

The role of minor character



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The role of minor character, Mrs. Linde, Ismene, Krogstad and Haemon in developing the themes of the play *A Doll's House* written by Henrik Ibsen in 19th century AD and *Antigone* by Sophocles in 5th century BC. The story of the protagonist is sometimes best developed by the presence of minor characters. Generally the minor characters are used to bring along a change in the lives of the major characters. They are the tools employed to shift the plot or to cause a change. Like in *Macbeth* it was three witches who set the climax of the play for the way it appears to the audience.

Sometimes when the plays become excessively serious or too heavy for the audience to imbibe, the minor characters are employed to add humour and ease the tension. Easing the tension builds up more pity and fear in case of a cathartic climax and in case of other kinds of climax as well the easing of tension is what brings out the final element of shock at the climax. Without the minor characters, the playwright is left with very little space to alter and add layers to the play.

A protagonist's way of thinking cannot be changed instantly without any external influence, without minor characters, the play becomes predictable and sometimes boring. Sometimes, the audience however might feel that the minor character is not required for the story to develop, this is only a misconception because minor characters play an important role but in furtive ways. In the play *A Doll's House*, the couple Mrs Linde and Krogstad play a major role in contrasting the relation of that between Nora and Torvald; the major characters.

Nora and Torvald are shown to be a couple that seems perfect but in reality is nothing but fake. Nora, the rebellious girl wants to establish self identity. She has absolutely no desire to follow the norms of the society. To bring out this character and highlight the tragic flaw, Mrs Linde appears in the scene. She is the idealistic woman, just the kind of woman that the 19th century Europe expected. The contrast is brought about in many ways. The technique used is contrasting statement. It is clear from the beginning that everything Nora says, Mrs Linde contradicts her by saying just the opposite.

Nora had taken a loan and when she tells Mrs Linde her reaction “ No, A wife cannot borrow without her husband’s consent. ” Suggests that she is the idealistic woman whereas Nora says “ oh, If it is a wife who has any head for business – a wife who has the wit to be a little clever” suggests that Nora is arrogant and rebellious and even though she is doing a good thing for her husband the society is not going to like it because she is going against the rules and is not ready to bend down to the requirements of an idealistic society.

This shows how Nora and Mrs Linde believe in opposite theories. Their thoughts are contradictory. This suggests that in the end their lives will be the complete opposite. When Mrs Linde marries and gives up herself identity to be with a man and Nora leaves the house to establish a self – identity. To bring about this theme, Henrik Ibsen used the minor character Mrs. Linde. Similarly in Antigone, Ismene is used to bring about the character of Antigone. Ismene, the weak and timid girl has no courage to say out loud what she believes is right.

She understands her family traditions and would like to bury her brother Polyneices but Creon the king has ordered that his body be left as a feast for the vultures. “ I do not dishonour them, but do this against the state – I have no strength for it. ” Ismene doesn’t have the courage to go against the order of the king or for that matter a man. Antigone on the other hand is fearless. She believes that its not only her right to bury Polyneices but also her duty towards her family and towards the gods.

Use that excuse, if you like, but I indeed will go and heap a tomb for my dearest brother. ” She doesn’t believe that a mortal’s law is above the divine law. She doesn’t show any inhibition in burying her brother. Ismene even warns Antigone and tells her not to take such a reckless action “ You have a hot heart for chilling matters” She is practical enough to know that the penalty of breaking the law made by the king would be no less than death with suffering.

She is selfish and doesn’t want to take any risks. Antigone on the other hand, is absolutely against the law made by the king and in the end she does what she believes was right, in spite knowing that she will be severely punished. “ I must please those below a longer time than people here, for i shall lie there forever” In this also we see how a minor character, Ismene, helps in bringing out the character of the major character, Antigone. The male minor characters also depict a similar picture.

When Torvald, a man of principles, a man who lives as the society has conditioned him, is contrasted with Krogstad who is clearly a man of no principles – the idea of male dominance is strengthened. “ it is horrible to

think of! I am in the power of an unscrupulous man; he can do what he likes with me, ask anything he likes of me, give me any orders he pleases- I dare not refuse. ” Krogstad does exactly the opposite of Torvald. He loans money to Nora, even when he knew that women cannot borrow money without the consent of a man. He lies and cheats.

Torvald on the other hand is absolutely against loans and is aware of the fact that his respect and honour is more important than anything else. Nora tells Mrs. Linde “ I even hinted that he might raise a loan. That nearly made him angry, Christine. He said I was thoughtless ” Krogstad’s character brings out the character of Torvald who is a major character in the play. Similarly Haemon, the son of Creon and Antigone’s fiance is completely opposite from his father who is also the king. Haemon is a sensitive man who agrees with the actions that Antigone is going to take.

He tries to convince his father, Creon “ Father, the gods endow human beings with intelligence, which is the greatest of all possessions. I could never – I don’t know how I could say you don’t speak correctly, but sometimes another man’s opinion is also right ” but Creon being a stubborn in and dominant king doesn’t pay any heed to Haemon’s suggestions. The two characters are completely contrasting. Haemon’s generosity and abnegation is what leads to the understanding of Creon’s dominant character.

Haemon also goes to the extent of sacrificing his life “ then she will die and dying destroy another” to stand by of his opinion that Antigone is right whereas Creon punishes her severely and doesn’t listen to the suggestions

made by anyone. This is how one understands the contrast between the characters. The major characters employed to deplore a theme whereas the minor characters are the important seed in showing that the actions taken by these characters. Without the contribution of the minor characters the major characters wouldn't be prominent. It is only the contrast that brings about the true nature of the major characters.