

Depiction of marriage norms in doll's house



The play ? A Doll's house is a three-act play written by Henrik Ibsen in 1879 in Norway, Europe. The play is important for its critical perspectives toward nineteenth century marriage norms. In A Doll's House, Ibsen paints a bleak picture of the sacrificial roles held by women of all classes in his society.

He is known as the father of the new genre in drama realism. Ibsen really portrayed what life is it like especially for women living in a patriarchal society. Its standard classification of gender roles and expectations it holds for a woman as a wife and a mother and as well as that of a man as a husband. The play lights up many flaws in the society in its structure and the expectation it has for individuals in relationships. There are many central themes in the play for discussion some of which are relevant to discuss in this paper are marriage, identity, infantilism, gender, rebellion etc.

Torvald and Nora are a couple with three children and their family fits the structure of a perfect middle-class family in their time. But this family picture of theirs became shattered when Krogstad in a letter revealed Norar's secret to her husband who reacts to it in a way that awakened the other side of Nora that has never been nurtured. She realizes the life of illusion and decides to leave her husband and children to go and construct her identity. Nora forged a signature to borrow money from Krogstad to save her husband's life. When Krogstad found out he was going to lose his job to Mrs. Linde, a friend of Norar's, he used the bond to blackmail Nora to persuade Torvald to let him keep his job in the bank. In a bitter sweet ending, Helmerr's relationship was broken but Krogstad and Mrs. Linde on the other hand rekindled a romantic relationship they had had in the past.

Marriage is one of the earliest structured institutions that spells out the various roles of the individuals involved. In a happy marriage in the nineteenth century, I would say, marriage in the Victorian era, women played roles than being themselves. They were to be obedient, subservient, the spiritual leader of the family, a guide to her children and most importantly a good support to her husband. Her goal was to maintain peace and comfort in the home and satisfy her husband's ego which typically includes sacrificing her agency and keeping her dependency on her husband. In the play, Nora exemplifies the conventional feminine standards of the time. She seems to be powerless, has no agency and confines herself through patriarchal expectations, that signifies a woman's social role at that time, that is, just be a good wife and a mother. The man on the other hand is the breadwinner, provider and the decision maker. And here, Torvald exemplifies the conventional masculine standards of the time. The society locks women and men into two separate worlds. The former in domesticity and the latter in a domineering state.

In A Doll's House, the Helmers each had a unique role in their marriage. Nora, like every other woman in the Victorian Era played a role in which they supported their husbands, took care of their children, and made sure everything was perfect in and around the house- though with the help of a maid. Torvald provided the security of his family. Torvald treats Nora as his little irresponsible child who needs guidance all the time while Nora treats him as the man of the house who has the authority to do anything he wants and have things done his way. The play revealed some of the restrictions on women during the 19th century and the many problems it posed on them.

The play, through Torvald makes us see through the filter of society's perception of women. One of the fundamental differences between men and women is that men are rational beings and women more hysterical. Gender roles are based on norms, or standards, created by the society. In a patriarchic society, masculine roles have commonly been related with strength, aggression, and dominance, while feminine roles have traditionally been related with passivity, nurturing, and subordination. This means that society has made women to look fragile and view them as a people who need masculine help and direction.

They teach women to also accept their inferiority to men. In the play, in her husband's eyes, Nora is nothing but one silly woman. She is called several diminutive, childlike names by Torvald throughout the play. He invariably from the beginning of Act One, made a habit of addressing his wife, Nora, using terms that highlight her diminutive size and helpless condition. Some of which include " my little songbird," " squirrel," " lark," " my little featherhead," " my little skylark," " little person," " little woman or a cute scatterbrain whose thoughts are nonsensical and typical of any other woman. Torvald constantly used the modifier " little" before the names he calls Nora. These all usually followed the possessive " my," signaling his belief that Nora is his possession. This is typical in most marriages of the time and even now.

Throughout the play, Torvald looked down upon Nora and treats her as one of his possessions. She is something used for his satisfaction. She also accepts and plays along with him sometimes quoting and referring to herself by the pet names to make requests.