believes that money represents power, and thus it must be under the authority of man; however, Nora manifests her power of reason to subvert the assumed norms of patriarchy just after experiencing economic and social alienation which indicates the uncanny itself:

Nora: It was I who procured the money.

Mrs. Linde: But, Nora, how could you possibly do it? Did you win a prize in the  
Lottery? --- Because you couldn't have borrowed it.

Nora: Couldn't I? Why not?

Mrs. Linde: No, a wife cannot borrow without her husband's consent.

Nora: Oh, if it is a wife who has any head for business – a wife who has the wit to be a little bit clever – (Act I 24).

The dialogue between Nora and Mrs. Linde indicates the uncanny in a sense that Nora performs an unexpected or unfamiliar act of gender through dealing with the financial problems which are indeed the issues men are supposed to fix. Traditionally, society presents predetermined rules in accordance with the gender the individual represents, and in case of acting out of the rules (becoming a masculine woman or a feminine man) this is considered antithetical to the social values. In this respect, Nora implies her power over money through subverting the traditional opinion of the patriarchal system concerning money; in other words, the return of the repressed is illustrated through the endeavor she makes to save the money she needs:

Nora: Well, then I have found other ways of earning money. Last winter I was lucky enough to get a lot of copying to do; so I locked myself up and sat writing every evening until quite late at night. Many a time I was desperately tired; but all the same it was a tremendous pleasure to sit there working and earning money. It was like being a man (Act I 28).

Because “psychoanalysis” as Nancy Chodorow states “is the method and theory directed toward the investigation and understanding of how we develop and experience ourselves and others” (Hartman 28), it is crucial to overthrow the patriarchal authority (as it claims to have the right to shape the self and the personality of woman in accordance with the dreams of male domain). Negating the biological determinism that Freud predicates male superiority on, Cixous regards the assumed gender division not as a given reality, but as culturally constructed conventions that are engraved in the subconscious:

When the “repressed” of their culture and their society returns, it's explosive, *utterly* destructive, staggering return, with a force never yet unleashed and equal to the most forbidding of suppressions. For when the Phallic period comes to an end, women will have been either annihilated or borne up to the highest and most violent incandescence. Muffled throughout their history, they have lived in dreams, in bodies (though muted), in silences, in aphonic revolts. (Cixous 886).

In *The Laugh of the Medusa*, Cixous portrays Medusa as a subversive character who achieves to gain control over her own choices. In the legend, Medusa is described as the one who was raped and thus cursed due

to the fact that she lost her virginity and innocence. However, in the version by Cixous, Medusa is immortal and she represents the return of the repressed through the revenge and the hatred she nourishes against those who victimized her. In other words, Medusa does achieve liberation out of patriarchal repression by acting against the roles cast for her gender. Now, she has the power to turn any onlooker into stone and this symbolizes the stance and resistance against the gender roles that are imposed in her subconscious. Therefore, Cixous's Medusa is laughing at the utter nonsense of the patriarchal norms: she regards all the roles that were attributed to her gender as unfamiliar, and thus she does not have any sense of fear of castration or penis envy any longer:

Medusa belongs to the female gender [...] As in every theatre of violence that we know of to date, men continue to be the unchallenged protagonists. But when a woman steps to the front of the stage of horror, the scene turns darker and, *although more disconcerting, paradoxically more familiar*. Repugnance is heightened, and the effect is augmented, as though horror, just as the myth already knew, required the feminine in order to reveal its authentic roots (Kokoli 25).

Nora's sudden estrangement to the domestic security of the house is recognized by the time she recalls the life she repressed under the sovereignty of her father and her marriage which is controlled and disciplined perpetually by her husband. The mechanical life she has led so far makes her realize the inferior existence under the male authority and by the time she discovers the fact that she has become estranged to her own subjectivity, Nora unmasks the deceptive nature of the house which indeed serves for the masculine ego:

Nora: When I was at home, of course I loved papa best. But I always thought it

tremendous fun if I could steal down into the maids' room, because they never

moralized at all, and talked to each other about such entertaining things (Act II

71).

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Nora: But surely you can understand that being with Torvald is a little like being

with papa (Act II 72).

The lexical ambiguity within the uncanny is based on the German word *unheimlich*: "the root, *Heimlich*, carries the primary signification "familiar and agreeable" [...] but in its secondary meaning it coincides with its opposite, *unheimlich*, "concealed and kept out of sight" (Falkenberg 26). Therefore, the uncanny is something that is both familiar and unfamiliar. As a semantic coding, the uncanny denotes

defamiliarization, estrangement, and derealization. Accordingly, *unheimlich*, as the disclamation of *Heimlich*, means unhomely and unknown. However, the top issue concerning the etymology of *Heimlich* is that the word also means something secret and covered. In this regard, “the prefix “un-” is not merely a linguistic negation; it is the “token of repression” (Masschelein 8). Put it differently, the thing which is ignored or denied indeed exists in the unconscious and stays on alert to come to the light. Therefore, the uncanny does embrace both the known and the unknown as the indication of the negation of singularism which adopts merely “either” this “or” that. By contrast, the uncanny is the signification of uncertainty and plurality which involves “both” this “and” that. Accordingly, *Heimlich* and *unheimlich* complement each other: something kept as a secret (*unheimlich*) could be revealed (*Heimlich*): something hidden and private (self) might become unhidden and public (others). The hidden self represents the subconscious, and thus the return of the repressed is the return of the familiar.

The “secret” she keeps from her husband is the example of the uncanny in that it remained hidden and then became visible in an unexpected way. The mistake Nora makes by taking on debt without her husband’s knowledge turns out to be an unacceptable act not only for Torvald but for the society as well. The main point which makes Nora guilty is that she attempts to overturn the absolute authority of Torvald on money. In other words, Nora’s act of taking on debt is regarded as sabotage against male domain. In the nineteenth century society, money constitutes a basis for the male authority; according to the patriarchal assumptions, man is the determining agent of things in the house: the owner and the master of money. “Nora will die and be reborn, will die from her old identity and will desperately attempt to expel the poison of the terrible new knowledge Krogstad has injected into her” (Johnson 110). The hierarchical order within the house reveals the very fact that money is the supreme power of man which he could exercise over woman. Despite the anxiety concerning the possibility of the discovery of the secret by Torvald, Nora seems to be decisive in her stance. The uncanny effect is implied with the dialogue between Nora and Mrs. Linde. Nora feels that all her fear and anxiety would end up in a stroke which she defines as wonderful yet terrible: something expected and unexpected, familiar and unfamiliar, secret and revealed:

Nora: A wonderful thing is going to happen!

Mrs. Linde: A wonderful thing?

Nora: Yes, a wonderful thing! – But it is so terrible, Christine; it mustn’t happen, not for all the world (Act II 78).

As the word *Heimlich* has double meanings, so does taboo have ambivalent meanings for Freud: “To us it means, on the one hand, “sacred,” “consecrated,” and the other “uncanny,” “dangerous,” “forbidden,” “unclean” (Jensen 56). The religious doctrines and primitive beliefs, which are believed to be

disciplined and controlled by the ideology, are the main sources of a taboo. Just as the uncanny, the taboo is indeed the outcome of a paradox within the self: the fear of danger or a sort of protection from danger. A woman with the fear of castration conforms to the authority of her husband; however, as in the case of Cixous's *Medusa*, she attempts to protect herself from the phallogentric regulations of the unrestricted patriarchy. In *Studies on Hysteria* (2004), Freud argues that hysteria is accepted as a female disease, and he interprets a set of abnormal behaviors as the effects of traumatic crisis the patient has already experienced. In fact, such a pathological behavior pattern, though considered abnormal and senseless, is indeed interpreted as a sort of mechanism through which the patient finds a way to cope with the trauma. In this sense, hysteria stems from unfamiliar or secret subconscious. Within the play, the hysterical condition of Nora is illustrated through the Tarantella dance. There are two variations concerning the origin of this dance: according to the first legend, a woman falls into trance after a poisonous tarantula spider bites her and she is believed to have been cured through dancing. The other legend claims that a woman, who is depressed and exhausted (due to the hard conditions of her life), performs Tarantella dance in order to cure herself. In this context, within the play the Tarantella dance represents a sort of action against the system which attempts to imprison Nora within the house. "Tarantella dance serves to provide cathartic relief from the psychological wounds inflicted by patriarchy" (Heilman 42).

Helmer: Listen to her, Mrs. Linde! She had danced her Tarantella, and it had been a tremendous success, as it deserved – although possibly the performance was a trifle too realistic – a little more so, I mean that was strictly compatible with the limitations of art ... (Act III 92).

Nora's Tarantella dance is more realistic than an act on the stage; the dance heals her, and she returns to what was once repressed in her subconscious. Nora returns to what was actually familiar to her, and she recovers her power and energy that were suppressed by Torvald. The Tarantella dance is thus a sort of "bodily cogito performance [...] in which she demonstrates her humanity" (Moi 268). After the Tarantella dance and the news that Torvald gets concerning Nora's secret, he accuses Nora of being "a hypocrite, a liar -- worse, worse -- a criminal!" (Act III 102). Rather than maintain her silence and give into the allegations of Torvald, Nora cries out her feelings and thoughts that were repressed in her subconscious. As a matter of course, the house which she initially believed to represent the security and privacy turns out to be frightening, uncomfortable, and disturbing for her. She has "the uncanny sensation that the past is repeating itself through her" (Templeton 69):

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 my dolls.

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Nora: 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 ... (Act III 109).

“In philosophy, the living doll – the doll that moves, that gives the impression of being alive – has been used as a figure for the problem of other minds” (Moi 266). Little girls consider their dolls alive or at least they expect their dolls would come to life someday. As Rilke states, the childhood relationship between the doll and the girl causes her to experience the uncanny in that what she imagines and then animates in the doll turns out to be an unfamiliar object as a consequence of the activation of her consciousness. For this very reason, for adults, thinking of a doll as a living being is quite absurd, extraordinary, and even frightening. “Only of you, doll-soul, could one never quite say where you really were; whether you were at that moment in us or in that drowsy creature to whom we were constantly assigning you. What is certain is that we often relied on each other, and in the end you were in neither of us and were trodden underfoot” (Nelson 69). Ibsen, in this regard, intentionally chooses the doll as a metaphor that stands for Nora throughout the play. At the end of the play, Nora rejects not only being a doll for Torvald but also her roles as a mother and a wife. Henceforth she would never be submissive to her fate; as a result of her awakening, she questions the system that bounded her through marriage and children.

The doll and double are two faces of the same coin [...] The former reminds us of the person we no longer are, and of that first identity we asserted in a doll's presence. The latter, or rather that tingle of unease we get from a double [...] makes us shiver for a moment and ask, Who is this? Who am I? In both cases, identity slips, becomes fallible (Eyre and Page 7).

Quite contrary to the initial portrayal of Nora as a typical woman who is appropriate for marriage and domesticity, Ibsen enables her to discover the fact that the mask of happiness she has worn for the sake of domestic comfort is indeed the thing that withhold her from living her real identity. As a consequence of her enlightenment, Nora presents a bold front against Torvald's authority: she is now acting in line with her free will.



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 tastes as your else I pretended to, I am really not quite sure which – I think sometimes the one and sometimes the other. When I look back on it, it seems to me as if I had been living here like a poor woman – just from hand to mouth. I have existed merely to perform tricks for you, Torvald. But you would have it so. You and papa have committed a great sin against me. It is your fault that have Made nothing of my life (Act III 108).

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Nora: I believe that before all else I am a reasonable human being, just as you are – or, at all events, that I must try and become one. I know quite well, Torvald, that most people would think you right, and that views of that kind are to be found in books; but I can no longer content myself with what most people say, or with what is found in books. I must think over things for myself and get to understand them (Act III 111).

“Ibsen hints that it might be possible for her to leave home in order to return home” (Sandberg 33), through which he indeed implies the uncanny. By leaving the house, Nora realizes the fact that it is a strange place which is away from her real home: the self. Nora's home detention through her marriage and her ideal portrayal through the pretended happiness are deconstructed or subverted by the time Nora slams the door and leaves the children behind. Thus the uncanny here is related to “the unearthing of the events of repression” (39) through revealing the manipulative force of the instruments that serve for the patriarchal purposes. She discovers that her real identity has been repressed in her subconscious through maternal and marital responsibilities; therefore, by leaving the house Nora returns to her sense of self by rejecting her roles. That said, with a desire to think over the reality and the source of the norms, Nora is now ready to question the instruments – such as religion – that has chained her so far:

Nora: I know nothing but what clergyman said, when I went to be confirmed. He told

us that religion was this, and that, and the other. When I am away from all this, and am alone, I will look into that matter too. I will see if what the clergyman said is true, or at all events if it is true for me (Act III 111).

“Ibsen’s uncanny ability to reflect the main currents of thought of his time emerges; for the problem of human identity, the nature of the self, seems to derive from the decline of religious belief” (Durbach 76). Religion, imposed as a fearsome subject to argue over, has always limited the possibility to question the validity and truth of the rules. In this sense, Ibsen enables the heroine to develop self-realization through turning the religious clichés upside down. Nora rejects all generalizations concerning her sex through revealing her repressed unconscious. Just as the mythical monster Medusa (her return symbolizes destruction and threat for those who victimized her), Nora’s act of rebellion against Torvald and thus against the system implies the return of the repressed. In other words, through the uncanny return Nora discovers the forgotten part of her true self, and therefore she poses a threat for the masculine authority.

#### 4. Conclusion

All of the pleasure he provides us in the first acts evaporates in the third, and one sits there in the most painful frame of mind [...] sickened by a catastrophe that departs from universal values in the harshest manner in order to pay homage to that which is untrue [...] Is there one mother among thousands of mothers, one wife among thousands of wives, who would behave as Nora does, who would leave husband, children, and home in order to herself first and foremost become “a human being”? (Sandberg 45).

Because the return of the repressed or the uncanny does correspond to a return to the inner reality or to the self which has been subdued by the dominant forces, Ibsen’s heroine, by means of the uncanny, does come up against the patriarchal system and social oppression, and she gains strength to subvert the roles that have been imposed upon her. Put it differently, in *A Dollhouse*, Ibsen enables Nora to overcome the assumption that women are inferior due to their sexuality, castration anxiety, and penis envy. Rather, he argues that all these generalizations concerning woman and her subjectivity are the products of the subconscious the social environment and the cultural conventions obtrude upon. Within the play, via the uncanny, the psychoanalytic understanding of gender and patriarchy is transformed and even subverted; the return of the repressed is the return of Nora’s true identity through the negation of the predetermined roles attributed to her. The deconstruction of the norms such as “house”, “family”, and “maternity”, which are coded as the representation of the shelter, the familiar, and the private, is achieved by Nora’s power to subvert the values which have restricted her sense of sense so far. Through the “power of the new to overcome once and for all the remnants of the past” (Sandberg 21), Nora becomes the uncanny itself through her departure from the house and leaving

her children behind. In other words, Nora does exemplify the return of the repressed through disregarding her gender roles as a submissive wife and as a devoted mother after awakening to the reality that her husband views her just as a toy; a doll without her own reason, decisions, and pleasures. Because the uncanny represents not only the familiar and the known, but the frightening and the strange as well, Nora turns out to be a danger and threat for the patriarchal power after subverting the cliché definitions of femininity.

To take my house dream: the older version of the house, the original, feels more sturdy in the dream than the flimsy present-day duplicate, no matter how inaccessible the former has become. The house we grew up in, or the dolls we played with as children, though lost to us, are still more real. As are, perhaps, the people we were growing with them. There are two versions of the doll, or the house, and two of us (Eyre and Page 8).

*A Dollhouse* not only illustrates the return of the repressed identity of Nora as a doll in the hands of her husband, but it reveals the dollish existence of Torvald as well. The house in which they live becomes a place in which both Nora and Torvald become the dolls of the patriarchal culture: while Nora is coerced to perform her obedient wifeness, Torvald is conditioned to exert his assumed masculinity. Whether he wishes it or not, Torvald, as the representative of patriarchal stance, is supposed to act in line with the expectations of the society he lives in; as though he were a marionette at the hands of a puppeteer, Torvald is taught not to question his self-identity and self-perception. Throughout the play, he has contradictions within his brain; he attempts to maintain his authority over Nora via pejoratives, yet he feels obliged to maintain his marriage and protect Nora no matter how inexplicably he thinks she behaves. Despite the repugnance he has against Nora's acts, it is, nevertheless, Torvald who ends the play by saying "The Miracle!"

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