

How far was torvald helmer a victim english literature essay

[Literature](#), [British Literature](#)



On the 19th of October 1878, Ibsen wrote a note in Rome which was the oldest note recorded concerning the dramatic play "A Doll's House" and he wrote:[1] "There are two kinds of spiritual laws and two kinds of consciences - one for men and one for women." [2] The play "A Doll's House", not only represents the roles of a woman, but also the role a man had in society at that time. The reaction from the Victorian audiences was one of outrage. How could Nora leave her children and how could Torvald accept, how Nora behaves in front of her husband? The storyline of the play develops in steps. First we meet Nora, the perfect wife, but Nora develops from a perfect wife to an example of a foolish woman in this century. The play has a double climax. The first climax is when Torvald is reading the letter of Krogstad and Torvald's reaction. The second climax is reached when Nora leaves Torvald and the house door is closing. The play was set in the Victorian era. [3] The main role of the husband was to be the provider and leader; this applies to Torvald the husband of the protagonist Nora. Torvald is always worried about money and the way he is portrayed. Torvald's family is representing the perfect role model of a family. He has a lovely wife, three children, servants and a well-paid job. Torvald: "(...) No debt, no borrowing. There can be no freedom or beauty about a home life that depends on borrowing and debt." [4] In my opinion Torvald is trying to earn enough money so he could reach the expectations of the Victorian society. [5] In the play Nora is pretending that she can't handle money, but instead she is playing that she can't handle money. This is what she wants Torvald to believe. To give an example instead of having a really nice present from Torvald for Christmas she wants money to pay back her debts. Torvald is keen on remaining debt

free, as he looks out for his own future, as well as that of his children. Nils Krogstad, the man who once loaned Nora some money, made this mistake in the past. Krogstad: "(...), I was guilty of an indiscretion." [6] Now Krogstad's reputation is facing a challenge. He is suffering from people's disrespect towards him and that it is hard for him to earn money. Krogstad was a lawyer as well, but because of his past mistake in court, he now is only a bank clerk. To hold his position is quite hard for him, because every time someone makes a mistake, the first one to think of, is him. Also his children will suffer from their dad's mistakes in the past. Nora, Torvald, Dr Rank and the society of Norway thought, that a parent's immorality is passed on to their children like a disease. Krogstad: " But now I must cut myself free from all of that. My sons are growing up and; for their sake I must try and win back as much respect as I can in this town." [7]

Dr Rank and Nora's friends think that he suffers from cancer due to his father's mistakes in the past. Dr Rank: " To have to pay this penalty for another man's sin!" (...) " My poor innocent spine has to suffer for my father's youthful amusements." [8] By " youthful amusements" and " sin", Dr Rank speaks of his father eating truffles, oysters, asparagus, " pâté de foie gras" and drinking champagne in excess. The society from this time thought that enjoying life was a sin and that their children will suffer, if they would enjoy life too much. Dr Rank's father did not protect his family or his son. It could also be that the father of Dr Rank had a sexually transmitted disease, which maybe, why Dr Rank has to suffer from his father's misdeeds. [9] It is not only that his father enjoyed life in excess, but now his son suffers because he is ashamed of his father's sins. A man had to be a protector and

a role model in this century. Torvald had to fit into this role, created by the society and tradition of his time. He had to have a good job, because without a good job, he could not support a wife or children. A man had to be a protector. This expected role must have created a big pressure on Torvald. When he reads the letter from Krogstad, where he explained what Nora did, he completely loses his mind. Torvald: " You have ruined all my future." [10] Torvald: "(...), it must appear as if everything between us were just as before - but naturally only in the eyes of the world." [11]

He is so keen on keeping his good reputation, that he would even ignore Nora, but still live with her, just to remain a model of the social expectancies at that time. It was all about the image the society had about a person; it was all about reputation and what other people saw and thought about a person. Torvald is stuck in his role as a provider and leader, that he fails his last and possibly one of the most important roles as a husband, to be a husband. Nora represents the protector in this play. Torvald is too weak to do so. When she says: " I will kill myself" she actually means it, to make sure, that her family is not harmed in any way. Torvald is not against her suicide, because he loves her, but because he is afraid of the gossip this would cause. He should respect and protect his wife and family, whatever the cost. Because he is really fixated on his own reputation, he misses that Nora expected him to be a protector and somebody who would understand her, who would support Nora whatever happened. He even said it himself after the New Year's Eve party. Torvald: "(...), Nora, I have often wished that you might be threatened by some great danger, so that I might risk my life's blood and everything for your sake." [12] When Torvald gets the chance to

save his wife, as he sad, he refuses and chooses to reject her and to scream at her rather than losing face.[13]The question was: How far was Torvald Helmer a victim of his society's prescribed gender roles just as Nora Helmer was? In general it could be said, that men were not victims of society, but a product of their time. That is what Torvald is. He is a product of his time; he was the norm. Then we have Krogstad, who is protecting his children and his honour as well, and his family. Helmer protected his family from dishonour, but he was not willing to protect his wife. He did not protect his family because he had to, but because he just thought about himself. After Helmer realized, that the holiday to Italy was paid by Nora, he feels belittled by her. There is nothing he could do against this feeling of being belittled by his wife, because this is what society taught him to feel; also he has to think about his reputation. He is still a very narrow-minded person, who is just thinking about himself and not about others. Torvald Helmer is a weak man who has no courage. This does not make him a victim, but a very small and not respectable individual, who should not to be trusted, when his honour is in question. We still should have sympathy for him, because he behaves towards Nora, how Nora wants him to behave. Nora is a victim of the society and of her marriage. We can see that, e. g. in how Tovald is talking to Nora. He calls her a lot of names, like: skylark, my squirrel, Miss Sweet Tooth and little Nora. All the names have one thing in common, there are all names for small animals, and he is belittling her by calling her small names. This is how he tries to make Nora small. He shows her, that she is a smaller person, than he is. He is just behaving like this, because this is, what society has taught him. The main difference between Nora and Tovald is that Nora tries to break

out of the prescribed gender role, by going away. This is a very interesting point to see. Nora Helmer, the weak and stupid woman, is breaking out of her prescribed gender role by the society. In respect of my conclusion, I think, that Nora and Tovald are both victims of the society.

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