ABSTRACT

The Disenchantment of the Wonderful - A Doll’s House and the Idealist Imagination

During the course of the nineteenth century, the notion of imagination underwent a radical redefinition. From being the highest, divine, power of man to being subjected to a growing pathologization and degradation, the redefinition of imagination played a central role in the transition from idealism and romanticism to the emerging modernism and realism. Henrik Ibsen’s A Doll’s House (1879) may be read into this particular context with its ‘disenchantment’ of the ‘wonderful’ – a word which Georg Brandes termed the very keyword of romanticism.

Focusing on the specific Scandinavian context, where idealist aesthetics continued to be particularly strong, I will examine A Doll’s House from the perspective of the contemporary spectator in the context of an on-going Nordic aesthetic dispute. The contemporary Scandinavian reviews will serve to bear evidence of this dispute. In the article, I analyse how the play thematizes imagination and employs recurrent references to idealist culture in order to disenchant the romantic imagination of the wonderful. The analysis will focus in particular on the representation of the characters of Nora and Helmer, but also comes to implicate the spectator of the play.

Keywords: imagination, Henrik Ibsen, Idealism, Romanticism, philosophy.

BIOGRAPHY

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The Disenchantment of the Wonderful - A Doll’s House and the Idealist Imagination

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Its famous afterlife as a trailblazing feminist play has somewhat overshadowed a view of A Doll’s House as a response to the era that preceded it. When A Doll’s House was first performed at the Royal Theatre in Copenhagen, 21 December 1879, it was not only Nora’s famous exit that was debated. More than solely a feminist attack on a patriarchal, authoritarian society, the play was – also – seen as a confrontation with the romantic, idealist culture that had dominated the nineteenth century. In the following, I will seek to examine A Doll’s House from the perspective of the contemporary spectator in the context of an on-going Scandinavian aesthetic and ideological dispute concerning the transition between the romantic idealist and the modern conception of imagination that took place in the nineteenth century. The course of the nineteenth century had seen a drastic ideological and aesthetic re-evaluation, and the notion of imagination played a central part in this process. It thus seems relevant to look closer at how this redefinition of imagination is addressed in this play, which deals with many aspects of imagination such as make-believe, pretence, masquerading and, notably, the collapse of the fantasy of the “wonderful”.

Consulting the Danish and Norwegian reviews of the publication and Scandinavian premieres of the play will bear evidence of this ideological and aesthetic dispute, being as they are both observers of and partakers in the cultural debate, as well as provide us with a view of the play’s impact on its audience. These reviews provide the starting point of my analysis of the play, which will focus on the representation of the characters of Nora and Helmer.

Idealism runs as an underlying current that dominates the century stretching from Immanuel Kant’s so-called “Copernican revolution” to the modern breakthrough. The context of Idealism in relation to Ibsen has been explored in Toof Moi’s Henrik Ibsen and the Birth of Modernism (2006). Moi, in her analysis, focuses on German Idealism, especially that of Friedrich Schiller. The Scandinavian context is distinct, however, from the European in its strong focus on the idyllic and harmonic. Furthermore, Scandinavian Idealism was incarnated in various forms such as the natural philosophy of Henrik Steffens (1773-1843), the National Romanticism of “Nordic Poet King” Adam Oehlenschläger (1779-1850), and in the Hegelian aesthetics of authorship of taste Johan Ludvig Heiberg (1791-1860). The current of Idealism bore a strong influence, permeating aesthetic, religious and philosophical thought. Even in the late 1870s, idealist aesthetics was still dominant. This was also evident in the theatrical repertoire.

In the following, I will first introduce key aspects of imagination in a Scandinavian idealist context, and the reversal in the appraisal of imagination as illustrated e.g. in Georg Brandes’ illustrative analysis of Oehlenschläger’s play Aladdin or the Wonderful Lamp (Aladdin, eller Den forunderlige Lampe, 1805) and Ibsen’s Peer Gynt (1867). This will provide the background for an analysis of imagination in A Doll’s House, where I argue that a similar reversal can be observed.
THE IDEALIST IMAGINATION

The concept of imagination has long been an overshadowed aspect in studies of both performance and of the drama text and a precise definition of imagination is still elusive. Originally derived from the Latin imagination (of image, image) translated from Gekk Phantasia (of phantazein, making visible, phantasma, mental representation), imagination had since Aristotle, whose influence was strikingly durable, signified a capacity to form mental images and was thus conceived as a reproductive faculty, which “mirrored” the sensible world in mental images. In the context of Idealism and Romanticism, however, the concept of imagination has a specific cultural and ideological significance as a productive or creative force of man, as suggested in the German terms Einbildungskraft or Vorstellungskraft. Rather than a mirror, imagination would be conceived as a “lamp”, a force of divine origin casting its inner light onto its object.

It was precisely the concept of imagination, Einbildungskraft, which was at the heart of Kant’s “Copernican revolution”, which was launched with the Critique of Pure Reason (1781). Here Kant redefined imagination as a productive force, a transcendent power. Hence, imagination would become recognized as the essential prerequisite of knowledge. In the Critique of Pure Reason, Kant would also set up a fundamental rift between subject and object. The subject can never experience an object as it is, “Das Ding an sich”, but only as it is experienced, i.e. as processed by the mind. The imagination would be the central medium for allowing this process to occur, not only in reproducing sensory experience, but in synthesizing sensation and understanding, producing the “rules” allowing for the comprehension of experience.

This redefinition of imagination would later allow for the Romantic, Idealist veneration of the genius, since only the (poetic) natural genius was believed to be able to exercise the full potential of imagination. Only the genius could, through these potentials, access the ideal world of infinity. In the Idealist aesthetics, the purpose of art is to reveal a truth beyond the truth, that of reason. Thus, in 1833, Norwegian poet Nicolai Wergeland (1780-1848) wrote in a defence of his son Henrik Wergeland’s (1808-45) poetry: “A sublime Imagination! Three or four, in a prosaic sense widely different, objects in one merging, to be conceived by the same capacity that created it, by Imagination, but impossibly by Reason.”

For Idealism, imagination was a means of connecting with the ideal, an ideal reality, free from the constraints of the material reality, which was only a faint reflection of the ideal. Hence, also the Romantic fascination with the exotic and fantastic... In modernist aesthetics, art goes beyond mere representation; accordingly, Danish philosopher F. C. Sibbern (1785-1872) can describe a “double idealization” in which the Ideal is represented in an ideal manner. An idea which we also find in the works of one of the most influential and dominant figures in Danish theatre and cultural life of the Golden Age, Johan Ludvig Heiberg, whose adoption of Hegelian aesthetics had a marked emphasis on unity, idealization and harmonization. Principally, this was to be made visible in the formal qualities of the artwork, the conformation of the infinite with the finite, which should be “Reality idealised, since it would otherwise not be poetry”.

With the veneration of the ideality of art, it, like religion, becomes a means of refining man. Thus, for Oehlenschläger, the purpose of art is to nurture the soul: “to give nourishment to the soul by a true holy Communion.” 9 A view that was reiterated at the celebration of Oehlenschläger’s 100th birthday on 14 November 1879, in philosopher Professor, Dr. Rasmus Nielsen’s (1809-84) commemorative speech: “It is the Poet’s Word, the Word of Imagination that gives wings to the Soul.” 10 Art was thus a vehicle, or “lamp” as described above, for letting the divine light of the ideal shine out onto the beholder. The idea of a divine relation between imago and art was thus still persistent when A Doll’s House was first performed. Accordingly, Norwegian professor and theologian Fredrik Petersen (1839-1909) in his review stated: “Art is a child of the human being’s creative gift in its highest ideality, the gift which takes him closest to divinity.” 11 However, the concept of the idealist imagination had been significantly contextual, especially in the latter part of the nineteenth century.

FROM ALADDIN TO PEER GYNT

The Romantic veneration of the poetic genius was later analysed by Georg Brandes (1842-1927) in his 1886 essay on Adam Oehlenschläger and his creative power, “Aladdin or the Wonderful Lamp (Aladdin, eller Den forunderlige Lampe, 1805). Aladdin, to Brandes, represented not only the foundation upon which Danish literature in the first half of the nineteenth century was built. It was the foundation of Danish cultural life as such—nothing less than the “the poetic bible” of an era. 12 Stating that, “[i]n the common view, Aladdin signifies […] the enforcement of Imagination” 13 Brandes defines the romantic imagination as “the poetic invention”, the free, creative invention that was “the watchword of Romanticism.” 14 When describing the influence of the figure of Aladdin in Danish culture, Brandes chose the image of light, not only of a lamp, but of a gigantic lighthouse to describe the immense impact of Oehlenschläger’s character: “There he stands, this Aladdin, with the radiant lamp held high in his hand, the formative figure of Denmark’s entire intellectual life in this century, like a gigantic light-bearing statue illuminating the entrance to a harbour.” 15 While Brandes did hold Aladdin in high regard, his analysis places it in a context of which he is markedly critical, namely the context of Romanticism and Idealism. Accordingly, the character of Aladdin, in Brandes’ perspective, is also the personification of the naive, free poetic spirit that is characteristic of Danish as well as Nordic Biedermeier Romanticism.

While we should be cautious of Brandes’ bias, the reversal in the view of imagination that he describes is notable. The counterpart to Aladdin Brandes found in the plays of Ibsen, in particular Peer Gynt: “The polar opposite to Aladdin is Peer Gynt [sic]. Like Aladdin is the glorification of imagination, Peer Gynt is the declaration of war against it. To Oehlenschläger the life of imagination is the grandest, to Ibsen the most dangerous and indeed degrading of all. The imagination is Aladdin’s blues and cause of his genius; it is Peer Gynt’s misery and causes his wretchedness. The same very power, which to Oehlenschläger is truth and life, is to Ibsen the lie that evades life.” 16

Imagination has, states Brandes, been entirely reevaluated: “for the same, which in Aladdin is the beautiful dream is in Peer Gynt the laithsome delusion.” 17 The opposition that Brandes sets up here between Aladdin and Peer Gynt is illustrative of the development in the understanding of imagination that took place in the nineteenth century. From wonderful dream and ideal truth to pathology, fantastical escapism and illusory lies, from worship to degradation, imagination underwent a radical redefinition where the relation of imagination and reality was turned upside down. And the light of the lamp became connected with diversion rather than revelation. A key term is fantasteri, which can be translated as delusion or revete, the fantaser being the escapists, or the dreamer, disengaged with real life. This was the topic of Danish writer Hans Egede Schack’s (1820-59) novel De Phantaster (Phantasten, 1857), a story of the coming of age of three young men, facing the negative consequences of fantasy, from childhood’s playful fantasies to adulthoods’ erotic fantasies and escapism, the pathological imagination and the inevitable confrontation with the demands of reality.

Søren Kierkegaard (1813-55) was one of the first philosophers to contest the idealist imagination, arguing: “The fantastic is generally that which leads a person out into the infinite in such a way that it only leads him away from himself and thereby prevents him from coming back to himself.” 18 The imagination, so to speak, becomes a flickering light that leads man astray, leading him away from himself. Kierkegaard too, defines imagination (Indbildningskraft) as idealization, as “the faculty of representing perfection (idealization).” 19 However, since imagination is idealization it is alluring and therefore deceptive. While imagination can be a positive force in its potential to save man from the pains of reality, there lies a danger in the liability of losing touch with reality and one’s inner, true life altogether. Further, precisely because imagination can only idealize, its shortcomings become evident when dealing with the sufferings of everyday life.
but suffering, on the other hand, is something the imagination cannot represent, except in a rendering which represents it as already perfected (idealized), that is, softened, toned-down, foreshorted.” The wording here is in significant contrast to the romantic conception of imagination as an emanating, complete perfection. The ideal that imagination produces is, in fact, imperfection, since “the imaginary picture, that is, the picture which the imagination presents and fixes, is after all, in a certain sense, unreality, it lacks the reality of time and duration and of the earthly life with its difficulties and sufferings.”

The imagination of the Romantic Idealism became, as it were, disenchanted. This disenchantment also comes to mark the end of an ideological era, as Prophets in Philosophy Richard Kearney describes it: “The collapse of imagination’s dream before the encroaching realities of historical existence, is the point where romantic idealism ends and existentialism begins.”

The initial wave of enthusiasm for imagination inevitably led to an equal disillusionment. The “extravagant claims for man’s creative power” that the romantic imagination had declared simply stood in such contrast to the modern industrialised, post-revolutionary reality that it could not be upheld. As Prophets in Philosophy Richard Kearney explains it, “one key reason why the imagination became pathologized was its potential to turn the mind within, away from engagement with the world.”

The relation between the real and the ideal thus becomes reversed and the ideal replaced by the imaginary, an as escapist inferior sphere that is in sharp contrast with reality. Accordingly, the relation of art to reality is reversed too. In 1901, Brandes would describe this reversal of imagination as follows: “For a long time and in many countries imagination was regarded as a kind of giant spider which out of itself span filaments of the brain in all sorts of beautiful figures; now it is probably rather conceived as a plant that draws all its nourishment from the earth wherein only it thrives: the poet’s observations and experiences.” No longer can art be conceived as conveying an otherworldly ideal, but must take its inspiration from the real life that the artist observes and, e.g. in Brandes’ aesthetics, debates.

**A DOLL’S HOUSE BETWEEN REACTIONARY IDEALISM AND PROGRESSIVE REALISM**

The view of the play as a confrontation with the aesthetic and ideological values of the nineteenth century is also evident in the Scandinavian reviews of A Doll’s House. As Eduard Brandes (1847-1931), brother of Georg Brandes, wrote: “A Doll’s House is a contribution to the strife between the fictionalities in Denmark-Norway and progressive literature. It is a strike against those who believe that they can confine poetry within the barriers of conventional morality.” It was a blatant attack on social, cultural, religious and aesthetic values as such, here described by liberal journalist Erik Vullum (1859-1916): “A Doll’s House is the individual’s opposition against the demands of traditional religion and the way society is organised, carried out with a ruthless consequence which has never before been seen in our literature.”

A Doll’s House became part of an on-going ideological polemic in which the reviewers were far from neutral observers, but rather active partakers. For the progressive advocates of realism, these values were the ideas of the times gone by: values which for the opponents of the play were still wholly of the present. What the positive reviewers commended was precisely what the negative reviewers condemned. So, while the favourable reviewers praised the triumph of realism and thus the defeat of Romantic Idealism, the critics reproached it. At the one end of the spectrum stood Helme, along with ‘the Helmes’ of the bourgeois society, as feminist author Amalie Skram (1846-1905) wrote in her review, the authority, the upholder of the idealist tenets; at the other end Nora, the child coming of age, rebelling against these principles; principles which were still far from defeated. As theatre historian Robert Neiendam expressed it: “Ibsen stroke hard, because he cut in living flesh.”

So what principles and ideas did Ibsen strike out against and how does this relate to the conception of imagination? In the following, I will analyse how the play thematizes imagination and employs recurrent references to idealist culture in order to ‘disenchant’ the romantic imagination, focusing in particular on the representation of the characters of Nora and Helmer.

**THE DISENCHANTMENT OF IMAGINATION**

In this context of an on-going cultural polemic the characters of Nora and Helmer were seen as symbols of recognizable societal characters, as observed by Vullum: “Helmer and Nora are individual figures, but at the same time they are typical and more than typical. There is something symbolic in them and about them, Helmer is an expression of external, vacuous authority; Nora is the opposition that breaks with this external authority, and however well this is covered, its symbolism eventually announces itself in our thoughts.”

This symbolic dichotomy was also suggested in the Danish casting. The world’s first Nora was played by Betty Heinings (1856-1939), famous for her repertoire of the ‘stock characters’ Lenora, the ingénue of Ludwig Holberg’s comedies. To the contemporary spectator, this background was recognised in the initial childish characterization of Nora, but stood in stark contrast to the determined, mature Nora of Act III. In contrast, the role of Torvild Helmer was portrayed by Emil Poulsen (1842-1911), a classic romantic actor. Torvild Helmer is the personification of the idealist aesthetic; noble, of high moral standards and refined taste. Traits that Poulsen emphasized in his portrayal of Helmer. Appearance and aesthetics, to Helmer, are key, already as laid out in Ibsen’s opening stage directions. His home is carefully decorated: carpeted floors, engravings, books in fine bindings and the piano, an expensive item in the lawyer’s bourgeois home. The Danish world premiere, directed by H. P. Holst (1811-93), emphasized the aesthetic idealism even further by displaying a bust of Venus in Helmer’s bookcase and engravings of romantic icons such as Beethoven and Mozart (the quintessential Aladdinesque prodigy) hung over the piano. Above these images hung a copy of Raphael’s Sistine Madonna (The Madonna Standing on Clouds with SS. Sixtus and Barbara, 1513-14), a painting, which had reached a cult-like status in Romanticism where it signified a particular poetic spirit of divine inspiration. Further, mahogany furniture and gilded branched candlesticks, statues and figures along with a second bookcase with sheets of music also served to establish a home of refined taste. A similar strategy could be observed in the Swedish premiere, which featured figures of Goethe, Schiller and Ode Bull as well as Raphael’s Sistine Madonna. The Christmas tree too was a potent social symbol that also had specific Idealist connotations.

It was, however, a home with an attractiveness that reviewers recognized as a surface only, disen-gaged with reality, as described by Vullum: “Lawyer Helmer is a typical representative for what we ordi-narily understand by beauty, but with him, beauty is merely another expression of outward glitter, and that is the meaning of the word in most people’s mouths. Beauty means the anti-aristocratic withdrawal from the world with its needs, reality and democracy, beauty is life among attractively bound and tame books, Persian carpets, lamps and candle-labas [...]. To embroider is lovelier than to knit, as Helmer says. But it is this interpretation of beauty, nobility and life’s values that Henrik Ibsen has tried to break down in A Doll’s House.” It should be noted here, how the reviewer exactly voices the dichotomy between on the one hand ideal, refined and notoriously disen-gaged beauty, which he sees as the standard, public attitude or life value, and on the other hand the call by Ibsen for a cessation of this view.

For those in favour of the play, Helmer was ex-posed as the personification of egoism. For Helmer, Nora is not only a doll, or a toy, but an ideal dream or fantasy in which he takes pleasure and pride. The ideal that he sees in Nora is, however, nothing but a reflection of himself. He is infatuated with her beauty rather than in love with her. He will not have her eating macaroons lest they damage her teeth. She must dress up, play the part. This, Nora has done to perfection, playing the role of the ideal wife, cater-ing for Helmer’s idealist tastes. Behind this fantasy lies a desire for authority. Helmer shapes Nora in his image. The theme of masquerading, the imagining and performing of roles and scenarios, lies recurrent throughout the play. The third act masquerade at Steingb’s, obviously, takes on a pivotal role, the end of the masquerade marking the beginning of the ca-tastrophe. But throughout the play, masquerading lies as the core of Helmer’s and Nora’s marriage, where Nora must take heed that there may come a catastrophe. But throughout the play, masquerading lies as the core of Helmer’s and Nora’s marriage, where Nora must take heed that there may come a catastrophe. But throughout the play, masquerading lies as the core of Helmer’s and Nora’s marriage, where Nora must take heed that there may come a catastrophe. But throughout the play, masquerading lies as the core of Helmer’s and Nora’s marriage, where Nora must take heed that there may come a catastrophe.
The sensuality he shows at night is also that of the aesthetician: she is adorned, beautified and appeals to his fantasy as a stranger; wrote Edward Brandes in his review.7 The dance that Nora rehearses in view of the audience and later performs at the upstairs masquerade out of view is the tartanella. Being an idealised expression of the essence of the Italian sensuality and vitality of peasant life, the tartanella in the nineteenth century was laden with cultural, aesthetic and historical connotations. In the public imagination, the tartanella was the quintessential fantasy of idyllic merriment of the imaginary Italy that, amongst others, August Bournonville (1805-79) portrayed in his ballets, and which had become identical with Italy itself. A fantasy, which in Nora's rehearsal is the exact opposite: namely a desperate misperformance in face of the encroaching realities, a tartanella characterized by a kind of savagery incommensurate with Helmer's idealistic aestheticism. In Nora's misperformance of the tartanella on stage, the idealized Italian fantasy is subverted for Helmer and the spectators alike.

The unsexed, but audible, and therefore nevertheless present tartanella that Nora performs at Stenborg's masquerade is, in contrast, an aesthetically pleasing tartanella, 'Helmer's tartanella. For Helmer, the aestheticized tartanella is the representation and awareness of his fantasies and desires. The Nora that Helmer desires is imaginary, an image, an idealized erotic fantasy: 'It's because I'm pretending we see Helmer's spiritual wretchedness, then the poet will have achieved his goal, exactly because, by making the wretchedness bourgeois decent, he forces us to see ourselves in the guise of Thorvald Helmer.' 24 In the failure of Helmer, the backbone of Idealism, the ideal of truth and decency is broken, and significantly, as Bang notes, the failure of Helmer points to the audience.

When Helmer fails to fulfill her fantasy of the wonderful, Nora must see her ideals that she had imagined in Helmer and their marriage, her ideal of the wonderful fall to pieces. The magical romantic idea, the wonderful, is exposed by Ibsen not as an ideal, but as an illusion. The wonderful, a word which in various forms is repeated throughout the play, again gives us a direct reference to the world of Romanticism and Idealism. Thus writes Brandes, paraphrasing a German study by Hermann Petrich (1845-1933): 'Therefore, Romanticism is fond of all direct and indirect terms for the wonderful. Such words are: fantastic, admirable, [German: wunderwürdig], eternal; secret, secretive, holy, heavenly, mysterious, enchanting, enigmatic; unimaginable, spontaneous, unknown; infinite, invisible, inexpressible, strange, amazing, wonderful, miraculous. – Wonder, wondering, marvell, miracle, miracle-working, flower-of-wonder, wonderkind.' 25

Thus we may see Ibsen's breakdown of the wonderful as a semantic deconstruction of the language of Romanticism. It was this romantic world that Helmer and Nora had cherished in their marriage: wonderful ideals, secret fantasies, enchanting erotic dances, holy mother- and fatherhood. Ibsen in A Doll's House exposes the notion of the wonderful as an illusion which is not inherent in, and indeed has nothing to do with, reality. For both Nora and Helmer, the ideals that they had set up for themselves are exposed as figments of the imagination.

Deception is a trait that lies at the core not only of Helmer and Nora, but of every single character of the play. In Kroeger's forgery, Rank's hidden feelings for Nora, Kristine's marriage to a man she didn't love. The only exception is found in the character of the nurse with her real affection for Nora, despite the desperate circumstances that forced her to leave her own daughter. The reality of A Doll's House is not a world of wonders and ideals, but a painful and ruthless world where mothers leave their children and where ideals are only masquerades.

NORA HAS LEFT THE BUILDING

For both positive and negative reviewers, the third act of the play – and in particular its conclusion – was deeply problematic. They simply found the sudden development of Nora's character to be too drastic. The psychological development from the childlike wife to the woman leaving her husband was unrealistic and unbelievable, and the idea of Nora leaving her children was – in the harshest criticism – even unnatural. Nora does not leave her...
home in a state of bewildered confusion or hysteria, which could be psychologically justified, but rath-
er in an inexplicable calm and composed state, as
the reviewer with the signature G. describes it: "It
is difficult to understand why the playwright in
this final part of the play lets Nora act with this calm
confidence and superiority when facing her hus-
band instead of, what would seem more natural, to
let her — exactly in a state of haziness and un eas-
iness — take the step that she does, in despair over
having been deceived in her ‘unergering’ belief in her
husband’s love.”

Seeing Nora and Helmer as representations of
decaying idealism and awakening individualism
or realism, rather than wholly psychologically mo-
tivated characters, and the play as a confrontation
between two struggling ideological positions, the
play’s conclusion may be less inexplicable. Reviewer
P. Hansen employs a quote from Kierkegaard’s Es-
sherOn (Enten/Eller, 1843) to describe the essence
of Nora’s ultimate choice: “When all around me
has become still, solemn as a still night, when the
soul is all alone in the world, there appears before
it not a distinguished person, but the eternal power
itself. It is as though the heavens parted, and the I
chooses itself — or, more correctly, it accepts itself.
The soul has then seen the highest, which no mor-
tal eye can see and which never can be forgotten.
The personality receives the accolade of knighthood
which ennobles it for an eternity.”

According to P. Hansen, Nora makes a leap towards the ethical stage
in her decision to make a choice that is true to her
self and precisely therefore do the Ideals commend
her choice. “Predictions are always silly, but I still dare to pre-
dict that the play A Doll’s House will not become a box-of-
ice success. It is too serious. Our aesthetic audience
will praise the Helmerian views, and find the play
unlovely and immoral. Henrik Ibsen must console
himself with the fact that he has created a power-
ful work of art of a shocking truth.” The corre-
spondence of so-called ‘Helmerian views’ and the
(aesthetic) views of the audience should once more
be noted.

Analyzing A Doll’s House at both a commentary on a building Scandinavian aesthetic and ideological
argument of a waning and an emerging concept of
imagination exposes a marked positioning of the
spectator, who is, on the one hand, confronted with
the exposing of the wonderful – the ideal – as an
illusion and the disenchanting the imagination; on
the other hand, invited to conclude in reality that
which is left unfinished in the realm of the fiction.
In a wider context, the defeat of Idealism did
come to mean the downfall of imagination. In a
time of growing industrialization, of major techni-
cal and scientific advances, the academic focus shift-
ed from philosophy to science. Indeed, there would
be no substantial study devoted to the subject of im-
agination until 1936 with the publication of Jean-
Paul Sartre’s L'imagination. In Sartre’s view, imagi-
nation was to be radically conceived as an essential
nothingsness. On the stage, however, imagination
was soon to be revived with symbolist drama, in-
cluding the later dramas by Ibsen himself, and thus,
the disenchanted imagination became a reimagined
imagination.
NOTES AND REFERENCES
2 This is the tendency of, amongst others, philosopher Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von Schelling, for whom art was the highest means of bridging the gap between the infinite and the finite, see Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von Schelling, *System Des Transzendentalen Idealismus* in Schellings Werke, vol. II, C. H. Beck, München 1965, p. 630.
8 Petersen continues: “Therefore it is not, as handicraft can be, pure reproduction, no, the human spirit must always have put its creative, idealizing touch on that which deserves the name artwork. The ideality of art is beauty, because beauty is the natural expression of goodness in external forms. Therefore, where art portrays ugliness, it is not the real ugliness, but the idealizing one.” Frederik Petersen, “Henrik Ibsen’s Drama A Doll’s House at the Royal Theatre” in Cede o Hylwe, vol. 3, no. 118, 4 January 1880. National Library of Norway, http://ibsn.nb.no/id/11195690 (accessed 5 January 2014).
9 Geog Brandes, “Adam Oehlenschlägers Aladdin” in Samlede Skrifter, vol. I, Gyldendalske Boghandels Forlag (F. Hegel & Son), København 1889, p. 236. Brandes continues: “for he, who was the emerse of the kingdom of work and events, was in Denmark for long times in fact […] considered the quintessence of all truth and all right.” My translation.
10 Ibid., p. 215.
11 Ibid., p. 230.
12 Ibid., p. 242.
13 Ibid., p. 243.
16 Ibid., p. 185f.
17 Ibid., p. 186.
19 Ibid., p. 185.
22 The director of the Royal Theatre, Edvard Falenbøk, had, when failing to hinder the publication of the text prior to the premiere, managed to persuade the Danish reviewers to still all reviews of the published text. In consequence, there is little discussion in these reviews between text and performance.
25 As the anonymous reviewer in *Borgens Tidende* some-what optimistically notes: “Realism in our time has triumphed everywhere in the visual arts and literature alike, and other Romanticism will here and there have a lonely representative, you strongly feel that its voice is but a weak reverberation of a movement, whose mission has been fully completed.” In Henrik Ibsen, *Et Dukkehjem*, Skriftet i Tor Aften, Kopenhagen, Gyldendalske Boghandels Forlag in Borgens Tidende, vol. 12, no. 2944 â€“ 2954, 18 and 19 December 1879. National Library of Norway, http://ibsn.nbn.no/id/11148930 (accessed 5 January 2014). My translation.
26 See e.g. Petersen, op. cit.