

Symbols and Symbolism - A Comparison of Nicknames in A Doll's House and Major Barbara

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Symbolism of Nicknames in A Doll's House and Major Barbara

The use of nicknames in literature is an important tool in which the author can provide insight into the attitudes of the characters toward each other and to provide illumination as to the nature of specific characters. Two such pieces of literature in which these attitudes and illumination can be evidenced are A Doll's House by Henrik Ibsen and Major Barbara by Bernard Shaw. The attitudes of the characters in A Doll's House, more specifically Torvald [Helmer](#) and the maid Anne-Marie, toward [Nora](#) can be evidenced with the names by which she is referred. In Major Barbara, the names by which the characters call each other not only show their personal attitudes toward each other, but also provide classical reference by which we can better understand the characters.

In A Doll's House, Torvald Helmer's attitude toward his wife Nora can be seen in the ways in which he refers to her. In line 11 of the first act, we come across the first instance of Torvald's bird references to Nora with "Is that my little lark twittering out there?" This reference is the first of many in which Torvald refers to Nora as a lark. Often this

referencing is preceded by diminutive terms such as "little" and "sweet, little." Torvald also refers to Nora as a squirrel, a spendthrift, a songbird, and a [goose](#), these terms also preceded with a diminutive. The significance of this nicknaming is to show Torvald's attitude toward Nora. Torvald sees Nora as small, sweet, unobtrusive and therefore easily controlled. This position is one he would like Nora to continue to occupy. In line 257, Torvald refers to Nora as "my richest treasure" denoting his attitude toward her as his possession.

Nora's nurse, and the nurse of her children as well, Anne-Marie, shows her attitude of Nora as well. In the beginning of the second act, we find Nora in a conversation with Anne-Marie in which Anne-Marie refers to Nora as "Miss Nora," "little Nora," and "poor little Nora." It seems to everyone that Nora not only acts as a child, but is seen as one as well. It is here we realize it is not only the man being overbearing and keeping the woman in what he sees as her rightful position, but the maid also contributes to the indoctrination.

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