

Theme or Issue - ISOLATION

A Handmaid's Tale – Juno – A Doll's House

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How theme is introduced (Opening)

Doll's House:

The opening of the text reveals how women ultimately are accepting of isolation in the patriarchal world of the text. Nora has recently attained a loan for her husband and thus proven her worth, yet is still unwilling to recognize or accept this as evidence or justification for a greater lot in life, showing how those affected by the detrimental actions of the opposite sex are willing to accept an isolated position inflicted on them by such individuals.

Nora attained the secret loan to assist her husband in the time of need, when he was ill, however this creates a dichotomy of sorts. On one hand, her doing so symbolizes her inner strength and worth to the marriage: she has stepped up and safeguarded her family at a deeply difficult time, which contravenes the female stereotype of passive and dependent on the husband. However, it also challenges societal traditions and conventions, whereby females, as isolated, were not supposed to assume such influence, as this would challenge the patriarchy whereby the man took charge of all matters in the household. Nora is more affected by the latter, lamenting that her loan could affect her husband if it became public knowledge, as it would ridicule his supposed position as patriarch: "How painful and humiliating it would be for Torvald, with his manly independence, to know that he owed me anything!" Her comment is telling as it completely ignores her worth to the family, subscribing to the patriarchy as it focuses solely on the man's situation and wellbeing, as he was central to the household. Nora is merely concerned with ensuring Helmer retains his reputation in society, which can come about if she retains her isolated position, unable to influence proceedings.

Handmaid's Tale:

Early in the novel the protagonist reveals the true extent of the isolation facing her and others (where they are not allowed freedom), as those who control her and other handmaids in the world of the text have gone to great lengths to ensure control and superiority through the isolation of the handmaids. This, in turn, represents the true extent of the narrator's isolation, as escape and freedom that she naturally longs for is not simply a general experience, but rather one that is specifically removed in different ways to ensure it cannot be enjoyed at all.

The narrator's description of different kinds of freedom represents how those who control her go to great lengths to ensure she cannot escape their influence, by isolating her: "It isn't running away they're afraid of. We wouldn't get far. It's those other escapes, the ones you can open in yourself, given a cutting edge." The quote indicates how there is not a general control of the narrator and others but coordinated and specific attempts to ensure they become isolated, meaning freedom cannot be enjoyed but also that it becomes an impossibility. The narrator presents various efforts to bring this about, a metaphor for the adversity that is created by those around her in charge of her world: "I know why there is no glass, in front of the watercolor picture of blue irises, and why the window opens only partly and why the glass in it is shatter-proof."

Juno:

The beginning of the film shows how relationships are affected by isolation rather than being wholly loving, seen with the stance taken by various characters in these bonds. Juno and Paulie are not shown as being in the throes of love and devotion for each other, but rather are shown at a considerable distance.

Such is seen near the beginning of the film, when Paulie reveals that he has longed for a sexual encounter with Juno for some time, "Do you know how long I've wanted this?", while the titular character's succinct response does not bring about a shared emotional connection but rather shows how she is isolated from her sexual partner: "Yeah". As the scene plays out Juno continues with such a stance, refusing to engage wholly and lovingly with Paulie, who in turn becomes isolated as a result; such is seen as he must allow Juno to dictate proceedings as he cannot emotionally connect with her if she will not allow this. This is represented symbolically with his sitting naked in the armchair, submissive and waiting for the moment when his lover wishes to begin the activity; he cannot initiate proceedings and hence instead is shown as isolated from the person and activity he is focused on at present.

Definition/ presentation of theme

Doll's House:

As the drama continues Helmer reinforces the idea of the woman as isolated in Norwegian society. Nora introduced the idea of the woman not having influence or any say in affairs so as for the male to assume dominance; Helmer now seizes this opportunity offered to him by her passivity, illustrating the dynamic of the patriarchy.

The patriarchy, as said, depends on the status of woman as isolated. Their acceptance of this position, already shown with Nora's guilt over taking the secret loan, thus creates an opportunity for the male to dominate and assume control over all affairs in the household, including those affecting his wife. Helmer's dominance of his partner is therefore not just significant for his actions, but also as this reinforces Nora's contribution to such coming about. This is seen when the villain declares his wife should not handle money matters, forbidding Nora from indulging in financial issues: "That is like a woman... you know what I think about that. No debt, no borrowing." The comment is on one level a source of dramatic irony, as the audience is aware of Nora's secret actions, however this underscores how the female has caused her own relegation to a position of isolation by accepting male dominance: the protagonist had the opportunity to use the loan to recognize and embrace her independence but chose not to, which gave her husband the opportunity to thus assume control of this area of life.

Handmaid's Tale:

As the novel progresses, the narrator's desire to escape her isolated state becomes so great that she becomes careless in her efforts. While this can be seen on one level as a bleak foreshadowing that she will not be successful in her efforts, it can also be taken that the narrator's desire to escape isolation is so great (hence representing how powerfully isolated she is at present) that she will merely embrace the possibility of such whenever it arises.

The narrator illustrates such carelessness in the twenty-seventh chapter when she admits Ofglen may be a threat to her plan but does not check herself in her various attempts to escape isolation: "It occurs to me that she may be a spy, a plant, set to trap me; such is the soil in which we grow." Such a comment displays no fearful tone of being caught or facing subsequent repercussions, representing the narrator's desire to escape isolation above all else. She therefore refuses to even consider the possibility of Ofglen being a spy, even though she admits this is a very real scenario, representing how powerful the narrator's desire to escape isolation is, as it encompasses her worldview and blinds her from all other considerations: "But I can't believe it; hope is rising in me, like sap in a tree. Blood in a wound. We have made an opening."

Juno:

Rollo's lack of empathy for Juno's situation suggests that one contributes to their own isolation; it hence appears as inherent to the self and therefore can only be overcome when the individual is willing to face up to the problematic situation affecting them at present. Indeed, the film as a whole can be seen as centred on Juno's coming to terms with her new role as mother of an unborn child, rather than viewing herself as an isolated individual as a result of this.

Rollo is clearly aware of Juno's new role, seen as he mockingly comments on her arrival and pregnancy: "Well, well. If it isn't MacGuff the Crime Dog! Back for another test?" His lack of compassion is noteworthy but he does reveal an obvious reality, that Juno has become isolated from reality while attempting to ignore her newfound role, mother of her unborn child: "This is your third test today, Mama Bear. Your eggo is preggo, no doubt about it!" While the colloquial manner in which he speaks appears heartless it may be taken that this represents the inherent nature of the role which must be accepted as part of one's everyday life (which Juno is isolating herself from at present) and continued existence. This is opposed to the fantasy Juno is attempting to indulge in by ignoring her pregnancy, pretending it isn't real, which leads to her at present assuming an isolated role, ignoring reality rather than having control of her living experience, seen earlier with the sexual encounter with Paulie: "Maybe you're having twins. Maybe your little boyfriend's got mutant sperms and he knocked you up twice!"

Characters who challenge the theme

Juno:

Many characters in the film are not so willing to accept the role of others, and as a result isolate themselves from such individuals, therefore causing their own isolation. This counterbalances with the likes of Juno who forge ahead to form their own roles, and reveals how such determination as

well as spirit to control one's own situation can often impact on others who do not hold similar intent and become isolated as a result.

Paulie introduces this when he rows with Juno, as she says the act of sex was not as meaningful to her as it was to him. As said, he isolated as a result of the protagonist's actions and outlook, and hence does not respond well to Juno's continued desire to influence her own situation, which here requires severing ties with her lover, albeit temporarily, so as to focus on her newfound role of mother. Paulie hence rejects Juno and becomes isolated from her, unwilling to accept her role which is based on independence. His criticism is also reflective of his desire to be in a relationship with Juno, meaning he is hence unappreciative of a situation where the two are not together and in harmony, where he can rely on her somewhat: "Like I'd marry you! You'd be the meanest wife ever, okay?" Poignantly, as the scene progresses he realizes the differences between their roles and that the act of sex, as shown, highlighted their contrasting nature and hence why such a divide is inevitable, for now: "And I know that you weren't bored that day because there was a lot of stuff on TV, and then 'The Blair Witch Project' was coming on Starz and you were like 'I haven't seen this since it came out and if so we should watch it' and then 'but oh, non, we should just make out instead la la la'."

Doll's House:

Nora, as protagonist, unsurprisingly presents the most forceful opposition to the isolated status of women. She is willing to reject all aspects of her life to escape such a depressing existence, realizing the only possible means of departing the patriarchy is to sever all ties with this space.

Nora's departure from Helmer is not surprising, considering his abuse of her over a prolonged period. Her abandonment of their children is somewhat of an initial shock as the protagonist plans an abrupt departure from the home: however, Nora realizes the only possible means of escaping the patriarch's control and her isolation is to remove herself from any possible avenue in which he can exploit her and consolidate his power, which illustrates the male's desire for control and how influential this can be if executed effectively. Nora recognizes this occurring as Helmer seeks to emotionally blackmail her by suggesting a retention of the family unit, symbolized by the reference to husband and wife as brother and sister, arguably a stronger blood connection: "No, Nora, no; I can't grasp the thought... But can we not live here, as brother and sister?" The protagonist recognizes this, and her decision to reject her children radically emphasizes how her husband will not be successful in his latest attempt to keep control of her, as this is the only other possible way he could possibly blackmail her in this form, as she has rejected him: "You know very well that wouldn't last long. Good-bye Torvald. No, I won't go to the children. I know they are in better hands than mine. As I now am, I can be nothing to them."

Handmaid's Tale:

Some individuals in the text do not focus on the isolation facing handmaids, but rather consider what they believe to be positives of these women's situation. This represents an alternative to the view of the narrator mentioned earlier and potentially indicates a reasoning for the dominance of those controlling the world, as those who could challenge them, connections of the likes of the narrator, are not concerned with such action, to overcome the isolation facing the handmaids.

Aunt Lydia and Gilead illustrate such a viewpoint when they choose to focus on various freedoms they believe women to enjoy, in turn ignoring the isolation they experience at present: "There is more than one kind of freedom, said Aunt Lydia. Freedom to and freedom from. In the days of anarchy, it was freedom to. Now you are being given freedom from. Don't underrate it." Their argument is that the women of Gilead should focus on what they have rather than that which they have lost (which has led to their isolated state), such as no longer experiencing sexism from strangers; while this is true, it does link back to what was mentioned about the narrator and other handmaid's isolation earlier, namely that freedom is focused on in a variety of ways by the controllers of the world so as to prevent this from being enjoyed at all. It can be argued that the women's focus on some of these freedoms is an acknowledgment and support of the efforts of such controllers, as it contributes to the difficulty of the narrator and others to escape their isolation, rather than assisting in such efforts.

Characters' various responses to the theme

Juno:

Despite Juno's eventual acceptance of her pregnancy and willingness to accept the newfound role of mother she does not forget or reject her previous position, that of daughter in the family she is part of. Her willingness to tell her family about the pregnancy displays a realization that they can assist her and hence that others can assist in overcoming her initially isolated position, as opposed to this just being brought about the individual as shown earlier.

Juno believes it appropriate to tell her parents of the pregnancy upfront, so as for them to be aware of all necessary information. The multitude of details she reveals and her willingness to disclose these - her pregnancy, her plans for the child to be adopted, the child's father - shows a realization that her parents can assist in gaining control over the situation, marking a difference from earlier where an ignorance of reality led to her assuming an isolated role: "I'm pregnant... But, uh, ah, I'm going to give it up for adoption and I already found the perfect couple, they're going to pay for the medical expenses and everything. And in... what, ah... thirty-odd weeks we can just pretend this never happened." This is not so much a juxtaposition with her newfound role of mother, which Juno is now embracing: rather it represents a desire to embrace this role with the help of others; such foreshadows what the film will now focus on, as Juno fuses her desire to control her situation with the assistance of others.

Doll's House:

Mrs. Linde is one character who accepts the woman's isolated role, and her actions seek to maintain a limited living experience. She does not seek out authentic emotional connection through the relationships she enters, and rather presents herself as wholly dependent on the male, a depressing position which the patriarchal society demands of its female members.

The woman's revelation that she only married her husband due to financial difficulties is telling, as it marks her as similar to other women in her world: "My mother was alive then, and was bedridden and helpless, and I had to provide for my two younger brothers; so I did not think I was justified in refusing his offer." Her contentment to accept financial assistance reminds us of how Nora will not assume the opportunity from attaining the loan to embrace independence and escape from her

isolated role: the woman willingly accepts constraints in return for salvation from debt, entering into a marriage where the male will dictate conditions, which thus appears as a loan of a different kind. Even later, when there is opportunity to forge a more conventional relationship, Mrs. Linde instead focuses on what the male can offer her, rather than entering the relationship as an independent being who can retain some control. She focuses largely on the

isolation she will escape from with Krogstad's presence, immediately recreating a relationship where the female is dependent on the male, thus foreshadowing further gender hierarchy in the future which will result in the woman retaining an isolated position, with no influence in proceedings: "Nils, how would it be if we two shipwrecked people could join forces?... Two on the same piece of wreckage would stand a better chance than each of their own."

Handmaid's Tale:

The narrator and other handmaids respond to and challenge isolation in atypical forms so as to maintain hope that they eventually, one day, will enjoy something other than isolation on a more emphatic level. On one level this can be seen to represent the attempt of the narrator and others to never give up hope in the quest for freedom from isolation.

In the seventeenth chapter the narrator describes how she and other handmaids steal butter and make use of it in a ritualistic challenge to those who impose isolation on them: "As long as we do this, butter our skin to keep it soft, we can believe that we will someday get out, that we will be touched again, in love or desire." The symbolism of such a ritual is obvious, as the lathering of the butter presents a cleansing of the control of others, so as to maintain innocence and avoid the corruptive presence of the controlling parties in the world; the indication is that avoiding such corruption is necessary as otherwise it will be impossible to eventually escape isolation and return to a previous state of freedom and independence. The narrator therefore metaphorically presents she and the other handmaids as enjoying such rituals away from those controlling them in a warped form of isolation (away from those who imposed an unwanted form of isolation upon them, where freedom is not allowed) creating a divide that is necessary if they are eventually to escape their current unwanted situation: "We have ceremonies of our own, private ones."

Key moment 1

Juno:

Juno's determination to ignore and remain disconnected from her mother shows how isolation can come about when individuals pursue their own desires. The protagonist's description of her mother and her new family shows how this woman sought to create a new role based on her own desires, but also how this has caused her to become isolated from her primary family as a result.

Juno reveals how her mother divorced her father and now has a new family of her own: "She lives on a Havasu reservation in Arizona with her new husband and three replacement kids." The mention of "her new husband" is a vague and generalized term, and implies both the protagonist's bitterness about the divorce as well as the belief that her mother abandoned her in the process of forming her new role based on what she wishes. This results in the protagonist's continued ignoring of and isolating of her mother, revealing that the latter's attempt to create a new position away from her first family has resulted in an irreconcilable distance from relatives who were left behind initially,

and now cannot be reconnected with: "Oh, and she inexplicably mails me a cactus every Valentine's Day. And I'm like, "Thanks a heap, Coyote Ugly. This cactus-gram stings even worse than your abandonment." It is significant that we only view the mother's role from Juno's point-of-view and hence in a distanced manner, as this shows us directly the reasoning for why such isolation comes about.

Doll's House:

Torvald's presentation of himself as Nora's saviour reveals males' commitment to the patriarchy and how this brings about the resulting relegation of women to an isolated position: such is his prolonged belief in his superiority that he believes it to be the truth, revealing how the mistreatment of women is caused by those who actually believe in the merits of such behaviour, rather than doing so for purely corrupt reasons.

Helmer arrogantly announces himself as protector of his wife, suggesting he has longed for her to fall into danger so he can prove this position: "Do you know that I've often wished you were facing some terrible dangers so that I could risk life and limb, risk everything, for your sake?" The repetition of "risk" is particularly telling and exposes the falsity of such a statement, as the patriarch's primary priority is to consolidate power, confirming he would most likely not act in such a manner, to protect his wife. However, this appears to be more influenced by his arrogant belief in superiority rather than the construction of a deliberate lie; indeed, it can be said that a prolonged period of dominance has created such a mind-set, and can be matched to his wife who has accepted her relegated position as isolated individual (with no influence in proceedings) to such an extent that it now becomes part of her subconscious, seen earlier in the dream scene. Such an example confirms how the patriarchy may affect each gender differently, but that males and females respond to it similarly.

Handmaid's Tale:

The description of the Center brainwashing Moira in the twenty-second chapter reveals how an escape from isolation, despite being longed for by the narrator and other handmaids, will be difficult to realize; their desire is shown as countered by the ability of the Center to remove such will and wanting so as to ensure control of all handmaids.

Moira's ability to begin to influence the women represents how isolation is difficult to escape, as their desire to escape this, previously shown as great, takes little time to slowly fade and weaken: "Moira was like an elevator with open sides. She made us dizzy. Already we were losing the taste for freedom, already we were finding these walls secure." The repetition of "Already" sums up what was just mentioned, how such a great desire to escape isolation is quickly undone, represented further by the narrator who hence presents herself as slowly disintegrating, a metaphorical reminder of how her entire worldview was based on achieving escape from isolation up until this point: "In the upper reaches of the atmosphere you'd come apart, you'd vaporize, there would be no pressure holding you together."

Resolution

Juno:

The close of the text reveals how one can avoid the role of isolated individual if they continuously work on bringing this about. Throughout the text Juno has embarked on this quest, to have full control of her living experience, as she familiarized herself with the newfound position of mother and included others rather than ignoring the reality of the situation, which required some sense of responsibility; this began with choosing Mark and Vanessa as parents for her future child as she saw them as a package, believing the two combined would offer her unborn child the best possible future. The later choice to allow Vanessa to raise the infant as a single parent is made on the same principle, confirming Juno does not isolate herself in the midst of difficult situations but still includes others.

As the film nears its end Vanessa and Mark's marriage ends, with the latter not willing to raise a child. However, Juno, after viewing the collapse of the Loring marriage, leaves a note which confirms that Vanessa can still become the child's mother, despite a change in her personal circumstances: we see the contents of this when the camera hones in on the baby's nursery, where Vanessa has framed the piece which reads "Vanessa: If you're still in, I'm still in - Juno." This hearkens back to the opening of the film when Juno ignored reality when trying to convince herself she was not pregnant. Now, when something similar occurs, which is unexpected and not what she wishes, Juno acts differently, including another and dealing with the situation full on, which results in her not being isolated from all others during an escapist tendency.

Doll's House:

At the close of the text Nora challenges the role of women as isolated, used by males as they see fit and assuming a passive, relegated role that cannot be challenged. Now she challenges her husband over such exploitative dominance, necessary to assume independence by making him aware of the significance of her departure.

Nora's attack on her husband, focused on his mistreatment of her, is significant as she focuses in on his true character. This is a symbolic reversal of the treatment she has received, when she was wrongly reduced to a mere stereotype earlier, such as when accused of not being able to handle money when it was her loan that saved her husband in a time of need: "When your terror was over - not for what threatened me, but for yourself - when there was nothing more to fear - then it seemed to you as though nothing had happened. I was your lark again, your doll, just as before - whom you would take twice as much care of in future, because she was so weak and fragile." Her focus on Helmer's nature destroys the façade which held their marriage together, namely his misguided belief in her apparent flaws, with the introduction of the truth necessary so as to inform her husband of the reasons for her departure and why she will no longer remain in his control, isolated and with no influence in proceedings where she has a justifiable say. Her doing so leads to an emphatic conclusion that she has nothing to stay for, justifying her departure as she will not remain for a husband she has no care for: "What do you consider my most sacred duties?... your duties to your husband, your children... I have other duties just as sacred... Duties to myself."

Handmaid's Tale:

Near the close of the text, the narrator reveals how being with Nick has had the effect of removing her desire to escape isolation. Her inability to find love and experience independence is a bleak

reminder of how the powers that be in her world dissect freedom into various elements so as to ensure escape from isolation cannot be achieved.

The narrator speaks of Nick, detailing how “The fact is that I no longer want to leave, escape, cross the border to freedom. I want to be here with Nick, where I can get at him.” Such a comment is significant as it indicates the narrator’s belief that freedom from isolation is not possible, and therefore there is a focus on making her confined and isolated experience that is life somewhat less of an ordeal than it was previously. The suggestion in the second sentence, where the narrator mentions “where I can get at” Nick, indicates she will direct her defiance and opposition at some other target now, bleakly indicating that the relationship will not be typically romantic but rather somewhat beneficial in another way, as she can focus her frustrations on some other rather than the controllers of her living experience who do not allow her to escape isolation.