Analysis Of Irony In A Doll’s House Essay, Research Paper

Analysis of Irony in A Doll?s House

All scenes of this play take place in the late 1800?s home of one of the

main characters, Torvald Helmer. Written by Henrik Ibsen, A Doll?s

House contains many instances of irony. The main characters, Nora and

Torvald, are especially involved in this. Many of the examples of irony in

this play are types of dramatic irony. Dramatic irony usually refers to a

situation in a play wherein a character?s knowledge is limited, and he or she

encounters something of greater significance than he or she knows.

Throughout the play, most of the dramatic irony displayed is between Nora

and Torvald, with Torvald being the character whose knowledge is limited.

Early on in the play, when Mr. Krogstad is threatening to tell Torvald

of Nora?s secret, Nora pleads with him and asks him not to. She says to him

that ?It would be a rotten shame. That secret is all my pride and joy ? why

should he have to hear about it in this nasty, horrid way??..hear about it

from you? (1431). This is ironic in that her ?pride and joy? is something that

her husband would completely disapprove of. Torvald tells Nora ?No debts!

Never borrow! There?s something inhibited, something unpleasant, about a

home built on credit and borrowed money? (1415). But nevertheless, she has

borrowed money, and it is her pride and joy. She takes pride in the fact that

she was able to borrow money, since women are not supposed to be able to,

and that she has been able to save and work for enough money to be able to

make the payments on her loan. What makes it even more joyful for her is

that she knows this helped save her husband?s life. The most joyful thing in

Nora?s life is something her husband disapproves of. What makes this even

more ironic is a statement Torvald makes to Nora after discovering her

secret. He says to her ?Oh, what a terrible awakening this is. All these eight

years?this woman who was my pride and joy?a hypocrite, a liar, worse

than that, a criminal!? (1462). He also uses the words ?pride and joy? to

describe Nora, just as she describes her secret.

Another illustration of irony is the way Nora treats her children as if

they were dolls. This is situational irony because Nora is treated like a doll

by her husband, and by her father when he was alive. She says ?I passed out

of Daddy?s hands into yours. You arranged everything to your tastes, and I

acquired the same tastes? (1465). She, in turn, influences her children in the

same way. Nora buys clothes for the children, and shows them off to

visitors, but she doesn?t actually mother them, Anne Marie does. Nora

leaves her home and family in the end because she realizes the way she has

been treated, and she wants to be her own person in the future. But

ironically, she treats her children like dolls, and leaves them there to be

treated like dolls in the future.

Another instance of dramatic irony again involves Torvald. He makes

the statement ?Oh, my darling wife, I can?t hold you close enough. You

know, Nora?many?s the time I wish you were threatened by some terrible

danger so I could risk everything, body and soul, for your sake? (1461). He

clearly says that he wants Nora to need him, and to need his help. Then,

when the time comes where she needs and expects his help, he does not

come to her rescue. He tells her ?Now you have ruined my entire happiness,

jeopardized my whole future? (1462). After everything is clear, Torvald

forgives her, which makes Nora realize that all he cares about is himself and

he would have never helped her.

A Doll?s House is rich in symbols and imagery, and things such as

that. But the irony, more than anything in this play, is very clear. Some

examples are more obvious than others, but it is all very clear. It is easy to

see the irony in the characters situations. Basically, Torvald Helmer has very

limited knowledge throughout the play. And therefore, he gets into situations

in which he encounters things of greater significance than he anticipates.

Ibsen, Henrick. A Doll?s House. Trans. James Mcfarlane. Literature: An

Introduction to Fiction, Poetry, and Drama. 5th ed. Ed. X.J. Kennedy

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Bibliography

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