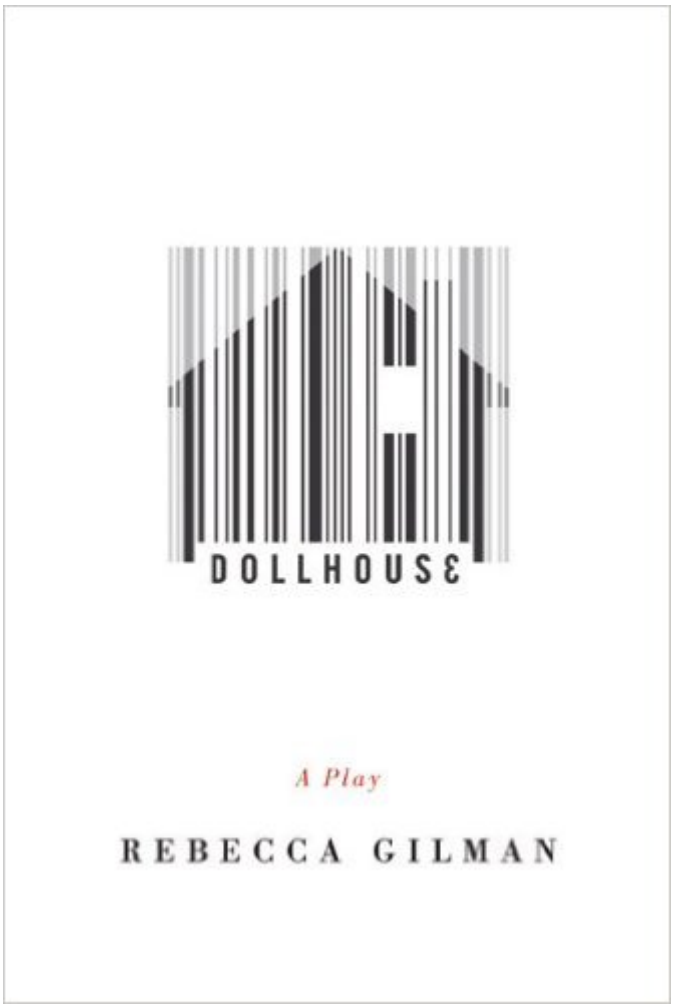
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Dollhouse: A Play



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Synopsis

Nora seems to have it all: a successful husband, three adorable children, and a beautiful home in the tony Lincoln Park neighborhood of Chicago. But what looks like the perfect life is woefully incomplete, propped up by dark secrets and bitter betrayals. While her husband, Terry, singlemindedly climbs the career ladder, NoraÃ¢â ¬â„¢s compulsive shopping and scheming pushes her ever further from freedom and self-fulfillment. As the lies on which their life is built gradually emerge, Nora comes to realize the true cost of what she thinks she has always wanted. From IbsenÃ¢â ¬â„¢s masterpiece A DollÃ¢â ¬â„¢s House, award-winning playwright Rebecca Gilman crafts a bold and insightful update. This contemporary adaptation brings IbsenÃ¢â ¬â„¢s classic into our century with a sharp eye for social satire and moments of dark comedy coupled with powerful human drama.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Ã¢â ¬Å“Savvy, droll and deliciously caustic.Ã¢â ¬Â• Ã¢â ¬â •Variety"A warning:Ã Â Dollhouse is the kind of play that could cause of difference of opinion with your significant other. Its message strongly resonates in today's society."Ã Â Ã¢â ¬â •Centerstage ChicagoÃ Â

Rebecca GilmanÃ¢â ¬â„¢s most recent play, The Crowd YouÃ¢â ¬â„¢re In With, was published by Northwestern in 2009. Her other plays include Spinning into Butter, Boy Gets Girl, Blue Surge, and The Sweetest Swing in Baseball. Her plays have been produced at the Goodman Theatre, the

Royal Court Theatre, Lincoln Center Theater, Joseph PappÃ¢â ¬â„¢s Public Theater, Manhattan Theatre Club, and Manhattan Class Company. She is the recipient of a Guggenheim fellowship, among other honors and awards, and her play The Glory of Living was a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize in 2001. Gilman is an assistant professor of playwriting and screenwriting in the MFA in Writing for the Screen and Stage program at Northwestern University.

I saw this play in its premiere production at the Goodman Theatre in Chicago. Terry (Torvald) is a banker. Nora is a spendthrift. Terry has also become addicted to prescription drugs, which in his line of work can be detrimental to a future for his career.Nora has a crappy credit rating. Terry won't seek help on his own as they've just bought this super expensive flat, and he does not want to rack up more debt--no matter that this is for his health. Nora persuades a friend of theirs to go get a loan in his name, and then give her the money.In Ibsen's play, of course, Nora forges her father's signature on a loan because Torvald will not borrow the money for his health. He is willing to put his family in jeopardy over this.I had the distinct honor of talking to Ms. Gilman after a performance at the Goodman, and it remains a highlight of the experience. One of the first things I mentioned to her was that I noted that she used the ending Ibsen later added to settle critics in her adaptation. She was thrilled that someone knew the original well enough to know that Ibsen did write a secondary ending in which Nora came back...it is set about a year later. Nora is eating macaroons and obviously pregnant. And having read several of the critics reviews upon my return home, I understood her surprise. I would expect a theatre critic to know Ibsen better and to know of the alternate ending.Granted, this version does not end with macaroons and pregnancy, just a willingness on both of their parts to work it out, rather than give up completely. It does pay homage to the added ending.I was very skeptical about the play. I wondered exactly how this play would be modernized because so many elements critical to the original piece were pretty much dated. Women can own property. Women can borrow money. Divorce is not the scandal it once was. So Ibsen's play is very dated -- still a significant work as it reflects his comment (not a perfect quote) about there being two different kinds of morality: one in women and a completely different standard for men. But the woman is expected to live by the man's.Nora, in both plays, acts out of love. Nora, in both plays, borrows money through questionable means, and is paying back. In the original, she forges a signature. In the adaptation, she has a friend borrow the money for her. In both plays, Nora lies about the source, claiming it to be an inheritance from a departed dad. In both plays, the husband (Terry/Torvald) faces an illness that requires a trip to cure (which is the reason Nora borrows the money). It is a source of stress. Both Terry and Torvald are shallow enough that they

are more concerned about Nora's appearance than they are about her emotions. Many times, this Nora tries to tell him, but he won't listen.And the crux of the play...the reason for the indiscretion is very important to Nora. It is love--and security. And a little concern over Terry/Torvald's focus on her appearance. She is not going to be young forever and one day, he's going to think to trade her in for a younger model. This is her insurance policy...what she did for him proves she is worthy of him.I do think, however, in Gilman's version, Terry is a bit more sympathetic than Torvald. His remorse after the big fight, when Nora leaves him for not being as noble as she believed him to be, for not loving her to the degree she loves him, shows that he is not concerned about the stigma of the divorce. He's realized that there are things more important.You're left feeling that, while not perfectly whole, the marriage has a chance -- now that they are both being honest with one another. it won't happen over night, but it gives you some hope that it might happen.While the Ibsen alternate ending is not that hopeful. It was written as an appeasement to his critics. Gilman's was written understanding how marriage is an equal partnership. His could not have ever imagined hers.The supporting characters of Christine and modern Krogstad are equally strong in this play.And yes, there is a focus on the commercial aspects of things. The relationship of Terry and Nora at the beginning is very shallow and superficial...but they grow as the story evolves.This is absolutely a new take on a classic. It brings it forward to the present in a way that makes it relevant again, and allows for the exploration of new themes. This is not a play about women's rights. It does not need to be. This is a play about how our consumerism has the ability to destroy us.

So, if you change a tragedy to give it a happy ending, it's no longer a tragedy. In this case it's reduced to feminist porn, which constitutes a misreading of the original play. Nora didn't "win" the first time, nobody did. That's the point -- that two people doing what they believe and were taught to be right can lead to something not so good. That's the meditation.Also, the ending undermined the additional conflict the playwright put in. The original issue (forging a signature on a loan document) was changed to Nora getting a kickback loan from someone American Torvald had loaned money as a banker, which is fine. But there was also an additional critique of American consumerism. In the Guthrie production this was crassly used as an excuse for product placement and brand advertising for Target, Crate and Barrel and Pottery Barn, while tisk-tisk quotes about American debt loads were put in the program. At the end when American Torvald submits to Nora, he acquiesces to her spending money they don't yet have. This is a contradiction of the basic premise, and not in an insightful Ibsen sort of way. Since the ending is really just an addition -- she walks out like before, but comes back -- it's possible to forget the last bit happened and just enjoy the play for

the rest.As a counter-example, setting another Ibsen discraced-banker play, John Gabriel Borkman, in 1950’s America works, like a small company did in Chicago about 10 years ago. Thinking you can improve Ibsen by changing the resolution to something completely opposite is a recipe for failure.

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