

The Awakening vs. A Doll's House

Just because a novel is considered a classic doesn't mean the messages it conveys to its readers are correct. Even though both *The Awakening* by Kate Chopin and *A Doll's House* by Henrik Ibsen are great literary works, some of the ideas embodied in them aren't appropriate. Both works suggest that it is common for husbands to be condescending to their wives; that if a person has enough money, they can have someone else raise their children for them; and that if a marriage gets hard, the couple should just give up on each other.

Taking the stories for their literary qualities alone, they are both quite good. Both novels are very well written. Chopin and Ibsen developed their characters well, used excellent imagery, and told interesting stories. Both shared their strong convictions even though they knew their ideas weren't popular. The strong beliefs that are shared in these stories are part of what makes them classics.

However, some of the ideas that are portrayed in these works aren't ideas readers should assume to be true or good. The first of these is the theory that husbands will most likely treat their wives as inferiors after they are married. In *A Doll's House*, Torvald is blatantly condescending to Nora. He calls her his "little squirrel" or "little skylark" and requires her to "do tricks" to please him. In addition, he treats her like a child, a "feather head" who can't understand anything important. In *The Awakening*, Leonce is more subtle in his mistreatment of his wife. He tries to control Edna by pushing his point until she does what he wants. He also tries to make her feel bad about herself. For example, he tells her she isn't a good mother to their sons. Although this type of behavior is condemned in both of these stories, just characterizing this behavior as normal sends a bad message. If young men are repeatedly told that this is how adult males act, they will inevitably feel that they should act this way when they are married.

The second bad idea conveyed by these stories is that if a person can afford to, they should have someone else raise their children for them. In *A Doll's House*, Nora and Torvald have a nanny who takes care of their children for them. This is the same nanny who Nora's parents had paid to raise her. Also, in *The Awakening*, Leonce and Edna not only have a person who takes care of their children for them; but, when Edna moves to the Pigeon-House, they send the children away to live with their grandparents. This attitude has become very prevalent in our society. People think it is acceptable to send their children to a daycare center instead of raising them themselves.

The third misconception in these works is that people should give up on their marriages if they start having troubles with their spouses. In *A Doll's House*, Nora and Torvald definitely have their problems. Torvald isn't a good husband. Nora, however never confronts him about it or tells him how she feels. Instead, she lets her feelings build up until she can't take it anymore. Then, she leaves her husband and gives up on their marriage and family. In *The Awakening*, Edna starts to feel fed up with her marriage too. Again, though, she doesn't sit down and discuss it with Leonce. Instead she not only leaves her husband and children, but sets an even worse example by committing suicide. This attitude is another that has become accepted today. Marriage no longer has the meaning it used to. People today think that they should get divorced the first time they have marital problems.

Finally, although both of these stories are well written classics with some good morals and ideas in them, not all of the ideas in them are positive or correct. Some of the ideas, such as husbands being condescending to their wives, having other people raise your children, and giving up on your problems, should not be accepted. It is our job as readers to separate these bad ideas from the good ones and use the good ones in our lives.

