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The Use of Realistic Elements in Henrik Ibsen's A Doll's House

ABSTRACT

Henrik Ibsen (1828-1906) is regarded the most distinguished Norway's playwright and the father of modern drama. He started handling realistic themes around the last quarter of the nineteenth century after he had given up writing romantic plays. He turned to the problem play with The Pillars of Society (1877) and kept tackling realistic subject-matters especially in A Doll's House (1879), Ghosts (1881), An Enemy of the People (1882), and The Wild Duck (1884). In these particular plays, he relentlessly attacked incorrect ethics of the society which made many people suffering from those immoral values. He used the prose dialogue in his realistic plays to replace the unrealistic elements of the previous romantic plays. In the realistic plays, Ibsen also subordinated action to the notion because he believed that ideas are more important than action in this kind of drama. Thus, the action is more psychological than physical in A Doll's House, which is the central thought in this article. At the same time Ibsen's realistic plays came as a surprise to the people who were influenced by the existing conventions. There is no wonder that such plays were not appreciated by the censors and banned in some European countries, especially at the first time of their appearance. Ibsen surprised Europe when he volunteered to speak of subjects no other playwright dared to speak so openly and fearlessly. Thus Ibsen's Ghosts could not be staged in England until 1891, ten years after its introduction in Norway. It was J. T. Grein who helped to direct the English version of Ghosts in The Independent Theatre, a private theatre, in order to escape the censorship imposed on the public theatres. The play was already translated into English by William Archer. The subject-matter of Ghosts revolves on a hereditary issue when a son inherits a venereal disease from his father, and also on a conventional situation when a wife is forced to remain with an immoral husband whom she hates.

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استخدام العناصر الواقعية في هنريك ايسن بيت الدمى

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الخلاصة:

يعد هنريك إبسن (1828-1906) من أبرز الكتاب المسرحيين في النرويج وهو أبو الدراما الحديثة. بدأ تناول موضوعات واقعية في الربع الأخير من القرن التاسع عشر بعد أن توقف عن كتابة المسرحيات الرومانسية. التفت إلى مشكلة اللعب مع أعمدة المجتمع (1877) واستمر في معالجة الموضوعات الواقعية خاصة في بيت الدمية (1879)، والأشباح (1881)، وعدو الشعب (1882)، والبطة البرية (1884). في هذه المسرحيات بالذات، هاجم بلا هوادة القيم الزائفة للمجتمع مما جعل الكثير من الناس يعانون. استخدم الحوار النثري في مسرحياته الواقعية ليحل محل العناصر غير الواقعية في المسرحيات الرومانسية السابقة. وفي المسرحيات الواقعية، أخضع إبسن الفعل للفكر؛ لأن الأفكار أهم من الفعل في هذا النوع من الدراما. ومن ثم فإن الفعل نفسي أكثر منه جسدياً في "بيت الدمي"، وهي الفكرة المركزية في هذه المقالة. وفي الوقت نفسه جاءت مسرحيات إبسن الواقعية بمثابة مفاجأة للأشخاص الذين تأثروا بالاتفاقيات القائمة. ولا عجب أن مثل هذه المسرحيات لم تلق استحسان الرقابة ومنعت في بعض الدول الأوروبية، خاصة في المرة الأولى لظهورها. فاجأ إبسن أوروبا عندما تطوع للحديث عن موضوعات لم يجرؤ أي كاتب مسرحي آخر على التحدث عنها بصراحة وبلا خوف. وهكذا لم يكن من الممكن عرض مسرحية "أشباح إبسن" في إنجلترا حتى عام 1891، أي بعد عشر سنوات من تقديمها في النرويج. كان جي تي جرين هو من ساعد في عرض النسخة الإنجليزية من أشباح في المسرح المستقل، وهو مسرح خاص، من أجل الهروب من الرقابة المفروضة على المسارح العامة. تمت ترجمة المسرحية بالفعل إلى اللغة الإنجليزية بواسطة ويليام آرتشر. يتركز موضوع الأشباح في قضية وراثية عندما يرث الابن مرضاً تناسلياً من والده، وكذلك فيما يخص الوضع التقليدي عندما تُجبر الزوجة على البقاء مع زوج فاسق تكرهه.

الكلمات المفتاحية: إبسن – واقعية – رومانسية – بيت الدمي – هلمر – نورا – كروكستاد

1. Introduction

A Doll's House was published on 4th December 1879 and got a big reputation through which more than 8,000 copies were sold, the largest printing to the date of Ibsen's plays. Its success was immediate and sensational. Despite its size, the first edition sold out within a month; a second edition 3,000 copies appeared on 4th January, and a third of 2,500 copies on 8th March. Such sales (proportionately equivalent to something around 150,000 in the United Kingdom today) were without precedent for a play in Scandinavia, and certainly no play, in Norway or anywhere else,

had had quite such an effect. *A Doll's House*, recalled Halvdan Koht, who was a child when it appeared, " exploded like a bomb into contemporary life " (Meyer 1974, 14).

Ibsen's realistic plays are full of details and known for their direct observations of life. Their subject-matters are concerned with their contemporary life with its social problems. Ibsen also places great emphasis on the hereditary and environmental factors in these plays. Moreover, these factors seem as if they were " *forming dominating dramatis personae who move unseen across the stage,* " (Nicoll 1957, 340) as Allardyce Nicoll puts it. Moreover, Ibsen focused on domestic themes and parental and filial relationships inside the family, or as Allardyce Nicoll remarks:

" *In the first place, his drama is a domestic drama. ... His aim is to dramatize the life of his own day. He realized perfectly that the long-antiquated emotions of the spectacular plays had nothing in common with ordinary men and women; that the drama, if it was to rise to its pristine greatness, would have no adapt itself to the needs of the present, to be a mirror of the age, and, instead of escaping into romantic fripperies, make itself the stern monitor of the time* " (Ibid).

It is believed that Ibsen's realistic characters, although they sometimes look like types in melodrama, are chiefly individuals because they " *are never fully understood until the final curtain has fallen,*" (Dower 1950, 300). This case is especially introduced in *A Doll's House* when Nora unexpectedly leaves her husband slamming the door behind her. Ibsen's interest in filling his realistic plays with suspense and surprise is especially influenced by the French technique in the well-made play which is also known for its economy, precision and inanimate characters. Az-Zubaidy believes that Imprisonment in *Death of a Salesman* is also one of the realistic elements used by Arthur Miller (Az-Zubaidy 2012, 19).

2. The Realistic Features in *A Doll's House*

Ibsen succeeded in proving the superiority of Realism over Romanticism in *A Doll's House* for certain reasons: First, since the period when the play was written had something to do with romanticism, Ibsen wanted to show some romantic aspects of certain characters in the play in order to shed some light on their faults. Ibsen himself was probably still affected by some of the literary romantic trends of his time, especially he himself had previously written romantic plays. Thus, the

melodrama, as a romantic genre, has its own influence on the play when we have such melodramatic characters as Krogstad the villain and the suffering lady as Nora, although Krogstad is changed for the better at the end of the play. The exploitation of a legal weakness on Nora's part is by itself a melodramatic element, or as Ronald Gray remarks: " *The manipulation of legal niceties against uniformed young women is another device characteristic of villains in melodrama* " (Gray 1977, 44). It is worthwhile to note that Raymond Williams feels that the characters in *A Doll's House* are closer to melodramatic types than to real individuals, especially when they are first introduced:

" *What was it that made A Doll's House, appear so strikingly original? That it dealt with " real people in real situations " ? This is surely very questionable. The characters of the play differ very little from the usual types of romantic drama: the innocent, childlike woman, involved in a desperate deception; the heavy insensitive husband; the faithful friend* " (Williams 1968, 48).

Krogstad, behaving like a typical villain in a melodrama is an indication to the actions inside the play. He threatens Nora and encourages the conflict between her and her husband. He tries to do his best to take advantage of a critical and sensitive situation to drive a wedge between people. He is himself corrupt with a tainted past trying to blackmail both Nora and Helmer. Up to this point Krogstad is doubtlessly a total villain.

Yet, Ibsen does not all the way treat Krogstad as a fixed and an unchangeable character, because he finally turns him into a nice person very different from what he was at the beginning of the play. Thus Ibsen, as far as Krogstad is concerned, does not commit himself to the prescribed unalterable characters of a melodrama. In other words, he wants to present *A Doll's House* as a realistic play about contemporary problems and a social conflict.

The second reason behind the excellence of Realism over Romanticism in the play is connected with its characters; it can be seen that they are at times tinged with romanticism. Nora's suffering and her depiction as an innocent woman threatened by a villain can be traced back to the romantic melodrama. Nora, on the other hand, has behaved romantically in certain places in the play. Her romantic illusion tells her that if she sacrifices herself, she will prevent Helmer's self-sacrifice. She does not want him to know that committed forgery and she threatened by Krogstad, because this will make him sad and he might involve himself in actions doing him a lot of harm. She first

believes her husband when he tells her that he will take the responsibility of firing Krogstad. But Helmer wants to fire Krogstad only because he does not like him without having the knowledge, yet of the business of forgery. Thus, Helmer tells Nora: " *Let what will happen, happen. When the real crisis comes, you will not find me lacking in strength or courage. I am man enough to bear the burden for us both* " (Frank McGuinness, II. p. 73). She confirms the same idea even after she quarreled with her husband telling him:

" *You are thinking I wouldn't have accepted such a sacrifice from you? No, of course I wouldn't! But what would my word have counted for against yours? That was the miracle I was hoping for, and dreading. And it was to prevent it happening that I wanted to end my life* " (III. p. 100).

She can herself see very clearly now how romantic she was when she first had these strange ideas in her mind.

Moreover, if Nora does not cherish romantic views, she will not let her husband call her by such endeared names as "lark", "songbird", and "squirrel". Her acceptance of these nicknames helps to make herself look like a "doll" in Helmer's eyes. Hence, we have the word "doll" included in the very title of the play. She imagines when her husband nicknames her by pleasant nomenclatures; he must be very loving and nice to her. In reality, his love for her is only a convenience but not commitment. She misunderstands her husband's intention when he brags he will stand by her and protect her. Thus, she feels confident of these allegations and asks him to go ahead and read the mail including Krogstad's first letter: " *Read your letters now, Torvald* " (III. p. 90). At the end of the play, she discovers her false and romantic evaluation of her husband when she finds out he is no more than a stranger. Thus she tells him: " *I realized that for eight years I had been living here with a complete stranger* " (III. p. 100), " *I can't spend night in the strange man's house* " (III. p. 101), and " *I don't accept things from strangers* " (III. p. 102).

Her romantic attitude makes her find enjoyment in the romantic word "miracle", which she associates with her husband's readiness to defend her and make her blame if Krogstad divulges the secret of forgery. Thus, she tells Mrs. Linde: " *A- miracle- is about to happen ... Yes. A miracle. But it's so frightening Christine. It mustn't happen, not for anything in the world* " (II., pp. 72-73). The miracle here is that her husband will take the blame if he knows about the forgery, but she is

mistaken. She herself finds out at the end that such a miracle failed and it was no more than a romantic illusion as we can tell from the following heated conversation between her and Helmer:

Helmer: " *Can you also explain why I have lost your love?* "

Nora: " *Yes, I can. It happened this evening, when the miracle failed to happen. It was then that I realized you weren't the man I'd thought to be* ".

Helmer: " *Explain more clearly. I don't understand you* ".

Nora: I've waited so patiently, for eight whole years- well, good heavens, I'm not such a fool as to suppose that miracles occur every day. Then this dreadful thing happened to me, and then I *knew* " *Now the miracle will take place!*" When Krogstad's letter was lying out there, it never occurred to me for a moment that you would let that man trample over you. I *knew* that you would say to him " *Publish the faces to the world!* "Then I certain that you would step forward and take the blame on yourself, and say: " *I am the one who is guilty!* " (III. pp. 99-100).

Even when Nora deserts her husband after having been disillusioned about him, she keeps thinking of miracles. Thus when her husband at the end of the play wonders if there is any way to get reunited, she answers: " *Oh, Trovald! Then the miracle of miracles would have to happen. ... You and I have to change so much* " (III., p. 102). But this time the expectation of miracles taking place is almost improbable, because she is speaking not of an ordinary miracle but of " *the miracle of miracles* " in order to show Helmer that such a reunion is ruled out, especially when she immediately adds: " *I don't believe in miracles any longer* " (Ibid).

Anyhow, Nora's illusions about Helmer have to some extent helped her to stand against the repressive environment created by her husband and the existing conventions. Repressed people always find a vent for their sufferings by creating a fanciful dream-like world which they retreat whenever they feel unable to face the unfavorable outside environment. Without these imaginations, fancies and miracles Nora cannot live normally in a society full of conventions which seem hard to change or overcome.

Her dream-like world encourages her even to lie. She promises her husband not to eat macaroons and denies having eaten them: " *No Trovald- I promise you, honestly--! ... You know I could never act against your wishes* " (I., p.25), but she has already eaten a couple as the stage direction tells

us: " *She takes from her pocket a bag containing macaroons and eats a couple* " (I., p.21). She backs out again when she offers some macaroon to Dr. Rank who immediately reminds her : " *I thought they were forbidden here* " (I., p.38). she claims she did not buy them herself: " *These are some Christine gave me* " (Ibid), which is a lie of course. She also lied to Krogstad when she told him first that her father had signed the bond (I.O.U): " *He did sign it* " (I., p.45), while in fact she forged her father's signature after his death.

The reason why Nora lies is because she cannot get what she desires for, only through deception and false allegations. She feels that without lies she is unable to secure the things she tries to procure or enjoy.

She also returns to illusions whenever she wants to escape from harsh surroundings. Thus, she tries to comfort herself by her husband's new job at the bank which will bring her a lot of money and she will get whatever she hopes for. Here is what she tells Mrs. Linde in this regard:

He's joining the bank in the New Year, and he'll be getting a big salary and lots of percentages too. From now on we'll be able to live quite differently- we'll be able to do whatever we want. Oh, Christine, it's such a relief! I feel so happy! Well. I mean, it's lovely to have heaps of money and not to have to worry about anything. (I., p.28).

Nora is not the only character who is dominated by fanciful imaginations. As the time of the play is still affected by romantic idealism, we have here Helmer, the idealistic character, boasting of his assumed devotion and readiness to stand by his wife's side against Krogstad plans: " *Let what will happen, happen. When the real crisis comes, you will not find me lacking in strength or courage. I am man enough to bear the burden for us both* " (I., p.61). This is only an illusion because Helmer is a selfish narrow-minded man who thinks first of his own interests before thinking of other's interests. His idealism will not allow him to borrow money just to save his life. He thinks borrowing money will lower the people's esteem for him. His self-aggrandizement prevents him from being indebted to anyone, as this will be insulting to his dignity. Moreover, his idealism does not make him accept being called by his first name even by his school mates. Thus he finds fault with Krogstad in this regard:

" *We were school friends. It was one of those friendships that one enters into over-hastily and so often comes to regret later in life. I might as well confess the truth. We-well, we're on*

Christian name terms. And the tactless idiot makes no attempt to control it when other people are present. On the contrary, he thinks it gives him the right to be familiar with me. He shows off the whole time, with "Trovald this", and "Trovald that". I can tell you, I find it damned annoying. If he stayed, he'd make my position intolerable " (II., p. 60).

Moreover, Helmer wants his wife to keep loving him even after he has severely insulted her. Thus after she tells him that she is no longer loves him because of his misconduct, he says: "*Nora How can you say this to me* "? (III., p. 99).

It's Helmer's self-styled idealism that makes Nora leave him at the end of the play, because she learns nothing profitable inside his house. She wants to educate herself away from his domineering personality: "*I must educate myself. And you can't help me with that. It's something I do by myself. That's why I'm leaving you* " (III., p. 97).

Since idealism is a romantic element, Helmer is always dominated by romantic illusions. Nora finally decides to leave him because she lost faith in miracles, which means they will never get reunited. Yet Helmer still believes in miracles, and hopes after all the inconveniences he caused his wife she might return to him: "*But I want to believe in them [miracles]. Tell me. We should have to change so that—*" (III., p. 102). The play ends with Helmer dreaming of miracles, or rather, "*the miracle of miracles*" (Ibid) to bring back his wife to him, but the final stage direction following his statement insinuates to us that such a romantic illusion will never come true when we hear "*the street door is slammed shut downstairs*" (Ibid) by the departing and non-returning wife.

In another place, and exactly before Helmer reads Krogstad's first letter, he arrogantly and romantically wishes something unpleasant might happen to his wife so that he can prove how faithful he is to her: "*Do you know, Nora, often I wish some terrible danger might threaten you, so that I could offer my life and my blood, everything for your sake*" (III., p. 90), but he soon backs out after he reads the first letter from Krogstad.

Helmer is romantic when he tries to get reconciled to Nora following reading Krogstad's second letter which includes the I.O.U. Thus he asks her to forgive him concerning his previous insults to her after having read Krogstad's first letter. He regards the whole matter as if it was a dream: "*I shall merely regard the whole business as a dream*" (III., p. 93). He blames what he

has already uttered against her on a dream-like state, which the romantics are influenced by. He is probably dreaming again that Nora will forgive him. Yet his self-arrogance still stipulates to him that he is superior to his wife and it is manly of him to forgive her. He does not condescend to ask for her forgiveness, but in reverse he forgives her as he was not to blame: " *You can't believe that I have forgiven you. But I have, Nora. I swear it to you. I have forgiven everything. I know that what you did you did for your love of me* " (Ibid). But these words do not wipe out the bad feeling caused by his wounding and shocking words he previously addressed her with. His idealization of himself does not allow him to look at his shortcomings. Anyhow, Nora is not all the time romantic because she has her realistic attitudes and opinions. The following quotation explains this matter:

Helmer: " *But to leave your home, your husband, your children! Have you thought what people will say?* "

Nora: I can't help that. I only know that I must do thus.

Helmer: " *But this is monstrous! Can you neglect your most sacred duties?* "

Nora: " *What do you call my most sacred duties?* "

Helmer: " *Do I have to tell you? Your duties towards your husband, and your children* " .

Nora: " *I have another duty which is equally sacred* " .

Helmer: " *You have not. What on earth could that be?* "

Nora: " *My duty towards myself* " .

Helmer: " *First and foremost you are a wife and a mother* " .

Nora: *I don't believe that any longer. I believe that I am first and foremost human being, like you – or anyway, that I must try to become one. I know most people think as you do, Trovald, and I know there's something of the sort to be found in books. But I'm no longer prepared to accept what people say and what's written in books. I must think things out for myself, and try to find my own answer.* (III., pp. 97-98).

At that time, this was the most defiant attitude from a wife to her husband. It is not only the husband who means everything to a woman, but also is her freedom and emancipation. Nora

challenges Helmer and tells him to his face that woman's education is not only dependent on her husband, but also on herself: " *Oh, Trovald, you're not the man to educate me into being the right wife for you* " (III., p. 97). Nora realizes at the end after she is changed from a romantic to a realistic woman that she was previously treated only as a doll both in her father's and husband's homes. She is now mature enough to see the faulty side of the prevailing conventions in her society. Thus she argues with her husband:

" *But our home has never been anything but a playroom. I've been your doll-wife, just I used to be papa's doll-child. And the children have been my dolls. I used to think it was fun when you came in and played with me, just as they think it's fun when I go in and play games with them. That's all our marriage has been, Torvald* " (III., p. 96).

Here, Nora is the spokeswoman of the females who are regarded by men as being inferior to the sterner sex. She makes a point that a woman is not a thing to be trifled with. Moreover, Nora believes she is free now from the Victorian shackles. There is no defense of a woman for her rights like the echoing words she utters when her husband accuses her of degrading him by forging her father's signature and borrowing money without his consent. She retorts that she did that in order to save his life and keep her dying father out of trouble: " *Has a woman really not the right to spare her dying father, or save her husband's life? I can't believe that* " (III., p. 99). It is certain that if she had told her husband about the transaction, he would not have allowed her to borrow money and certainly his death would have deteriorated. She did not borrow money for her own sake, but only to help cure Helmer in Italy as the doctors suggested. Now she is paying back the loan by working hard through the needlework, crouching and copying. She did not even take advantages of Dr. Rank to borrow money from him, as she did not want to embarrass him.

She regards her action a sacrifice and argues with her husband why men should not reciprocally sacrifice for women while " *millions of women have done it* " (III., p. 100) for the sake of men. But to Helmer this statement is childish: " *You think and talk like a stupid child* " (Ibid). Moreover she argues with him that he must take the blame instead of accusing her: Then I was certain that you would step forward and take all the blame on yourself, and say: " *I am the one who is guilty* " (Ibid).

Nora's argument that she would rather leave her children than stay at home is convincing when we remember that Nora herself was brought up by the same nurse she is now leaving her

children with. Many children are brought up by nurses when the mothers are no longer at home for some reason or other. As for earning her living, there is no problem about that. If Mrs. Linde finds a job and she is a widowed woman, why can't Nora find a job especially when she has already tried her hands in needlework, crocheting and copying? She is no longer deceived by her narrow-minded husband, who now begs her not to leave as they can even live not as husband and wife, but only as " *brother and sister* " (III., p. 101). She suddenly retorts: " *You know quite well it wouldn't last* " (Ibid). Moreover, She wants to hear no more of the cheap and false words from her husband as she used to do at the beginning of her marriage. She wants now to argue with him and face facts: " *Just listen to what I have to say. You and I have got to face facts, Torvald* " (III., p. 95).

Since the realistic elements of the play are stronger than the romantic ones, we should also allude to other dominating factors related to realism. Realistic plays usually deal with the influence of heredity and environment on the characters. *A Doll's House* supplies us with a lot of examples concerning this aspect. Thus, Dr. Rank's disease is contracted from his father's sexual profligacy, and this is made clear when he says: " *My poor innocent spine must pay for the fun my father had as a gay young lieutenant* " (II., p. 63). This fact was previously repeated by Nora while speaking to Mrs. Linde: " *But he's got a terrible disease – he's got spinal tuberculosis, poor man. His father was a frightful creature who kept mistresses and so on. As a result, Dr. Rank has been sickly ever since he was a child – you understand* " (II., p. 55).

Nora's wastefulness, carelessness and indifference at the beginning of the play are attributed to her father. Thus, Helmer tells Nora, the spendthrift:

" *You're a funny little creature. Just like your father used to be. Always on the look-out for some way to get money, but as soon as you have any it just runs through your fingers and you never know where it's gone. Well, I suppose I must take you as you are. It's in your blood. Yes, yes, yes, these things are hereditary, Nora* " (I., pp. 24-25).

Again Helmer tells Nora that she is like her father in the way she behaves: " *Oh, don't be melodramatic. Your father was always ready with that kind of remark* " (III., p. 92).

It is also hereditary when children become liars and criminals because of mothers. Accordingly Helmer tells Nora: "*I've come across it so often in my work at the bar. Nearly all young criminals are children of mothers who are constitutional liars*" (I., p. 51). This is also applied to fathers when they are liars and crooked, as when Helmer adds referring to Krogstad: "*The father can have the same influence. Every lawyer knows that only too well. And yet this fellow Krogstad has been sitting at home all these years poisoning his children with his lies and pretenses*" (I., pp. 51-52). Consequently, lying fathers and mothers hereditarily affect their children and contaminates their minds: "*Because an atmosphere of lies contaminates and poisons every corner of the home. Every breath that the children draw in such a house contains the germs of evil*" (I., p. 51). It is no wonder that Nora starts suspecting herself as a wrong-doer and liar, because she has already committed forgery and lied both to Krogstad and her husband concerning the I.O.U. Thus she does not prefer to play with her children on the assumption that this will lead to "*corrupt my little children--! Poison my home*" (I., p. 52)!

The environmental factor is regarded the third reason behind superiority of Realism over Romanticism, therefore, there are some examples in this regard. We know that Krogstad and Mrs. Linde were in love, but the latter jilted the former and married a wealthy man. The reason is related to the environment in which she was living, as she was in financial straits and preferred a wealthy husband to the poor Krogstad. Thus she now tells Krogstad with whom she wants to get reconciled: "*You mustn't forget I had a helpless mother to take care of, and two little brothers. We couldn't wait for you, Nils. It would have been so long before you'd have had enough to support us*" (III., p. 79).

We also have the nurse to preferred to leave her husband and daughter in order to look after Nora when she was a child. She did that because of the harsh environment she lived in. she depended on herself to earn her living when her husband was good-for-nothing. Thus she tells Nora in this respect: "*But I had to when I came to nurse my little Miss Nora. ... When I had the chance of a good job? A poor girl what's got into trouble can't afford to pick and choose. That good-for-nothing didn't lift a finger*" (II., p.54).

Nora's inhibition and reservation at the beginning are also due to environmental factors. She first looked as if she was immature and withdrawn because both her father and her husband called her a "doll-child" and a "doll-wife" respectively. She found it difficult to talk to her husband about any

serious subject. That is why she tells her husband before leaving him: " *In eight whole years – no, longer – ever since we first met – we have never exchanged a serious word on a serious subject* " (III., p.95). Moreover, the strict environment and conventions forced her before her marriage to go and talk to the servants rather than face her father and a little walk with him: " *When I was at home, of course, I loved papa best. But I always used to think it was terribly amusing to go down and talk to the servants; because they never told me what I ought to do; and they were such fun to listen to* " (II., p.67). When she got married she had the same problem with her husband who, like her father, did not allow her to exchange opinions with him. Thus, whenever she wanted to have a conversation with somebody she went to Dr. Rank who amusingly told her that he replaced her father's servants: " *I see. So I've taken their place* " (Ibid). Nora finally leaves her husband and her children because of the cruel circumstances at home. Without such a repressive environment she would not have left her family.

Another realistic feature in *A Doll's House* is traced in its theme which is concerned with a social contemporary problem and social movements at Ibsen's time. It is about the emancipation of women and their role in society. However we must not judge what happened in the play, especially Nora's departure, by our modern criteria. Nowadays many wives easily leave home if they are not satisfied with their husbands. Thus it sounds as if there was nothing revolutionary in *A Doll's House* if we look at it from a modern perspective. John Gassner refers better to this point by saying:

" *Today it seems incredible that A Doll's House should have created the furor it did. In exploding Victorian ideals of feminine dependency the play seemed revolutionary in 1879. When its heroine Nora left her home in search of self-development it seemed as if the sanctity of marriage had been flouted by a playwright trading the stage with cloven-feet* " (Gassner 1962, viii).

Then John Gassner compares the way Nora slammed the door behind her when she left home at that time to a pistol shot: " *An anarchist's pistol shot could not have reverberated more frighteningly in the Victorian world than the closing of that door* " (Ibid).

The play depicts a situation in which a wife lives with a narrow-minded middle-class husband influenced by the strict conventions of his time. She has the courage to argue with him and make him face facts. She decided to leave in order to be free in the outer world and be equal to man. Thus the principle of equality will be applied. This point can be more elaborated when we

take Harold Clurman's statement into consideration that " *men cannot be 'free' ... persons unless women are equally free* " (Clurman 1977, 109). Seymour L. Flaxman concentrates on this point saying that Ibsen succeeded in making the readers sympathize with the middle-class people in their misfortunes the same way as the readers do with the great characters of tragedies: " *With A Doll's House Ibsen had brought middle-class tragedy to new heights, and had proved that the failures of middle-class men and women could be as moving as those of kings and queens* " (Flaxman 1962, 10).

As for the setting and structure of the play, they are cast in the realistic mold. First: the play is written in prose with detailed stage direction and has much life observations. It has no significant asides or soliloquies, and has more dialogue than action. The setting is box-like, always indoors and mostly in a quiet living room. Most of the dialogue takes place inside this setting. The real furniture and the joined solid three walls give the audience the feeling as if they were looking at the characters through the imaginary transparent fourth wall of the realistic stage. This technique gives the impression that the characters are discussing matters without feeling that they are interrupted by the outer world. They feel that the stage is life itself. They never address the spectators and never think that they are being watched by them, because in real life we are not supposed to talk to others and they are not expected to talk to us or watching us while we are separately discussing something at home. This illusion of the disconnection between characters and audience is emphasized in the play when the living-room itself does not lead to the outside world. It leads only to the study and the hall. It is only through the hall can the characters come in touch with the outside world. It is interesting to quote Thomas F. Van Lean who compares the setting to a prison from which Nora, "the lark" flies to the outside world where she can enjoy freedom:

" *As a result, the setting comes to represent not only a milieu but also a prison, the cage in which Helmer confines his twittering lark. In the last act, when" from below is heard the reverberation of a heavy door closing", the significance of Nora's release from her husband and his world gains the added implication of the shattered box, the burst cage, the sudden coming into existence of the freedom of the outside world where the lark can try her wings* " (Lean 1970, 44).

3. Conclusion

A Doll's House is a realistic play that sheds a bright light on the unpleasant situations of the middle-class people and their sufferings without hiding or covering up disagreeable things. It shows how people suffer when they are alienated and on bad terms so that we can visualize their problems and feel sorry for their adversities. It is a play in which realism triumphs over romanticism, because it is concerned with the revolutionary movement related to woman's emancipation. Its structure and setting are within the demands of realistic plays. Its abundance in dialogue and lack in action is another realistic feature. As a good-example of its early success in Norway, thousands of spectators and readers were anxious to see and read it. It is worthwhile reading the following quotation from Michael Meyer, one of the modern translators of the play, to know how it was received in Norway.

The play is considered a realistic play, because it reveals a current social problem concerning family life and marriage. Marriage in this play is no longer regarded sacrosanct. The theme is a challenge to the authority of man in the family. Nora is not all the way depicted as a romantic girl in the play. She has also her realistic positions which Ibsen appreciates and admires. She revolts against the conceptions of marriage applied at her time. She directly tells her husband that a wife's sacred duty is not only confined to serve her husband and children, but also herself. The play is an attempt to reveal men's feelings and emotions at the end of the nineteenth century towards women who regard them as inferior to men whatever the situation was. In other words, it was the woman who was always to be blamed even if the husband treated her cruelly and mercilessly. This is the case the playwright criticizes throughout the play and tries to uncover. The play also sheds more light on the idea of equality between men and women because a wife is not a doll but a human being. Thus the whole play is about the development of Nora from a submissive girl to a defiant woman paving the way for future emancipation.

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