
A Theme Of Reputations In A Doll House By Henrik Ibsen

Reputations. They can be positive or negative. They can benefit or worsen a person's life. The play *A Doll House*, written in 1879, follows the marriage of Torvald and Nora, as Nora attempts to pay off a debt, after taking an illegal loan from Krogstad. Through Torvald's obsession over his reputation, Ibsen reveals how worrying about others' opinions deteriorates an individual's mental state and relationships, making life worse.

Torvald's continuous paranoia over his reputation leads to the downfall of his marriage. When Nora displays genuine concern over firing Krogstad, Torvald is quick to retaliate with, "Oh yes- as long as our little bundle of stubbornness gets her way-! I should go and make myself ridiculous in front of the whole office-give people the idea I can be swayed by all kinds of outside pressure". Torvald does not even consider Nora's concerns, as he is too preoccupied with his reputation in his office. This demonstrates the barrier his obsession places between him and his wife, Nora. Torvald does not even consider his wife's feelings, driving her farther apart from himself.

Another example of his obsession destroying his marriage is when he tells Nora that "almost everyone who goes bad early in life has a mother who's a chronic liar," when explaining Krogstad's reputation. He then goes on to explain, "It's usually the mother's influence that's dominant". This declaration of how a mother's reputation can affect their children, causes Nora to stop mothering her children, making it easier for her to leave in the end, as her children are already dependent of her. This is another example of how Torvald's obsession with reputations ruins his marriage and family. His constant fear of losing status drives the wedge between himself and Nora, causing the fallout at the end. Nora realizes that Torvald "never loved me". At least not as much as he loves his reputation. The constant obsession over how the rest of the world perceives Torvald does not only destroy his marriage and life, but also destroys Nora's happiness and love. Nora is forced to follow countless rules, and monitor everything she says, does, and eats around Torvald, in fear that she will blemish his reputation, and make him angry.

From the beginning, Ibsen displays that Nora is forced to lie about eating macaroons. Nora later reveals that she lies about eating macaroons because "Torvald is worried they'll ruin my teeth". Torvald forbids Nora from eating macaroons, despite her obvious love for them, because he worries they will ruin her appearance, consequently tarnishing his appearance, as her husband. This showcases how Torvald's obsession depletes Nora's happiness. At the end of the play, Torvald asks his wife, "Haven't you been happy here," which she replies with, "No, never". The perfect appearance Torvald constantly, desperately, strived for ruins his marriage and life, while also shattering his wife's happiness. The need for a perfect reputation shatters Torvald's chance at true happiness and blinds him from love. Nora tells Torvald that she "was so sure that you'd step forward, take the blame on yourself and say: I am the guilty one," after seeing Torvald's letter and demand.

However, Torvald did not, which he justifies by stating, "there's no one who gives up honor for love". This proves that his unnecessary need for honor blinds him, true love. Torvald does not know what love means, as he is unwilling to sacrifice anything for Nora, whom he claims he

loves. Nora then continues, explaining, “When you’re big fright was over- and it wasn’t from any threat against me, only for what might damage you – when all the danger was past, for you it was as if nothing had happened”. This furthers the point that when one is obsessed with others’ opinions when one cares about status, love is unattainable. Love is about sacrifice, and putting someone first. Torvald is incapable of doing so, as he puts his reputation first, proving that he does not love Nora, and cannot love Nora, without overcoming his obsession.

Torvald’s constant fixation on his reputation eradicates his happiness, marriage, and family. The downfall of Nora’s and Torvald’s marriage is caused by his need to appear perfect; it’s caused by the fixation of his status. This causes not only his life to be ruined, but ruins his wife’s happiness as well. Reputations, whether good or bad, should not overtake one’s life, as it can only lead to despair.

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