

Ibsen's Treatment of Women

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Abstract

Henrik Ibsen, one of the leading modern playwrights, realizes the social problems arising out of the marginalization of women of his age. His dramatic art exposes an in-depth exploration of familial, social, cultural, economic, and psychological conflicts faced by women in everyday life. Ibsen has earned popularity and fame among audience, critics, reviewers, and scholars around the globe through shedding a new light on his women. The article, entitled "Ibsen's Treatment of Women," focuses on Ibsen's plays in the light of his attitude towards female subjugation, marginalization, subordination, psychological trauma, dilemma, rights, and the suffrage of women, and oppression of the 19th century Scandinavian bourgeois society. It makes a thorough study of Ibsen's treatment of women in different phases of his literary career. It examines also Ibsen's skills in exploring powerful women, both in their individual spheres and in relation to the people around them. Thus, it endeavors to reveal various aspects of the women in the Ibsen canon. The researcher is of the view that Ibsen's plays are important for us today because they reveal powerful female characters that survive and exert their presence in the society in different ways. On the whole, this article attempts to look at the categorization of Ibsen's women, treatment of women and contemporary Scandinavia, role of motherhood, and critical evaluation of his female characters.

Keywords: Hedda gabler; Ibsen; Motherhood; Nora; Women

Introduction

Henrik Ibsen (20 March, 1828-23 May, 1906) was a major 19th century Norwegian playwright. Ibsen is often referred to as the "father of modern drama" [1]. Today he is considered to be the greatest Norwegian author and is celebrated as a national hero by the Norwegians. However, there was a time when Ibsen was an object of criticism and condemnation not only in his contemporary Norway, but also in the continental Europe, and in the conservative bourgeois society in particular. It is Ibsen who has given women a vigorous and strong voice through creating some powerful female characters like Nora Helmer, Mrs. Alving, Hedda Gabler, and Hilda Wangel. Ibsen's female characters are eminent in merit, intelligence, firmness, and integrity, in comparison with the males. It is widely believed that his plays deal with social conflicts, dilemma of freedom and necessity, marriage problems, unwed motherhood and divorce, hypocrisy of the church, career and family, freedom and fairness in expression of salvation, vicissitudes of human life, universal rights, and suffrage of women in the modern society. Ibsen's women are excited in sexuality, self-conceited in appearance, and agitation caused by the demand of the bourgeois society they encounter in everyday life. He wants to show us how women fall victim of sacrifice in spreading predominance of power and freedom from the lower stage to the higher level of the masculine society. He is a forerunner in exploring the notion of woman's self in gendered relationships in his major plays. He creates an array of interesting female characters in a predominantly male society. Women, in the 19th century Scandinavian societies, were constantly subjugated and marginalized by the members of the patriarchal society. On the whole, this submission attempts to focus on the categorization of Ibsen's women, treatment of women and contemporary Scandinavia, role of motherhood, and literary criticism of his powerful women.

Categorization of Ibsen's women

According to critics and scholars, Ibsen's plays can be viewed as a gallery of portraits of various kinds of men and women through social reality and psychological trauma while they are determined to struggle for seeking truth and freedom. His women characters outshine their male counterparts by winning the hearts of both readers and audiences, by demonstrating great courage in times of crisis, and in face of adversity. His strong women characters are marked with great devotion towards their ideals and enormous resolution in pursuit of individual freedom and existence. They are actually bold, revolutionary women warriors with independent and intelligent psychology and aspiration for spiritual emancipation. They endure great pains to defend dignity and rights as human beings rather than subservient to the male dominated society. An Ibsen heroine, like Nora Helmer, Mrs. Alving, and a fascinating one, Hedda Gabler, is first and foremost a human being, rather than merely a woman. The word "woman," in fact, implies the "role" intended for her by the society or man, who sets norm for her. She should be weak, gentle, comforting, caring, tame and obedient while for those unconventional women characters through possessing strong, intelligent, ambitious, resolute, and irreconcilable personality [2]. From Ibsen's contemporary age to the present; they are supposed to be the source of inspiration for today's women socially, economically, politically, and psychologically.

While we study Ibsen's play-texts, we are immediately impressed by his women characters that bear the testimony of strong personality incomparable with social conventions. Generally, Ibsen's women characters are of two categories. One of the critical approaches to his women characters is: a man is caught between a pair of opposing women, one is strong, independent and deviant, and the other is weak, tame and obedient namely "the demon" and "the darling" opposites in Asbjorn Aaserth's term [3]. Thus, Ibsen's heroines naturally fall into "demonic" or unconventional category. It is the strong deviant woman

who is fore-grounded in his plays, while mild, gentle, darling women are set in the background to highlight their bold and rebellious sisters. Sometimes, these strong women even belittle male characters. The unconventional heroines are based on the powerful personalities consisting of strong-willed, independent, intelligent, and full of vitality. In some cases, they are sexually passionate, erotic, proud, temperamental, highly demanding, and easily bored with trivial daily matters. With the strong personalities, they are confined to a male-centered society where they are deprived of basic right and suffrage as human beings in its full-vigour. Since society is based on the patriarchal structures and dominated by the patriarchal rules, it is simply not in such a society, a concept such as "individual" is gendered in terms of the male gaze.

A female individual is assigned with all her duties and obligations directed by the patriarchy. Men dominate over the "male-centric" world, while women have to be obedient and subservient. They are usually bound in matrimony, functioning as either toys or tools to serve others. In serving this, obligation is embedded in their social and female identity while their identity as human being with the right to happiness, and freedom is almost completely sacrificed. In such a patriarchal social framework, they are represented by a set of self-sacrificing and subservient attributes; those who break away from this norm are labeled with such tags as "deviant," "rebellious," or even "demonic." Most of his women suffer from this labeling as victims of the male dominated society for their rebellious spirit. Ibsen insightfully describes a range of rebellious characters, and unveiled the spiritual pilgrimage; they have gone through their persistent pursuit of emancipation, freedom, and bitter struggle to regain their identity and power as human beings.

On the other hand, there are some Ibsen's women who fall into "the darling" categories, including Thea Elvested in Hedda Gabler, Mrs. Linda in A Doll's House, Bolette, Hilde in The Lady From the Sea, Beata in Rosmersholm. The "darling" type is the embodiment of traditional virtues: weak, gentle, caring, and compassionate, capable of unselfish love, committed to their duties as the devoted wives and loving mothers. Scholars and critics have contributed to enrich this approach to the portrayal of women by using different terms like "good" and "bad," or "mild" and "strong." This type of categorization seems to be convincible based on Ibsen's notes: The mild woman represents man's ideal image of woman, formed in accordance with the romantic female role. The strong woman, on the other hand, contrasts with the traditional idea of what femininity should be, i.e. her nature does not coincide with the role for her framed by society. Male dominated society denies her formal education, or professional training, and the possibilities of finding a job which earns a decent independent life for her. It is a society in which women are homeless and insolvent. Ann Marie Stanton [4] points out that woman is constructed as a social being who is obliged to give herself completely up to man and child. Those who break away from this patriarchal social framework are certainly incompatible to conventions and will be put to death if they cannot observe these conventions. Many rebellious women often suffer from the persecution in such societies where the patriarchal system has been practiced for centuries. The categorization of "the darling" and "the demon" is also gendered and based on men's idea about how women should behave to qualify as "good" or "evil." Therefore, the so-called darling/demonic or conventional/deviant division is from men's perspective, and it serves to confirm male dominance, socially, ideologically and even linguistically. They should be deconstructed by the force of feminism [2].

Ibsen wants to show women as gaudy appearance and image in some plays, the role of women has overtaken in the role of men from the aspect of importance. He creates such women characters in his plays which are the reasons of conventionally and traditionally condemnation and protest not only in his contemporary Norway, but also in the continental Europe, in the conservative society in general. A conventional society is accustomed to seeing women from the male point of view. The real position of a woman is confined to her family. The decision-maker of a family decides about the important issues in the male dominated society, the task of a housewife is to accept them without any debate, without any protest. The protesting image of woman, in male attitudes, is very unjust. But, obedient woman, completely dedicated woman long for building up a happier family, tolerated woman seek freedom despite her husband's negligence and cruelty. Ibsen witnesses woman beyond obstructive and oppressive diagram. The playwright also wants to show woman's protesting mood, their destructive forces through creating powerful female characters, including Nora, Mrs. Alving, and Hedda. Ibsen, during 19th century Scandinavian women's liberation movement, was eager to prove himself as a prime figure of orator in that movement (My translation).

From the above discussion, we may say that Ibsen wants to highlight a big difference between patriarchy and matriarchy through creating women characters. Still now his female characters demand the appreciation of readers, scholars, researchers, directors, and playwrights. In this way, this study emphasizes on Ibsen's women into two categories with a view to unveiling social, economic, and women's images of his age.

Ibsen's treatment of women and contemporary Scandinavia

Ibsen's treatment of women was much influenced by the 19th century Scandinavian women's rights and movements. Naturalistic issues and women's questions were central points in his plays. Women demanded for legal equality, financial independence and economic solvency, and above all, suffrage.

The naturalistic movement, particularly at the time when it reached the theater—coincided with the fight for women's rights, and fostered the demands for legal equality, financial independence, and voting rights. Ibsen presented women in his naturalistic plays, most notably, Nora in A Doll's House, Mrs. Alving in Ghosts, Rebecca West in Rosmersholm and the title figure of Hedda Gabler. Ibsen's women were portrayed without moral bias as figures striving for authenticity against the unconscious hypocrisy of males in their patriarchal society. The naturalistic emphasis on women created a new dimension in the theater history, and Ibsen led the way with his strong women characters. His plays focus on the ideology of women's movement, but in theatrical images they were accessible, and the empathy created by stage performance encouraged women's identification. The views of women characters were given equal rights and weights to those of male figures in his social and realistic plays. By asserting themselves in opposition to the male dominated society, women revolted against traditional norms and order, even though in general, they failed and either withdrew from society, or be trapped, like Mrs. Alving in the play, Ghosts [5].

The situation of women in Scandinavia had become a subject of debate by 1854 when Norwegian daughters were first given equal inheritance rights to sons. In the same year, two Swedish economists focused on peasant women and servants that woman in the north was the household beast of burden and the slave of man. Moreover, contemporary sociologists were much concerned with contemporary

women's situations who pointed out that though women of the middle classes spared from drudgery, they were cut off from functional activity. They were either more intimate servants, or decorative hothouse plants. If their fathers and husbands were rich enough to keep them in indolence, they might be given excellent formalistic educations, but they were separated from the world and from life by a Chinese wall of proprieties which served to frustrate any desires for active self-expression. The wall was built of modesty, helplessness, delicacy, gratitude, and chastity was valued more than it approached ignorance. Supreme virtue was obedient. Men of the lower middle classes demanded women as the same behavior. If the lot of daughter and wife were drab, the unmarried woman would be dreary. She was not even ornamental, where she could perform some useful work in the house of her relatives; she was able to maintain her self-respect and was often welcome. Otherwise, she must become a burden, or seek refuge in some sort of foundation, or take employment as a servant [5].

The ideals of women frustrated self-expression and isolated women from public life form the context of Ibsen's women characters with Hedda Gabler as the most notable example. Similarly, although male guardianship of an unmarried woman was abolished in Norway in 1863, and after 1866 women had the right to earn an independent living, the situation facing unmarried women was still bleak, giving added weight to both the attitude of Mrs. Linden (who bemoans life of a working woman) and Nora's famous decision to walk out on her marriage and make her own way in the world of *A Doll's House*. In addition, Norwegian nationalism itself contained a symbolic representation of gender, which denied equality. For instance, on the May 17 celebration of statehood in 1827, the procession carried paintings of Nora—a female symbol of the Norwegian nation, the name of Ibsen's heroine in his most shocking early naturalistic play, while the national anthem was first performed on May 17, 1864 and codified different roles for men and women. A commentator wrote in 1996, "The song reflected the roles assigned to each gender in the construction of the national home: the strong father protecting his house, actively supported by his wife." She continued, "Against this background, it seems to be natural that men, as fathers and defenders of the nation, had the right to take part in political decisions." Women as mothers, "had their special function in the national home, but to take part in active combat did not comply with their feminism [5].

Ibsen had associated himself with women's movement in Norway shortly after writing *A Doll's House*. He clearly expressed his support for women's rights movement. A short speech reflected his desire for individual liberty and self-fulfillment for all not just for women, but for "mankind in general." Since his speech was delivered a year before he started drafting Hedda Gabler, where the heroine not only burns a manuscript that she clearly identifies as the intellectual equivalent of a baby, but also rejects constricting ties of motherhood in the most final way through her suicide, which means the murder of her unborn child, his comment on the role of mothers had particular significance [5].

A month after the official birthday celebration being over, Ibsen and his wife Thoresen Ibsen were invited to a banquet in his honor given by the leading Norwegian feminist society. Here, my study aims to focus on Ibsen's speech at the festival of the Norwegian Women's Right League, Christiania (present Oslo), May 26, 1898 as follows:

I am not a member of the Women's Rights League. Whatever, I have written has been without any conscious thought of making propaganda. I have been more the poet and less the social philosopher than people generally seem inclined to believe. I thank you for the toast, but must disclaim the honor of having consciously worked for

the Women's Rights Movement. I am not even quite clear as to just what this Women's Rights Movement really is. To me, it has seemed a problem of mankind in general. And, if you read my books carefully, you will understand this. True enough, it is desirable to solve the woman problem, along with all the others; but that has not been the whole purpose. My task has been the description of humanity. To be sure whenever such a description is felt to be reasonably true, the reader will read his own feelings and sentiments into the work of the poet. These are, then, attributed to the poet, but incorrectly so, every reader remolds the work beautifully and neatly, each according to his own personality. Not only are those who write, but also those who read poets. They are collaborators. They are often more poetical than the poet himself. With these reservations, let me thank you for the toast you have given me. I do indeed recognize that women have an important task to perform in the particular directions; this club is working along. I will express my thanks by proposing a toast to the League for Women's Rights, wishing it progress and success. The task always before my mind has been to advance our country and to give our people a higher standard. To achieve this, two factors are important. It is for the mothers, by strenuous and sustained labor, to awaken a conscious feeling of culture and discipline. This feeling must be awakened before it will be possible to lift the people to a higher plane. It is the women who shall solve the human problem. As mothers, they shall solve it. And, only is that capacity can they solve it? Here lies a great task for women. My thanks! And, success to the League for Women's Rights [6].

The statement stated above gives us an idea concerning Ibsen's full support toward women's rights and suffrages. It also shows women's duty and responsibility to solve human problems. His speech to Norwegian women's rights league notwithstanding, the younger Ibsen made a number of claims which qualified him for the position of 'social philosopher.' While making notes for *A Doll's House* in 1878, he wrote: "A woman cannot be herself in contemporary society; it is an exclusively male society with laws drafted by men, and with counsels and judges who judge feminine conduct from the male point of view" [7]. Ibsen argued that the post of librarian be filled by a woman and that female members of society be granted the right to vote in the meetings. Even more politically charged was his support in 1884 of a petition in favor of separate property rights for married women; in explaining why women and not men should be consulted about married women's property bill, Ibsen said: "to consult men in such a matter is like asking wolves if they desire better protection of the sheep" [7].

Ibsen's treatment of women would not be completed without mention of his reception, whether, or not one chooses to regard his work itself as a feminist, there is no denying the fact that *A Doll's House* was, enthusiastically, welcomed by feminist thinkers in Norway and throughout Europe. In closing the door of her husband and children, Nora opened the way to the 19th century women's movement. To mention only a few examples of the play's impact, Gina Krog, a leading Norwegian feminist in the year of 1880s and the first editor of the feminist journal *Nylaende*, called the drama and its reformative affects a miracle. Amalie Skram, Norway's foremost naturalist writer and the first Norwegian author to treat women's sexuality, praised the play dramatically and psychologically, and saw it as a warning of what would happen when women in general woke up to injustices that had been committed against them. Regarding Nora's character, Pastor M. J. Farden commented:

Just as Nora appears in the final scene, free and unfettered by any bond, divine or human, without commitment or obligation to the man whom she has given her promise or to the children she has brought into this world—like wise, we will find the wife in the modern marriage, from beginning to end. The emancipated woman has taken her place at the door, always ready to depart, with her suitcase in her hand. The suitcase and not, as before, the ring of fidelity – will be the symbol of her role in marriage [7].

A Doll's House did indeed have a significant impact on the improvement of women's condition in Scandinavia as documented by Anna Agerholt in *The History of the Norwegian Women's Movement*. Gail Finney [7] approached the topic of Ibsen's women in the major prose plays by considering double standard and marriage and more extensively, emancipated woman and motherhood. It is expressed that beliefs in differences between masculine and feminine character and behavior are put into the mouths of narrow, stodgy, hypocritical, and unsympathetic characters. Ibsen's sensitivity to women issues had been praised for his creation of women characters. Regarding Ibsen's women, James Joyce pointed out: "Ibsen's knowledge of humanity is nowhere more obvious than in his portrayal of women. He amazes one by his painful introspection; he seems to know them better than they know themselves. Indeed, if one may say so of an eminently virile man, there is a curious admixture of the woman in his nature" [7]. Although the majority of Ibsen's protagonists are male, some of his most memorable and well-known characters are female: Nora Helmer, Mrs. Alving, and Hedda Gabler. Elizabeth Robins also claimed concerning his feminism: "No dramatist has ever meant so much to the women of the stage as Henrik Ibsen" [7]. His women characters are distinguished by their rejection of a strict division between conventional masculine and feminine behavior, by their disdain for public opinion, and by their freedom from hypocrisy that accompanies maintenance of the status quo. Their emancipated status is reflected in their appearance, language, and behavior.

Ibsen once wrote to his friend Georg Brandes: "What will be the outcome of this moral combat between two epochs, I do not know; but anything rather than the exciting state of affairs—so say I" [8]. This is standard for a life superior to the "existing state" are set by women in Ibsen's plays. Although it is not hunger and other material privations that indict society, their frustrations are allied to the present "epoch." Ibsen linked the situation of women in his time to that of the workers. He insisted on the nobility of character as superior to the privileges which come with property and adds:

This nobility will come to us from two sources from our women and from our working men. The reshaping of social conditions which is now under way out there in Europe is concerned chiefly with the future position of the working man and of woman. That it is which I hope for and wait for, and it is that I will work for, and shall work for my whole life so far as I am able [8].

Ibsen's women are not judged by specific "good" actions as opposed to "bad" ones by the good faith they bring to their acts. Their attitude towards sex illuminates their struggle for happiness. Men, generally, declare sexual pleasure inferior to more ideal varieties. Women who are endowed with critical clarity and energy are the most sexual. Ibsen's idea of freedom means emancipation from any kind of oppression. To Ibsen, the subordinate condition of women within the four walls of the house was like the condition of working men who were equally deprived. For Ibsen, women rights and human rights were synonymous. That is why he wanted to give Nora all those social rights

that society is not ready to give a woman. He saw woman as an individual rather than "man's dependent if not his slave" [9].

Ibsen's aim was to see the world through female eyes for establishing separate identity. They have never been encouraged to see the world. As though they were deprived of essential biological organs to see and to feel it, it is through men's eyes that they learn to see the world. The obsessed, blocked view of women never gives them the opportunity to realize "that before everything else [woman is] a human being [9]. They must step out to see the real world which is not arranged by men, and they must learn to construct their own opinions.

Ibsen's idea of independent women was different. What Ibsen necessarily wanted to establish is that it is the self-realization of women that can give them the necessary courage to strive to achieve freedom in the male dominated society; she should be aware of herself as well as of her position in family and society, Ibsen rightly said, "What you call freedom I call liberties; and what I call freedom is nothing but a constant, active acquisition of the idea of freedom" [9]. Woman's idea of freedom is still a burning issue in the 21st century. In the western world, women have moved a long way to achieve their freedom to lead their lives as their own. But, in third world countries, women are still struggling to achieve human rights. Ibsen dreamt of having a new world where women would be equal to men; their relationship would be based on equity, transparency, and love. His women's dilemma, struggle, and conflicts reflect every woman who wants to wake up "gradually out of a dream a delicious, grotesque, impossible dream" to live a free life [9].

Role of motherhood of Ibsen's women

Mothers are women who inhabit, or perform the role of bearing some relation to their children, who may or may not be their biological offspring. Thus, dependent on the context, women can be considered mothers by virtue of having given birth, by raising their children, supplying their ovum for fertilization, or some combination thereof. Such conditions provide a way of delineating the concept of motherhood, or the state of being a mother. Women who meet the third and first categories fall under the terms "birth mother" or "biological mother", regardless of whether the individual in question goes on to parent their child. Accordingly, a woman who meets only the second condition may be considered an adoptive mother, and those who meet only the third a surrogacy mother.

The above concepts defining the role of mother are neither exhaustive, nor universal as any definition of mother may differ based on how social, cultural, and religious roles are defined. The parallel conditions and terms for males: those who are, biologically, fathers do not, by definition, take up the role of fatherhood. It should also be noted that motherhood and fatherhood are not limited to those who are or have parented. Women who are pregnant may be referred to as expectant mothers or mothers-to-be though such applications tend to be less readily applied to fathers or adoptive parents [10].

Historically, the role of women was confined to some extent to being a mother and wife, with women being expected to dedicate most of their energy to these roles, and to spend most of their time taking care of home. In many cultures, women receive significant help in performing these tasks from older female relatives, such as mothers in law, or their own mothers. Mothers have historically fulfilled the primary role in raising children, but since the late 20th century, the role of the father in child care has been given greater prominence and social acceptance in some Western countries. The 20th century also

saw more and more women entering paid work. The social role and experience of motherhood varies greatly depending upon location. Mothers are more likely than fathers to encourage assimilative and communion-enhancing patterns in their children. Mothers are more likely than fathers to acknowledge their children's contributions in conversation. The way mothers speak to their children is better suited to support very young children in their efforts to understand speech than fathers. Since the 1970s, in-vitro fertilization has made pregnancy possible at ages well beyond "natural" limits, generating ethical controversy and forcing significant changes in the social meaning of motherhood. This is, however, a position highly biased by Western world locality: outside the Western world, in-vitro fertilization has far less prominence, importance, or currency compared to primary, basic healthcare, women's basic health, reducing infant mortality and the prevention of life-threatening diseases such as polio, typhus and malaria. Traditionally, and still in most parts of the world today, a mother was expected to be a married woman, with birth outside of marriage carrying a strong social stigma. Historically, this stigma not only applied to the mother, but also to her child. This continues to be the case in many parts of the developing world today, but, in many western countries, the situation has changed radically, with single motherhood being much more socially acceptable now [11].

A careful examination of complex, powerful women characters, especially Nora Helmer, Mrs. Alving, and Hedda Gabler shed new light on Ibsen's observation. Ibsen suggested that potentially or partially emancipated women, male-dominated nature of his society, affecting their thinking from birth; stand by the way of autonomy. This belief is reinforced by multiple portrayals of motherhood whether actual, prospective, foster, or metaphorical in his plays. In so far as female ability to bear children is the most crucial ramification of physiological difference between women and men, the issue of motherhood has been central to every feminist movement. As Julia Kristeva wrote, "It is not woman as such who is oppressed in patriarchal society, but the mother [7]. A focused look at Ibsen's mother figures discloses a similar message: maternity is viewed by those who are not biological mothers, whereas his actual either prospective mother, or deny their pregnancy, abandon their children, give them away to be cared for elsewhere, raise them in an atmosphere of deception, or neglect them. Motherless women inflict results from their own victimization by a powerful social norm equating anatomy with destiny; in the notes to *A Doll's House*, Ibsen wrote that a mother in modern society is like 'certain insects who go away and die when she has done her duty in the propagation of the race'. Ibsen bore a witness to a 19th century historical strategy which Foucault termed 'hysteria', or the process of defining women in terms of female sexuality, the result of which was to bind them to their reproductive function [12].

In literature, self-fashioning is related to an individual quest for existence based on the moral position, which puts the individual at odds with the rational, collective social institutions. Ibsen was a fore runner in exploring the notion of self, especially female self, in gendered relationship in his plays. He created an array of interesting women characters drawn by their romantic quest and struggle for existence in a predominantly male society. It is a quest for a coherent identity on women's part and their incessant search for self-expression, that have caught fancy and imagination of many young writers in the early 20th century. Nora's moral crisis in life, her struggle for self-fashioning and autonomy, her assertion of her emerging female self, and her ultimate determination to leave for family in search of a coherent identity have been noted with admiration and approval by many young intellectuals since then. Fascinated by Nora's

transformation from a self-effacing woman, who dutifully performs her roles as daughter, wife, and mother to become a self-assertive individual eager to define herself and reconstruct her gender relationship with others. The Nora-motif takes on a fresh look when protagonist decides to divorce her husband whom she loves in order to preserve integrity and existence. Nora, as the symbol of motherly woman, autonomy, integrity, and emancipation, presents the emerging female consciousness that enables women to re-examine their selves in relation to their sexuality. Many critics observed that no playwright could have created such an assertive, likable heroine without feeling sympathy for the challenges facing women at the time. Therefore, it is natural for the feminists throughout the world to regard the play as one of the masterpieces for women's liberation [13].

The portrayals of victimization by motherhood, or imminent motherhood, are as memorable as that in *Hedda Gabler* [14]. While Hedda is pregnant, the play abounds in intimations of her condition; as Janet Suzman claimed: "Hedda's pregnancy draws together every strand of the play." Hedda is the only main character who does not refer to her expectations; in response to the allusions to the possibility of pregnancy made by her husband Tesman, his aunt Juliane Tesman, and Judge Brack, she reacts with irritation or even anger. She supplies the reason herself when Brack mentions the prospect of a sacred responsibility. For the maternal calling of the conventional 19th century woman is thwarted in Hedda by tendencies that are viewed as masculine. The influence of her motherless, father-dominated upbringing is everywhere evident: in her taste for horses and pistols; in her eager anticipation of a contest between Tesman and Lovborg for the university professorship; even in General Gabler's portrait in the opening state directions, before we meet characters, as occupying a prominent place in the Tesmans' drawing room. Explaining the play's title, Ibsen wrote: "I intended to indicate that as a personality she is to be regarded rather as her father's daughter than as her husband's wife" [7]. As Elizabeth Hardwick [15] also pointed out that Hedda's husband is "much more of a girl than she is" Hardwick [15], while she was brought up by a general, he was raised by two maiden aunts.

Hedda's society provides few outlets for her masculine ambition. Her comment to Brack-'I just stand here and shoot into the blue' is loaded in multiple respects. In the face of her own aimlessness, she seeks masculine experience by pressing Lovborg to confess his debaucheries to her as her insight into a world 'that she isn't supposed to know anything about', conjecturing that she could make it for her life's goal to encourage Tesman to go into politics. As in the play, Hedda Gabler, a clash between Hedda's unfeminine inclinations and the step she takes down the feminine path of marriage and pregnancy results in hysteria. Her gestures are as telling as her words: drawing the curtains, seeking fresh air, walking nervously around the room, raising her arms, clenching her fists, drumming her fingers, physically abusing Thea Elvested. Hedda is the victim of traditional thinking to move from hysteria to feminism. Trapped by Brack between two conventional attitudes; her fear of scandal and her abhorrence of adultery; she fulfils the prediction she makes upon Tesman's joyous response to the news of her pregnancy. She has become pregnant during the couple's six-month honey-moon; Miss Tesman presses for a revelation, hinting to Tesman that might be found for the empty rooms in the house. As an unmarried, childless woman, she takes on one foster-child after another; having raised Tesman, who acknowledges to his 'Auntie Julle' that 'You've always been both father and mother to me', she has recently filled her life by nursing her ailing sister Rina, and after Rina's death, she plans to replace her with another invalid. Contrast to Hedda, who regards such care as a 'burden', is evident [7].

The antithesis between Hedda Gabler, a mother in spite of herself, and Juliane Tesman, who idealizes motherly woman from the vantage point of one who has known it not as a biological necessity but as a chosen, foster calling is paradigmatic in Ibsen's plays, recurring with different contours in *Little Eyolf*. (Ibsen investigated the explicit treatment of female sexuality in Rita Allmers; the psychology of a woman whose enormous sensuality renders her unsuited for motherly love. Showing great self-awareness, she sums up her situation to her husband:

I can't go on just being Eyolf's mother. And, only that [...] I want to be everything to you! To you, Alfred! [...] Motherhood for me was in having the child. But, I'm not made to go on being mother to it [...] I want you! All of you! You alone! The way, I had you in those first glorious, throbbing days [7].

Bearing witness to Adrienne Rich's contention that women who refuse motherhood are perceived as dangerous. Rita's neglect proves fatal to her small son, insofar as he drowns because his lameness prevents him from swimming, and this handicap is the result of a fall that he suffers as an infant when she leaves him unattended in order to make love with Alfred. As in the play, Hedda Gabler, maternal indifference is counterbalanced by love and devotion of a female relative whose feelings are all the more heartfelt because they are chosen rather than biologically imposed. In the first action, we see Alfred's half-sister Asta takes a look at Eyolf, whom she refers as 'the poor little lad!' Finney [7], her empathy with him is reinforced by the revelation that she may be named Eyolf if she were a boy that Alfred would often call her by that name when they were children. Having taken care of Eyolf, she is blamed by Rita for usurping his affections when her love is directed toward Alfred Allmers, to whom she learns she is not related after all.

Ibsen's awareness of difficulties of motherhood on the one hand and of the overwhelming power of the myth of maternity as the proper calling for women on the other hand is expressed by several memorable instances in his plays in which women who have either lost their children, or never have any remain trapped in maternal thinking towards metaphorical offspring. Irene in *When We Dead Awaken* (1899), childless woman develops rhetoric of motherhood to describe her role in the production of works of art. Irene says of Rubek's masterpiece sculpture for which she sits as model, 'Our child lives on after me in honor and glory.' Her admission to Rubek that he no longer needs her as his model, she dies inside. Her role is more accurately that of midwife, or muse than metaphorical mother if she were genuine artist. The rhetoric of artistic maternity shows Irene is to fall between the two stools as it is the 19th century division of labor which assigns artistic creativity to men and childbearing to women. Although Irene fails to participate in either area, the myth of maternity as woman's destiny is so powerful that she is appropriate for its language in the compensatory fashion to describe her artistic midwifery [7].

This consideration sheds new light on Ibsen's claim late in life that "it is the women who are to solve the social problem. As mothers, they are to do it. And, only as such can they do it?"⁶ Whereas Ibsen regards motherhood as the proper calling for women, he suggests that it is the only vocation truly open to them. Many women figures in his plays demonstrate enormous and detrimental influence of the notion that maternity is woman's duty; women who have motherhood imposed on them against their will, mothers unsuited to motherhood, childless women for whom the maternal model is so strong that they take on metaphorical children. Motherhood plays an important role in such

plays. Thus this study focuses on the role of motherhood through portraying Ibsen's female protagonists.

Literary Criticism

If Ibsen's plays are studied, we can understand that many critics and scholars have criticized Ibsen's powerful women characters in different ways. In this way, his plays have achieved fame, international identity and popularity in many countries of the world through their critical judgments. Consequently, some powerful female protagonists have been criticized positively or negatively. This article aims to look at social reality, women's love, marriage, freedom, emancipation, and power through applying critical thoughts of Ibsen's critics and scholars as stated below:

According to Marholm, the plays of Ibsen were revelations; she read Ibsen for the first time in 1883 and later, remembered this moment as a true eye opener. Ibsen's social plays had "a liberating influence on Marholm and other women in the 1880s," Broomans and Marholm [16] saw women in Ibsen's plays as individuals who rebelled against the rules of bourgeois society. She underlined the importance of love. Those women who succeed in combining artistic expression with womanliness are natural women. She reacted to the images of women in authorship like Ibsen's [16].

In "Henrik Ibsen and Marriage", Meyboom stated that, while reading Ibsen's plays, marriage is the lapses of judgment, an important theme. She discussed his view of marriage, love, and the question of in what way a person is allowed to sacrifice, without the approval of his/her loved one, true love for another, higher cause. She showed in her analysis from *Love's Comedy* to *When We Dead Awaken*. Two themes, lapse of judgment and marriage become connected to each other in his later plays. Another observation of Meyboom was that Ibsen's consciousness, regarding the difficult position of women, grows. Meyboom was positive concerning his disapproval of the person who rejects true love and lives a life of untruthfulness. In the survey of *The Master Builder*, she (1892) commented:

Here we find the full-awareness that even woman has a vocation that is worth the same as the mission of the most educated man. Even, she can be broken, as the artist who cannot develop his talent [16].

In "Trends in Nordic Literature", Herzfeld praised Ibsen's earlier heroic plays but she criticized the play, *A Doll's House*, and commented that the step to Nora is the one which leads Ibsen away from aesthetics. She regarded the characters of Nora and Torvald Helmer as "dead coat hangers" whose only function is to propagate Ibsen's own ideas. If Nora is for Marholm an eye opener, a support to break free, for Herzfeld, Nora is the end of Ibsen as a true poet. It is striking that both Marholm and Herzfeld criticized Ibsen for his unfaithfulness to what they regarded as true womanhood.

Though De Savornin Lohman was positive about some of Ibsen's plays, she was negative regarding the final scene of *A Doll's House*, and what she thought was the central part in Ibsen's view on women. Lohman described, in *Politikken*, the way Ibsen wrote about the nature of women:

[...] He (Ibsen) knows that women can be something else than our narrow-minded upbringing has thought us to be. However, when Ibsen describes a woman who liberates herself from the ties she is bound with and who dare to go to a new direction; he is connecting himself with the yearning for freedom his poetical characters feel. And, at this point, Ibsen goes too far, for a man cannot understand a woman—the

most delicate of her inner life the quintessence of her nature, her love [16].

Lohman's criticism can be seen against the backdrop of her view concerning women's emancipation and her view on love. She is for equal rights between men and women, equal payment for equal work, but she is of the view that it has to be restricted within the natural destination of a woman, and that is to love husband. She questioned in an essay from 1896 whether it is worth for the sake of one's own personality "to harm, to wound and to destroy the abandoned husband or parents or children" [16]. How a real woman feels and loves can never be understood by a man, For instance, Nora's love lies when she understands what Torvald Helmer is really like a mistake. Lohman points out that a woman's love will never die like this. A woman loves blindly and will always forgive. Another mistake of Ibsen's is that he lets Nora forget her children. A real woman could never do that. Lohman also admitted that Ibsen might be the only male author who understood women's emancipation if they get an opportunity to develop their talents so that society can benefit from them.

Marholm, Herzfeld, and Lohman had an ambivalent attitude towards Ibsen's powerful women. Their criticism of *A Doll's House* is, in general, negative, Meyboom, who wrote her article about ten years later and after the death of Ibsen in 1906, was of a different opinion, Ibsen wrote realistically about the real people. For Meyboom, Ibsen's work was about marriage, true love, and the real people. Marholm, Herzfeld and Lohman, who were in the midst of the "New Women" debate, seemed to have followed a new trend in the image of Nordic literature in Europe: "A focus on neo-romanticism and a quest for a new woman, a true woman" [16]. It is a trend that the nature of a true woman can be expressed by a woman and is not expressible for the male writers, even for Ibsen.

In the review of *When We Dead Awaken*, James Joyce also paid a tribute to Ibsen's supreme insight into the psychology and ways of thought of modern women:

Ibsen's knowledge of humanity is nowhere more obvious than in his portrayal of women. He amazes one by his painful introspection; he seems to know them better than they now themselves (Aarseth, 1997, p. 9).

This positive evaluation was shared by many, but not by all commentators at the turn of the century. One of the toughest critics of Ibsen in those years was Laura Marholm Hansson, a German author of several essays on female psychology. In "The Poet of the Blind Alleys" (1886), Hansson claimed that Ibsen's erotic nature is poorly developed: "[...] He has limited instinctive knowledge of woman. As such she holds on attraction for him, she is to him merely a concept and a piece in a board game. And, he begins moving the pieces back and forth [3].

The question of Ibsen's powerful women characters bears a sufficient resemblance to real women either Norwegian, or generally European, was frequently debated in connection with the publication of his modern prose plays in the 1880s and 1890s. In a Norwegian booklet, "Are Ibsen's Female Characters Truly Norwegian in Kind?" Hertzberg commented that the author, who is a male claims that women in the contemporary Norwegian society are freer than shown by Ibsen; they practically enjoy the same rights as men. He expressed his concern that Ibsen's drama makes a depressing effect on the foreigners as to the conditions of women in his own country. A contemporary English critic, Mary S Gilliland (1894) also pointed out that Ibsen tears down more than he builds up. She deplores the absence on the Ibsen stage of

female ideals like the ones we are familiar with from Shakespeare's plays:

That in Ibsen's world there is a want of beauty and of joy must, we fear, be admitted, where do we find in any of his pages, the joyous whole hearted self-surrender of a Juliet? We are used to hearing that Ibsen is the prophet of modern womanhood; he tells that they must be independent and fearless, must learn to take an initiative in life, and must learn to realize their own souls. But, where has he shown us a woman more fearless, more frank, more independent, more instant in knowing her mind, or more brave and resolute in acting on it than this dear and deathless daughter of the Capulets? The end of Juliet is tragic, but she has triumphed, and she lives forever in our hearts, radiant, tearless, loving, and beautiful [3].

Gilliland commented that what Ibsen created to reject the kind of women, was not a proper response. The ugly and the prosaic appear to belong to the art of time; Ibsen is, in this respect, intensely modern. Women characters like Nora, Hedda, and Hilde Wangel are not exactly ugly; they are brave, strong, and important; they are of today. That is why the effect of an Ibsen play is unailing: "Ibsen comes home to us. His problems are real problems and are ours" [3].

Studies of Ibsen's plays with regard to the relationship between sexes had led in 1890 to observation that seemed to confirm the view that his powerful women characters are superior both morally and intellectually compared to male characters. Ellen Key, an outstanding Swedish essayist, found that the typical Ibsen woman is more personally devoted to her ideals than her male counterpart; she is more passionate in her efforts to do away with obsolete conventions and more upright and determined in fighting the spirit of compromise. "To be less of a social being, more of an elemental force-that is the quality which, in Ibsen's view, makes woman more thoroughbred, more vigorous, more demanding, more in need of closeness to real life and vital fullness than man" [3]. The quality may be created for a literary purpose, and is meant to produce a dramatic effect, which is hardly considered by feminist critics of the age. They need all the evidence; they can find to advance in their fight for equal rights for women.

Many have interpreted Henrik Ibsen's social and realistic plays as a direct contribution to the cause of women's rights. In this view, *A Doll's House* and *Ghosts* are seen as the dramatic versions of the modern literary program that George Brandes, a Danish critic (1872) set forth at the time in his work, *Main Currents in Nineteenth Century Literature*. He demanded that literature must break with romanticism and become realistic. This means that social issues have to be debated in literature. These issues are to be linked to social institutions including marriage, sexuality, business affairs, school, church, and law. Women's rights stand out as an issue of singular importance. John Stuart Mill's book, *On the Subjection of Women* (1869) played a prominent role in raising awareness of the oppressive women. Brandes also claimed that the question of women's rights must be taken as a central topic of debate in the modern literature of the times [17]. In this way, Ibsen's plays bear the identity of modern women. Ibsen wanted to create modernism among his women characters, where self-existence is the pre-dominant issue in their inner psychology. In fact, his female creation is truly acceptable from post-modern point of view.

In several of her publications, Sandra Saari further emphasized on the connection between the suppressed position of women in Ibsen's time and the portraits that Ibsen sketched both rebellious and well-adjusted women. To a woman deprived of social, legal and political power, the ideal is to be ready and willing to sacrifice. Sarri quoted

from a publication about the art of marriage, written for the young women at that time. It was every woman's goal to become "virtuous," "humble," "modest," "submissive from choice," and "obedient from inclination." According to this description, an ideal for a woman is to live "a fixed secluded and meditative life." Saari commented that in Ibsen's plays a number of women characters go under precisely because they are forced into such socially created roles; she maintained that if Ibsen's women should attempt to become actively involved in society, they would soon discover that society in an external sense has no place for them in living out their lives. Their newly gained independence would not be needed. Saari put it in this way: "If she rejects the traditional image of an 'ideal woman,' being strong in her sense of self and a member of an established society, she finds no significant and challenging vocation open to her, and her strength and initiative reach a dead end" [17]. In this way, Saari indirectly considered it as a negative factor that Ibsen's women have only their personal lives, their feelings, and experience of life as a measure for true existence. To her, the utopia, the liberation and self-realization of woman, means full-participation in society. The picture she portrayed is a rather pessimistic one. If it is applied to *A Doll's House* it does not leave Nora with much hope from the moment she shuts the door behind her in the last act of the play.

Ibsen held a similar pessimistic view when it came to the possibilities women are in the larger world outside the protective walls of home and marriage. He did not hold high hopes for women exercising their right and living. Neither Nora nor Rebecca, nor Ellida Wangel, nor Hedda Gabler has a social position of her own. They are all dependent on their husbands, and their urge for liberation does not allow them to gain access to man's domain by the way of occupation, or socially defined positions [17].

In *The History of the Norwegian Women's Movement*, Anna Caspari Agerholt commented that "the case of women in Norway had its decisive break through at a time when literature began to portray current social concerns." Then, she continued: "Henrik Ibsen undoubtedly belongs to those who through literary art indirectly and involuntarily turns out to advance the cause of women" [17]. In that connection, Agerholt referred to a well-known statement by Ibsen himself, in which he guarded against being perceived as a poet debating on behalf of feminine gender.

In the article, "Ibsen's Liberated Heroines and the Fear of Freedom," Errol Durbach underscored that women's concerns are portent as a sounding board in Ibsen's social plays. Ibsen, on a realistic level, depicted the suppressed position of contemporary Scandinavian women which we call the modern break through; through his rebellious women characters, he protested against the situation. But, this is not the heart of the matter in his plays. On a deeper level, we find a conception of freedom and liberation that pertains not to societal issues, but rather to existential issues. It is modern existential philosophy that provides the frame of reference for Durbach understood about Ibsen. In his article, he indicated how his powerful women characters are tested and tried with regard to one ruling issue: it is not possible to claim a fully developed human life without attaining to what is called authentic existence. Durbach thought that this kind of human liberation not the social liberation is the goal of his women. Then, he found that Ibsen represented strong women marked by considerable anxiety, linked to the tragic paradox that freedom can simultaneously involve death. Women from an earlier phase including Nora Helmer and Mrs. Alving want freedom from everything that inhibits their development. Taboo and sexuality, socially dictated, leave

them un-free. The women of a later phase, including Ellida Wangel and Hedda Gabler strive for freedom to something, to something indefinable; they dream of a "becoming," with their individuality fully intact. A human being who strives for freedom must make a choice; she must know what she wants. To Hedda, existence itself is a prison when she wants to learn herself away from it, death is her only way out. Spontaneity and responsibility must be reconciled in a higher unity. This is the real test, or touch-stone of a woman's personal existence. For a woman as Hedda, such a unity is impossible to actualize in her life. It looks as if Durbach might be right about Ibsen's women characters having a stronger desire for a personal life in freedom than for a life as active members of society. Consequently, their rebellion bears the hallmark of protest in close, even intimate human relations – involving, for instance, husband or lover rather than in the larger context of society. In the early social and realistic plays, the husband is a representative of society [17].

Lou Salome analyzed Ibsen's women characters with regard to a utopia of love. In Ibsen's *Heroines*, Lou Salome (1892) concerned herself more with woman's psyche than with any social fitness in Ibsen's fictional women. Salome saw a development of *A Doll's House* and *Ghosts* where women glorify love, elevate their male partners, and have to disengage themselves from them to the plays: *The Wild Duck*, *Rosmersholm*, *The Lady from the Sea*, and *Hedda Gabler*, where women no longer cultivate men as objects of love, but where they continue to idealize their own emotional lives and their own love. They are so keenly conscious, and in control of self that they choose to sacrifice the self for the ideal of love in which they believe. Through sacrifice, women like Rebecca and Hedda Gabler realize their nature at the deepest level. The development moves in the direction of "the giving of one's self instead of freedom one's self" [17].

Salome's pointing to woman in a sacrificed role was viewed positively. This stood in contrast to Sandra Saari, who viewed a corresponding feature in purely negative terms. But, the problem of sacrifice was quite in keeping with what Ibsen-scholars noted as a distinctive feature running through the entire authorship, a feature that links Ibsen to literature of tragedy in the west and to the protagonists. Even so, some held the view that dream about love and the struggle to actualize one's personal life are clearly manifested among Ibsen's powerful women characters.

Daniel Haakonsen, an Ibsen scholar wanted to focus on an apparent contradiction between socio-critical and personal-philosophical theme in Ibsen's portrayal of women. In the article, "Women Characters in Ibsen's Writings," he observed how Ibsen's women as a rule express utterly contempt for ordinary social ethics. This is because they live their lives in areas other than social and legal ones. They are characterized by spontaneous reactions of an emotional kind; they demand their men to follow the visions of a higher order than the common places of everyday life [17].

Conclusion

To conclude, we can express that Ibsen's powerful women characters demand the appreciations to readers, researchers, scholars, critics, dramatic artists, audience, producers, translators, actors, actress, and so on in many countries of the world from Ibsen's age to the present. Despite contradictory comments, some powerful women have been able to acquire popularity either by the stage performance, or by research, or by translating, or transforming and so on. In some plays, Ibsen has presented his women as bold, revolutionary, powerful,

unconventional, and unfeminine figures. On the other hand, some of them are weak, tame, obedient, the so-called darling, conventional and mild categories. They are devoted to achieving their identity, freedom, self-existence, empowerment, right, and suffragettes. Through the female protagonists, Ibsen endeavors utmost to focus on social problems of the 19th century Scandinavian bourgeois society. On the whole, this study aims at categorizing Ibsen's women, his treatment of women and contemporary Scandinavia, the role of motherhood, and the critical evaluation of his powerful women.

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