**AP Euro: Chapter 23 Opposing Viewpoints – Advice to Women: Two Views**

**Industrialization had a strong impact** on middle-class women as gender-based social roles became the norm. Men worked outside the home to support the family, while women provided for the needs of their children and husband at home. In the first selection, *Woman in Her Social and Domestic Character* (1842), Elizabeth Poole Sanford gives advice to middle-class women on their proper role and behavior.

Although a majority of women probably followed the nineteenth-century middle-class ideal of women as keepers of the household and nurturers of husband and children, an increasing number of women fought for the rights of women. The second selection is taken from the third act of Henrik Ibsen's 1879 play *A Doll's House*, in which the character Nora Helmer declares her independence from her husband's control.

**Elizabeth Poole Sanford, *Woman in Her Social and Domestic Character***

The changes wrought by Time are many. It influences the opinions of men as familiarity does their feelings; it has a tendency to do away with superstition, and to reduce everything to its real worth.

It is thus that the sentiment for woman has undergone a change. The romantic passion which once almost deified her is on the decline; and it is by intrinsic qualities that she must now inspire respect. She is no longer the queen of song and the star of chivalry. But if there is less of enthusiasm entertained for her, the sentiment is more rational, and, perhaps, equally sincere; for it is in relation to happiness that she is chiefly appreciated.

And in this respect it is, we must confess, that she is most useful and most important. Domestic life is the chief source of her influence; and the greatest debt society can owe to her is domestic comfort; for happiness is almost an element of virtue; and nothing conduces more to improve the character of men than domestic peace. A woman may make a man's home delightful, and may thus increase his motives for virtuous exertion. She may refine and tranquilize his mind,—may turn away his anger or allay his grief. Her smile may be the happy influence to gladden his heart, and to disperse the cloud that gathers on his brow. And in proportion to her endeavors to make those around her happy, she will be esteemed and loved. She will secure by her excellence that interest and that regard which she might formerly claim as the privilege of her sex, and will really merit the deference which was then conceded to her as a matter of course.…

Perhaps one of the first secrets of her influence is adaptation to the tastes, and sympathy in the feelings, of those around her. This holds true in lesser as well as in graver points. It is in the former, indeed, that the absence of interest in a companion is frequently most disappointing. Where want of congeniality impairs domestic comfort, the fault is generally chargeable on the female side. It is for woman, not for man, to make the sacrifice, especially in indifferent matters. She must, in a certain degree, be plastic herself if she would mold others.…

Nothing is so likely to conciliate the affections of the other sex as a feeling that woman looks to them for support and guidance. In proportion as men are themselves superior, they are accessible to this appeal. On the contrary, they never feel interested in one who seems disposed rather to offer than to ask assistance. There is, indeed, something unfeminine in independence. It is contrary to nature, and therefore it offends. We do not like to see a woman affecting tremors, but still less do we like to see her acting the amazon. A really sensible woman feels her dependence. She does what she can; but she is conscious of inferiority, and therefore grateful for support. She knows that she is the weaker vessel, and that as such she should receive honor. In this view, her weakness is an attraction, not a blemish.

In everything, therefore, that women attempt, they should show their consciousness of dependence. If they are learners, let them evince a teachable spirit; if they give an opinion, let them do it in an unassuming manner. There is something so unpleasant in female self-sufficiency that it not unfrequently deters instead of persuading, and prevents the adoption of advice which the judgment even approves.

**Henrik Ibsen, *A Doll's House***

Nora (*Pause*): Does anything strike you as we sit here?

Helmer: What should strike me?

Nora: We've been married eight years; does it not strike you that this is the first time we two, you and I, man and wife, have talked together seriously?

Helmer: Seriously? What do you mean, *seriously*?

Nora: For eight whole years, and more—ever since the day we first met—we have never exchanged one serious word about serious things.…

Helmer: Why, my dearest Nora, what have you to do with serious things?

Nora: There we have it! You have never understood me. I've had great injustice done to me, Torvald; first by Father, then by you.

Helmer: What! Your father *and* me? We, who have loved you more than all the world!

Nora (*Shaking her head*): You have never loved me. You just found it amusing to think you were in love with me.

Helmer: Nora! What a thing to say!

Nora: Yes, it's true, Torvald. When I was living at home with Father, he told me his opinions and mine were the same. If I had different opinions, I said nothing about them, because he would not have liked it. He used to call me his doll-child and played with me as I played with my dolls. Then I came to live in your house.

Helmer: What a way to speak of our marriage!

Nora (*Undisturbed*): I mean that I passed from Father's hands into yours. You arranged everything to your taste and I got the same tastes as you; or pretended to—I don't know which—both, perhaps; sometimes one, sometimes the other. When I look back on it now, I seem to have been living here like a beggar, on handouts. I lived by performing tricks for you, Torvald. But that was how you wanted it. You and Father have done me a great wrong. It is your fault that my life has come to naught.

Helmer: Why, Nora, how unreasonable and ungrateful! Haven't you been happy here?

Nora: No, never. I thought I was, but I never was.

Helmer: Not—not happy! …

Nora: I must stand quite alone if I am ever to know myself and my surroundings; so I cannot stay with you.

Helmer: Nora! Nora!

Nora: I am going at once. I daresay [my friend] Christina will take me in for tonight.

Helmer: You are mad! I shall not allow it! I forbid it!

Nora: It's no use your forbidding me anything now. I shall take with me only what belongs to me; from you I will accept nothing, either now or later.

Helmer: This is madness!

Nora: Tomorrow I shall go home—I mean to what was my home. It will be easier for me to find a job there.

Helmer: On, in your blind inexperience—

Nora: I must try to gain experience, Torvald.

Helmer: Forsake your home, your husband, your children! And you don't consider what the world will say.

Nora: I can't pay attention to that. I only know that I must do it.

Helmer: This is monstrous! Can you forsake your holiest duties?

Nora: What do you consider my holiest duties?

Helmer: Need I tell you that? Your duties to your husband and children.

Nora: I have other duties equally sacred.

Helmer: Impossible! What do you mean?

Nora: My duties toward myself.

Helmer: Before all else you are a wife and a mother.

Nora: That I no longer believe. Before all else I believe I am a human being just as much as you are—or at least that I should try to become one. I know that most people agree with you, Torvald, and that they say so in books. But I can no longer be satisfied with what most people say and what is in books. I must think things out for myself and try to get clear about them.

**Historical Thinking Skill: Patterns of Continuity and Change over Time**

* What do these opposing viewpoints reveal about support for changes in middle-class women's roles?

Sources: *Elizabeth Poole Sanford, Woman in Her Social and Domestic Character. From Elizabeth Poole Sanford, Woman, in Her Social and Domestic Character (Boston: Otis, Broaders & Co., 1842), pp. 5–7, 15–16. Henrik Ibsen, A Doll's House. Excerpt as appeared in Roots of Western Civilization by Wesley D. Camp (Wiley, 1983).*