

Lidia Nesci

World Literature II

Dr. Clemens

28 March 2013

Compare and Contrast: Gender Roles in *Tartuffe* and *A Doll's House*

Gender played a large role in the texts, *Tartuffe*, and *A Doll's House*. Although they weren't written around the same time period, the reader gets a sense of how much the gender roles didn't change throughout that time. Men were seen as superior and women should be disregarded, along with their thoughts or ideas. Both plays compared the differences between men and women. They did however have different depictions of how the women reacted in these time periods where gender roles were present.

Tartuffe is a story about a sleazy man, Tartuffe, which acts holy. In reality, he is just a hypocrite. He is invited to live in a wealthier man's home named Orgon. Orgon's family and servants see behind Tartuffe's lies and try to open Orgon's eyes to this man's hypocrisy, however Orgon wants to hear nothing of this subject.

Orgon's maid, Dorine, is expressed as an outspoken woman. She has a lot to say and even when Orgon tells her to stop talking about Tartuffe in such a negative manner, she ignores him and continues. Women, especially of lower class, were never to question, argue, or disobey the man of the house. She did not adhere to the typical gender role placed on women.

Elmire, Orgon's wife, also goes against the woman's role in society. Elmire also protests that Tartuffe is a fraud and bad man, but Orgon does not believe his own wife. The fact that Orgon suppresses Elmire's objection toward Tartuffe and doesn't listen to her suggests how wives opinions' weren't valued. What a woman said did not matter because she was a woman.

Elmire was not given a fair chance to be heard by Orgon, he simply disregarded whatever she said. This shows how a man's gender role was meant to be dominant over a woman. Elmire didn't stop there; she took it a step further by having Orgon hide while Tartuffe made a pass at her sexually. Orgon had to see it for his self to even consider what she had said to be true.

Elmire and Orgon's daughter Mariane did show the reader what a woman in that time period should be like and how a daughter should act. Mariane did feel the same way as her mother and Dorine towards Tartuffe, but she didn't tell her father about it or go against what he said. In fact, Orgon tells her, "Yes, Tartuffe shall be allied by marriage to this family, and he's to be your husband, is that clear? It's a father's privilege (65)..." Mariane doesn't go against what her father says. She keeps quiet and knows that if that is what her father wants, then that is what she must do. As for the male gender role, Orgon shows his authority over Mariane by telling her whom she is going to marry. He doesn't give her a choice and she has no say in this matter even though it is her future. When Mariane speaks to Dorine about what her father wants, she tells her "What good would it do? A father's power is great (70)." Mariane continues by saying, "I've bowed so long to Father's strict control, I couldn't oppose him now, to save my soul (70)." She clearly shows that she knows her place as Orgon's daughter and as a woman with no right to say anything of the matter.

A Doll's House is about a woman, Nora, who saves her husband's life by forging her father's signature and borrowing money to go on a trip to Italy. This was not something a woman in that time period was allowed to do. Women weren't allowed to be in charge of money transactions like borrowing. Already, Nora was going against what society would say is normal and allowed of women.

Nora's husband, Torvald, also treated her like a child. He gave her pet names and never had a serious conversation with her until the end of the play when she says she is leaving. Nora makes this clear by telling him, "We have been married either years. Does it not strike you that this is the first time we two, you and I, man and wife, have talked together seriously? (1112)" The fact that Nora emphasizes that they are man and wife gives the reader an impression that they aren't equals. Nora realized in that moment that they are partners but Torvald has never taken her seriously enough to have a real conversation with her. Most marriages at that time were the same as Nora and Torvald's. The husband looked down on the wife in a way. The women had two main duties, being a wife and a mother; the men, as husbands, would shelter the women and were providers for them. Men were seen as the dominant figures, just as they were in *Tartuffe*.

Nora decided to go against the norm in that society, just as Elmire and Dorine had in their society. They did go about this in different ways, but they were treated the same in both plays by men. In *A Doll's House*, Nora took action and left behind her children, her husband, and her past as a woman, whereas in *Tartuffe*, Elmire and Dorine struggled to have their voices heard and recognized by Orgon. Both plays showed how the men were superior to women and dominated the culture. Women couldn't disobey the laws and rules put in place by men and in society, but that didn't stop a few outspoken women. The role of gender played a big part in both pieces and was made clear by the authors.