

An analysis of the willingness to ignore the truth by the main characters in Oedipus and a dolls house.

References to eyesight and vision, both literal and metaphorical, are very frequent in Oedipus. Ancient Greeks cared deeply about the pursuit of knowledge. Although the truth was often a terrifying concept, they still saw it as a critical virtue. The theater was one way in which the ideas of knowledge and truth were examined ¹. In a dolls house the sight and/ or blindness of the characters is also mixed with a willingness to ignore the truth, and in both plays the characters are made to pay the consequences for their ignorance. The deception of initial appearances of the characters in both plays also plays a pivotal part in the telling of the stories, but ignoring the true characteristics of the people around them leads to difficult decisions having to be made by the characters in both plays.

In Oedipus clear vision is used as a metaphor for knowledge of the truth. When Sophocles refers to eyesight and insight in Oedipus it makes a meaningful pattern in together with the references to literal and metaphorical blindness to the truth. Oedipus is famed for his clear-sightedness and quick comprehension, but he discovers that he has been blind to the truth for many years, and then he blinds himself so he does not have to look at his own children/siblings. Tiresias, the prophet, is blind, yet he sees more truth than the other characters in the play. For example, when Tiresias accuses Oedipus of being the murderer, the king takes the counter-offensive, actually accusing Tiresias of the murder when he asserts, "You helped hatch the plot, you did the work, yes, short of killing him with your own hands . . ." Soon, however, Oedipus' character changes to a man in denial². Overall, the play seems to say that human beings can show incredible insight, and they have a great capacity for knowledge, but that even the most capable human being can make mistakes when willing to ignore the truth.

When Oedipus and Jocasta begin to get close to the truth about Laius's murder, in *Oedipus the King*, Oedipus fastens onto a detail in the hope of exonerating himself also in an attempt to ignore the truth Jocasta says that she was told, "Strangers" killed Laius, but Oedipus knows that he acted alone when he killed a man in similar circumstances. This is a very important moment in the play because it calls into question the entire truth-seeking process Oedipus believes himself to be undertaking.

Both Oedipus and Jocasta act as though the servant's story, once spoken, is unquestionable history. They are both unwilling to acknowledge the possibility of what it would mean if the servant were wrong. For Jocasta it would mean that the person that she thought she knew so well would turn out to be a murderer and her son, so Jocasta can only see the good in Oedipus because she loves him. She makes believe not to see the truth. This is probably why Jocasta feels she can tell Oedipus of the prophecy that her son would kill his father and continue not to see the truth, and Oedipus can tell her about the similar prophecy given him by an oracle, and neither feels the need to remark on the coincidence; or why Oedipus can hear the story of Jocasta binding her child's ankles, and not think of his own swollen feet. While the information in these speeches is supposed to make the audience glaringly aware of the tragic irony, it also emphasizes just how desperately Oedipus and Jocasta do not want to speak the obvious truth: they look at the circumstances and details of everyday life and imagine not to see them.

Over the course of *A Doll's House*, appearances prove to be misleading. Our first impressions of Nora, Torvald, and Krogstad are all eventually undercut and the readiness to ignore the true character of the other characters is astonishing. When one hears the word doll one is reminded of a figure that is pretty and perfect, She is manmade, an object that is false, and naturally does not talk back. Nora seemingly fits this description beautifully until one looks closer at her character throughout the play. By the end of the play we discover a human being with few of the qualities connected with a porcelain toy.

Nora wears a mask in front of others to give the perception of being vapid. From the beginning of the play, Nora plays up to the stereotypical image of the perfect wife. Happy buying gifts for Christmas and shrieking, 'money!' when her husband so generously gives her some extra money for the housekeeping. However, we see some of her true rebellious attitude with her favorite treat, macaroons. Her husband Torvald detects guilt in his wife's eyes and asks her if she has been eating the forbidden macaroons and she replies, 'I would never dream of doing something you did not want me to', which is an outright lie, yet Torvald accepts this without question because he could not bear the thought of his wife lying to him. When Mrs. Linde is condescending towards Nora, Nora tells her outright that, 'little Nora isn't as stupid as everybody thinks'. That comment along with, 'you all think I'm useless', is proof to the reader that Nora knows everyone around her *thinks* she is naïve, but she knows the truth. She deceives them into believing that for her own protection.

Nora lies about why she wants to help Krogstad keep his job to Torvald. She lied to Krogstad when she said the signature on the I.O.U was her father's. She also lied to her husband about the odd jobs that she had to do to pay back her IOU. The other characters are prepared to accept these lies because it compliments them. Nora ignores the fact that she is unhappy with her life, and she mentions to Mrs. Linde that the fact that Mrs. Linde's mother is dead and brothers' grown up, 'must be such a relief', because Mrs. Linde has no one to look after and can be independent. At the end of the novel she stops ignoring the truth but then is faced with the difficult decision to leave. She decides to leave her home, children and husband to concentrate on herself. A complete turn around from the, 'little skylark', that we were introduced to and by the end she is a strong-willed, independent thinker.

Torvald, though he plays the part of the strong, benevolent husband, but then his true character reveals himself to be cowardly, petty, and selfish when he fears Krogstad may expose him to scandal. Torvald wills himself into believing he is the big man, the breadwinner that can do anything. He feels safe and secure because he has a new job at the bank, '...safe job, and a good fat income'- 'it's a good thing we've seen the back of those lean times'. He seemingly keeps checks on Nora and acts as if he has control of her. When Nora tells him lies he just accepts them because he is unwilling to accept the truth. He never takes the time to get to know his wife to find out the real person that she is and is content in his ignorance. He tells her that she is, 'just like your father. Always on the lookout for money...just seems to slip through your fingers'. This shows that he didn't think much of Nora's father and does not think much of her common sense, but he would not want his, 'little songbird to be the least bit different', because he likes to feel superior.

He fires an old school friend, Nils, because he calls him by his first name at work. He tells Nora he loves her, and then he is so quick to let her go at the slightest sign of imperfection. Torvald is constantly ignoring the truth and hiding behind society and at the end of the play he pays the price and loses his wife.

The instability of appearances within the Torvald household at the play's end results from Torvald's devotion to image at the expense of true happiness. He fails to really see the people around him and because Torvald needs respect from his employees, friends, and wife, status and image are important to him. By the end of the play, we see that Torvald's his repeated suppression and denial of reality have harmed his family and his happiness forever. Oedipus is not quick to blame himself for the plague of the city. He tries to place the burden onto others as he continues his investigation, blindly trusting his own superior ability while ignoring the damaging evidence that surrounds him³.

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