UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA SANTA CRUZ

ANAG[NORA]ISIS

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Abstract

ANAG[NORA]ISIS

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My thesis project is a response to Henrik Ibsen’s A Doll’s House; entitled ANAG[NORA]ISIS, it is an adaptation and expansion upon the life of Ibsen’s character Nora Helmer. Using dance, music, poetry, borrowed and original text, ANAG[NORA]ISIS delves into the unexplored aspects of Nora Helmer’s consciousness, imagining what passes through her mind in the moments before she decides to leave her husband. In addition to both writing and adapting A Doll’s House, I also directed ANAG[NORA]ISIS at San Jose Repertory theatre's Emerging Artists Lab.
PREDECESSORS

The journey to ANAG[NORA]ISIS began when I was introduced to theatre practitioners Maria Irene Fornes and Hélène Cixous. Fornes does not follow the Aristotelian plot structure to which I had been previously exposed. Instead Fornes abandons the Aristotelian model and writes “politically oriented, language-driven plays full of playful paradox” with multiple climactic points and non-linear structures (Bottoms 144). Fornes’ approach is characterized by Hélène Cixous calls ‘écriture féminine’ which literally translates to ‘feminine writing’. Elizabeth Ordonez calls écriture féminine “...the most influential theoretical constructs for women’s writing and reading during the [1980s]” (45). Ordonez explains the revolutionary work of Cixous and how she questions Sigmund Freud's interpretation of female sexuality as being both problematic and misrepresentational. Cixous believed that the female perspective was misconstrued through a male chauvinist gaze and needed to be rewritten using a feminist approach. Cixous argued that the female gender should be celebrated and reified. Cixous takes the traditional perspective of the female as ‘inferior’ and redefines this perspective to regard the female as an equally powerful and separate identity. Essentially Cixous claims that the biological anatomy of a human being, either female or male, is what determines femininity or masculinity (Dolan 6).
Écriture féminine is what feminist theatre critic Jill Dolan would call the “cultural feminist” approach. Cultural or radical feminists embrace the female anatomy as both different and superior to the males. Dolan explains that, “...the formulation of sexual difference is the bedrock of cultural feminist thought”(7). The cultural feminist approach aims to unify women through their shared anatomy.

Although Fornes denies any political agenda, she seems to advance another kind of feminist ideology, which Dolan would call “materialist feminist”. The materialist feminist approach examines the materialized world of gendered structures within theatrical practices, determining their underlying ideologies and restructuring them making gender a role that is performed (99-101). Instead of gender being innate because of one’s biology, as in cultural feminism, the materialist approach emphasizes the individual. Maria Irene Fornes concerns herself with individual stories and experiences, instead of just one political group. This approach does not look specifically for gender differences, as with cultural feminism, but instead promotes individuality within the feminine gender. The fact that there is no “main character” in Fornes’ play Fefu and Her Friends emphasizes the significance of the individual. Fornes presents eight different women, all of whom have distinct stories. Fornes suggests, in Fefu and Her Friends, that women need a structure of their own, through which they can then define themselves. In Fefu and her Friends, one of her eight female characters
comments on “The human being” as being of a “masculine gender...Everything on earth is for the human being, which is man” (Fornes 35). Fornes emphasizes, like Cixous, that here is no room for the female body within the patriarchal dominant structure and within this male chauvinistic mechanism women are seen as both foreign and secondary. In Fefu and Her Friends, this same character continues, “[women are]... 1--A Mystery. 2--Another species...wicked and evil and good which is evil” (35). Fornes goes on to argue that women still continue to fight against a dominant theatrical structure which is inherently patriarchal. The climactic Aristotelian structure is both representative of, and sympathetic to, the male chauvinist perspective. Frustrated with being confined to a plot structure to which they could not relate, they created plays with multiple climactic points, and an erratic and non-linear narrative. Cixous and Fornes revolutionized the perception of the female in contemporary dramatic writing.

Preceding both Fornes and Cixous, was Henrik Ibsen, who represents an ideology that Jill Dolan would later identify as the “liberal feminist” approach. Revolutionary for his time, in 1879 Henrik Ibsen premièred the play A Doll’s House. When Ibsen’s character Nora Helmer, walked out on her husband, abandoning her role as both mother and wife, this moment in A Doll’s House achieved notoriety as “the door slam heard around the world” [attributed to Harley Granville Barker]. Ibsen, like Fornes, claimed to have no political agenda
in his writing and outwardly rejected the notion that he ever consciously forwarded the woman's rights movement. Ibsen was acknowledged at the Woman's Rights League in Cristiana in 1898 for his work toward advancing the feminist agenda. Here Ibsen clearly explains his position:

I am not a member of the Woman's Rights League. Whatever I have written has been without any conscious thought of making propaganda...I thank you for the toast, but must disclaim the honour of having consciously worked for the woman's rights movement. I am not even clear as to just what this woman's rights movement really is. To me it has seemed a problem with humanity in general.

[Innes 74]

Instead of furthering one specific political group, Ibsen tells one individual’s story that consequently furthered feminist goals. Ibsen did not define himself as a liberal feminist because the term had yet to be defined, but that is what he is. Ibsen believed in equality for all human beings, not just women, which is why he hesitates to adhere to any one political agenda. Instead, Ibsen’s plays focus on specific people who are too big for their surroundings and who are inhibited by the society that surrounds them. In A Doll’s House that person is Nora. In X’s view, Ibsen pits “feminine instinct (nature) against masculine thinking (culture)”(Meyer). Although Ibsen adheres to the classical Aristotelian
structure, A Doll’s House anticipates the “liberal feminist” approach. Ibsen’s work revolutionizes the role of women, exploring their social position and psychology.

Current female playwrights continue to circumvent the Aristotelian structure, among them Sarah Ruhl. Specifically in her play Eurydice, Ruhl takes an old Greek myth, written from the perspective of the male character, Orpheus. Ruhl subverts this text and instead looks at the female perspective of Eurydice. In an interview Ruhl explains what attracted her to Eurydice’s story: “...rarely does anyone look at Eurydice’s experience. I always found that troubling--she’s the one who dies and takes a journey before Orpheus, but we don’t really see her experience” (Weckwerth 30). So often in the theatre, a female perspective is sidelined for a male’s, which is why feminist theatre practitioners like Ruhl are writing plays with females centerstage. Gerald Weales’ explains Ruhl’s approach to Eurydice succinctly, “the emphasis has shifted from the musician who invades the Underworld to rescue his dead wife to the wife herself” (Weales 608). Ruhl changes a story that was inherently male in its Aristotelian plot structure and makes it feminist. She uses imagery, symbolism and metaphysical layering that move beyond male chauvinistic drama (Ruhl 30).

After being introduced to both Ibsen and Ruhl, I directed a scene from Eurydice in my directing studio. As I studied Ruhl’s play in detail, I wondered if
Nora was ever in love like Eurydice, and if so, what is running through her mind moments before she walks away. If Eurydice knew she could share the same fate as Nora, would she still fall in love with Orpheus, or would she walk away. To find the answers to those questions I staged the opening scene of Eurydice, where Orpheus proposes marriage. Instead of having Eurydice comply without reservation to Orpheus, I had Eurydice take pause, for two specific reasons.

I surrounded Eurydice by books to highlight her intellectual independence from Orpheus. As Orpheus proposes to her, he takes away her books, holding them in his arms; Eurydice was thus made to choose between her identity and the boy she loves. She pauses here to acknowledge the weight of her decision: the choice between self actualization and love. Eurydice avoids facing the decision and abandons her books and accepts Orpheus as her fiancé. Orpheus runs off, elated by her choice and Eurydice hesitates once more. Just as she is about to run off in pursuit of love, a book catches her eye, the only book Orpheus left behind, A Doll’s House. Alone on stage, Eurydice reads the ending monologue of Nora Helmer:

All right. But you neither think nor talk like the man I would want to share my life with. When you had got over your fright..you weren’t concerned about me but only about what might happen to you...I was your little skylark again, your little doll, exactly as before...That was the moment I
realised that for eight years I’d been living with a stranger, and had borne him three children...Oh, I can’t bear to think about it! I could tear myself to shreds…

(Act III, Scene V)

Eurydice takes a moment to contemplate Nora’s words. She then looks toward the path where Orpheus ran off, then back at the book once more. For one last time Eurydice confronts her dilemma, until finally she drops the book and follows Orpheus.

This was the starting point for my commentary on, and critique of, modern love and femininity. As I watched the scene I had created, I realized that these women--Nora and Eurydice--did not reside only within fiction or history. These women were fictionalized distillations of women I knew: friends of mine, colleagues, smart, modern, well-educated women, women who, time and time again, would choose to be with a man instead of defining themselves. I watched Eurydice choose love over identity and saw myself doing the same. I suppose this is why I couldn’t let this exploration end in my directing studio, because I saw myself in both Nora and Eurydice. I knew that I too, was sacrificing my own identity and beliefs for an inadequate idea of love. After working on this scene, I found myself contemplating how the cultural portrayal of men and women that we have all inherited, fosters and inadequate perception of love. Why do we feel
trapped by relationship in which we are seemingly willing participants? It was then that I knew I had to question this further, not only for the sake of dramaturgical study and practice, but for my own life. I set out to write a play with significant roles for women--female characters with opinions and ramifications like Ibsen’s. I wanted to subvert the Aristotelian structure of A Doll’s House using a materialistic feminine approach. Just as Sarah Ruhl takes the Orpheus myth and creates Eurydice to tell Eurydice’s point of view. I too wanted to subvert a traditionally Aristotelian play; I wanted to retell A Doll’s House from Nora’s perspective.

The following year I applied to the graduate program at UCSC proposing to direct a non-linear bridging of A Doll’s House and Eurydice. I would create a play of short scenes, which would overlap, interweave and converse with one another. The piece would be interdisciplinary--incorporating dance and music. Upon my acceptance to the graduate program, I began cutting and interweaving Eurydice and A Doll’s House. At the end of that quarter I staged a reading with some of my close friends, so I could hear the work aloud and develop it further. After the reading, I found my colleagues were more concerned with the logistics of Ruhl’s created world of Eurydice than with the issues I wanted to highlight. Ruhl’s story was a distraction but I wanted to retain her structure. So I abandoned
the Eurydice narrative, retained Ruhl’s multiplistic structure, and applied it to my re-imagined and deconstructed story of Nora Helmer.

DEVELOPMENT OF ANAG[NORA]ISIS

In brief, I wrote a play for a cast of four actors: two women playing Nora Helmer and two men playing Torvald. The central idea of this stripped down version, was to pit Nora’s state of mind at the beginning of the play with her state of mind at the end. Taking my cue from the tarantella, the performance incorporated my own dialogue, repeated dialogue from Ibsen’s play, movement and dance. ANAG[NORA]ISIS emerged as my title from Aristotle’s definition of anagnorisis, or recognition, “the change from ignorance to knowledge” and the name of my title character Nora Helmer (Hardison 19).

As my work began to take shape, I applied to the student production company SJ REAL, San Jose Repertory Emerging Artists Lab. The Emerging Artists lab is a production company run by up-and-coming Bay Area artists. They accept play submissions from other rising artists in the Bay Area who wish to exhibit their work. Upon acceptance SJ REAL offers their lobby area for two performances, held directly following the mainstage show at San Jose Rep.

In February, Steve Boyle and Rory Strahan-Mauk, the student production officiates of SJ REAL, accepted my proposal and offered me their space for April.
I was both thrilled and terrified: thrilled because I would be able to engage in critical conversation through my performance piece, and terrified because I had so little time to pull it all together. I had to come up with a script, cast my actors, find a stage manager, secure rehearsal space, find the time to rehearse and do it all before April. Somehow, by the end of February, I was able to convince three of my close actor friends to be in my show. I also secured a stage manager and assistant director, to all of whom I am deeply indebted. We began our project that March, rehearsing through the month of April and finally performing mid month in the lobby of San Jose Rep.

March was filled with broadening my perspective: listening to the BBC World News, talking with my cast about women's issues and dissecting and analyzing their personal relationships and stories of love. The development of the script became a process through which we were all able to examine and heighten our awareness of our personal ideologies: engaging in thrilling conversation about what the role of women is today and how it has changed from when Ibsen wrote A Doll’s House. The more we read and discovered together, the more we realized that the world hadn’t changed all that much. Women are still fighting for identity and for a satisfactory definition of femininity. One of our first discussions of femininity within our cast was in response to Carolyn Hedman’s TED Talk, “A Sexy Lie.” This talk addresses women as objects of sexual desire and how in the
1960s and 1970s women were concerned with the representation of women: the first wave of feminism. This continues through the 1980s and 1990s but as we progress into the 2000s, women seem to be less and less concerned with objectification. Hedman makes the case that because we are talking less about female objectification, we are not given the vocabulary to identify when it is happening, making the world more susceptible to this behavior than ever before. Women are seen in the media as a commodity; ads are being hypersexualized to gain attention as advertising agencies become more and more competitive. Hedman explains that objectivity versus subjectivity is the difference between being acted upon versus acting for yourself, women being continually acted upon in the media. What this leads to then, is women believing they are valued solely for their sex appeal and unrealistic standards of beauty, leading to depression, eating disorders, body shame, etc. Being exposed to these realities on a daily basis, these facts were nothing the cast and I hadn’t heard before but we were unsure of how to confront an issue so widespread. This idea of objectification is what we saw Nora experience in A Doll’s House, defined by her gender and her sexuality. The question became: how do we combat the collective cultures objectification of women? To counter this trend Hedman advocates awareness and education. Expanding on Hedman’s ideas, through ANAG[NORA]ISIS, we sought to create awareness through our piece,
artistically calling attention to the persistence of gender roles that remain in society, the gender roles from which Nora decides to break free. Right from the start the ensemble determined that this problem is one to be faced by men and women together, it is not exclusively a female issue. We set up a Facebook page to share our findings, including relevant articles, engaging topics regarding feminist culture, images, etc. We were in constant conversation throughout the process, discussing the relevance of our production and reminding ourselves of its necessity right now. I made sure that ANAG[NORA]ISIS, a discussion of femininity in the United States today, was a story all of my actors wanted to tell, a story that they wanted to share with our audience. I knew that their personal commitment would create powerful and meaningful theatre.

My goal was to create a play to which a broad spectrum of people could relate, projecting their own circumstances and backgrounds on to Nora’s story, creating their own meanings, and engaging in critical thought about the structures through which love and gender are defined.

AUDIENCE AS CRITIC

Instead of staging my adaptation of A Doll’s House in a naturalistic way, I democratize and reject the rigidity of conventional performance spaces. There were no blackouts, no lighting techniques used, everyone, including the audience,
was in full view throughout. The audience members were asked to be active participants in ANAG[NORA]ISIS, engaging and thinking about what each moment meant, instead of being told what to think. This, “foregrounding and denaturalizing the representational apparatus,” is a Brechtian feminist materialist practice (Dolan 106). In Gay Gibson Cima’s essay Strategies for Subverting the Canon, she explains how using a non-theatrical space can be used to further a feminist agenda. In ANAG[NORA]ISIS, it is the naturalistic setting of A Doll’s House that I deconstruct, “highlighting its conventions” and “Consider[ing] the spatial relationship between the actor and the audience carefully, as in performance artist Suzanne Lacy’s work” (99-100). Lacy creates site specific and political performance events where the lines are blurred between the actors and the spectators. Instead of placing her performers on stage, separate from the audience, she unifies the two by having both the performer and spectator in view and next to each other--making the audience an active participant by simply being present. ANAG[NORA]ISIS was interactive in this way too. The actors sat side by side with audience members, reaching out into the audience, breaking the fourth wall and acting within arms reach. I wanted the audience to be incorporated into the space, experiencing everything up close. The audience sat on either side of the playing space facing inward, looking at themselves. By setting the audience to face themselves, they are visually reminded that they are watching a
performance piece. The theatrical space became just that--a theatrical space, void of elaborate scenic design and everything was in view.

WRITING ON BODIES

In her book Full Frontal Feminism by Jessica Valenti she asks her readers what the worst thing you can call a woman is. She replies with, “…words like slut, whore, bitch, cunt...notice anything?” she says, “The worst thing you can call a girl is a girl’(5). Valenti explains how calling someone a girl is the “ultimate insult.” In ANAG[NORA]ISIS I ask that same question to my audience, ‘why is the worst thing you can call a girl is a girl?’ I did this by having my actresses write on their bodies the words ‘cunt’, ‘slut’, ‘bitch’ and ‘nymphomaniac’, words that directly insulted their female bodies and their sexuality. Nora struggles to come to terms with the words society writes on her: words that dismantle her own sexuality. Nora reveals the words written on her skin just after she strips for Torvald, in effort to win his attention and affection. Noras efforts are wasted as Torvald leaves her alone, to get back to work. Nora is left to confront herself, nearly naked, alone and covered in words that describe her deepest insecurities. Nora shows the audience the words written on her body, words she would be called if she left her husband and went out into the world; words women are called by society when they don’t adhere to their predetermined gender role. Nora
is confronted with the idea that leaving Torvald and facing the unknown is just as impossible as staying with him.

DANCE

The movement pieces in ANAG[NORA]ISIS are a combination of Nora dancing the tarantella in A Doll’s House and Nora’s anagnorisis. In ANAG[NORA]ISIS the two women playing Nora, physicalize her internal struggle. Nora is experiencing anagnorisis—she is discovering herself. Nora realizes that her life has been a submissive one, devoted to pleasing Torvald and adhering to pre-constructed gender norms. Nora struggles to decide how to move forward with her life now that she has realized it has been performed. No longer knowing who she is, Nora dances for understanding, contemplating the ways she can adapt to her anagnorisis. In A Doll’s House Nora contemplates suicide, she says, “Five. Seven hours to midnight. Then twenty-four hours till the next midnight. Then the tarantella will be over. Twenty-four and seven? Thirty-one hours to live” (McFarlane 61). Ibsen connects the symbolic nature of the tarantella to Nora’s suicidal thoughts, “It is a dance of the death” (26). In ANAG[NORA]ISIS the women grab each other by the neck, a reference to this moment in A Doll’s House. By the end of the dance though, the women rise up together, changing into new clothes, embracing their new awakened state of
anagnorisis, deciding to leave Torvald in pursuit of her own identity. They write the title of the play, ANAG[NORA]ISIS on their backs in lipstick.

In Act III of A Doll’s House Nora dances the tarantella. As Nora frantically dances around the room Torvald says, “...Nora you are dancing as though your life depended on it” and she replies, “It does” (McFarlane 59). In ANAG[NORA]ISIS this moment from A Doll’s House is deconstructed using a swing dance. The two Nora’s are tossed back and forth between the two men, a metaphor for her lack of control within her own environment, how she is objectified and used. At the end of the dance both the men toss Nora on the floor like a play-thing and leave her crumpled, with “ANAG[NORA]ISIS” scrawled on her back. This moment recognizes the deep betrayal of Torvald in A Doll’s House and the moment where Nora decides she can no longer go on being married to him.

TEXTUAL SUBVERSION AND HISTORIZATION

In ANAG[NORA]ISIS the feminist brechtian mechanisms of historicization and fragmentation are used. The audience is asked to actively analyze and question the play. Instead of producing A Doll’s House as it was intended—a play happening in the moment, in real time—instead, it is a fragmented commentary on a historical piece. Most audience members are aware of how A Doll’s House ends, it was “the
The play is stripped of its original suspense because the audience knows the ending. My piece did not rely on the shock of Nora leaving her husband. As Dolan points out, when using this type of historical piece, “suspense will no longer play a part in the seduction of the text” (111). My aim is not to seduce my audience into a particular narrative, instead, I want them to question why Nora makes the decisions she makes, and why she walks away. Dolan says that in “Denaturalizing historical texts,” like A Doll’s House, we “provoke the spectator to contemplate the structure…” the naturalistic structure of which A Doll’s House typically resides. Instead the spectator is made an active participant, questioning, “...the dominant ideology that shapes their interactions” with one another (112).

At both performances of ANAG[NORA]ISIS spontaneously, and much to my surprise, both audiences asked immediately following the show, for a talk-back. They wanted to ask me about the play, what certain scenes meant, what it was like for the actors to play in ANAG[NORA]ISIS, what the term ‘anagnorisis’ meant, etc. I was absolutely thrilled; I had never been a part of a production where the audience asked to talk afterward.
CRITIQUE

Examining the play ANAG[NORA]ISIS, there are some things I would have liked to improve upon if given more time and resources. I would have a more racially dynamic cast, a chorus of women delivering Nora’s lines, to include people with experiences different from this white and middle class story. I also would have incorporated more scenes into the play, including commentary from historical female figures, reviewer’s responses to the premier of A Doll’s House and the works of female poets. I would have included more scenes with more audience interaction, scenes they could directly affect through participation. I would add scenes with differing feminist viewpoints in regard to race, sexuality and socio-economic backgrounds. I also would find ways to engage the audience even further in critical thought.
[SCENE 1]
[ALL CHARACTERS ENTER: MAN 1 AND WOMAN 1 STAND FAR APART FROM EACH OTHER. MAN 2 AND WOMAN 2 DANCE EXTREMELY CLOSE]

MAN 2:[WHISPERS SOMETHING INAUDIBLE INTO WOMAN 2s EAR]
WOMAN 2:[GIGGLES SOFTLY]
BOTH:[GIGGLE TOGETHER, DANCING]
[Silence]

WOMAN 1: Sit down and talk with me, would you?
MAN 1: What?
WOMAN 1: Funny, isn’t it? We’ve never actually sat down and talked with one another…
MAN 1: What are you talking about? We’ve talked plenty of times…

MAN 2: I love you. [PAUSE]
WOMAN 1: You know what I mean. Not talked, not really...

WOMAN 2: Thank you.

[THEY CONTINUE DANCING]
MAN 2: [Pulls her out in front of himself to look at her in the eye] Really, I do. I... I love you.

MAN 1: We talk just fine, Nora. We’ve been talking together for years..

MAN 2: I mean it. I love everything about you…
WOMAN 2: I... I... I love…

WOMAN 1: Right. But all we’ve ever talked about, all you’ve ever listened to, all I’ve ever listened to are your ideas.
MAN 1: What?
WOMAN 1: I’m not blaming you. It’s my own fault, honestly. I’ve never truly been myself…. I’ve simply reflected your thoughts and ideas and never my own. I’ve been a reflection of you… a mirror… nothing more.
MAN 1: What are you talking about?

WOMAN 2: I love. (pause) I love you.
MAN 2: What? Yes?
WOMAN 2: Yes.
WOMAN 1: Do you know what I think about anything? About religion, art, politics? Do you know what my favorite thing to do is on a Saturday afternoon?

MAN 1: (silence)

WOMAN 1: You don’t know because I don’t know. I’ve never took the time to find out. I want to know. I have to know...I have to know who I am...

MAN 1: But you...you love me. Don’t you? Eight years….three children…

WOMAN 1: You aren’t listening to me...it’s not about you.

MAN 2: Yes (smiles)

WOMAN 2: Yes (begins to giggle)

MAN 2: Yes. (kisses her head a few times and then the resume dancing, her head on his shoulder.)

WOMAN 2: (She nestles back into his chest and looks out to the audience smiling and then it changes to a disconcerned look...she breathes heavily and then relaxes. They slowly part and MAN 2 exits. WOMAN 2 makes her way to a seated position in the audience)

MAN 1: But you love me?? Nora! You love me, don’t do this!

WOMAN 1: I don’t.

(WOMAN 2 picks up a small undescriptive male puppet)

WOMAN 2: (talks as the male puppet) I love you. These last three years have been the best of my life.

MAN 1: What?? You don’t mean that!
WOMAN 1: I can’t, I’m sorry. My answer is no.

WOMAN 2: I don’t want it to ever stop being this way. Me and you, together. You’re the best thing that’s ever happened to me.

MAN 1: But you told me! Over and over again! You lived with me, under the same roof for years? And you say you never loved me?

WOMAN 2: I want you in my life forever…

WOMAN 1: I loved the idea of you. I loved the idea of love, I suppose.
MAN 1: The idea of love?? What is that supposed to mean? What do you think love is?
WOMAN 1: I’m not sure, but it’s not this. Here’s your ring back… [SHE TAKES OFF HER RING AND HANDS IT TO WOMAN 2]

WOMAN 2: [WOMAN 2 TAKES THE RING] Marry me? [SHE COLLAPSES THE PUPPET AND EXITS]

MAN 1: But I love you.
WOMAN 1: You don’t though.
MAN 1: Unlike you, I think I know what I do and do not love!
WOMAN 1: You could never have truly loved me. Because I don’t even know who I am without you. I’ve never given myself the chance to know.
MAN 1: How can you say that?
WOMAN 1: Because it’s honest. And I think deep down you know it’s true.
MAN 1: But I don’t want you to go…you belong here…you belong with me!
WOMAN 1: I don’t know where I belong…but it isn’t with you…
MAN 1: I don’t understand you.

[they look at each other and MAN 1 slowly backs away, turning his head away from her]

[SCENE 2]
[WOMAN 2 ENTERS singing “So this is Love” from Cinderella, while dance with puppet from previous scene.]
WOMAN 2: Hmmmm...mmmmm. Hmmmmm.....*
WOMAN 1: So this is love...hmmmmm*
WOMAN 2: So this is love…*
WOMAN 1: So this is what makes life divine…*
WOMAN 2: I'm all aglow, hmm*
WOMAN 1: And now I know…*
WOMAN 2: And now I know…*
WOMAN 1: The key to all heaven?*
WOMAN 2: is mine…my heart has wings*
WOMAN 1: hmm…*
WOMAN 2: And I can fly...I'll touch every star in the sky…*
WOMAN 1: So this is the miracle…that I've been dreaming of…*
WOMAN 2: Hmm…*
WOMAN 1: Hmm…*
WOMAN 1 & 2: So this is love…*
[SCENE 3]
[WOMAN 2 and MAN 2 play NORA and TORVALD]

WOMAN 1: I meet him on a summer night.

NORA
I’m not talking about worries. I’m saying we’ve never once sat down together and seriously tried to get to the bottom of anything.

TORVALD
But, my dear Nora, would that have been a thing for you to do?

NORA
That’s just it. You have never understood me…I’ve been greatly wronged. First by my father, and then by you.

WOMAN 1: There is a huge bonfire going on, tons of people on the beach surrounding this billowing fire and we just lock eyes.

TORVALD What! Us two! The two people who loved you more than anybody?

NORA
You two never loved me. You only thought now nice it was to be in love with me.

WOMAN 1: I just know right then. This is him. We finally found each other...two people meant to be. We spend the whole night talking, our feet buried in the cool sand, his soft bulky sweatshirt wrapped around me like a big blanket.
TORVALD
But, Nora, what are you saying?

NORA.
It’s right, you know. At home, Daddy used to tell me what he thought, then I thought the same. And if I thought differently, I kept quiet about it, because he wouldn’t have liked it.

WOMAN 1: We talk about everything his family, mine. We both grew up the youngest in our families...the babies.. We get along so well, practically finishing the others sentences.

NORA
He used to call me his baby doll, and he played with me as I used to play with my dolls. Then I came to live in your house....

WOMAN 1: Then in a crazy haze we strip down to our underwear....shaking, goosebumps surfacing but burning with excitement... we break out into a run.

TORVALD
What way is that to talk about our marriage?

NORA[imperturbably]
What I mean is: I passed out of Daddy’s hands into yours. You arranged everything to your tastes, and I acquired the same tastes. Or I pretended to...I
don’t really know... I think it was a bit of both, sometimes one thing and sometimes the other.

WOMAN 1: [WALKS TO MAN 1] Fear and caution to the wind, we run faster and faster toward the big dark ocean. We plunge into the icy water,[GETS ON KNEES] screaming as the waves splash heavily against our bare skin, we begin to shake…

NORA When I look back, it seems to me I have been living here like a beggar, from hand to mouth.

WOMAN 1: Our lips begin to turn blue and I look over at him once more...hair wet. Iced to the bone...how ridiculous..we begin to laugh uncontrollably.

NORA: I lived by doing tricks for you. But that’s the way you wanted it. You and Daddy did me a great wrong. It’s your fault that I’ve never made anything of my life.

WOMAN 1: I could see his deep blue eyes reflecting in the moonlight.

TORVALD
Nora, how unreasonable...how ungrateful you are! Haven’t you been happy here?

NORA
No, never. I thought I was, but I wasn’t really.
TORVALD
Not...not happy!

NORA
No, just cheerful. And you’ve always been so kind to me. But our house has never been anything but a playroom. I have been your doll wife, just as at home I was Daddy’s doll child.

TORVALD
And can you also account for how I forfeited your love?

NORA
Yes, very easily. It was tonight, when the miracle didn’t happen. It was then I realized you weren’t the man I thought you were.

TORVALD
I don’t understand you… (he turns and walks away)

WOMAN 1: He pulls me into his arms, we kiss and I fell[WOMAN 2 FALLS]...deeply in love and deeply into the arms of my very first love.

[SCENE 4]
[She brings in shopping bags with dresses in them. HUMMING “SO THIS IS LOVE”, WHILE UNPACKING.]
TORVALD. [MAN 1]
Is that my little skylark chirruping out there?*

NORA. [WOMAN 1]
Yes, it is.*

TORVALD. [MAN 1]
Is that my little squirrel frisking about?*

NORA. [WOMAN 1]
Yes!* 

TORVALD. [MAN 1]
When did my little squirrel get home?*

NORA. [WOMAN 1]
Just now. [She stuffs the bag of macaroons in her pocket and wipes her mouth]
Come on out and see what I’ve bought.*

TORVALD. [MAN 1]
I don’t want to be disturbed! [A moment later he opens the door and looks out, his pen in his hand.] ‘Bought’, did you say? All that? Has my little spendthrift been out squandering money again?*

NORA. [WOMAN 1]
But surely this year we can afford to spread ourselves just a little. This is the first Christmas we don’t need to be careful.*

TORVALD. [MAN 1]
Ah, but that doesn’t mean we can afford to be extravagant, you know.*

NORA. [WOMAN 1]
Oh yes surely we can afford to be just a little bit extravagant now, can’t we? Just a teeny-weeny bit? You are getting quite a good sized salary now, and you are going to earn lots and lots of money.

TORVALD. [MAN 1]
Yes, after the New Year. But it’s going to be three whole months before the first pay check comes in.*

NORA.[WOMAN 1]
Pooh! We can always borrow in the meantime.*

TORVALD.[MAN 1]
Nora, Nora! Just like a woman! Seriously though, Nora, you know what I think about these things. No debts!

TORVALD.[MAN 2]
Never borrow. There’s always something inhibited, something unpleasant, about a house built on credit and borrowed money. We two have managed to stick it out
so far, and that’s the way we’ll go on for the little time that remains.*

NORA. [WOMAN 2]
Very well, just as you say.*

TORVALD. [MAN 2]
There, there! My little singing bird mustn’t droop her wings...Has it got the sulks, that little squirrel of mine? [takes out money] Nora, what do you think I’ve got here?*

NORA. [WOMAN 2]
Money! Ten, twenty, thirty, forty. Oh thank you! This will see me quite a long way.*

[Strip tease ensues between Woman 2 and Man 2 to the song “Pour Some Sugar on Me” by DEF LEPPARD. MAN 2 KISSES WOMAN 2 HARSHLY THEN EXITS, THROWING MONEY IN HER FACE]

[SCENE 5] [Song: “Breath Me” BY SIA PLAYS]
WOMAN 2: [LOOKS DOWN AT HER BODY AND REALIZES THE WORDS WRITTEN ON HER: [CUNT, SLUT, NYMPHOMANIC]

WOMAN 1: [LOOKS DOWN AT HER BODY AND REALIZES THE WORDS WRITTEN ON HER: [NYMPHOMANIAC, TART, SLUT, LOOSE]
WOMAN 2: [TRIES TO PUT BACK ON HER CLOTHES BUT WHEN SHE PUTS HER DRESS ON IT SAYS: PRUDE, PURITAN, OLD MAID, GOODIE-GOODIE, SPINSTER, UPTIGHT, PRISSY, STRAIGHT LACED. SHE LOOKS DOWN AND ACKNOWLEDGES THE WORDS, THEN TAKES IT OFF IN DISGUST, THEN SEES THE OTHER WORDS, THEN PUTS IT BACK DOWN, THIS REPEATS]

WOMAN 1: [COMES OVER AND WALKS AROUND WOMAN 2, TAKING HER CLOTHES OFF TOO, CROSSES OUT THE WORDS ON WOMAN 2'S BODY]

[THEY DANCE]

WOMAN 1: [WALKS OVER HANDING WOMAN 2 A NEW DRESS THAT READS 'WOMAN' WOMAN 2 PUTS ON THE SAME]

[THEY DANCE. WOMAN 1 AND WOMAN 2 END UP HAND AND HAND.]

[SCENE 6]

[SWING MUSIC BEGINS TO PLAY. THE MEN TURN AND ENTER. A SWING DANCE ENSUES. IT STARTS OF SIMPLE BUT THEN QUICKENS, THE WOMEN BEING TOSSED ABOUT AND THEN CRASH INTO EACH OTHER. THE MEN CIRCLE THE WOMEN. THEN THE MEN EXIT TO OPPOSITE SIDES OF THE STAGE, STILL LOOKING IN AT THE WOMEN]
SCENE 7

(Woman 1 and 2 trying to escape scene, but constantly failing. Man 1 playing with blocks off stage and Man 2 working with papers off stage.)

WOMAN 2: Did you talk like that with him often...not really talking...begging I mean?

WOMAN 1: Nearly every week.

WOMAN 2: When did it begin?

WOMAN 1: Begin? [LAUGHS AND PICKS UP A STUFFED DOLL OFF THE GROUND] Well lets see...god knows my mother did the same...and hers I’m sure.....

WOMAN 2: I mean when did it start with you two?

WOMAN 1: That is what I mean. It has always been... something I learned a long time ago...something that’s been passed on...

[PAUSE]

WOMAN 1: [IN A COMMANDING TONE] ‘till now

WOMAN 2: ‘till now?

WOMAN 1: [EVEN MORE DEMANDING TONE] ‘till right now. [pause]

[Grabs make up wipes from under chair and hands to WOMAN 2.]

WOMAN 2: ‘till now.

[THEY START RE ENACTING THE LAST SCENE OF DOLLS HOUSE AT THE MEN. THE MEN RESPOND, STANDING IN PLACE, LOOKING straight forward, not making eye contact]

WOMAN 1: [LOOKING AT MAN 2]Yes, I’ve changed*
MAN 1: What for? It’s late.*
WOMAN 2: [LOOKING AT MAN 1] Sit down. I have a lot to say to you.*
BOTH WOMAN: [whispering] Sit down. I have a lot to say to you.
WOMAN 1: What we’re begging for is different, but it’s begging all the same.
WOMAN 2: Exactly. And it begins with our fathers I suppose….or our mothers maybe...
WOMAN 1: It’s as if we’re a sort of doll, something filled with stuffing, all sewn up… [GRABS DOLL]
WOMAN 2: Into exactly what they want us to be…

MAN 2: I would gladly toil day and night for you Nora, enduring all manner of sorrow and distress. But nobody sacrifices his honour for the one he loves.*

BOTH WOMEN: Hundreds and thousands of women have.*

MAN 1: Oh you think and talk like a stupid child.*

WOMAN 2: We dance when they dance, we cry when they cry, we walk, we talk…and yet our tears, our words are never our own. Just a mass production of what has come before us…never our own...

WOMAN 1: Just what they want us to be.
WOMAN 2: And everything else….
WOMAN 1: We beg for…
WOMAN 1: As I turn it over and over again in my mind, it all comes together, spanning through time...something we’ve chosen, continue to choose...a powerful choice...to lose oneself, to beg, to say yes over and over again, so much so that we forget who we are...if we were anything, ever at all.

WOMAN 2: It’s not the same for men, they come into the world with options, generations of men choosing before them, to be something...generations of decisions already made. Today, they tell us we as women have them too, but its not the same, our options are muddled and slippery...so easy to slip into what came before.

WOMAN 1: [AT MAN 1]All right. But you neither think nor talk*

BOTH WOMEN: [to MAN 2] like the man I would want to share my life with.*

WOMAN 1: Trapped. [searches for a way out]

WOMAN 2: As I turn it over and over again in my mind

WOMAN 1: I was your little skylark again. Your little doll, exactly as before*...Sliding.

WOMAN 2: it all comes together, spanning time...

WOMAN 1:Except you would have to protect it twice as carefully as before

WOMAN 2: Now that it had shown itself to be so weak and fragile.* [Rises.]

Confined....Something we’ve chosen, continue to choose...

WOMAN 1: That was the moment I realised.*

WOMAN 2: Slipping further and further…

WOMAN 2: A powerful choice...to lose..

WOMAN 1: That for eight years I’d been living with a stranger and had borne him three children…*

WOMAN 2: Drowning...

WOMAN 1: Oh, I can’t bear to think about it! I could tear myself to shreds.*
WOMAN 2: As I turn it over and over again in my mind, it all comes together, spanning through time...something we’ve chosen, continue to choose...a powerful choice...to lose
WOMAN 1: TO LOSE oneself, to beg, to say yes over and over again
WOMAN 2: So much so that we forget who we are...
WOMAN 1: Weak.
WOMAN 2: Until...
WOMAN 1: Until..
BOTH: [THEY TURN TO LOOK INTO EACH OTHERS EYES] Until we choose otherwise.
WOMAN 2:[GRABS WOMAN 1’S HAND]I understand you.
[PAUSE]
WOMAN 2:I understand you.
WOMAN 1:I understand you.
WOMAN 2:I understand you.
WOMAN 1:I understand you.

[MAN 1 AND MAN 2 STORM ONSTAGE, MAN 2 BEHIND WOMAN 2 AND MAN 1 FACING WOMAN 1]

[SCENE 8]
[MAN 1 PLAYS TORVALD, WOMAN 1 PLAYS NORA, MAN 2 AND WOMAN 2 WATCH THE SCENE]
TORVALD:
I don’t understand you.*

NORA:

Exactly. You don’t understand me. That problem is beyond me. There is another to be solved first. I must set about it alone. And that is why I’m leaving you.*

[BEAT. HIS RAGE SUBSIDES]

TORVALD: [GRABS HER]

Nora, will you never think of me? May I write to you?*

NORA:[PUSHING HIS HANDS DOWN]

No, never. I won’t let you.*

TORVALD:

But surely I can send you…*

NORA:

No. Nothing.*

TORVALD:

Nora, can I never be anything more to you than a stranger?*

NORA:

Both you and I would have to change to the point where…Oh, I don’t believe in miracles anymore.*

TORVALD: [GRABS HER]

But I will believe. Name it! Change to the point where..?*
NORA: Where we could make a real marriage of our lives together.[PUSHES HIM AWAY] Goodbye Torvald.* [She exits. The door slams. WOMAN 2 TURNS AROUND AFTER THE SLAM AND SEES MAN 2]

[MAN 1 WALKS OFF SLOWLY, FADING BACKWARD]
[MAN 2 LOOKS AT WOMAN 2]

TORVALD: I meant what I said when I told you that I loved you. (Pause) I still do, Nora. I love your laugh, the way your nose crinkles when you smile, the way you can never truly sit still. When I asked you to be my wife, I did it without any reservation in my heart. I wanted you with every fiber of my being…forever. (She tries to comfort him, he steps back)

You should go. This isn’t the way I wanted things to be. I wanted things to work out. But I don’t know what to do, I don’t know how to fix this, I don’t know how to make you happy…

WOMAN 2: You can’t.

TORVALD: I just don’t know when things changed, where I went wrong…

WOMAN 2: What about where WE went wrong? Where I went wrong?

MAN 2: What are you talking about?

WOMAN 2: There’s never been a WE. We’ve never had real conversations, any conversations, about anything of importance.
MAN 2: I don’t understand you. I don’t understand why you would do this…why you would walk away after all that I’ve done for you. I’ve supported you, fed you, cared for you…and you want to walk away? I don’t understand you, but I do understand now, that I need to let you go.

MAN 2: I don’t understand you, but I do understand now, that I need to let you go…

WOMAN 2: I’m sorry.

MAN 2: Me too.

[WOMAN 2 begins to walk away, MAN 2 walks to his guitar, sits and begins to play. They sing together. Her back facing him. They never look at each other.]

[SCENE 9]
MAN 2: You only know what I want you to*
WOMAN 2: I know everything you don't want me to*
MAN 2: Oh your mouth is poison, your mouth is wine*
WOMAN 2: You think your dreams are the same as mine*
BOTH: Oh I don't love you but I always will
Oh I don't love you but I always will
Oh I don't love you but I always will
I always will* [X3]
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