

Analysis Of Protagonists From A Dollhouse And Tartuffe

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Introduction

Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House* and Molière's *Tartuffe* were written in different centuries and dramatic traditions, yet both examine households governed by mistaken authority. Nora Helmer and Orgon occupy very different social positions. Nora is a wife whose intelligence and sacrifice are hidden beneath the role of a dependent "doll," while Orgon is the male head of a wealthy family whose power allows his religious infatuation to endanger everyone around him. The original essay correctly recognizes patriarchy, idealism, hypocrisy, determination, and the protagonists' changing awareness. A fuller comparison shows that Nora's secrecy responds to legal and marital inequality, whereas Orgon's blindness is enabled by his authority. Both characters construct idealized identities, but only Nora ultimately subjects her own role to sustained criticism. (Ibsen)

Different Dramatic Worlds

Tartuffe, first performed in the seventeenth century, is a verse comedy that exposes religious hypocrisy, gullibility, and domestic tyranny through exaggeration, reversal, and ridicule. *A Doll's House*, first performed in 1879, is a realist drama that reveals how ordinary language and respectable marriage conceal unequal power. Molière moves toward comic restoration after disorder is exposed; Ibsen ends with a rupture that refuses easy reconciliation. These formal differences shape the protagonists. Orgon becomes comic because the audience sees what he refuses to see. Nora becomes tragic and liberating because the audience gradually discovers how much she has concealed from others and herself.

Nora's Performed Identity

At the beginning of *A Doll's House*, Nora appears playful, financially careless, and pleased by Torvald's pet names. Her behavior is not proof that she naturally lacks seriousness. She has learned to perform the identity expected of her: cheerful wife, attractive possession, obedient child, and harmless consumer. Torvald calls her his "little skylark" and "squirrel," language that sounds affectionate but reduces her to a decorative dependent. Nora sometimes manipulates this role to obtain money or influence, showing that apparent submission can contain strategy. Nevertheless, a strategy used within domination is not the same as equality.

Nora's Secret Loan

Nora's hidden loan is the central fact that contradicts her childish appearance. When Torvald became seriously ill, she obtained money to finance travel that could save his health. Because a married woman's independent financial authority was restricted, she forged her dying father's signature as security. The act is legally wrong, but its moral meaning is complicated by love, desperation, and unequal law. Nora works privately to repay the debt, demonstrating discipline and competence. Her secret therefore exposes the difference between social reputation and actual responsibility: Torvald appears to be the rational provider, while Nora has carried the household's most consequential financial burden.

Nora's Dream of the "Wonderful Thing"

Nora believes that if her secret is revealed, Torvald will take responsibility and sacrifice himself for her. She fears that outcome but also treats it as proof of ideal marital love. This "wonderful thing" is the fantasy sustaining her obedience. She has risked law and reputation for him and expects a reciprocal moral courage beneath his paternal language. When the crisis arrives, Torvald responds first with fear for his own status and condemns Nora as unfit to raise the children. His reaction reveals that his love depended on control and appearance. The failure of the wonderful thing becomes the beginning of Nora's self-recognition.

Orgon's Search for Certainty

Orgon also constructs an idealized identity. He wants to see himself as a man of religious seriousness who has risen above worldly attachments. Tartuffe offers him a visible performance of humility, devotion, and moral authority. Orgon's attraction is not only stupidity. Tartuffe supplies certainty and validates Orgon's wish to dominate the household through an apparently sacred standard. Orgon claims that Tartuffe has taught him indifference to family, property, and earthly feeling, but this supposed detachment becomes an excuse for cruelty and irresponsibility. (Molière)

Tartuffe's Manipulation

Tartuffe succeeds because he identifies Orgon's needs. He displays exaggerated piety, condemns minor pleasures, speaks in moral formulas, and presents dependence as humility. Orgon interprets performance as spiritual truth. The hypocrite does not control the household through force at first; he gains access through Orgon's authority. This distinction matters because the family repeatedly warns Orgon. Elmire, Cléante, Dorine, Damis, and Mariane perceive the danger, but Orgon can ignore them because patriarchal power allows him to treat disagreement as disobedience.

Gender and Authority

Nora and Orgon are both mistaken, but their mistakes do not carry equal institutional power. Nora's deception occurs under legal and marital constraints. She cannot openly negotiate as an equal, and disclosure threatens her family and social identity. Orgon's self-deception is amplified by ownership and paternal authority. He can command Mariane to marry Tartuffe, expel Damis, transfer property, and dismiss Elmire's testimony. His error becomes the family's crisis because the household is organized around his will. Comparing the characters therefore requires attention to power, not merely personality.

Money and Property

Both plays connect intimacy with money. Nora's loan reveals that financial dependence shapes marriage and moral judgment. Torvald considers debt a threat to freedom, yet he does not understand the debt that preserved his life. Krogstad uses the forged bond as leverage because law and reputation make Nora vulnerable. In *Tartuffe*, Orgon's property becomes the instrument of his delusion. He gives Tartuffe control and entrusts him with politically dangerous papers. Money is not merely background in either play; it determines who can act, who can threaten, and whose version of morality receives authority.

Religion and Morality

Tartuffe does not condemn sincere religion. Cléante repeatedly distinguishes genuine devotion from theatrical extremism. The target is hypocrisy and the willingness of powerful people to outsource judgment to a supposed holy man. *A Doll's House* addresses morality through law, duty, marriage, and selfhood rather than religious satire. Nora eventually says she must examine religion and morality for herself rather than repeat what authorities taught her. Both plays therefore challenge borrowed moral certainty. Orgon accepts Tartuffe's language instead of judging conduct; Nora begins to reject moral rules that classify her sacrifice without confronting the injustice that produced it.

The Family as a Stage

Each household functions like a theater. Nora performs cheerfulness, Torvald performs protective masculinity, and their marriage performs respectability. Tartuffe performs holiness, while Orgon stages himself as a converted man indifferent to ordinary weakness. Other characters become audiences who must either applaud or expose the performance. Dramatic irony allows the actual theater audience to see more than the authority figure. In Molière, laughter punishes pretension. In Ibsen, the gradual stripping away of performance produces discomfort because the social script extends beyond one foolish individual.

Women Who See Clearly

Women in both plays recognize truths that male authority suppresses. Elmire understands Tartuffe's desire and devises the test that finally exposes him. Dorine uses wit and resistance to protect Mariane. Mariane's wishes are disregarded until others intervene. Nora's insight develops more slowly because she has internalized the role assigned to her. The contrast is significant: Molière's women often possess practical intelligence from the start, while Ibsen traces the painful formation of a woman's independent judgment. Neither play portrays women as naturally powerless; both show how social structures determine whether their knowledge is heard. (Templeton)

Methods of Revelation

Orgon must see Tartuffe's hypocrisy with his own eyes. Elmire hides him under a table while Tartuffe attempts to seduce her, turning direct observation into the cure for blindness. Even then, Orgon's awakening comes too late to prevent legal danger because he has already transferred property. Nora's revelation is psychological rather than evidentiary. She already knows Torvald's habits, but the letter crisis reveals what those habits mean. His response forces her to reinterpret the entire marriage. Orgon discovers that another man is false; Nora discovers that the self and marriage she inhabited were constructed on false terms.

Determination and Obstacles

Both characters are determined, but determination is not automatically virtuous. Nora's persistence in obtaining and repaying the loan demonstrates courage, yet secrecy prevents honest relationship and exposes her to blackmail. Her main obstacles are law, gender roles, debt, and fear. Orgon's determination becomes obstinacy. He ignores evidence and uses authority to force his plan. His obstacles are family members who try to restore reality. The comparison shows that moral evaluation depends on the object of determination and the power through which it is pursued.

Self-Deception

Self-deception is central to both protagonists. Nora wants to believe that performing the ideal wife will eventually produce equal devotion. She recognizes parts of the problem but postpones their meaning. Orgon actively rejects testimony that threatens his chosen image of Tartuffe and himself. Nora's self-deception grows from dependency and hope; Orgon's grows from pride and authoritarian certainty. Once exposed, Nora questions the system that formed her. Orgon repents his trust in Tartuffe but briefly swings toward condemning all religious people, showing that he still tends toward extremes until Cléante corrects him.

The Role of Other Men

Torvald and Tartuffe are not parallel characters, but each helps reveal the protagonist. Torvald is not a disguised criminal; he is a socially respectable husband whose paternalism becomes morally destructive. Tartuffe is a calculated impostor exploiting piety for sex, property, and power. Krogstad, meanwhile, complicates the moral world of Ibsen's play because he has committed wrongdoing but remains capable of change. These differences prevent a simple claim that both plays merely condemn male dominance. They examine different forms of authority: respectable patriarchy, religious fraud, legal coercion, and the possibility of reform.

Endings and the Possibility of Change

Tartuffe ends with royal intervention that arrests Tartuffe and restores Orgon's property. The ending satisfies comic order but also reveals the family's dependence on external sovereign justice. Orgon remains head of the household, presumably chastened. *A Doll's House* ends with Nora leaving Torvald and the children to educate herself and determine whether she can become an equal person. No authority guarantees the outcome. The famous closing door converts domestic conflict into an open social question. Orgon is restored to his position; Nora abandons hers.

Protagonism and Moral Development

Calling both Nora and Orgon protagonists is defensible because each drives the central action, but their moral arcs differ. Orgon is primarily a comic object of correction. His recognition restores common sense after his folly. Nora becomes the center of a realist awakening. Her decision challenges the audience to reconsider marriage, law, motherhood, and individual duty. Orgon learns that Tartuffe is not what he appears; Nora learns that she herself has never been permitted to become what she might be. The scope of her recognition is therefore broader and more destabilizing.

Conclusion

Nora and Orgon are linked by idealism, secrecy, family conflict, and eventual recognition, but they occupy unequal positions within patriarchal households. Nora's forgery and deception arise from an attempt to save her husband within a system that denies her full agency. Orgon's deception of himself empowers Tartuffe and allows personal fanaticism to become domestic law. Both characters mistake performance for truth: Nora trusts the performance of protective marriage, while Orgon trusts the performance of piety. Their endings reveal the difference between correction and transformation. Orgon's household is restored after he sees the fraud; Nora leaves because she sees that the household itself has treated her as a doll. Together, the plays show that clear judgment requires more than exposing one liar. It requires examining the authority, law, gender expectations, and desires that

made the lie persuasive.

Works Cited

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