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A Feminist Critical Study of Ibsen's A Doll's House

Research Project

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Dedication

TO ALL MY DEAR FRIENDS

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Abstract

Feminism is one of the main approaches of literature that can be used to analyze literary works. Ibsen is one of those prolific writers who contributed to writing about feminism in a literary style. This play, as one of the prominent plays of modern literature, aims to tackle the issue of feminism by depicting a new type of woman who casts her footprint to be free rather than to be a doll. She, at the end of the play, sets herself free from these chains of the society and becomes self-dependent. The research has three sections: the first section is the life and works of Ibsen. Section Two is about a brief look of feminism. Section Three is a feminist application to the play of A Doll's House.

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Section one

Ibsen's A Doll's House in Brief

1.1 An Introduction

This research discusses and describes feminism in modern English drama. We chose this subject at first because we are both girls and we thought that this is good subject especially in our society which has so many cases that happen against women. Also there are a lot of distinction and violence against women's rights. That's why; we will shortly define feminism in this research.

1.2 Ibsen's life and works

(Ibsen's) born on march 20th, 1828 died May 23rd, 1906 was a Norwegian playwright and theatre director at age 23. At 15, Ibsen stopped school and went to work. He landed a position as an apprentice in an apothecary in Grimstad. Ibsen worked there for six years, using his limited free time to write poetry and paint. Jan 2, 2015 As one of the founders of modernism in theatre, Ibsen is often referred to as "the father of realism" and one of the most influential playwrights of his time. Ibsen is the most frequently performed dramatist in the world after Shakespeare, and A Doll's House was the world's most performed play in 2006, and we course we will give an example which is a drama which name (a doll's house) and about A Doll's House is a three-act play written by Norwegian playwright Ibsen's which deals with the limitations and harsh expectations of woman (Adams, 2019) at the time Ibsen's work Ibsen's has a lot of works but we mention some of them (Ibsen's) major works include "Brand", "Peer Gynt", "An Enemy of the People", and "A Doll's House", as well as "Hedda Gabler", "Ghosts", "The Wild Duck", "When We Dead Awaken", and "The Master Builder". (Ibsensociety.org, 2019).

1.3 A Doll's House's plot summery

A Doll House: is a three-act play written by Norwegian playwright Henrik Ibsen. It premiered at the Royal Theatre in Copenhagen, Denmark, on 21 December 1879, having been published earlier that month. The play is set in a Norwegian town circa 1879.

Despite Ibsen's denial that it was his intention to write a feminist play, the play is notable for the way it deals with the fate of a married woman who, at the time in Norway, lacked adequate prospects for self-fulfillment in a male-dominated environment. It sparked a "storm of angry debate" that spread beyond the stage and into the realm of journalism and society at the time.

A Doll's House had the distinction of becoming the world's most performed drama in 2006, the centennial of Ibsen's death. In acknowledgement of their historical significance, UNESCO inscribed Ibsen's handwritten manuscripts of A Doll's House on the Memory of the World Register in 2001.

The most frequent translation of the play's title is A Doll's House, however other academics prefer A Doll House. A Doll's House, according to John Simon, is "the British name for what [Americans] call a 'dollhouse.'" "Rather than being preferable to the original interpretation, it merely sounds more idiomatic to Americans," Egil Törnqvist said of the alternate title.

Act One

The play begins with Nora Helmer entering her house with a large number of goods. Torvald, Nora's husband, is in his study when she arrives. He sarcastically chastises her for overspending on Christmas gifts, referring to her as his "little squirrel." He taunts her about how, due to a lack of funds the previous year, she had spent weeks handcrafting presents and ornaments. Torvald is slated for a promotion at the bank where he works this year, so Nora thinks they may relax a little. Mrs. Kristine Linde, an old acquaintance

of Nora's who has come to seek employment, and Dr. Rank, a close family friend, are both welcomed into the study by the maid. Kristine has had a terrible few years since her husband died, leaving her penniless and without children. Nora claims that things have been difficult for them as well: Torvald fell ill, and they were forced to fly to Italy to heal. Kristine reveals that she had to care for her brothers when her mother was sick, but now that they are adults, she believes her life is "unspeakably empty." Nora says she'll speak with Torvald about getting her a job. Kristine tells Nora that she reminds her of a child. Nora is enraged, so she jokes that she received money from "some admirer" so that they might fly to Italy to treat Torvald's health. She claimed her father gave her the money, although she had unlawfully obtained it without his knowledge (women were prohibited from doing financial operations such as signing checks without a man's permission). She has been working and saving in secret to pay off the loan since then.

Krogstad, a lower-level Torvald bank employee, comes and enters the study. When Nora sees him, she plainly feels nervous. Dr. Rank exits the research and expresses his dissatisfaction, despite the fact that he, like everyone else, want to continue living. He claims that the individual in the research, Krogstad, is "morally afflicted," in contrast to his physical ailment.

Torvald emerges from the study after his meeting with Krogstad. Nora inquires whether he can offer Kristine a job at the bank, and Torvald responds enthusiastically, stating that this is a wonderful time because a post has just become available. Nora is left alone when Torvald, Kristine, and Dr. Rank depart the house. Nora plays with the kids for a bit when the nanny returns with them, until Krogstad sneaks into the living room via the ajar door and surprises her. Krogstad informs Nora that Torvald plans to dismiss him from the bank and requests that she intervene with Torvald on his behalf so that he may maintain his job. She refuses, and Krogstad blackmails her about the

loan she took out for the trip to Italy; he knows that she obtained this loan by forging her father's signature after his death. Krogstad leaves and when Torvald returns, Nora tries to convince him not to fire Krogstad. Torvald refuses to hear her pleas, explaining that Krogstad is a liar and a hypocrite and that years before he had committed a crime: he forged other people's signatures. Torvald feels physically ill in the presence of a man "poisoning his own children with lies and dissimulation."

Act Two

Kristine arrives to assist Nora in repairing a dress for a costume event that she and Torvald intend to attend the following day. Torvald returns from Krogstad, alleging that she is concerned that Krogstad would print slanderous stories against him, ruining his career. Torvald rejects her concerns, explaining that, despite the fact that Krogstad is a hard worker who appears to have turned his life around, he must be dismissed because he is too close to Torvald in front of other bank employees. Torvald then goes to work in his study.

Dr. Rank, the family friend, arrives. Nora asks him for a favor, but Rank responds by revealing that he has entered the terminal stage of his disease and that he has always been secretly in love with her. Nora tries to deny the first revelation and make light of it but is more disturbed by his declaration of love. She then clumsily attempts to tell him that she is not in love with him, but loves him dearly as a friend. (Rose , 1998).

Section Two

Feminism in Brief

2.1 Definitions and History

Feminism is a movement of woman's right it's an idea to change society though which is the purpose is not to talk and or to get woman's right just, but it dreams about how to remove all of kind of oppression and try to banish all kind of differences and gender segregation and racism. Book shno mihr parwar . Feminism is usually defined as an active desire to change women's position in society. Linked to this is the view that feminism is par excellence a social movement for change in the position of women (Delmar, 2018) feminism is a wide range of political movements, ideologies and social movements that share a common goal to define, establish, and achieve political, economic, personal and social equality of sexes the underline premise of feminism is to seek women's equality and justice in every sphere of life and create opportunities for women to have the same access to the resources that are otherwise freely available to men.(An overview) In general, feminism is a political concept coined in 1837 It came to the French culture and the term feminism is derived from the Latin word (femino) meaning (women) and was first used about the issues of equality woman's right movement the definition of the term 'feminism' differs from person to person (Raina, 2020).

2.2 simone de Beauvoir

Which we think that she was the best writer and feminist, not just us most others thinks like that at that time, she born in January 9,(1908)in Paris French she was friend with big philosophers and writers who have given a literary transcription to the themes of existentialism Simon de Behavior is a feminist icon. She didn't just write the feminist book she wrote the movement's bible also. And she wrote a book called the (second sex) (The

Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica, 2019) and another one (Woolf before her) Simon believed that women is concerned the other and the lower gender by male but in a secret way because at that time woman couldn't tool money from any one they treat with woman just like a doll (Bressler, 1999)

2.3 Virginia woolf

Adeline Virginia Woolf born on January 25, (1882) and died March 28, (1941) Virginia Woolf was an English writer, considered one of the most important modernist 20th- century authors and a pioneer in the use of stream of consciousness as a narrative device. (The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica, 2019) Before the Second World War and long before the second wave of feminism, Virginia Woolf argued that women's experience, particularly in the women's movement, could be the basis for transformative social change. (Cornell University Press, n.d.) In 1919, the British scholar and teacher Virginia Woolf (1882-1941) developed and enlarged Mary Wollstonecraft's ideas, laying the foundation for present- day feminist criticism in her powerful work *A Room of One's Own* (1929). In this text Woolf declares that men have treated and continue to treat women as inferiors. Males define what it means to be female and determine who controls the political, economic, social, and literary structures. Agreeing with Samuel I. Coleridge, one of the foremost nineteenth-century literary critics, that great minds possess both male and female characteristics, Woolf hypothesizes the existence of Shakespeare's sister, one who is equally as gifted a writer as Shakespeare himself. Shakespeare's sister's sex, however, prevents her from having "a room of her own." Because she is female, she cannot obtain an education or find profitable employment. And because she cannot economically afford a room of her own, her innate artistic talents will never flourish. Being able to afford her own room would symbolize the solitude and autonomy needed to seclude her from the world and its social

constraints to find time to think and write. In Woolf's text, Shakespeare's sister dies alone without any acknowledgment of her personal genius. Even her grave plot does not bear her name; she is buried in an unmarked grave because she is female. (Walters, 2005).

Section Three

3.1 A feminist Analysis of a Doll's House

This play has many feminist ideas, the main subject or issue on which the drama *A Doll's House* is written is the issue of women. The drama centers on the Helmers, Nora and Torvald, who appear to have the perfect existence. Torvald is a wealthy and accomplished banker, and Nora is charming, gentle, and incredibly attractive. Of course, the couple had faced challenges in the past; when Torvald was ill in their first year of marriage, they were quite impoverished and struggled to make ends meet. Nora admits that they needed to fly to Italy to allow Torvald time to recover, and that in order to do so, she was obliged to borrow money from one of Torvald's employees, lying to her husband that the money came from her father. However, when Nora speaks of these tough times, it seems to merely emphasize the good fortune the couple has fallen into now. Wealthy, attractive, and prominent, the Helmers appear to be the perfect family. Yet the old adage holds true: appearances are deceiving. As Nora reveals more about how she has been secretly working to pay off the loan to Krogstad, Torvald's coworker, it becomes clear that there is a great deal of tension under the calm surface of the couple's home life. This tension mounts as Torvald tells Nora that he wants to fire Krogstad from the bank, and Krogstad subsequently threatens to reveal Nora's lies to her husband if she does not find a way to save his job. The play's action escalates, finally culminating in Torvald's discovery of a letter Krogstad has written, revealing the truth about Nora's loan. Upon learning that his wife has deceived him, Torvald becomes irate, and is immediately concerned with preserving his own image—even though Nora's deception enabled Torvald's recovery, for which he would presumably be grateful. At this point, Nora's transformation from a silly, childish girl to an intelligent, independent woman is complete. She realizes that Torvald saw her only as a doll and leaves him. Audiences and critics have a number of varying reactions to Ibsen's *A Doll's House*, but the

most shared conception of the play is that it is, without a doubt, a feminist text. In her article entitled "The Doll House Backlash: Ibsen, Criticism, and Feminism," Joan Templeton examines the many ways in which *A Doll's House* is a play about feminism and women's rights. [W]hen Nora realizes she has responsibilities beyond those of a 'wife and mother,' responsibilities she refers to as 'duties to myself,' she is expressing the most fundamental of feminist principles: that women, like men, have a moral and intellectual nature and have not only the right but also the responsibility to develop it. Templeton argues that Nora's very transformation from childlike and naive to motivated and strong-willed is in its very essence feminist; moreover, the feminism of the play is prevalent regardless of whether or not Ibsen intended it to be so. And it seems fairly probable that Ibsen did not in fact intend *A Doll's House* to be read as strongly feminist, stating at a banquet given to him by the Norwegian Women's Rights League that he "must disclaim the honor of having worked consciously for the women's rights movement...my task has been the description of humanity". It is apparent from such a remark that Ibsen did not write *A Doll's House* with the purpose of creating a groundbreaking feminist masterpiece. Following this reasoning, a number of other reviewers strongly disagree with Templeton's claim that Nora (and, by extension, the play as a whole) is intrinsically feminist. Michael Billington, a British theatre critic, disagrees with this feminist view of the play. "Far from being a plain feminist trumpet cry, the play becomes a nuanced study of two individuals who both have to reconstruct their identities," Billington says after attending a performance of *A Doll's House* at the Southwark Playhouse in London. (Guardian Unlimited). Here, Billington changes the focus from the character of Nora, who is the central tenet of Templeton's argument, to the dynamics of the relationship between Nora and Torvald. In this way, the focus becomes less about Nora struggling with her sense of self, and more about the identities of both characters. Similarly, in a rebuttal of Templeton's essay on

feminism in *A Doll's House*, Michael Werth Gelber writes, "In the dollhouse of Torvald and Nora, both husband and wife suffer from arrested development, which neither may eventually outgrow" (Gelber 361). Billington and Gelber, along with many others, seem to read Ibsen's classic as humanist rather than feminist, arguing that Ibsen's message was not that women should strive to find themselves, but that all people should engage in a search for true identity. *A Doll's House* was written and published in 1879, and as such, Ibsen was certainly aware of the prevailing attitudes concerning women. Women were supposed to follow their husbands and only think about frivolity and enjoyment before to the twentieth century. In fact, when it came to women and reading, US President Thomas Jefferson summed up the mindset of the period when he said, "Female education should focus on adornment and the amusements of life...dancing, sketching, and music." Women were not expected to educate themselves or become self-sufficient, resulting in total dependency on their husbands. These widely held attitudes were undoubtedly familiar to Ibsen, and while he argues that his goal was never to draw attention to women's difficulties, feminism played at least a tangential influence in the creation of *A Doll's House*. At the same Norwegian Women's Rights League banquet where he claimed that addressing women's rights was not his intention, Ibsen states, "I am not even quite clear as to just what this women's rights movement really is...It is the women who shall solve the human problem" (Gelber 361). Despite the fact that Ibsen pretends to be oblivious of the women's rights movement, he lays the duty of dealing with human rights movements in the hands of women, demonstrating that he has a strong regard for and confidence in women at the very least. *A Doll's House* has a protagonist who is supposed to serve as an example to both women and men, emphasizing the significance of discovering one's actual identity. Women and men, both then and now, may turn to Nora for examples of how to truly find oneself. "I've been doing tricks for you, Torvald," Nora

says as she suddenly understands she is nothing more than a doll to Torvald. That's how I've managed to stay alive. You wanted it that way... It is because of you that I have accomplished nothing in my life" (Ibsen). Although partnerships like Torvald's grip on Nora were far more widespread in the 1870s, they are nevertheless prevalent today. However, dominance may now occur in both directions; in certain couples, women rule the males in the same manner that I do. (literatureessaysamples.com, 2019).

In our opinion this play is about the issues and problems women in 19th century in Norway especially which is related to how they were prevented from working outside men were working outside and they had money women were not allowed to work outside that to get money that is why women faced a lot of problems this research talks about the problems of women in Norway society in the 19th century the main character who in name is nora our research is in a feminist point of view we have money problems in our research for example first problem is that how women can be confident to not accept men second how women are confident to work outside, third how women get money and also how women are able to solve the problems of their own houses especially when it is related to husband.

Ibsen concludes the play by portraying all of the female characters as feminists who leave their 'doll' lives behind to become free, meaningful, and responsible members of their society. Nora and Linde, for example, start off as slaves but finish up as feminists. As a result, Ibsen's "A Doll's House" becomes a feminist essay. In the history of theater, Ibsen created the first true "feminist" figure. Nora is a delicate and troubled creature who desires to be treated as an individual like the rest of us. She asserts her right to life while acknowledging her permanent inferiority.

Conclusion

This study targets several important points for its readers, as follows:

Feminism is a very important approach for literature and to understand the position of women in the society in general. *A Doll's House*, which is written by Ibsen, in this regard is a pivotal play that has been always interpreted in a feminist perspective. Moreover, women's rights are discussed in this study as to formulate the way they acquire freedom, sustainability, provision, welfare and dignity. This movement has been both political and social in origin which emerged first in France. Lastly, the study results in the belief that Nora's sense of self, freedom, awareness and self-respect comes only when she leaves Torvald (her husband) and his enslaving finance. She is the voice of new woman and she seeks a new form of life depending on herself.

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