

# The Women's Emotional Isolation in Shakespeare's *Macbeth* and Ibsen's *A Doll's House*

**Menalosini**

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## Introduction

Literature grows out of life, reacts upon life, and is fed by life. Yet to define literature is an extremely difficult task. The scope of literature is so vast that it is impossible to reduce it to a formula. Generally we can say that everything in print is literature. Literary study is related with the history of civilization but then such would not be exactly literary; it may be more historical and less literary. Literature is the personal use or exercises of language. Drama is a unique literary form because they are designed to be an audience. The word 'dra' meaning to act or to do. As literature in action, drama brings a story to life before our eyes. Modern drama also focuses on different perfuming styles and aesthetics as they change form operatic styles in Europe. William Shakespeare was an English poet, playwright and actor, widely regarded as the greatest writer in the English language and the world's pre-eminent dramatist. He is often called "Bard of Avon". His extant works, including collaborations, consist of approximately 38 plays, 154 sonnets, two long narrative poems. Ibsen is often considered the greatest dramatist since Shakespeare.

## Representation of Women

Women who were the most dormant segment of India population have now become active participants in all walks of life. Till now, they were only unit of the family organization. Now, women are becoming not only a significant unit of the society but also influencing the course of social change in society. Women are an important element of our Society. The modern society has started recognizing the individual identity of women. She is believed to have her aspiration, abilities and qualities as a man does have and it is also agreed that she should have the opportunities to develop her faculties and to express them according to her own choice. Women can help the society in various ways. They can engage in social activities and work for the betterment of the society. In the English-speaking world today Henrik Ibsen has become one of the three major classics of the theatre: Shakespeare, Chekhov and Ibsen are at the very centre of the standard repertoire, and no actor can aspire to the very first rank unless he has played some of the leading roles in the works of these three giants.

## Portrayal of Women by Shakespeare and Ibsen

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**Language in India** [www.languageinindia.com](http://www.languageinindia.com) ISSN 1930-2940 20:3 March 2020

**Prof. Dr. S. Chelliah, Editor: Select Papers of the International Conference on Human Praxis and Modern Configuration through Literature -- VOLUME 2**

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Here, I have tried to highlight the critical judgments of several critics based on the character –analysis of the two powerful female protagonists. Considering the femme fatale characters of Shakespeare and Ibsen ,the most renowned and powerful playwrights writing in English and Norwegian language respectively, especially the powerful and domineering female protagonists cum heroines, Lady Macbeth and Nora, this paper proposes to draw attention to the play-texts of both dramatists as the embodiment of the 21 st century radical feminism as well. Shakespeare de-feminizes Lady Macbeth Shakespeare’s representation of women in his tragedies to give her ambitions credibility. Such unnatural positioning created tension in the play and reflected anxiety in the Elizabethan world. Shakespeare pushes Lady Macbeth’s oddity so far as to reverse Macbeth’s gender roles. In the play Macbeth, lady Macbeth is considered nearly sinister in comparison with her husband, Macbeth, a perception that is supported by such assertions as from the lips of her character. Her husband’s weakness is not only shameful in Lady Macbeth’s eyes; his weakness is also as unnatural as her strength. Such a reversal carries with it significant social ramifications. Her possession of illicit desire in its most masculine form- the twisted ambition of the malcontent, leads directly to regicide. Positioning woman over man has not just domestic but political connotations as well. Shakespeare realizes that throughout the history of mankind, women have always been at a disadvantageous position socially, economically and politically. Through strong female characters, Shakespeare has delineated gender issues. He has given a comprehensive view of life with equal emphasis on both male and female characters. His female characters show the social stigmas they have undergone during that time. He has portrayed his personal admiration for intelligent, strong women, using virtues and strength he gives his female characters. So we can say that Shakespeare should be considered one of the pioneers of feminist movement. Actually, through representation of women characters in the tragedies, he wants the elimination of gender discrimination and advocates the true liberation of women in society.

Ibsen's concerns about the position of women in society are brought to life in a doll's house. He believed that women had a right to develop their own individuality, but in reality, their role was often self-sacrificial. Women were not treated as equals with men, either in relation to their husbands or society, as is clear from Torvald's horror of his employees thinking he has been influenced in a decision about Krogstad's job by his wife.

Women could not conduct business or control their own money, for which they needed the authorization of the man who 'owned' them - husband, brother or father. Moreover, they were not educated for responsibility. Nora falls foul of both injustices, by taking out a loan without the authority of her husband or father, and by believing, out of ignorance of the world, that she could get away with forging a signature. In a sense, single women like Mrs

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Linde were freer than married ones, in that they had a right to the money they earned and did not have to hand it over to the man of the family. But the employment open to women was restricted and poorly paid, as we see in Mrs. Linde's case: there was clerical work, teaching or domestic service. Also, women's work was grindingly dull, and likely to leave an intelligent woman like Mrs. Linde "empty" inside. Marriage was a trap in another sense, too. Though divorce was available, it carried such a social stigma that few women saw it as an option. This is why Torvald would rather have a pretend marriage, for the sake of appearances, than a divorce or an amicable parting.

Nora begins the play fulfilling a role that society prescribed for women - that of dutiful wife and mother. Her role is restricted to such activities as creating a beautiful home, meeting the needs of her husband and children, and singing and dancing prettily and seductively for her husband. Ibsen does not suggest that there is anything inherently wrong with such duties, but he does point out the dangers of having an individual's life defined by society in a way that ignores their personal identity and journey. In leaving Torvald and her children, she will outrage society and stigmatize herself. This is a terrible price to have to pay for self-fulfillment, but inevitable, given that society and the individual are so much at cross-purposes. Society wishes to preserve the status quo, whereas self-fulfillment often means pushing and breaking boundaries.

The nineteenth century saw huge social and economic changes. Society shifted from a largely rural agricultural community of 'landed gentry' and land workers, to urban communities based on manufacturing. More than ever before, what defined one's place in society was one's ability to make and control money. Those who controlled the money were the bankers and lawyers, like Torvald. They were almost invariably male. Their ability to control money enabled them to control others' lives, including defining morals. Torvald, because of his position at the bank, can afford to sit in moral judgment on Krogstad and Mrs Linde, and decide which of them should be allowed a job.

The first interactions we see between Nora and Torvald are about money; she knows that if she behaves in a certain subservient way, Torvald will give her more money. She later uses similar manipulations on Dr Rank, drawing attention to the way in which women in an unequal society tend to barter sexual favors in return for money. Torvald teases Nora about being a spendthrift: this is his way of displaying his dominance over her, since he who controls the money controls the relationship. Nora's attempt to take partial control of the money in their marriage by taking out the loan ends in disaster, as Torvald feels morally shamed by her action. It has put him at the mercy of Krogstad and, it is

implied, compromised his standing as a man and a moral member of society. The theme of morality relates closely to that of the individual and society, in that society defines the suffocating moral climate that a doll's house satirizes. Nora begins to question society's morals when she realizes how it would criminalize her for forging her father's signature, an action that she believes to be morally acceptable in the circumstances, if legally reprehensible. The most heroic action of her life, her sacrifice to save her husband's life, becomes an unforgivable crime in the eyes of society and its dutiful representative, Torvald. It is not surprising that part of her journey of self-discovery at the play's end is to consist of finding out "who is right, the world or I." Before Ibsen revolutionized drama through his embrace of realism, many plays contained a character with the role of 'moral foil', a commentator on the actions of others. Ibsen partially subverts the notion of the 'moral foil' in the characters of Dr Rank and Mrs. Linde. They arrive in the play at the same time, which alerts us to the fact that they share a dramatic purpose. To some extent, they are truth-bringers in the false setup of the Helmer marriage. Mrs. Linde decides not to persuade Krogstad to recall his letter, as she believes it is time the Helmers faced the truth about their marriage. And Dr Rank talks to Nora as the intelligent person she is, not as the silly doll-child that Torvald prefers. But these characters turn out to be as fallible and morally compromised as most people are in real life. Mrs Linde has betrayed her true love, Krogstad, by marrying another man for money and security, an act which has left her "empty." and Dr Rank is not entirely the selfless friend to Torvald that he first appears to be: he visits because he is in love with Nora.

Nineteenth-century breakthroughs in genetic science led to a growing interest in inherited disease and traits. A Doll's House contains several references to the idea that both physical disease and moral traits are passed down through generations. Torvald, after he reads Krogstad's first letter and rejects Nora, forbids her from bringing up their children as he thinks she will taint them morally. She herself is already convinced of this and has begun to distance herself from them. Torvald believes that Krogstad's children will be poisoned by their father's moral crimes. Dr Rank has inherited tuberculosis of the spine, the disease that kills him, from his father, who led a promiscuous life and contracted venereal disease.

Nora, being an individual feminine personality within the confines of a stereotyped society, strives to become a self-motivated to save the life of her husband without thinking what is right for law. She is finally confused on what is right and what is wrong and realized that she cannot live with a husband who cannot dissociate himself from the laws of society. Though she is defeated in her marital life, she is victorious as an individual. Death

of a wife and mother gives birth to Nora as a new modern woman. Thus, Nora's transformation from a very dependent wife to an independent woman is a struggle in search of her own identity, is a struggle for woman's emancipation.

He has a unique ability to materialize my thoughts and feelings regarding society's expectations of females in his plays. The women in Ibsen's plays embodied the struggles that i experienced while growing up. That is one of the main reasons why Ibsen's women characters are so very real to me. They are rebellious, outspoken, and unique in nature and problems. I immediately felt inspired by his works although they were written so long ago. Henrik Ibsen's work on the women in Victorian times. The feminist movement was just beginning, and he had a certain unique understanding about how women of his era were thinking and feeling. He is an amazing man for his time.

### **Summing Up**

The isolation of the two women is accomplished primarily by the character of each and by the circumstances, rebellion against recognized authority, involving them importance of the issues. It is important to note that repetition of certain issues or It is important to note again that in this study the repetition of certain issues or themes proves that Ibsen intended to focus on them. Therefore, this study proves that Ibsen was advocating women's rights and his intent was to bring about awareness. Shakespeare's *Macbeth* and Ibsen's *A Doll's House* by portraying Lady Macbeth and Nora who are representatives of Elizabethan England and the 19th century Scandinavian bourgeois society culture respectively. Through this female protagonist both dramatists wanted to expose their contemporary situation of the female community. Both Nora and Lady Macbeth have raised a fiery voice or initiated a dreadful revolution against the patriarchal rule, power, and domination with a view to attaining self-pelf, self-power, and self - domination.

In these two plays both Shakespeare and Ibsen have prioritized the female identity, revolt and dominance more than the male order and custom. This also aims to discuss the character of Lady Macbeth as the matriarchal influence upon the patriarchy, the ambitious crime, woman's idea upon masculinity, Lady Macbeth's effort to repudiate womanhood her femininity versus her unnatural resolve, her fear and remorse her sleepwalking; Nora is also viewed as a male adjusted ,neurotic, unfulfilled, unnatural woman, full of nervous energy and longings-gliding to irresistible self-destruction.

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