

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

The nineteenth century is known as the time when women in Europe faced strict gender roles, which are set by the society. They were expected by the society to be housewives who could only obey and take care of their husbands and children. They were not allowed to get an education, to work, to vote, or even to file for divorce to their husbands. They also could not control their money and they needed their husbands or fathers' permission to use their money. ("The Role of Women in Norway (in the late 1800's)").

Two playwrights who deal with the situation of women in the 19th century Europe are Henrik Ibsen and August Strindberg. Both of them used literature as a means to criticize the existence of gender roles which was constructed by the society at that time. Henrik Ibsen is a Norwegian playwright, theatre director, and poet who is considered to be one of the most famous and influential playwrights and poets in Europe in 19th century. He is known as "the father" of modern theatre and one of the founders of modernism in theatre. "After Shakespeare, he is considered as the second most influential and insightful dramatist and poet of the 19th century." ("Henrik Ibsen")

From many works that Ibsen has written, I chose *A Doll's House* to be analyzed. It is one of the most famous plays and is also known as the most frequently played in modern theatres until now. The play tells about the protagonist, Nora Helmer, who at the beginning of the story seems to be a proper woman; she is a good wife and mother who takes care of her children and obeys her husband. She even sacrifices herself by doing an illegal loan to a man named Krogstad to save her husband. She decides to get away from her husband and children because her husband, Torvald, does not appreciate what she has done for him.

The other playwright whose work I am going to analyze is a Swedish writer, August Strindberg. He was a successful playwright, novelist, and short-story writer. His works are also known for they mostly talk about women, especially middle class women in the 19th century. Some of them are *The Father* (1887), *Miss Julie* (1888), *Creditors* (1888), and *Comrades* (1886).

One of Strindberg's most famous works which I am going to analyze is *Miss Julie*. It is known as one of his most successful plays. It has been played on stages around the world each year since 1889 and also adapted for film several times. *Miss Julie* is a story about a woman called Miss Julie, who comes from a middle-class family. She is known as a dominant and proud woman that is different from other women at that time. Her falling in love and having sex with her servant John forces her to deal with the society's rules, and makes her turn into a different person. She becomes weak and is willing to obey to John.

Both plays deal with each protagonist's struggle for individuation, and both authors used the protagonist in each play as a means to comment on the condition of women at that time. Thus, the most suitable literary element that I am going to analyze from these

works is the theme, which will be discussed through the portrayal of the protagonist. Portrayal means “the portrait of individuals presented in literary selections and also to the performance of an actor who plays (interprets) the role of a stage character” (Shaw). Protagonist means “the central character or leading figure in poetry, narrative, novel, or any other story” (“Protagonist”), and theme is “a main idea or an underlying meaning of a literary work that may be stated directly or indirectly” (“Theme”). By knowing the portrayal of each character, the readers will grasp the theme of each play.

Statement of the Problems

The problems that will be discussed are:

1. What is the theme of Henrik Ibsen’s *A Doll’s House* and August Strindberg’s *Miss Julie*?
2. How does the portrayal of the protagonists help in revealing the theme of each play?

Purpose of the Study

Based on the problems above, the purpose of the study are as follows:

1. To show the theme of Henrik Ibsen’s *A Doll’s House* and August Strindberg’s *Miss Julie*.
2. To show how the portrayal of the protagonists helps reveal the theme of each play.

Method of Research

In writing my thesis, I did some library research. First, I began by reading Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House* and August Strindberg's *Miss Julie* as the primary texts, I also searched the Internet to find necessary references that are relevant to the subject. Then, I analyzed the plays by using the references I found to support my analysis. Finally, I drew some conclusions from my analysis.

Organization of the Thesis

The thesis consists of four chapters, preceded by the Acknowledgements, Table of Contents, and Abstract. Chapter One consists of the Background of the Study, Statement of the Problems, Purpose of the Study, Method of Research, and Organization of the Thesis. Chapter Two contains the analysis of the theme through the portrayal of the protagonist in Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House*. Chapter Three contains the analysis of the theme through the portrayal of the protagonist in August Strindberg's *Miss Julie*. Chapter Four is the Conclusion of what has been analyzed in the previous chapters. This thesis ends with the Bibliography and Appendices, which consist of the summary of both plays and the biography of the authors.