

A Doll's House, by Henrik Ibsen

Nora and Torvold Helmer live during the late 1800s with their three children and what seems to be the perfect home life. It's Christmas Eve, and everyone is very excited to spend time together. However, Nora reveals to her friend Christine that everything is not as it seems...the Helmers have gone through rough times, and Nora is now living a lie, deceiving her husband about something she had done years ago without his knowledge that could ruin her and her family's reputation. Over the Christmas holiday, it becomes apparent that Nora's crime is the least of their family problems.

During the Victorian era, marriage was viewed as economically necessary, whether or not any feelings were involved between the couple. If the couple loved each other, that was a plus, but it was not regarded as a vital part of the union. Torvold's relationship with Nora is also characterized by insulating her from any responsibility. Rather than seeking her guidance, it was typical of the time for Torvold to treat Nora like a glass doll, something to be put on a shelf and protected from any care in the world. With this behavior, he shows a lack of respect for his wife's intellect.

Though he would deny it, the typical Victorian man viewed women as inferior to them. Rather than Torvold relying on his wife to help him in his endeavors, he puts her on a shelf to play with at his pleasure. They are presently content to play house with Nora as the obedient and carefree wife and Torvold as the sole protector and provider of the family. In his own way, Torvold loves her, but he can't experience the fullness of the love that comes with a healthy marital union. It takes a major crisis to reveal the flaws in the Helmer's doll house.

Over the course of their whole married life, Nora had been playing a role, and any chance she got, she tried to sneak a small amount of escape from it. She was raised with this mindset of male-superiority, and she had no chance to develop as an individual human being, with her own opinions and interests. Torvold is correct when he says Nora is extremely naive, but he fails to realize that it was her father and himself who made her that way.

The playwright Henrik Ibsen lived during the thick of this common misconception of marriage. The somber, rebellious finale to *A Doll's House* was radical for its time, and the play was met with critical reviews. Ibsen was actually forced to write an alternate ending. But Ibsen had painted an accurate picture of what happens when men treat women in a degrading and submissive manner. The ending, like modern feminism, can be considered a pendulum swing, an over reaction to a real problem. Everything Nora says about her relationship with Torvold is true, but that doesn't justify her response.

It's very easy to see this play as an attack on marriage, but just because the author offers the wrong solution doesn't mean that his analysis of the problem is incorrect. A man who ignores the wise counsel of his wife scorns the gift that God has given him and shows a lack of respect and love for his wife. A marriage like this is a mockery of what God created. Marriage is a picture of God's relationship with His people, and a husband and wife should offer no less of a sacrifice for each other than what God has given, and still gives, to His bride every day.

"And the Lord God said, It is not good that man should be alone, I will make him an help meet for Him." Gen. 2:18. "Whoso findeth a wife findeth a good thing, and obtaineth favor in the Lord." Prov. 18:2 "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female, for ye are all one in Christ Jesus." Gal. 3:28