

A doll's house with
that of angel and tess
in tess of the
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Both Henrik Ibsen and Thomas Hardy were groundbreaking authors in the Victorian era, portraying female protagonists as becoming materially and emotionally independent from their male partners. Their depictions of the breakdown of a marriage in their respective works were controversial at the time of publication, but highlight the hypocrisy of the patriarchal Victorian society. The key relationships in each work are fraught with tension, dealing with the men's rejection of their wives and their insistence that societal pressure is more important than love.

Both men fall short of their wives' idealistic hopes by rejecting them after their 'crimes' are revealed: although Torvald's "salvation" and attempted reconciliation are played out on a much smaller timescale than Angel's eventual return to his wife, both authors depict the women as morally and emotionally superior to their insincere husbands. A key feature of both relationships is idealism. From the very first scene where Nora "pops the bag of macaroons in her pocket and wipes her mouth", the secrecy and illusion which keep the Helmers' marriage alive is apparent.

The macaroons, a running motif throughout the play, symbolise Nora's childishness and her small acts of rebellion against Torvald's paternal role in their marriage. Many symbols of this idealistic facade appear in *A Doll's House*, including Nora's Italian fancy dress costume which she takes off at the end to represent the ending of the charade. The couple focus so much on decorating the Christmas tree, on the children's presents and on the show Nora will give at the party, that it is clear that all of these occupations are simply distractions from the emptiness and falseness of their relationship.

Additionally, as most effectively portrayed in the title of the play itself, Nora describes their home as “ a playroom” and herself as a “ doll-wife” sending the key message of the play that Torvald and Nora have been conditioned by society to act the way they do: neither of them really believes their roles which they have undertaken. The forced lightness and frivolity of their interactions shows their lack of seriousness in their marriage, something which Nora herself points out during the “ first time” they have “ a serious talk together”.

In *Tess of the D'urbervilles*, Hardy uses religious imagery to highlight the idealistic bubble in which Angel and Tess are living during their courtship. To emphasise just how absorbed in their romance they are, Hardy describes their “ feeling of isolation, as if they were Adam and Eve” which impresses itself on Angel particularly, as he soon starts to mould his view of Tess to fit their “ luminous” surroundings. He begins to see her as a “ divinity who could confer bliss” i?? “ a visionary essence of a woman” rather than a simple milkmaid, hence his inability to understand her impurity later on.

The husbands' lack of knowledge about their wives' true natures is also displayed through their use of nicknames. Torvald constantly calls Nora names originating from the lexical field of nature, such as “ songbird” and “ squirrel”, connoting lightness, gaiety and frivolity. The essential attribute of his nicknames are that their only worth is to give pleasure to others and to brighten up their surroundings, completely downplaying any type of serious and important role Nora may have held in the household.

Similarly, Angel's nicknames for Tess, including "Artemis" and "Demeter", stem from the semantic field of classical literature. Not only does this patronise the uncomprehending Tess and give his intelligence greater prominence over her own, this also exemplifies the numerous ways in which he puts Tess on a pedestal and refuses to believe she is as flawed as he himself is. "Artemis" in particular was the Roman goddess of purity, representing Angel's high regard for Tess' supposed maidenhood and the importance he places on it, which also foreshadows his reaction to her eventual confession.

Another key similarity between the two relationships is how the women overestimate the strength of their husbands' characters. Nora believes that Torvald will "step forward and take all the blame" of her crime, an event she terms a "miracle" and refers to in order to bolster herself whenever she fears her secret being revealed. The use of the abstract noun "miracle", with its religious connotations, suggests that Nora idolises Torvald as she would a deity, mirroring Tess' "idolatry" of Angel.

Similarly, Tess fails to comprehend that it is entirely possible that Angel's feelings towards her could change, especially as he is so "frank and affectionate" towards her. Hardy further highlights her naivety and her childlikeness when she has a "sudden enthusiastic trust that he surely would forgive her", the pre-modifying adjectives "sudden" and "enthusiastic" demonstrating Tess' failure to grasp the seriousness of her predicament, and her inability to recognise the patriarchal bias of Victorian society when she becomes convinced that her history "'tis just the same" as Angel's "dissipation with a stranger".

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Both authors show the wives' unswerving trust in their husbands not only to gain sympathy, but to show that they are initially filling the role society provides for them: it is the men who let them down, rather than the women rebelling for no reason. Torvald and Angel react in very similar ways when their wives' secrets are revealed. Torvald refuses to believe what Nora has done, exclaiming "it's impossible, it can't be true!" In this section of the play, Ibsen uses question marks and exclamation marks to great excess to highlight Torvald's melodramatic reaction, and uses dashes to break up the sentences and imply shock.

Angel reacts in the same way, although less dramatically, asking "Am I to believe this?" The difference in reaction is to be expected, given that Ibsen's play depends on pace and heightened tension onstage, while Hardy's subtler style intensifies the emotion between the characters. Additionally, neither husband can believe his own judgement of his wife has been wrong, and prefers to blame her for changing instead.

Torvald describes it as a "dreadful awakening... he who was my pride and joy - a hypocrite, a liar", once again taking on a more parental role as he describes Nora as his "pride and joy", a phrase commonly attributed to children. Angel's reaction similarly corresponds to the ongoing theme of illusion and idealism as he states "the woman I have been loving is not you". Not only does this exemplify the Victorian attitude that impure women were intrinsically different from their virginal counterparts, but this also counteracts Tess' honest declaration that she loves Angel "because you are yourself", demonstrating the difference between loyal female love and changeable male love.

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Nora also attempts a similar avowal that she has “loved you more than anything else in the world”, but Torvald sees her feminine devotion as inferior, calling it “silly excuses”. His belittling of her emotions again epitomises the Victorian attitude that women were not considered capable of feeling as deeply as men, and that they were more transient and less steadfast, something which both Hardy and Ibsen attempt to disprove. Continuing with the contemporary idea that women's emotions were insignificant and fleeting, neither husband takes the notion of suicide seriously.

Angel tells Tess she is speaking “absurdly” and that he wishes “not to hear it”, implying his peace of mind is more important than her safety. Torvald mocks Nora further, rhetorically asking “How would it help me if you were gone from this world, as you put it?” Ibsen's use of the first person pronoun “me” in this interrogative makes it clear that Torvald is so self-absorbed that he only considers his wife's possible suicide in the way it would affect him. The two husbands continue to overreact and place disproportionate blame on their wives.

Interestingly, both Torvald and Angel assume that their wives' less-than-honourable families passed on unattractive characteristics to them. Torvald's exclamation that Nora's “father's recklessness and instability he has handed on to you!” is a total overreaction and shows his lack of knowledge about Nora's real character and personality. Ibsen portrays Torvald as particularly hypocritical, given that he has had the biggest influence over Nora in her adult life and therefore should take some responsibility for her supposed character flaws.

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Even more unfairly, Angel uses Tess' sensitivity about her ancestors to justify what has happened to her, saying that "decrepit families imply decrepit wills, decrepit conduct". The adjective "decrepit" connotes death and ruin, suggesting that Tess is morally dead to him now. The aftermath of each situation is very different, however. The sudden change in Torvald's demeanour is not entirely realistic, but fits well with the pace of the scene and its melodramatic nature. Ibsen continues the religious semantic field with the passive verb "saved", relating to salvation and rescue from a hideous plight.