The Societal Position Of Women In “A Doll’s House” And “Hamlet”

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Introduction

It is observed that many playwrights provide effective indications about the prevailing role of women in society through the genre of drama. Henrik Ibsen and William Shakespeare also critically address the societal position of women through their well-known dramas, “A Doll’s House” and “Hamlet.” Both stories reveal the stereotypical role of women perceived by society.

“A Doll’s House,” presented by Henrik Ibsen, is an effective interpretation of the conventional roles of men and women set by society. The following play is based on the specific mindset of realism. Ibsen successfully depicts the women of the 19th century who immensely suffer due to the limitations of the specific roles set by society for them. The specific character, Nora, in the play, is a significant representation of the overall role of women in society. On the other hand, “Hamlet” by William Shakespeare is known as a great interpretation of the social and political scenario of society. This specific play comprises six different acts and is set in the paradigm of medieval Denmark. The story of Hamlet is mainly based on Hamlet’s intentions to take revenge on his uncle for murdering his father. The existence of two female characters in the play is an effective representation of the importance of women in the overall spectrum of society. Initially, both female characters in the play seem passive, but they play a crucial role in figuring out society’s stance on the importance of women.

Undoubtedly, both plays, “A Doll’s House” and “Hamlet,” are crucial examples of critically figuring out the role of women in the society portrayed by Henrik Ibsen and William Shakespeare. This research work will compare and contrast the elements of both plays, “A Doll’s House” and “Hamlet,” in the context of the role of women in society.

Literature Review

Both plays indicate the males’ specific perspective on the role of women in their lives and the overall paradigm of society. The prospects of women, as demonstrated by Ibsen and Shakespeare, have been critically analyzed by many literary researchers. Previous research provides the necessary direction to understand the actual role of women in society by considering the insights provided by Ibsen and Shakespeare in their plays. “A Doll’s House” is the representation of the gender struggle that both men and women face in their lives due to the specific perspective of ideological power determined by society. Women are the main stakeholders who immensely suffer from the approach of power, which never gives equal rights to women as to men in society. The imbalanced approach to power also

adversely impacts the relationships and associations between genders, and this is the exact case described by Ibsen in the play. Nora and Torvald are the main characters in the play, and they portray the conventional stance of society over the roles of both genders. Their relationship with each other ultimately shows how society defines the role of women. The character of Torvald is the representation of European society in the 19th century, where people believed that women were inferior characters compared to men as they were less intelligent. The role of women is only limited to their domestic responsibilities (Yuehua, 81).

William Shakespeare also highlights the suppressed circumstances for women in Elizabethan society. Males try to dominate women in all the different forms, whether they are brothers, fathers, or partners. It is indicated by the play that males have the particular approach that women are inferior to them, and their only duty is to obey their orders. Gertrude and Ophelia are the only female characters in the play Hamlet. Both characters successfully reflect the status of women in society. They have little or no power to make decisions about their lives. Both Gertrude and Ophelia show the complex form of women's intervention in the overall aspect of decision-making (Adelman, 10). The specific character of Gertrude is exposed as an unfaithful and selfish woman who lacks loyalty in her marital relationship. This form of particular judgment about the character of Gertrude shows the specific expectations that are set by society for women. The struggle of Hamlet in the play also comes with the indication that women are considered liable entities to share the burdens of the males in the relationship as their role is to provide comfort to the males who exist in their lives.

The character of Ophelia is another crucial example that successfully depicts the status of the young woman in society. She suffers immensely after her father's death in the form of tragic loss, which is ultimately enhanced due to the repressive feature of the dominating male society. Ophelia is depicted as the symbol of beauty and suffering according to the specific parameters set by society for women (Fisher and Silber, 131). She also greatly suffers after her father's death, like Hamlet, but both characters are perceived differently. The main character of the play, Hamlet, is one perfect example of the specific male-centered approach, and that influence cannot be established in the case of the female character of Ophelia.

Discussion

Both plays, "A Doll's House" and "Hamlet," effectively provide an approach that indicates the role of women in society. Both plays have similar points of view as they indicate the adverse societal conditions for women. The overall approach of society shows that it is male-oriented and not ready to give equal rights to women. Both female characters struggle to sustain their acceptable position in society. They strive to attain life the way they want with their active contribution to decision-making. Females in the play are portrayed as the victims of the specific society of that era due to the perspective of male dominance. The character of Nora shows that her only role is to take care of the household, while men are responsible for generating income for the family.

It is essential to mention that males in both plays believe that women are not intelligent enough to formulate wise decisions as well as men can because they are inferior to males by nature. The character of Nora in the play “A Doll’s House” tries to challenge the superiority of men in her life but remains unsuccessful due to the specific gender perspective set by society for them. Although she lives a happy married life, she strives for her freedom and independence in decision-making, which is not possible for her as her husband treats her as an object in the form of a doll. Somewhat contrary to Ibsen’s approach, Shakespeare indicates the strong side of the female character in the form of Gertrude, who was Hamlet’s mother in the play. She is shown as a woman who has an adequate form of power and intelligence. She manipulates the different situations to maintain her position of power.

The character of Nora in “A Doll’s House” tries to get rid of the marital relationship as she wants her independence and freedom at any cost. This particular perspective appears due to the approach of dominance adopted by her husband. He always tried to suppress her by making his judgment without her consideration. Torvald only treats her as a pet, not as his better half. She struggled hard to attain her independence and freedom as a person in her marriage and in society. Ultimately, she decided to disobey the man by leaving her responsibilities as a wife and a mother. She depicts the perspective of sublimation through her actions and decisions in life. Both plays define the female’s role in society as the suppressed gender who is compelled by societal norms to obey men in their lives. Ibsen and Shakespeare indicate the same relationship between man and woman, where the male character is dominated by the fundamental standards set by society regarding gender roles.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it is crucial to indicate that both plays adopt a similar approach to defining women’s role in society. Females have to face different forms of difficulty to attain and sustain their position in their associations with the male characters. The approach of their relationship ultimately defines their position in the overall spectrum of society. Writers of both plays give the necessary edge to their male characters as they have the right to treat women as less than themselves because they have high ranks in society. Society sets the standard that women should listen to men before making any decisions in their lives, as they are not intelligent enough to make their own decisions. Women in both plays, in the form of Nora and Gertrude, try to change their position. They want to get freedom by making different decisions, but they are never successful in maintaining an effective position because society never accepts their dominance.

Work Cited

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