

Influence of antigone on a doll's house



It is very difficult to label something as a first in literature. Much the way inventions are often adaptations of previously patented objects, most authors borrow ideas and techniques from pre-existing media. In order to truly classify something as a first one must look for something entirely revolutionary, something that has never been done before. Two of these so called "firsts" include the first modern novel with Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* and what has been called the first modern play in Ibsen's *A Doll's House*. Regarding the latter, it is important to realize that while the play did break several molds which had endured for centuries, much was borrowed and adapted from past works. Of these, another "first" emerges for having shown a strong influence on Ibsen and his revolutionary play. Coincidentally, it is what historians refer to as one of the first plays in existence, Sophocles' *Antigone*. In merely looking at the surface, one notices right away that both plays are significant in that they avoid the social temptation of using a man as a protagonist. Looking deeper into the stories, however, one can see that in even more contradiction with society, the female characters go against men. Both *Antigone* and *Nora* step into the spotlight as the female hero who has been put in a compromising situation and is forced to decide whether it is more important to follow what society dictates, or go with what they feel is moral and just. *Antigone* is faced with the death of both brothers, one who is to be buried with full military rites, while the other, under dictate of the king, is to be cast aside and allowed to rot in the sun. She places family before the law, and ventures out to give her brother a proper burial. In *A Doll's House*, *Nora* too must decide where the line between right and wrong is drawn. In order to save her husband's life, *Nora* forges her father's name on a promissory note. Both women thus break the law using similar justifications.

Antigone does so under the premise that the Gods dictated that all men deserved a proper burial. Likewise, Nora commits her crime with the belief that since it is saving a life, her situation is an exception to the rules. The leading men in both works also have similar characterizations. Both Creon and Helmer are egotistical men, who put too much value on their position of authority; Creon so much so that he is willing to put a decree that defies the laws of the Gods. Furthermore, both are close-minded and too stubborn to see that they could be wrong. When Nora reveals her crime to Helmer, the audience expects to see a grateful and understanding husband, but instead is greeted with a spiteful and unappreciative man who does not see the true purpose of Nora's deed. Similarly, Creon, instead of seeing that his niece Antigone placed family and the Gods before the law of the land, solely sees that he has been disobeyed. Both men worry about how their social status will be affected by the actions of the women; Creon is afraid he will look weak if he allows Antigone's deed to go unpunished, and Helmer is worried about allowing his wife to commit such a crime. One could argue that the true criminals are the men themselves, for not having the conscience to step down. Both men realize too late the consequences of their behavior. After yelling at Nora, and revealing to her in not so many words that she is merely a doll in his doll house, Helmer tries to apologize. Likewise, after much debate, Creon heads to the cave where he had exiled Antigone to free her. In both instances their apologies are too late. After Helmer's soliloquy, Nora walks out on her family to find a new life and discover herself. When Creon arrives to his destination, he finds Antigone hanged and his son dead by his own hand. It is due to both men's stubbornness that their stories take this tragic turn. While Sophocles and Ibsen are from two entirely different times

and cultures, and although their writing styles differ dramatically, the influence of Antigone on the story of A Doll's House cannot be overlooked.