

The Importance of Feminism against Masculinity with reference to the play A Doll's House

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Abstract:Ibsen, one of the most famous playwrights of the nineteenth century, has created a masterpiece that highly reflects feminism. He, from the external point of view, is a feminist writer. The play is written by describing the marriage relationship in the family of humanism. It shows the face of the capitalist society, exposing its selfish and hypocritical nature and the "doll" of women in the family. Nora, in this case, is a family doll, a victim of a patriarchal society. She had become a doll under his husband's hand and the hand of the masculine society. Based on Simone de Beauvoir's feminism theory, the paper focuses on Ibsen's personal experience in creating the play during that specific time which stimulated the growth of the women's movement. To stress the importance of the paper, the paper does not only focus on the female image by the character Nora but also on how Hermer stimulates revolt from Nora in reflecting the society.

1. Introduction

A Doll's House is written by one of the most significant dramatists in the world, Henrik Ibsen (1828-1906). The play was created during the second industrial revolution when the massive productivity development allowed females to engage in labor. Norway's history also made an objective condition for Henrik Ibsen to have a rebellious mindset. Norway has declared independence only since the 20th century. The overall economic development is low, meaning a late appearance. The impact of feudal society is small, creating a space for independent thinking. It is essential to relate the play to Norway's female liberation movement.

The paper will use the method of literature review and the use of corpus to expand the goal of the essay further and emphasize the importance of the purpose of the essay. It mainly focuses on the play's content to show how it answers the research problems. Additionally, it will use historical context to explain the impact on society.

The previous papers have focused on the individuality of females and the rise of freedom inside a patriarchal and masculine society. It raises significant problems that female needs to face in a male culture: low social status, control of behavior, and the deprivation of expressing thoughts. However, it needs to focus on the historical background the play produced. To clearly articulate the relation, specific historical text may need to be analyzed from the corpus to clarify the goal of Ibsen trying to create the space. Furthermore, to show how impactful the play is to society, it's crucial to look at how this play individually contributes to woman's proper movement. Past studies from famous scholars have studied how a particular character, like Nora, fights against injustice. The paper wants to show a bigger picture by bringing attention to

feminism. This points out the overall research significance. The problem with past research is that it focuses on the knowledge of feminism inside literary works. This paper desires to concentrate on how Nora reflects females' position through the idea of feminism inside society. Maximizing the research significance, practically speaking, requires attention from people in society, such as people not reading literary works. Bringing the idea of feminism to society can allow people to apply it in real life. The paper has also focused on the character Hermer as a stimulus to Nora's revolt. This means the paper focuses more on masculinity, emphasizing that the idea of feminism sprouts from a masculine society. The play has portrayed a potential example of a case under a masculine culture, impacting more female movements and showing historical background. The paper will be categorized into these different parts:

1. **How does a doll's house relate to society's historical background, and how does it impact society?**

2. **Methodology: Introduction to the methodology of the idea of feminism.**

3. **Result:**

3.1 **How does a doll's house relate to society's historical background, and how does it impact society?**

3.1.1 **State the importance of a doll's house being a drama instead of a play.**

3.1.2 **The historical background of Norway and Ibsen himself to create the work A Doll's House.**

3.2 **What and how does the play portray the concept of feminism?**

3.2.1 **How does Hermer's behavior reveal the concept of masculinity?**

3.2.2 **How does Nora resist? - How does Nora embody the way women resist in the face of male control**

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4. Discussion and Conclusion

2. Methodology: Introduction to the methodology of the idea of feminism.

Feminism is a theory that focuses on women's inequality in politics, power, and sexuality. It campaigns against issues such as harassment, domestic violence, and discrimination. These issues resulted from an external factor: patriarchy. In the play *A Doll's House*, the problems, directly or indirectly, come from the patriarchic system.

Simone de Beauvoir (1908–1986) was a French writer, feminist, and social theorist. Her famous work, *the second sex*, illustrates and provides a detailed analysis of feminism. The concept describes the woman as “the Other.” “One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman.” (Beauvoir 293) ^[1]

Ibsen creates an environment in this play that illustrates these ideas. The play is intended to become a medium for reflection. The feminist theory of Simone de Beauvoir, particularly her concept of how gender is socially constructed, is exceptionally pertinent to Henrik Ibsen's play “*A Doll's House*.” Gender, according to De Beauvoir, is a social construct that is imposed on people from birth rather than a biological reality. In “*A Doll's House*,” Ibsen examines how gender roles and cultural norms restrict and oppress women, evoking De Beauvoir's position.

It is De Beauvoir's critique of the societal construction of gender that is reflected in Hermer's patronizing behavior toward Nora and his assertion that women are “by nature inferior to men” (Ibsen 33). In the play, Nora is relegated to the position of a “doll” in her husband's home, where she is supposed to be obedient and decorative rather than independent and self-reliant. De Beauvoir's demand for women to reject the restrictions imposed by society and express their agency is echoed in Nora's struggles to break free from these limitations and claim her identity as an independent person.

As De Beauvoir presents, the concept of “becoming a woman” may also be found in Ibsen's play. De Beauvoir says women are made, not born, via socialization and cultural expectations. It is possible to interpret Nora's development throughout the play as a process of becoming a woman in De Beauvoir's sense. By rejecting the duties and expectations placed upon her, she transitions from a state of subservience and passivity to one of agency and self-realization.

3. Results

3.1. How does a doll's house relate to society's historical background, and how does it impact society?

A Doll's House, a play by Henrik Ibsen, reflects the social and political climate of the late 19th century. The drama emphasizes the gender roles and social conventions that predominated in the culture at the time.

Women were expected to be subservient and obedient to their husbands at the period, and their primary responsibilities were to care for the home and raise the family. They were prohibited from interacting with the public or participating in activities away from the house. In contrast, men were considered the family's only decision-makers and breadwinners.

The character of Nora, who struggles against her husband's authority and pursues her independence, presents a challenge to these social conventions throughout the drama. At the play's conclusion, Nora makes a shocking and ground-breaking choice by leaving her husband.

As it sparked discussions about women's rights and gender roles, “*A Doll's House*” profoundly impacted society. The drama became well-known in literary and political circles and represented the feminist movement. The play also helped other literary and artistic works that questioned gender roles and promoted women's rights get recognition.

3.1.1. State the importance of a doll's house being a drama.

A work's reception and perception can be significantly influenced by the genre in which it is presented. The fact that “*A Doll's House*” is a play is essential to its significance and impact.

The play “*A Doll's House*” is first and foremost intended to be played in front of an audience. The meaning and interpretation of the play can be influenced by the actors' performances, the staging, and the use of movement and space. The conversation and action are written to be seen and heard rather than read, making the play's impact on the audience more immediate and visceral.

Second, “*A Doll's House*” is a collaborative piece of art because it is a play. Each performance of the play is different because the playwright collaborates with directors, performers, and designers to bring the play to life. This implies that the play is adaptable and interpretable in various cultural settings and historical eras, enabling it to stay robust and relevant over time.

Finally, “*A Doll's House*” belongs to a more wonderful tradition of theatrical literature because it is a play. Ibsen was affected by the plays written by numerous playwrights before him, and innumerable authors and artists after him have been greatly influenced by his plays. “*A Doll's House*” is a testament to the ability of theater to examine the human experience and challenge social standards as part of this tradition.

3.1.2. The historical background of Norway and Ibsen himself to create the work *A Doll's House*.

The 1870s were dominated by strict Victorian social codes and laws that severely restricted the rights of all women and married women. European governments used the Napoleonic Code, preventing women from engaging in financial transactions. Many women who conducted their businesses or earned their wages chose not to marry

because the laws regarding what married women could do regarding finances were so limiting. By the beginning of the 20th century, things were beginning to change as the female suffrage movement swept over Europe and the world, and women were awarded rights such as the right to own property and the right to vote. However, for most people in the late 1870s, such eventualities were not a distant dream.

Henrik Ibsen's life experiences and perceptions of society influenced his writing, notably his play "A Doll's House," in a big way. Even though the space was not explicitly motivated by any one experience or event, Ibsen's composition was probably impacted by a few significant reasons.

Ibsen's strained connection with his father was one of the contributing factors. Like the play's protagonist Nora, Ibsen grew up in a society where women were expected to be subordinate to men. His father was a wealthy businessman who went bankrupt and, as a result, lost emotional contact with his family. In the play, this might have impacted how Ibsen portrayed male authority figures, including Hermer, Nora's husband.

Ibsen's awareness of the social and political upheavals in Norway and Europe in the late 19th century was another factor. With the development of feminism and the challenging of old gender norms, this was a period of enormous upheaval. Other authors and ideas of the day, like Charles Darwin, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Sren Kierkegaard, also impacted Ibsen. Ibsen once said the play was "the result of a painful process of growth and self-discovery." (Meyer 134) [5]

3.2.What and how does the play portray the concept of feminism?

The main character in the play is the couple, who are Hermer and Nora. Each of them represents one of the concepts, which are masculinity and feminism. In the last part of the paper, the definition of feminism has been clearly explained by creating a connection between the play and the character Nora. The text analysis method focuses on the play in this part of the paper. The uniqueness of the dramatic style of telling has created a difference in terms of these two characters. In the former part, the paper will focus on how Hermer reflects the idea of masculinity in society. The next part will focus on how Nora's resistance to oppression reveals feminism. By this contrast, the paper can stress the origin of feminism, not only daily but also in a broader picture of society.

3.2.1.How does Hermer's behavior reveal the concept of masculinity?

Helmer presents himself as a kind husband and a caring parent. In response to his wife's distress, he would make her feel better, play the piano, choose the party outfit, and even put his work on hold to practice dancing with her. Working my way up to manager of the banking department is a positive accomplishment. He had not engaged in any unlawful activity while at work and had exercised caution. But he also has a self-centered,

hypocritical side. His masculinity generally is revealed by his change of attitude. The speed of Hermer's transformation is impressive. (Li 124) [3]Before the first letter from Kerstie arrived, he had said to Nora in earnest,

"Dear darling! I always feel like I'm not holding you tight enough. Do you know, Nala, that I often wish there was something dangerous threatening you that would make me die, sacrificing everything to save you?" (Act 3)

However, after reading the first letter, his attitude did a 180-degree change:

"Hey! It's like I woke up from a bad dream! For eight years -- the woman I am most proud of and most fond of -- a hypocrite, a liar -- worse than that -- a criminal. What a terrible thing! Hum! Hum!" (Act 3)

"You have ruined all my happiness. And I've ruined my career for you. Oh, it's awful to think about! Now I've got a bad guy in my pocket... It was a cheap woman who caused me all this trouble!" (Act 3)

Then came the second letter, and after reading it, Helmer's attitude changed immediately:

"You think a wife should love me as her husband loves me? You just didn't have the experience. You did it the wrong way. But don't I love you because you have no ideas of your own? I never will." (Act 3)

"Yes, go ahead. My frightened little bird, don't be afraid, calm down, calm down. I'm in everything. My wings are wide enough to protect you." (Act 3)

This change of attitude reveals what Nora means to Hermer. Nora had become a doll to him where no free will is allowed. She can be sacrificed under Hermer's control to protect a man's prospect, wealth, and reputation. All of his actions are based on himself, including the words that he says.

3.2.2.How does Nora resist? - How does Nora embody the way women resist in the face of male control

Nora has always resisted male control and shows feminism in several ways. Her action and behavior become an embodiment of feminism in the play.

1. Questioning traditional gender roles: Nora questions the conventional gender roles imposed on women in her society, which called for their submissiveness, obedience, and dependence on males. (Ibsen 23) [2] She insists on having the freedom to think for herself and make her own decisions rather than being treated like a child or a doll.

"I must try to educate myself. You can't imagine how complicated it is to be a husband's doll-child" (Act 2).

2. Choosing to pursue her happiness: Nora's choice to separate from Hermer and their kids to achieve independence and pleasure is a feminist action. She affirms her right to live her life on her own terms and rejects the notion that a woman's prominent role is serving her spouse and family.

"I'm going to find out who's right, society or me" (Act 3).

3. Male hypocrisy exposed: Nora's actions reveal the hypocrisy of the males in her society who seem to

appreciate and love their wives while treating them like less valuable human beings. Nora challenges the patriarchal power systems that have kept women underrepresented for so long by exposing Hermer's actual nature and refusing to be intimidated by him.

"You have never loved me. You have only thought it pleasant to be in love with me" (Act 3).

To summarize, Nora has been defending women's rights. Nora's actions and attitude serve as an example for other women to stand up for their rights and demand equality. She acts as a role model for women trying to escape the confines of patriarchal culture, and her narrative is relatable to women fighting for their rights worldwide.

4. Discussion and Conclusion:

This part will focus on some of its research limitations in this paper. Firstly, this paper had been restricted by the requirement for word limits. This literary work is play-based, so this paper cannot expand further on other characters' roles and functions. This is because a play can only be fully demonstrated if every single character is being analyzed. The paper considers this as a limitation since more than studying two characters from a play is needed to generalize the idea of the whole.

Nora's decision to forego her responsibilities as a wife and mother is condemned by society because she is ruthless and unfeminine. Ibsen violated both moral and literary traditions when he created her. Nora acts against society's mores and morality, rejecting and resisting the home role. The play's theme of the issue is women's rights as human rights. To understand the truth about herself, her life, and her society, every woman must learn about herself and learn to stand on her own two feet. (Shah 353) ^[6]

Social conventions are in the search for the truth. Additionally, it addresses every woman's desire for self-discovery, behaving according to the truth even when that truth runs counter to social approval and combating. Whereas for Hermer, the capitalist society has enabled him to change his attitude at his will for whatever he wants.

Women still endure unjust treatment despite historical advancements in their standing and rights. It is essential to consider how to highlight women's demands, represent women, convey women's rights and interests, and work for social justice through writing in the face of this realistic suffering. Women's status, rights, and interests can be better preserved via the efforts of the entire society, and female awareness will be more appreciated and comprehended. (Mao 68) ^[4]

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