

Comparison various characters of both Ibsen's "A Doll's House" and Williams' "A Streetcar Named Desire"

Literature



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

In Ibsen's *A Doll's House* and Williams' *A Streetcar Named Desire*, both playwrights have shed light on the struggles women face to establish their place in the patriarchal society. While in *A Doll's House* women finally triumph over patriarchy, in *A Streetcar Named Desire*, they end up on losing side because they accept their dependency on men for a better life. By comparing various characters of both the plays, one can understand the battle which a woman has to fight to free herself from the restrictions imposed in all spheres by the patriarchal system.

In patriarchy, men hold complete authority over women. When Nora was a child, she was her father's doll as she tells about her father. She married Torvald and became the doll living in her husband's doll house which is the representation of an ideal family living in the patriarchal society. Similarly, Williams has portrayed Stella as stereotypical submissive women living under patriarchy and Blanche as a woman fighting against patriarchal norms. Loyalty, sexual purity, and endurance define the feminine sphere while violence, lust, and hostility come under masculinity. Women are shown to be dependent on men socially, mentally and economically for their marriage and survival. For example, Stella relies on Stanley for household needs, Mrs. Linde married a businessman instead her love interest Krogstad to support her sick mother and two younger brothers and the nurse Anne-Marie who sacrificed her daughter for her job given by Nora's father.

The characters of Nora and Blanche highlight the theme of achieving independence by overcoming all the barriers in the patriarchal society.

Both fight for achieving freedom from men, but it's Nora, who emerges victorious at the end while Blanche ends up getting oppressed. The reason is although Blanche forces Stella to end her abusive relationship with Stanley, she allows herself to depend on men to live a good life such as Mitch and millionaire Shep Huntleigh. Blanche considers marriage as an escape route from all her miseries even after her first marriage ended awfully. In the end, she enters a state of dilemma, incapable of distinguishing between reality and fantasy. which is a sad truth since men have always taken advantage of her solitude to satisfy their lust. She challenged the female archetype in a patriarchal society by choosing to live life in her way and fulfilling her desires.

Nora fights for independence by breaking the notion of women being weak, incapable, and dependent on men. displays her bravery to stand for her freedom and fight male domination. The influence of patriarchy on Nora transformed her character from a docile housewife into a strong, independent, and fearless woman who is powerful enough to create the life she wants. Torvald is ready to disown her for the sake of retaining his reputation. In the end, Nora realizes that her husband is not worthy of her love and takes a big step to leave him forever. A Doll's House encourages gender equality and shows a woman's struggle to escape .

Stanley and Torvald are the epitome of patriarchal values. Both are happy in the fact that their wives need them for support. Men regard women as objects and degrade them to just tags such as Torvald always calls Nora while Stanley calls Stella as honey, baby or sweetie. Stanley asserts his

dominance over Stella through actions such as giving Stanley's character becomes more aggressive as the play progresses, for example, throwing away the radio and abusing Stella, smashing the dinner plate and lastly, raping Blanche to prove his gender superiority. On the other side, Torvald puts his reputation first over his wife. He is more focused on blaming Nora for the loss of his status in the society than acknowledging her love for him. He thinks Nora is spendthrift, but the reality is all the money she borrows goes into repaying the debt, which she took for Torvald's well-being. He fired Krogstad for the same reason since he thinks Krogstad won't pay him proper respect. Therefore, preserving male ego is the sole priority for patriarchal men over love and marriage.

In my opinion, women's actions play a key role in defining a man's character. We see a softer side of Mitch at the starting of play as he cares for his mother and respects Blanche's feelings. Had Blanche not lied, Stanley would have failed in manipulating Mitch against her. It also proves the two-faced nature of men in patriarchy. Mitch refuses to marry Blanche by saying she is not "clean enough" (10. 1872) to live in the same house as his mother. But he doesn't hesitate from making sexual advances towards her, adapting himself to the masculinity present in the patriarchy. Then, it is Krogstad who is eager to get back his lost reputation, an important trait of patriarchal men, by blackmailing Nora. But, he gives up his thirst for status after Mrs. Linde decides to marry him revealing his good side. He is ready to work again to "win back a place in their eyes"(3. 1691). But, it was Kristine, in the first place, who was the reason behind Krogstad's bad behavior because she left him for another man. The outcome for women in both the plays is different

because of women's discretion to help other women. Stella refuses to believe her sister that her husband has raped Blanche. Instead, she chose to depend on him, leaving Blanche alone in her lowest moment. On the contrary, Kristine helps Nora by manipulating Krogstad to take his letter back and also encourages Nora to fight for her rights since she has Kristine helps Nora overcome the restrictions of patriarchy. That's why it's a win for women in *A Doll's House* while Stella sticks to patriarchy resulting in Blanche meeting a terrible fate. Nevertheless, it is ironic that (Shideler 189), by asking Torvald for the job, and marrying Krogstad after the death of her first husband.

There are various other aspects of the plays where patriarchal ideology comes into effect. For instance, patriarchy rejects homosexuality. Blanche's first husband committed suicide because he was gay. It shows that society humiliates women and non-heterosexual people to such an extent that they are forced to commit suicide. Moreover, patriarchy allows only men to drink alcohol while women have to make excuses for the same as Blanche says. Contrarily, Stanley is shown drunk and abusing women throughout the play. Women must depend on men for money as Nora depended on her husband even though they are capable of earning on their own. When Torvald was ill, Nora did various jobs like needlework, embroidery or copying down the papers to repay the loan. She enjoyed earning money by herself as she tells Mrs. Linde "it was wonderful fun, sitting and working like that, earning money. It was almost like being a man"(1. 1663).

Both playwrights have used a variety of symbols to bring out the effects of patriarchy. In the end, Stella has to choose between Blanche, an illusion, and

Stanley, a reality. She chooses reality which is living with her husband over dream of helping her sister Blanche. The tragedy of a woman is such that the only choice she has is to either struggle or to tolerate. One can interpret this symbolism in another way, such as Mitch and Stanley judged Blanche on her past mistakes instead of the reality that Blanche suffered from alienation and rejection. Ibsen has used symbols in the setting of the play. A doll's house is set during the week of Christmas and New Year's Eve. New Year marks the new beginning and the end of old problems. Nora commences her new journey alone in the patriarchal society, leaving behind her husband and children. Torvald will be getting the promotion at the job. Another symbol is the Tarantella dance which was believed to cure Tarantula bite by the Italians in the nineteenth century. Nora is trying to get rid of the poison in their marriage, which is the Krogstad's letter by performing Tarantella and keeping Torvald busy so that he can't open the letter.

The title "A Streetcar Named Desire" not only refers to the streetcar in New Orleans but also to Blanche's desire to find love and affection after the death of her husband. Her liberal lifestyle lands her into various troubles in the patriarchal society as she loses her job, her house and her sanity at the end. The title by her husband and her father respectively. Both have controlled her life according to their benefit. She condemns both at the end saying.

The protagonists in both the plays evoke intense pathos in their final scenes. One can't help but feel sympathy for Blanche because men have taken advantage of her again and again which leads to her mental breakdown. Similarly, it is shocking to see a submissive woman like Nora making a bold

decision to end the dominance of male figures in her life by leaving her husband and children. However, it is sad that other female characters in the play continue to abide by the patriarchal ideology and accept violence and injustice as Eunice says “ Life has to go on. No matter what happens, you’ve got to keep on going”(11. 1878). Thus, by using various techniques like dialogue, symbol, and setting, women are shown fighting an everlasting battle to extricate themselves from the cage of patriarchy.