

FRIENDSHIP VERSUS LOVE IN IBSEN'S DRAMAS

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“Yes--you see there are some people one loves best, and others whom one would almost always rather have as companions”. With these words from *A Doll's House*, Nora explains to Dr. Rank about her close relationship to him in contrast to her relationship to her husband. Later in the same scene she uses the term “friend” and “friendship” to describe their relationship. She asks for “a great proof of our friendship” and she assures Rank: “There’s no one else I trust more than you. I know you’re my best, most faithful friend.”

Nora’s words indicate that love and friendship can be relationships with different qualities, and that a friendship can have certain positive aspects that are absent in a love relation and in a marriage. Considering the pessimistic attitude to harmonious relationships between men and women that Ibsen’s dramas in general present, Nora’s remark is very interesting. It indicates that a friendship offers a possibility for a woman to be equal to a man in a way which transcends the limits of the traditional patriarchal system, where a woman is defined as subordinate to a man in every possible relationship, as sister, wife or daughter. A closer look at some of the other dramas, following *A Doll's House*, reveals striking parallels in the way friendships between men and women are presented as positive relationships. In this article, I will discuss friendship as an important motive by examining passages in four dramas where friendship appear as an alternative to traditional relationships, such as marriage or love between men and women. These dramas are *A Doll's House*, *The Lady from the Sea*, *Rosmersholm* and *Hedda Gabler*. I will discuss the dramas in chronological order, focusing on parallels and contrasts in scenes where friendship is mentioned. I find that the concept of friendship has an important function in the discussion of women’s situations, and it also has a symbolic function which is developed throughout Ibsen’s dramas.

We know that Ibsen read John Stuart Mill’s famous book *On the Subjection of Women* (1869) and often discussed women’s subordinate role in society with his wife Suzannah and author and critic Camilla Collett (Sæther 2008). I see Ibsen’s dramas as his answer to central political and cultural issues that were being discussed among Norwegian intellectuals in his time, and women’s situation certainly were among these. How this is reflected in his dramas, has been discussed by many female Ibsen critics like Joan Templeton (Templeton, 1998), Gail Finney (Finney, 1994), Sandra Saari (Saari, 1983, 1990) and Toril Moi (Moi, 2004). Most of these studies however, focus on the female characters more than the relationships, and friendships seem not to have been given much attention in Ibsen studies before. Anne Marie Rekdal points out in her book *Ibsen’s to kvinner* (Rekdal 2012), that the so called “Ibsen triangle”, a man standing between a fair and a dark woman, is well known, but the focus in the studies mentioning it, has been on female characters and their social roles. What is central in a drama, the relationship between characters, are then left out, Rekdal states. I share her interest in the relationships, but I will approach it focusing on friendships. My questions are the following: What friendships appear, and what is their function? Does a friendship offer a positive alternative to the traditional

relationships between men and women in Ibsen's dramas, or is perhaps this positive idea of friendship only an illusion?

Friendship – a relationship for equals

Torvald Helmer, in *A Doll's House*, treats his wife Nora like an innocent but spoiled child in need of a father's firm guidance. Nora lives up to her husband's image of herself, hiding her true self from him. As a contrast, Nora's friendship with Rank is a more relaxed relation between seemingly equal parts. She can enjoy long private conversations with Rank, she is free to do things her husband forbids her to do, like eat macaroons and say naughty words. In this way, her relationship to Dr. Rank is like her relationship to Mrs Linde, Nora's "veninde" (female friend) from the past. This indicates that such a good personal relationship is possible between two people regardless of their sex. This equality goes both ways. As Kristine Linde and Nora share their problems, Rank can tell Nora how serious his illness is, which he cannot tell his good friend Helmer. These contrasts function to illustrate how the traditional marriage is dominated by the husband-as-father and wife-as-child-idea. Friendship, opposed to this, seem to be based on equality and mutual respect for each other. The relationship between Mrs Linde and Krogstad functions as a clear contrast to illustrate this point. It also indicates that friendship and love can be combined, if the man and woman involved are on the same level socially and financially. They have both experienced poverty, hard work and personal loss. She is a widow, he is a widower, and they are both qualified for the same position in the bank. They have nothing to hide for each other, and they are now finally in a position to show the love they have felt for each other for many years, get married and establish a relationship that, in all aspects, seems to be happy and harmonious.

It is the element of love that makes Nora's and Rank's relationship different to Kristine Linde's and Krogstad's relationship, and it is the confession of love that dramatically alters the friendship between Nora and Rank. In her despair, Nora is determined to tell Dr. Rank about her loan, obviously hoping he can help her with the final payment. But when she is just about to tell him her secret, he confesses his love for her. This information comes as a shock that completely changes the situation for Nora, and she gives up her plan.

The consequence of this news is most interesting here. When love is declared, the friendship as a relationship between equals is brought to an immediate end. As Nora does not share Rank's feelings, she realizes that her idea of their relationship differs from his. Critics have discussed if Nora secretly feels love or even sexual desire for Rank, since her flirtation in the silver-stocking scene earlier in the same act, certainly has sexual undertones, but I think John Northam is right in arguing that this scene merely serves to reflect Nora's upbringing:

She can get her way with men by cajoling, by teasing – and she has learnt no other way more self-respecting. That is why she flirts so cruelly with Rank – not because she gets fun out of it, but because it is the only way she knows how to deal with men. It is the spoiled Nora who does the flirting (Northam 1965, 104f).

Whatever feelings Nora may have, however, it is the fact that love is being mentioned openly, that changes everything. She never blames Rank for loving her, but for *telling her* about it. When love is declared, she drops the idea of asking Rank for financial help. Critics have argued that in this way, Nora shows her moral integrity, as she will not take advantage of Rank's feelings for her. But this also shows us the limits of friendship. The fact that Rank loves her makes a sexual aspect come into their relationship, and it changes their friendship into a relationship based on love. As I read this, accepting Rank's money would mean, for Nora, to accept Rank's love, and in this way, she would be unfaithful to her husband, and this is not what she wants. She loves her husband and wants him to love her as she loves him, which means to praise her for having saved his health, and that is what we know what he never does, which leads to Nora leaving him.

Friendship as a patriarchal free zone

The Lady from the Sea, is in a feminist perspective often seen as following up the theme from *A Doll's House*. Equality is presented here as a basic criterion for a harmonious relationship between man and woman. The happy, though ambivalent ending in this drama, comes as a result of Doctor Wangel giving his wife Ellida what Torvald Helmer was unable to give Nora, the freedom to choose for herself. In this way, Wangel accepts Ellida as somehow equal to himself, as an adult and a human being, both capable of and free to make her own decision. By doing so, he transcends the traditional husband-as-father-position given to him by law and culture. In this way, Wangel is about to become, so to speak, husband and friend in one character. Ellida, being freed from her legal bounds of marriage, is then able to see Wangel as the kind and caring person he is, as the controlling father figure role has disappeared. In this way, their marriage is reinforced with an element of equality, which gives it a fresh new start. The (temporal) suspension of traditional roles seem to be a condition for this shift. The term "friendship" is not used to describe their relationship, but there is no doubt that Ellida and Wangel both love and respect each other.

But it is not only Nora's relation to her husband which is repeated in this play. Nora's friendship with Dr. Rank has an interesting parallel in the relationship between Bolette and her former teacher Arnholm. In the same way as Nora hopes for financial help from her faithful friend Rank, Wangel's daughter Bolette is expecting help from Arnholm, who she considers as her good friend. She has overcome her teenage love for him long ago, but when asked by Lyngstrand if she cares for her old teacher she says: "Yes, indeed I do, for he is a true friend – and adviser too – and then he is always so ready to help when he can". When asked to give her opinion on why Arnholm has never married, though, she responds as a modern, intellectual girl who will not follow conventions: "Why, good heavens! One does not marry a man who's been your teacher".

What happens to her is similar to what happens to Nora. Arnholm promises to help her, and Bolette starts dreaming of her new life, leaving home, travelling, seeing the world, studying and learning. But then Arnholm suddenly confesses his love for her, just as Rank did to Nora. Like Nora, Bolette is at first both shocked and confused. She finds it impossible to accept financial help from him as she does not have the same feelings for him. For Arnholm, this does not make any difference, he

states. He insists on helping her and promises that he "... will always be her good, faithful and trustworthy friend."

Again, we see that when love is declared, the friendship cannot exist as before. The most striking parallel to *A Doll's House* is that this is revealed when financial help is mentioned. The element of love is a reminder of the importance of gender in a relationship. In a relationship between a man and a woman in patriarchy, a woman is dependent on a man. The optimism Nora and Bolette share in regarding friendship as a kind of utopian sphere beyond patriarchy, is destroyed. These scenes seem to indicate there is no relationship attainable beyond patriarchy.

Conflicting demands for a middle class woman is reflected in Bolette as a character. She is torn between her feelings of responsibility for her father, sister and her own ambitions as a modern young woman who wants knowledge and education. She also has a practical sense, and realizing her limited options, soon changes her mind and accepts Arnholm's offer to become wife, as this will serve her future plans. For her, education seems to be more important than love and marriage. Many feminist Ibsen scholars describe Bolette's choice as a clear example of the typical practical marriage of support and survival, the so-called *forsørgelsesekte*, and it cannot be denied that Arnholm takes advantage of her situation. An early feminist critic, Hanna Andersen Butenschøn, states that: "This relationship is, ... based on only one thing: - buying and selling" (Butenschøn, 1889, 5) (my translation). Even if this is the case, we could say that their friendship sweetens the pill. Bolette trusts Arnholm as a faithful friend who respects her enough to think he will keep his promise to her, and she has nothing to lose. It is interesting to see that she has to give up one of her own ideals of not marrying her teacher for practical reasons. This is in fact what many girls in her position did, and it is focused on in many Norwegian novels from Ibsen's time, such as Camilla Collett's *Amtmandens Døttre* 1854, being the most famous. But for Bolette, when idealism is confronted with the hard facts of (female) life, practical sense wins.

There are another aspects of her choice that are also worth mentioning. Accepting Arnholm's help would mean to be held in a father-daughter relationship, and this is not something a modern woman like Bolette would be comfortable with in the long run, we can assume. Another option for Bolette is to sacrifice her best years being Lyngstrand's *muse*, inspiring him to become an artist, just to be dumped when this job has been done because she will then be too old for him. With this background, accepting Arnholm's offer gives her the best possible outcome. A marriage based on friendship is far better than being an inspirator for an artist who cares only for himself and his career.

Friendship as cover up

The friendships presented in *Rosmersholm* and *Hedda Gabler* are closer than the friendships we see in *A Doll's House* and *The Lady from the Sea*, but we also see in these plays, that the *confession* of love destroys the friendship and marks important turning points. In *Rosmersholm*, Johannes Rosmer and Rebecca West have a friendship, which started when Rebecca came to Rosmersholm as Beate Rosmer's companion. Rebecca and Rosmer soon became friends on an intellectual level, discussing modern thoughts that Rebecca has brought to the house with her

stepfather's books; thoughts clearly connected to the so called "free thinkers" including a critical attitude to the traditional ideas of marriage held by church and society.

After Beate's death, these two live at Rosmersholm as friends. Both of them insist that their friendship is being based on "*the possibility of a man and a woman living together in chastity*" (det rene samliv mellem mann og kvinne), as Rosmer put it, that is a platonic, non sexual relationship. But it is obvious that the people around them do not understand that such a relationship is possible, and they are convinced that these two have a sexual relation. Rosmer's brother-in-law, headmaster Kroll, is the one that presents the general idea among most people, that obviously free thinking goes together with free love. Even Madam Helseth, the maid at Rosmersholm, takes it for granted that the reason Rebecca finally needs to leave the house is because Rosmer has had his way with her and made her pregnant.

Kroll's and Helseth's attitude, reflecting public opinion, makes it obvious that there is something very strange about Rosmer's and Rebecca's relation. When Rosmer, forced by headmaster Kroll, starts examining it, he wonders if their "...friendship is not already tingled with love", and he goes on to describe their relationship as a love relation. "...we two have deluded ourselves the whole time, when we have been calling the close tie between us merely a friendship," he claims. He describes how their relationship started, "... as the sweet mysterious love of two children" (en barndomsforelselse). Rebekka's unwillingness to answer him, indicates that there are aspects of their relationship which is highly problematic for her. Rosmer goes on analyzing: "The tie between us has been a spiritual marriage" and...this is why I am guilty", he concludes. Even if this is a platonic non sexual relation, the element of spiritual intimacy makes Rosmer feel that he has committed adultery, and he is therefore filled with feelings of guilt. Rebecca also feels guilt, but for other reasons. What now is revealed in the drama, are both Rosmer's and Rebecca's private reasons for this guilty feeling which has hindered them both from being engaged in a physical relationship. These histories have been hidden behind the façade of a "friendship", but comes out in the open in the last acts.

It is well known that this drama reflects the important moral debate on sexuality in Norway during these years, called "Handskedebatten", named after Bjørnson's drama *En Handske*. Radicals wanted sexuality before and outside marriage accepted for both men and women, but feminists claimed this would lead to women being victims as long as they were not equal to men on a financial level. Some conservatives in the debate, among them Bjørnson himself, claimed that men should follow the same rule as women did, not having sex before marriage. - Rosmer seems to follow Bjørnson's idea, but taking it even further, living in celibacy even in marriage, this being the reason why his wife Beate never had children (Engelstad 1994, 154). The drama reveals the psychological reasons for Rosmer's ideas. His strict father made Rosmersholm a place where children never laughed or cried, leading to a deep fear of sex in him (Engelstad 1994, 159). His political project, to make people into "free noblemen" (frie adelsmennesker), is thus revealed as nurtured by and based on this fear of sex and strong feelings of guilt. Anne Marie Rekdal states, in her Lacanian reading of this drama: "The love relation he describes, points to regression and the love in the symbiotic relation, or mother-child love"(Rekdal

1998, 166) (my translation). Rekdal continues: “The flight from guilt and the flight from sensuality becomes two sides of the same thing – a flight into preoedipal purity and absolute freedom outside The Law” (Rekdal 1998,167) (my translation).

Rebecca, on the other hand, is a free spirit from the North of Norway, who has brought modern ideas into Rosmer’s stagnant world, but who also has to confess what lies behind their friendship. At first, she loved Rosmer passionately, she claims, but then her optimistic and independent spirit had crumbled and paralyzed by the atmosphere of Rosmersholm, which also resulted in deep feelings of guilt in her. She is therefore not able to engage in a sexual relationship with Rosmer. For her, their friendship, that is the platonic relationship with Rosmer, clearly has functioned in being the perfect disguise for the past she cannot talk about. As we know, her secret is that she had a sexual relation to her stepfather, who she later learns was her real father. Rebecca’s background is thus quite the opposite of Rosmer’s background when it comes to sex. She is experienced, he is totally innocent, and the fact that Rebecca’s relationship to her father has been incestuous makes it even more impossible for her to tell anyone about it. Given this background, Rebecca has had good reasons to hide her secrets behind the image of a close friendship, and to let Rosmer believe he has got his new ideas and insight on his own. The truth is that she has carefully, step by step, manipulated him to his new points of view. In their relationship Rosmer therefore has taken it for granted that Rebecca shares his thoughts and loves him in the way he loves her. Toril Moi points out in *Ibsens idealism*, how this is a misunderstanding and a result of his own projections:

...Rosmer’s criterion for love... is that he has always been able to express his soul to Rebecca. Taking his own openness for genuine communion of souls, he felt ecstatically happy. He also felt childish – that is to say, sexually undefined – and so above all, he feels *unfallen*. Projecting these feelings onto Rebecca, taking her to be the pure woman, he is overjoyed and delighted (Moi, 2006, 283)

Rebecca obviously has been fully aware of their difference in attitude, and in every dialogue between them she hesitates to give her consent to his ideas, and she is otherwise very unwilling to discuss their relationship. “I think surely that our friendship can endure, come what may”, she replies when Rosmer wonders about the future of their relationship. As we have seen, she has had her own personal reasons for pretending to have shared Rosmer’s thoughts. This “friendship” thus appears for her to have been a convenient cover up for forbidden feelings that both of them are unable to accept or even express. As Fredrik Engelstad points out, when their feelings of guilt and shame of their past come out in the open, the defences crumble for them both, and idealism takes over as mental compensation and the pathway to the Millrace lies open.

What Ibsen explores in this dark drama, is how culture forms both men and women psychologically and limits the possibilities for both sexes to have a positive attitude to sexuality and to each other. What is interesting in a friendship perspective, though, is how the two very different souls in *Rosmersholm*, unite as equals in the final scene. After their secrets are revealed, Rosmer leaves the house and Rebecca

asks for her suitcase, planning to leave. But soon after, they meet again and are both eager to sort out their conflict, understand each other and become friends again. The irony is that they continue to misunderstand each other, but regardless, their will to die together seems to confirm a basic need for a connection on a spiritual level. In this way, the basic idea of friendship, as deeply positive, survives.

Comrades

In *Hedda Gabler*, several friendships are presented. In this play, Hedda, a general's daughter, has abandoned her close friend Ejlert, a bohemian academic living a wild life, and married Jørgen Tesman to be supported and live a comfortable high society life. It is obvious from the start of the drama that this marriage is based on neither love nor sexual attraction, but is a proper "forsørgelsesekteskap" for Hedda. This goes both ways. Marrying General Gabler's daughter means a flying start for Tesman's career and social status. It also means a new status for his ambitious aunt, who considers Hedda the perfect means to secure fame and pride for the whole Tesman family.

The first "friendship" mentioned in this drama, is the relation between Hedda and Thea Elvsted, who pays Hedda a visit. They went to the same school, but were never close friends. Hedda's intimacy with Thea in this scene, therefore, seems both hypocritical and cynical, which is however, typical for most relationships in this drama. Thea got married to a judge who obviously found marriage more convenient than paying her for being a governess and housekeeper. This repeats Hedda's situation, and thus underlines that marriage, as a matter of buying and selling, is a central theme in this drama.

The object for Hedda's real interest, we soon learn, is not Thea, but Ejlert Løvborg. Thea has helped Ejlert to live a decent life and finish his book, a book which now comes up as an unexpected obstacle for Tesman's career and thus for the comfortable life Hedda has planned for herself. When Thea eagerly describes how inspiring and important her conversations with Løvborg have been for her, and how they always worked together on his book, Hedda suggests: "You were two good comrades, in fact?", and Thea replies (eagerly) "Comrades! Yes, fancy, Hedda - - that is the very word he used!..." This special word "comrades" is repeated in Hedda's conversation with Løvborg about their relationship and it is presented as a parallel to friendship. "To me it seems as though we were two good comrades - - two thoroughly intimate friends", she says.

By using the term *comrades* and not *friends*, Ibsen most likely was inspired by the relationship between the Swedish author Victoria Benedictsson and her friend Axel Lundgård who addressed each other as "comrades". The word *comrades* is associated politically with the socialist movement, and in this way, the element of equality is made even stronger than by the word *friend*. The link to politics might also indicate that the relationship was seen as more intellectual than personal, but Hedda's reactions reveals that there was more to it than just sharing ideas. She becomes jealous and irritated by Løvborg's new comradeship with Thea, and Løvborg states that Thea and him are *real* comrades (as opposed to Hedda and him), obviously provoking her. Løvborg says: "...for we two—she and I—we are two real comrades. We have absolute faith in each other; so we can sit and talk with perfect

frankness— “. This seems to hit a weak point in Hedda, provoking the anger which leads her to burn Løvborg’s precious manuscript, which she calls Thea’s and Løvborg’s “child”.

The term “child”, which Hedda uses to describe the fruit of Thea’s and Løvborg’s work together, clearly indicates that Hedda thinks of it as an intimate relationship with sexual undertones. Her intense reaction also tells us that there must have been similar elements in the past with her own relationship to Løvborg. A closer look at what kind of comradeship this was shows interesting parallels to basic aspects of the relationship between Rosmer and Rebecca. Exactly the same words are used when the relationships are examined. As Rosmer asks Rebecca about her true feelings, Ejlert Løvborg asks Hedda if there was not a spark of love, “en stenk av kjærlighet”, in their relationship. Like Rosmer, Løvborg also seems to have thought that his female comrade had shared his own ideas and loved him the way he loved her. He asks Hedda if their relationship was not at least a “comradeship in the thirst for life”. Like Rebecca, Hedda is then, rather unwillingly, forced to reveal her reasons for her engagement. It brings into the light that they have had completely different needs as a basis for their comradeship. Hedda has enjoyed listening to Løvborg’s detailed reports of his bohemian life. In this way, she could get a glimpse into a world otherwise forbidden to her. Løvborg, it seems, has thought she wanted to “purify him”. He asks: “...was there not love at the bottom of our friendship? On your side, did you not feel as though you might purge my stains away - - if I made you my confessor? Was it not so?”. Like Rosmer and Rebecca, Hedda and Løvborg live in different worlds. They do not seem to understand each other, they have different experiences and different needs. The different values for men and women when it comes to how much sexual experience that is socially accepted, which is an important aspect of “Hanskedebatten”, is presented in this drama as well.

What the idea of friendships conceals

As a young girl in a bourgeois family, Hedda has access to the fascinating forbidden world of sexuality only through Ejlert’s stories. Any direct knowledge of sexuality seems otherwise denied and unacceptable to her. Her upbringing seems to have made her deny any sexual feelings she might have, or more precisely, to channel them into an activity that seems acceptable, like secretly being a *voyeur*, someone who finds excitement and pleasure in peering into other people’s sex life. The roles here are the opposite from what we see in *Rosmersholm*, where the woman is the experienced part and a free spirit who comes into a stagnant aristocratic family. In *Hedda Gabler*, this role in the relationship is held by the male part. And the way this difference is dealt with is similar though. The friendship is a cover concealing unacceptable feelings, and when love is declared, the friendship or comradeship is abandoned.

This class aspect in Hedda’s life, in many ways, echoes Nora’s background, as Nora also seems to have been fascinated by the world forbidden to bourgeois girls. Nora tells Rank: “...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...”

Nora and Hedda both represent the upbringing of daughters in bourgeois families: Sexual matters were not talked about, belonging to a forbidden world.

Decent women had, officially, no sexual feelings and sex was only accepted in marriage, as opposed to what was culturally accepted for men. Ibsen explores how the different standard for men and women is an obstacle for meaningful relationships. He says about Hedda that she is fascinated by Ejlert's world, but she doesn't dare to take part in it.

The darker side of friendship

So far we have seen how the idea of friendship serve to include both the ideal of equality but also to cover personal secrets. The drama *Hedda Gabler* also presents another type of friendship between a man and a woman, which also reflects an important aspect of this moral debate. This friendship is the relationship between a married woman and an unmarried male family friend, which in fact also echoes elements of Nora's friendship with Rank in *A Doll's House*. In *Hedda Gabler*, we see a much darker version of such a relationship. Judge Brack, one of Hedda's earlier admirers " (oppvartende venner), wants to be a friend of the Tesman family: "All I require is a pleasant and intimate interior, where I can make myself useful in every way, and am free to come and go as--as a trusted friend—". He talks about a triangle of husband, wife and family friend, but what he has in mind is clearly an intimate relationship with the wife. He wants to be a friend: "... of the mistress first of all; but of course of the master too, in the second place. Such a triangular friendship--if I may call it so--is really a great convenience for all the parties, let me tell you."

In her boredom, Hedda at first enjoys the idea of Brack being "a third passenger on the train" - a person with a cultural background like her own, as she has nothing in common with her husband. In this way Brack now takes over Ejlert Løvborg's comrade role in Hedda's life. But past events repeat themselves. Whenever Hedda tries to establish a friendship to a man, the elements of physical love and desire destroy her plans. Let us look closer at how Hedda and Løvborg's comradeship ended. When asked by Løvborg why she broke up with him, Hedda states that it was because he transcended the limits of comradeship. She explains: "Yes, when our friendship threatened to develop into something more serious. Shame upon you, Ejlert Løvborg! How could you think of wronging your - - your frank comrade." Her words indicate that Løvborg must have followed his sexual desire and tried to have his way with Hedda.

After Løvborg's death, Hedda seems to suspect Brack will do the same, since he uses the fact that he is the only person who knows about her part in Løvborg's death to force her into a sexual relation. Like Rebekka, Hedda then chooses to escape these threats of male sexual attempts in order to keep her secret and avoid the sexual aspects of life that she clearly cannot cope with. Hedda is a woman deeply frustrated by the conflicting cultural standards in her society. She is brought up to have what she wants, she is fascinated by the aspect of life which is forbidden to her, peers secretly into it, and she goes as far as she can to amuse herself. At the same time, she seems deeply afraid of a real sexual relationship and does all she can to avoid it. But her dangerous game is catching up to her, which leads to the tragic ending.

Conclusion

These four dramas shows us, on many levels, friendships between men and women as an opposition to traditional gender roles. Friendship at first seems like an idealized conflict free zone, beyond patriarchy, based on trust, loyalty and mutual respect, where a woman can experience equality with a man, where they can discuss social and political matters, be it personal and share their secrets. But at the same time, all four dramas show us that such a positive conflict free relationship in the long run cannot exist without love and sexual feelings coming up to destroy this relative freedom. The relationship is then forced to follow the given rules of patriarchy, where women are subordinate to male supremacy; financially, culturally and practically.

We also see how the friendship motive gradually develops from drama to drama. Friendships function to cover and hide secrets from the past, especially secrets concerning sexual attraction. The friendship motive thus functions to expose the different cultural standards men and women live by. The confessions of love comes in all four dramas from the men, and they come as a shock and a very unpleasant surprise to the women concerned. When love is declared, the friendships are ruined and there is no way back. The women are again facing the reality with its unfair conditions of female subordination and different standards for male and female lives.

The declarations of love mark dramatic turning points in all these dramas, as they are triggers to the disclosure of the illusions on which the female characters have based their plans. The four dramas differ on what illusions are focused on, but generally, we can, in following the friendship motive, recognize Ibsen's well known shift of focus from economy and sociology to psychology and culture.

In *A Doll's House* and *The Lady from the Sea*, the declaration of love implies that Nora and Bolette cannot get access to the money they would have otherwise been given within a friendship. This clearly shows how personal relationships are closely connected to legal and financial matters, making marriage a matter of survival for women. In *Rosmersholm* and *Hedda Gabler* we meet stronger, more educated and experienced women, but they still have to rely on men for financial support. Here, the different sexual standards are focused. Rebekka West has a socially unacceptable sexual relationship behind her, and gets engaged in a platonic relation to a man with no sexual experience at all. They are united in sharing their mutual need to deny love and sexual feelings, with their friendship being a cover up for feelings of guilt. Hedda and Løvborg's comradeship is also a cover up for forbidden feelings, his wild life and her wish to get access to a forbidden world.

We see that even if the limited options for women are clearly exposed here, the male character's lives also have tragic endings mirroring the women's misery. Ibsen shows us a culture that makes life frustrating for both men and women. They are victims alike, but in different ways. There are elements of hope though, for those who are able to free themselves from the cultural blindness. We see this in *The Lady from the Sea*, but we also see it in the contrasting couples in the other plays. It is interesting to see that those who come from lower classes are not to the same extent victims of bourgeois values. In *Hedda Gabler*, Jørgen Tesman and Thea Elvsted seem to have a prosperous future working together, united in the common project of

reconstructing Løvborg's work. They appear as a repetition of Krogstad and Kristine Linde in *A Doll's House*. They have less illusions and ideals, less fright or feelings of guilt, and they are able to adapt to the realities. The positive sides of friendship seem to be attainable for them, and in this way, real friendship is not only an illusion, but something that can be realized in Ibsen's dramas.

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Summary

The article explores how friendships between men and women are presented in the dramas *A Doll's House*, *The Lady from the Sea*, *Rosmersholm* and *Hedda Gabler*. Friendship is an important motive which functions to show women's subordinate role in the bourgeois society in Ibsen's time. Friendship seems to be a positive alternative relation to love and marriage for women, as it has the element of equality and freedom from traditional female roles. When love is declared, though, this hope is destroyed and it is revealed how all relations are involved in patriarchy and finances. Friendships also function for both male and female characters as an illusion and a convenient psychological cover for unpleasant feelings of guilt the characters are not able to admit or express. This functions in presenting the different cultural standards

for men and women as it pertains to what are socially accepted of sexual feelings and experiences. In this way, we see how Ibsen, through his dramas, takes part in the important cultural debate on sexuality in Norway in his time, reflecting different arguments in this debate.

Keywords

Ibsen, feminism, love, relationships, friendship, sexuality.