

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

Henrik Ibsen is a renowned Norwegian playwright of the late 19th century who is categorized as one of the most outstanding and important playwrights in the European drama after William Shakespeare (“Henrik Ibsen (1828 – 1906)”). His writings were so influential that he was nominated for the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1902, 1903, and 1904.

Ibsen is commonly known as the founder of modern drama who introduced his own style of drama to the European theater. He refused to follow the traditional European drama in his time, since the intellectual generation demanded to see a serious drama instead of the conventional entertainment dramas that comprised romance and glorified a happy life (Kennedy). Other than the founder of modern drama, Ibsen is also referred to as the father of realism who depicted and explored the real condition of life and morality in his time as opposed to the beauty of life that had often been illustrated in the traditional European works

(Trumbull; “Explain ‘Realism’ in Drama as Introduced by Ibsen in *A Doll’s House*”). These two characteristics of Ibsen can be seen in most of his major works including in a drama entitled *A Doll’s House* (1879) which will be analyzed in this thesis.

A Doll’s House, which can be considered as Ibsen’s most interesting realistic drama, was one of the most frequently performed dramas in the world in the early 20th century (Smith). This drama is said to have “maintained its place in the popular repertoire and is regularly performed. Actresses such as Claire Bloom, Janet McTeer – who won a Tony Award (Antoinette Perry Award for Excellence in Theater) – for the role, Cheryl Campbell and Tara Fitzgerald have portrayed Nora onstage” (William and Kissel).

The drama itself tells a story of a female character named Nora Helmer who struggles to achieve her freedom and rights as a person. The drama basically raises the notion that women should reconsider their position in relation to men – that women should be equal to men as a human being. This is the point that has made people curious about the drama, as well as the reason why the selling of the book was “a sensational success” (Hanssen).

Other than the issue it raises, the strength of this drama also lies on its depiction of the main character. Hossain states that “this text is viewed as one of the most famous plays of Ibsen for his presentation of Nora Helmer who is regarded today as one of the most powerful female characters.” Considering that the issue can be seen from the strong depiction of the main character, I choose the portrayal of the protagonist as the most suitable element to be discussed in this thesis. Portrayal is defined as “the act of showing or describing somebody or

something in a picture, play, book, etc.; a particular way in which this is done” (“Portrayal”), whereas protagonist is “the central character or leading figure in poetry, narrative, novel or any other story” (“Protagonist”). The protagonist of the drama herself experiences a change in her characteristics over the course of the story; therefore, the protagonist can be categorized as a dynamic character, which refers to a character “who changes over time, usually as a result of resolving a central conflict or facing a major crisis. Most dynamic characters tend to be central rather than peripheral characters, because resolving the conflict is the major role of central character” (“Types of Characters in Fiction”).

In analyzing the portrayal of the protagonist, I am going to use formalism, which is an approach that “regards literature as a unique form of human knowledge that needs to be examined on its own terms. All the elements necessary for understanding the work are contained within the work itself, which means all the elements can be found within the text” (“Critical Approaches to Literature”). Considering that all the data I need to analyze the portrayal of the protagonist already exist in the drama itself, it is felt best for me to use this approach.

Statement of the Problem

The problems that are going to be discussed in this thesis are:

1. How is the protagonist portrayed in the drama?
2. What is the purpose of the author in portraying such a character?

Purpose of the Study

Based on the statement of the problems above, this study is conducted:

1. to show how the protagonist is portrayed in the drama;
2. to show the purpose of the author in portraying such a character.

Method of Research

I use the library research in conducting this study. First, I read the script of the drama. After reading the script, I search for and collect a number of information from books and Internet websites to support my analysis. Lastly, I analyze the portrayal of the protagonist in the drama and draw some conclusions from my analysis.

Organization of the Thesis

This thesis is divided into three chapters, preceded by Acknowledgement, Table of Contents, and Abstract. Chapter One is Introduction, which consists of Background of the Study, Statement of the Problem, Purpose of the Study, Method of Research, and Organization of the Thesis. Chapter Two contains the analysis of portrayal of the protagonist in Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House*. Chapter Three is Conclusion. This thesis ends with Bibliography and Appendices, which consist of Synopsis of Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House* and Biography of Henrik Ibsen.