

**A Comparative Study of Euripides' *Medea* and  
Ibsen's *A Doll's House***

**I. Kanaga Priya**

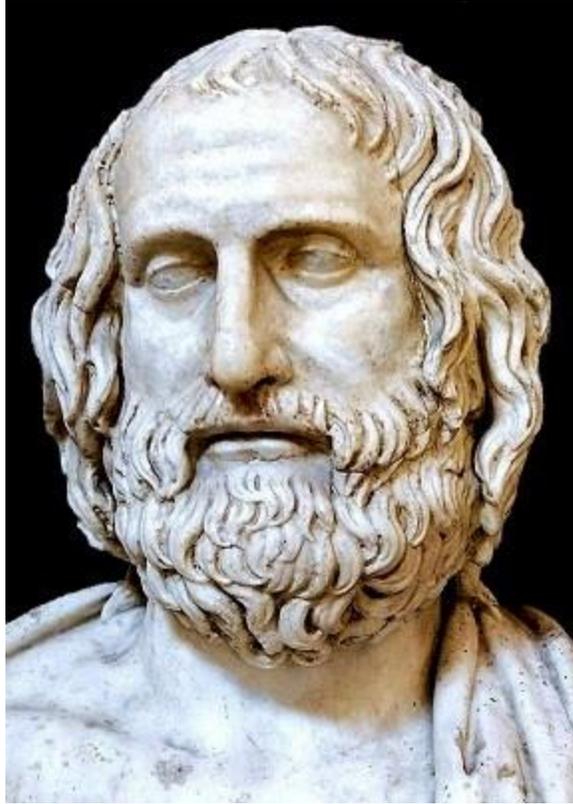
**Abstract**

Euripides and Henrik Ibsen are noted for their delineation of strong women characters. Despite being Grecian and Norwegian, the female protagonists of these two writers are strikingly similar in many ways and yet so distinctly dissimilar in other ways. In *Medea* by Euripides and *A Doll's House* by Ibsen, 'marriage' is the crux of the tragedy. *Medea* and *A Doll's House* are set in different eras, but Medea and Nora, the chief protagonists of the plays respectively, find themselves in marriages that have difficulties and complications and even betrayal. Both the authors show the significance of honour in marriage and how the lack of it jeopardizes a relationship. Medea and Nora risk their honour and dignity, to uphold the respect that is required in a marriage. Torvald and Jason's use of wives as subsidiary "objects" for their own self interest, alter both Nora and Torvald's and Medea and Jason's relationship with their children. Medea and Nora struggle for individuation and for identity beyond class and gender with varying degrees of success. Both of them, however, share a sense of outrage at centuries old institutions of male prestige and control. Medea decides that in order to avenge Jason, she must make him suffer the way he has made her suffer. Nora also reflects that her "sacred duty" is not to her husband and her children, but first and foremost, to herself. Thus, destroying or building a family rests in the hands of the woman though she may be considered as insignificant in the eyes of her husband.

**Key words: Love, Marriage, Sacrifice, Struggle, Submissive, Self-realization, Freedom, Self-identity.**

**Euripides**

Among all the epic writers, Euripides (485-406 BC) was the youngest dramatist and also unique among the writers of ancient Athens. He was the most remarkable Greek tragedian who had a way of baffling and startling his audiences. He radically humanized and popularized Greek tragedy and was responsible for bringing tragedy closer to the experience of the ordinary citizen. He used his plays to challenge the societal norms and even introduced greater flexibility in dramatic structure. Though he used the traditional form of the drama, he had some very unconventional things to say, and he said them in a language that was much easier to comprehend than that of Aeschylus or even Sophocles. Euripides rejected rare and archaic words. He popularized diction and utilized everyday expressions. Generally, his plays are comparatively loose in structure and he uses the prologue and *deus ex machina* to simplify plot structure. The treatment of Chorus by Euripides is different from the other playwrights. He is known for his skillful handling of the Chorus. Another striking feature of Euripides' play is the use of "Parados", "Episode", and "Exodos". He is also known for having been the first Greek playwright to start exploring the psychology of characters. He was also the Ibsen of his day because he was the first to introduce heroes in rags and crutches and in tears. He treated slaves, women, and children as human beings and insisted that nobility was not necessarily an attribute of social status.



Euripides 484 BC - 406 BC

Courtesy: <https://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=gr&GRid=86247357>

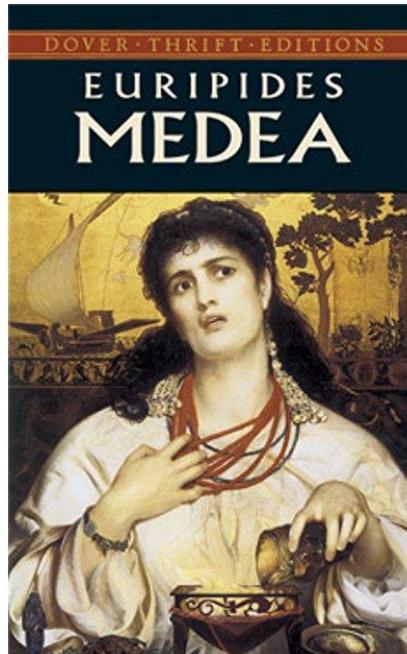
Euripides' works have greatly influenced drama and have a profound impact till today. Most of his surviving plays have been produced numerous times at many theatres. The subject of his plays makes them eternal. Euripides developed many theatrical innovations that have profoundly influenced drama down to modern times. The setting of his plays varies greatly from urban to country. His unique writing style expanded into modern day comedy, romance, etc., and he became known as the most "tragic" of all poets. He focused on the inner lives and motives of his characters in a way previously unknown. His themes remain relevant till today and that's what makes them even more special. His plays deal with human psyche and therefore they are still relevant. Euripides inspired people back in his day and his legacy also continues today. He inspired Henrik Ibsen to develop characters who destroy each other by the intensity of their loves and hates in the same style that Euripides used himself.

By the end of the fourth century BC, Euripides' dramas had become the most popular of all due to the simplicity of the language of his plays. The translation of his plays into the English language helped in the identification of Euripides as a meritorious writer. He influenced later New Comedy and Roman drama, and was later idolized by the 17th Century French classicists such as Corneille and Racine, and his influence on drama has reached modern times.

Modern drama begins in the late nineteenth century and continues to the present day. By the late nineteenth century, Romanticism gave way to Realism, paving the way for the era of contemporary drama in the twentieth century. Modern drama involved much experimentation with new forms and ideas. The pivotal and innovative contribution of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Norwegian dramatist Henrik Ibsen and the twentieth century German theatre practitioner Bertolt Brecht dominate modern drama. In terms of the traditional theoretical discourse of genre, Ibsen's work has been described as the culmination of "liberal tragedy", while Brecht's has been aligned with a historicized comedy.

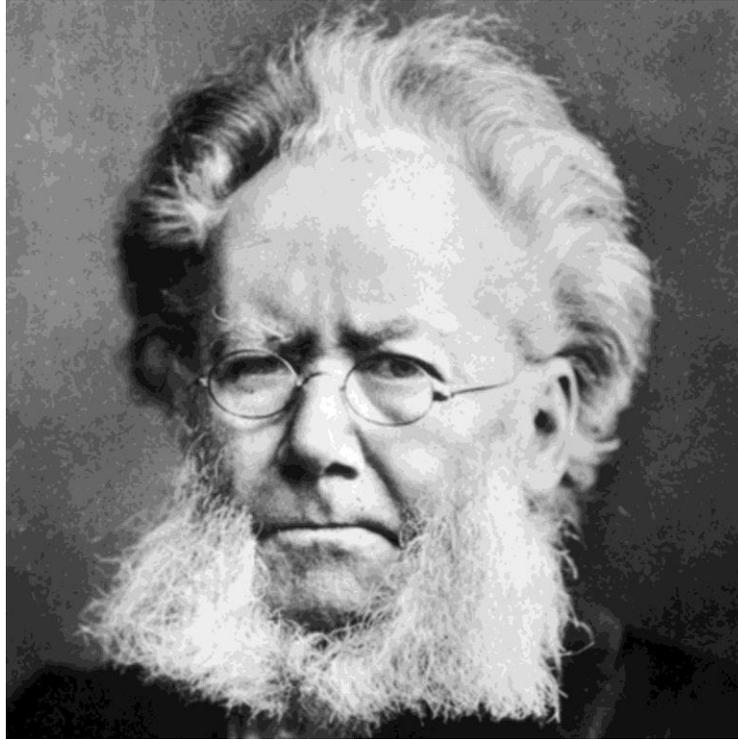
### **Euripides' Play *Medea***

His play *Medea* has always been one of the most famous Greek tragedies. The story exerted tremendous influence on both literature and art, and it was also one of the most popular in Athenian drama. The play *Medea* treats the theme of a woman, betrayed by her lover. The plot centers on the revenge taken by Medea, the protagonist whose husband Jason deserts her for another woman. Medea's anger knows no bounds as she recalls the sacrifices that she has done for the sake of her husband, Jason. She has helped him to obtain the Golden Fleece. She has also committed fratricide and patricide and turned her back against her tribe and followed Jason to a foreign land, Corinth. Medea emerges as an evil woman who repays evil with a much greater evil. Her dreadful revenge consists of killing Jason's new bride, the bride's father and the two sons of Jason. Finally, she escapes to Athens in a magic Chariot which was given to her by the Sun-god Helios, her grandfather.



### **Henrik Johan Ibsen**

Henrik Johan Ibsen (1828-1906) was a major nineteenth century Norwegian playwright, theatre director, and poet. He has certainly achieved a unique and peculiar place among the most significant modern dramatists. He is considered as the father of modern drama and also an advocate of individual freedom. He was a pillar of society who cared for social issues and raised questions on aspects of life by describing “the real world” with “the genuine language”. The language of Ibsen becomes true to reality. A striking feature of Ibsen is the use of metaphors and Symbols in his play. He also looks back to Greek antiquity, and brings back Sophocles’ retrospective technique in his play He is famous not only for his plays and poems but also for his deep philosophical and revolutionary ideas, which had an undeniable impact on the development of literature in general and drama in particular throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. He is the most frequently performed dramatist in the world after Shakespeare, and *A Doll’s House* (1879) became the world’s most performed play by the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.



Henrik Ibsen (1828-1906)

Courtesy: <https://www.biography.com/people/henrik-ibsen-37014>

### ***A Doll's House***

*A Doll's House* is a tragedy in which the protagonist Nora leaves her house by slamming of a door to the world of new possibilities. She is going off to know her own responsibilities towards herself. This kind of self-realization, which usually leads to a new beginning, is one of Ibsen's main ideologies posed in his play. Nora opens her eyes and observes that her individuality and freedom have been taken in living with Torvald Helmer. Nora is a woman who will not go on living her life on illusions and with a strange man anymore. Helmer has lived according to the reasons and rationality of a man, his point of view is arranged based on power and order. For such a systematized, disciplinary man, reputation is more important than sacrificing himself for the family life. Nora's winning of her individual freedom is for self-development whereby she is to become a person in her own right and also in the sight of others. In order to reach real maturity, she must leave this life behind. Hence, after her bitter experience, she comes to the conclusion that it is worthwhile to leave her family to achieve her independence and individuality. The play discussed social problems in general, and individuals in particular, and women are considered as victims and society as a victimizer. It is a true story of Laura

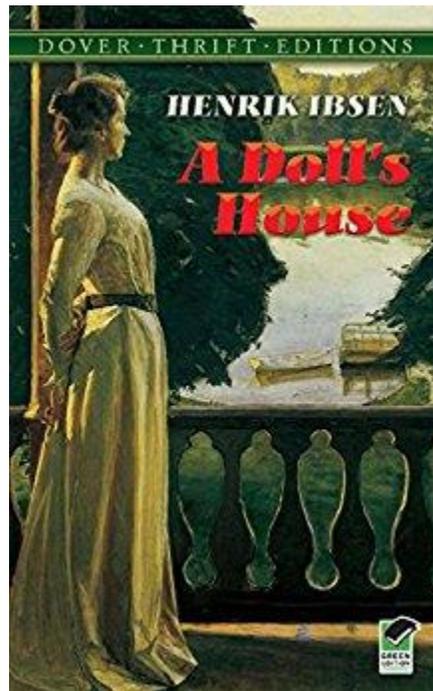
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Keiler who had borrowed money for her husband's treatment and had kept it a mystery. Ibsen persuaded her to tell it to her husband. But she was divorced as borrowing was considered to be unwomanly and illegal. It annoyed Ibsen to the extent of fury. Thus he created *A Doll's House* which shook the whole Europe. It depicts the role of women as subordinate in order to emphasize the need to reform their role in society.



### ***A Doll's House and Medea***

Further, *A Doll's House* is in some respects similar to Euripides' *Medea*. In both plays the heroine is a dominant figure who ultimately leaves her rather insipid husband. All social instructions and conventions are the enemy of every individual because they restrict the characters' personal identity and their freedom. In particular, Ibsen expands this outlook on the women's position whose individuality and freedom are denied by the masculine society. Both these writers are noted for their delineation of strong women characters. In their society women were viewed as inferior to men and were not provided full legal rights. Women of that era were expected to stay at home and attend to the needs of their spouse and children. Despite being Grecian and Norwegian, the female protagonists of these two writers are strikingly similar in many ways and yet so distinctly dissimilar in other ways. In *Medea* and *A Doll's House*, the authors use foreshadowing to give hints to the reader of what will happen by the end of the play.

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The dramatic events at the end of the plays show the achievements of the main characters. Medea's escape on the chariot and Nora's exit from her home demonstrate dramatic endings that shock the audience of the contemporary period.

### **Marriage is the Crux of the Tragedy**

Man's world is the world of all sorts of cruelties, hard-heartedness, logical reasoning, abstract and strict laws, legal rights and conventional patriarchal duties while women's world is that of compassion, compromise, emotions and human values. In *Medea* by Euripides and *A Doll's House* by Henrik Ibsen, 'marriage' is the crux of the tragedy. *Medea* and *A Doll's House* are set in different eras, but Medea and Nora, the chief protagonists of the plays respectively, find themselves in marriages that have difficulties and complications and even betrayal. The husbands wield power over their wives because society permits them to do so. But the protagonists of these plays are poles apart in nature. On one side, is a fiery Medea plotting against her infidel husband while, on the other side, is an apparently submissive Nora who gilds her marriage with sugary deception. In both the plays, the protagonists leave their husbands as they have been betrayed by them. Medea's passion for Jason and his betrayal makes her to take revenge, by killing her own children before she leaves. Nora leaves her husband by leaving her children to her nurse.

### **Honour in Marriage**

Honour in marriage is a state of holding supreme levels of respect and self-respect for one self and one another. Honour is earned through esteemed behaviour, benevolent and just conduct, courage and integrity. In both *A Doll's House* by Henrik Ibsen and *Medea* by Euripides, the author shows the significance of honour in marriage and how the lack of it jeopardizes a relationship. Medea and Nora mutually share a traditional outlook on marriage. They believe in sacrifice and enduring anything to protect and honour their spouse's reputation or life. The situations of both characters hold similar to each other because both wives risk everything, their own honour and dignity, to uphold the respect that is required in a marriage. Thus positive and negative role of honour is similar in both pieces of literature which is depicted through Medea and Nora's sacrificial actions, Torvald and Jason's use of wives as subsidiary "objects" for their

own self interest, and the consequences that alter both Nora and Torvald's and Medea and Jason's relationship with their children.

### **Contrast between the Playwrights**

There is a contrast of how both the playwrights treat their protagonists. Medea is portrayed by Euripides as a strong, capable and proud woman who broke all the rules of approved female compliancy and submission. She is trapped in a society where women were expected to be dependent and less intelligent than men. Although Euripides chooses to represent Medea as the murderer of her children, he still presents her in a sympathetic light. He communicates Medea's grief through her own lamentations and uses other characters to indicate pity for Medea and condemnation of Jason. She suffers Jason's abandonment and is also a victim of her own passion and pride, in that she has killed her own brother and her two sons. The tragedy is that of a loving woman who destroys everything she loves on account of her misplaced passion. She withdraws her affection from her father and country and chooses to give her love and loyalty to her new husband. When that family proves to be based on false love and security, she finally confronts the pain of being betrayed by the one she loves. With this treachery, her passion turns to fury; ultimately everything in her path is destroyed, including herself. To some extent, the betrayal of her father comes home to her in the form of her husband's rejection. Once, she was the perpetrator but now the victim. Medea's regret and fury culminates in the destruction of her new family. Thus her intense passion is the cause of the destruction of her predecessors and her progeny alike.

Nora is treated by Ibsen with sympathy and understanding. She prances in the first act, behaves desperately in the Second act, and gains a stark sense of reality during the final act of the play. In the beginning, she exhibits many childish qualities, especially when she interacts with her husband. She behaves playfully yet obediently in his presence, always coaxing favours from him instead of communicating with him as an equal. Torvald gently chides Nora throughout the play, and she good naturedly responds to his criticism as though she were some loyal pet. Ibsen portrays Nora as a weak woman but the audience soon learns how she uses this kind of behaviour to manipulate Torvald. The audience gets to see the other side of Nora's character. The audience no longer sees Nora as the sheltered, carefree wife of an attorney. She

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knows what it is to struggle and take risks. She is proud of the sacrifice she made for her husband Torvald. Nora's epiphany occurs when the truth is finally revealed. As Torvald unleashes his disgust towards Nora and her crime of forgery, the protagonist realizes that her husband is quite different from what she had expected. His devotion towards her was false. Nora in the end realizes that her marriage to Torvald was a sham, and she was living a life of deception and lies. So she makes the decision to break out of the final chains of captivity and leave Torvald.

### **Sacrificial Role of Women**

In both the plays, women are portrayed in a sacrificial role. Medea's state of mind in the beginning of the play is that of hopelessness and self pity. Medea is both woman and foreigner; that is to say, in terms of the audience is prejudice and practice. She is a woman who has stood by her man through thick and thin. She has turned her back on her family and killed her own brother while helping Jason capture the Golden Fleece. Despite all of her devotion to her husband he has fallen in love with someone new, Glauce. She gives everything up for Jason who deserts her for a younger woman.

As a foreigner Medea has forsaken her old family to help her new husband, so she has no alternative home where she can find sanctuary. She states "O father, O country, that I forsook so shamefully, killing my brother, my own!" (Med. 41). Thus, in the case of divorce, she has no legal rights and family to return to. Divorce destroys her reputation and relegates her to obscurity. Furthermore, he expresses no gratitude for all she has done and displays complete insensitivity towards her plight. Jason is self-centered and unconcerned about a mere woman and her situation. In fact, his thought may have been similar to the average contemporary man of Euripides' audience. Euripides thus reveals the difficult position in which women were placed. They had no form of expression in a society which admired quiet discreet women – a society which deemed women 'bad' or 'wicked' if they rejected their prescribed passive role. In their oppressed state women could not speak for themselves. Euripides thus constructs a dramatic but realistic situation of domestic upheaval and cross-gender conflict.

Nora sacrificed herself to save her husband. She plays the "skylark" and the "squirrel" to her husband for she wants him to retain his ego that he is the head of the family and Nora cannot

do without him. This effort to sustain her husband's pride also makes her resort to lies and pretensions. As she does not want to hurt his pride, she has to play the mask and face beneath. Under Torvald's masculine power she is deprived of her own identity and dignity and has to be comfortable to his ideology. She must keep secrets from Torvald, such as eating macaroons and borrowing money from Krogstad, as she knows clearly that Torvald wouldn't bear to see his wife engaged in deceitful actions. So she stops to eat macaroons in front of him and eats them only in the presence of Dr. Rank or when she is alone. Though she is accused as a spendthrift by him, she is very economical and buys only the cheapest clothes and presents for Christmas.

To save her husband's life, it was quiet urgent that they had to go to Italy and so she arranged for the trip. But it cost quite heavily by way of money. So she has borrowed money from Krogstad by forging her father's signature. She tries to pay off the loan installments by saving on the house-keeping money besides doing pretty odd jobs such as knitting and copying letters. All this indicates that Nora is what she does not make people believe her to be. She has been doing everything to please her husband until she realizes in the end that he is a phoney and a sham. This makes her take a sudden step to break off all her ties with him. She does not want to live with a stranger any longer. So she breaks out of her cage and walks into freedom for the realization of her selfhood.

### **Difference between Medea and Nora**

The difference between Medea and Nora is also in the way they free themselves from their oppressors. Medea is a Barbarian Princess who defeats her husband, thereby defending her right to self-esteem and honour as an individual. She is figuratively demanding equality. She rivals any man with her immense power, intelligence and strength and states: "I had rather fight three battles than bear one child" (Med. 43). Her excessive behaviour protests against her position as supportive wife when she found that Jason had neglected his obligation as a protective husband. In Ibsen's *A Doll's House*, Nora's decision at the end of the play reveals herself to be emancipated woman. She takes a sudden decision to snap her marital ties with Torvald and walks out of her husband's house by a loud slamming of his door. She feels that she must educate herself first and try to understand the true meaning of life untainted by the opinions of others. She owes, she feels, first of all a duty to herself before her duty to her husband or her

children or to society. So she goes out to realize her selfhood and individuality in its broadest sense.

Euripides choice of women support characters such as the nurse and the chorus is imperative to the magnification of Medea's emotions. The very fact that the nurse and chorus are female deepens Medea's sadness, impassions her anger, and makes the crime of killing her own children all the more heinous. The nurse sets the scenario and the mood. Medea an Asian princess avenges herself against her husband, her husband's new bride and the new bride's father who humiliated her. In her revenge, she also murders her children. The author uses the Nurse to explain Medea's tragedy. The action of the play opens with the nurse's prologue:

NURSE. Jason has betrayed his own children and my mistress to sleep beside a royal bride, the daughter of Creon who rules this land, while Medea, luckless Medea, in her desolation invokes the promises he made, appeals to the pledges in which she put her deepest trust, and calls Heaven to witness the sorry . . . (Med. 37-38)

Euripides develops the heart of Medea's character sympathetically by the approach of the Nurse: "Only now and then she turns her white neck and talks to herself, in sorrow, of her dear father and her country and the home which she betrayed to come here with a husband who now holds her in contempt" (Med. 38).

The Chorus is very much an important part of Euripides' *Medea*. As the representative of women in Corinth, they also give an insight into Euripides' views and values. Through the chorus, Euripides positions the audience to be receptive to Medea's quest for justice and to recognize the heroic nature of her stance. In the beginning of the play, the Chorus is stated to be a chorus of Corinthian Women. This draws the first link between them and Medea. The Chorus follows Medea on her journey through this play. They act as narrators on important occurrences in the play; however, they also act as a device Euripides uses to influence the opinion of the audience. He does this by presenting to the audience a moral voice in the Chorus. The audience can relate to them, because the Chorus is in a neutral position in the play. They are definitely an integral part of the play, but their role is not so much to influence the actual plot of the play, but

more to echo what has happened in the plot and the thoughts of the protagonists, and to suggest moral solutions to the audience. Through this relationship between the Chorus and the audience, Euripides is able to influence the audience to sympathize with Medea.

Similarly, in *A Doll's House*, Ibsen paints a bleak picture of the sacrificial role held by women in his society. He also carries the issue of patriarchy or its symbolic oppression which is expressed quite expressively throughout the play. Mrs. Linde is one of the important characters who play a vital role in the play. She is a close friend of Nora. She seems to be far more independent and mature than Nora; however she represents the hollowness of the role of wife and mother. She was left destitute and unhappy by an unloving marriage and was deprived of a happy childhood. Her entrance into the play leads Nora to find her self-discovery. She is shown to be an unfortunate woman who is deprived of money. She tries to seek help from Nora. Widowed at a very young age, Christine Linde comes with a hope to get a job at Torvald's bank. Nora is moved at her friend's plight and decides to help her as soon as possible. It's later revealed that Mrs. Linde had married without love only to help her mother and her brothers and she takes pride in her decision. The daughter of a poor family, Christine was forced to sacrifice her young love.

Christine Linde seems to be the exact copy of the self-reliant and useful woman that Nora yearns to be. Mrs. Linde fills the useful role of confidant to Nora. Her greater experience and steadiness throws Nora's childish excitements into higher relief. Mrs. Linde and Nora demonstrate the position of women who are victims of the patriarchal society. Although Mrs. Linde is sensible and reliable whereas Nora is volatile and immature, between them they illustrate the ways in which society marginalizes the woman – she can either be a butterfly or a drudge, but never a respected individual in her own right. Mrs. Linde accepts this situation by expediently renewing her relationship with Krogstad, while Nora questions it and challenges it.

Anne Marie is another character in the play that tends to be forgotten by the audience. Though appearing in the play for hardly five minutes, this character seems to, however, help Nora when she seeks advice. Nora was motherless and only Anne took charge of her. She is the nurse who had brought up Nora as a child too. Nora confirms to the nurse that she would not be

spending time with her children any more as before. She also asks the nurse to take care of the children.

NORA. Do you think they do? Do you believe they would forget their mother if she went quite away?

ANNA. Gracious me! Quite away?

NORA. Tell me, Anna- I've so often wondered about it- how could you bring yourself to give your child up to strangers?

ANNA. I had to when I came to nurse my little Miss Nora . . . (DH 59)

The play also studies the pernicious effects of money, class, and patriarchal ideology in distorting social behaviour and marginalizing the lower orders and women in general.

Anne Marie, the nurse, has to abandon her child and become a household help because of social strictures and poverty. She had her own incomprehensible circumstances that made her leave her family. Her husband was not a good person and did not provide her proper means to bring up the family. Circumstances led her to leave her own daughter to strangers and carry on her life. Her character is quite similar to Mrs. Linde who had to give up her youthful love for the sake of money and security. She has played the substitute to Nora's mother. It seems to be callous of her giving up her own daughter and serving as a mother to another girl. She seems to be more sincere to Nora than to her own daughter but the fact was that she has left her daughter for the sake of security and money.

### **Woman Depicted as Secondary to Man**

Woman is always depicted as secondary to man. She does not exist as an entity by herself but as the "other". Gender relation is discussed through the portrayal of struggle of ideological power between the men and the women. Euripides brings to the attention of his audience the troubles that women face as mothers and wives, and gives women their own voice. He has, in this tragedy, cast Medea as a typical woman who is faced with extraordinary circumstances brought on by the man she has tied herself to. This is especially prominent in Medea's speech in the first episode of the tragedy. Here she clearly describes the position of women in Athenian society, as well as the vulnerability of women in marriage in terms of their husband's power over

them and the reliance that women had on their husbands. Medea begins by stating, “Moreover by our mere nature we women are helpless for good, but adept at contriving all manner of wickedness” (Med. 47). This speech clearly would have been understood by Euripides’ audience because it reflected marital practices in Athens. It also depicts the role of women as hard and unfair and illustrates prominently the double standard existing between men and women. This speech not only makes Medea sympathetic but all women. Medea takes on the role of the hero in this tragedy. Here Euripides is allowing women to possess a central and important role, giving them a voice, a moral compass, and the capacity to make plans and decisions.

Ibsen while portraying his women characters has shown them under strong influence of ideological power, environment, money and hereditary. *A Doll’s House* has been for a long time been appropriated as a work of feminist literature because of its portrayals of struggles of a woman caught in the grip of patriarchal society. The appropriation is rightly made on its apparent level. It revolves around precisely such a theme, a woman struggling to free herself from her husband and the society. Her subjection is clearly communicated through the words and gestures her husband uses for her.

Ibsen’s women characters are in a bondage to an object or person that manipulates the characters’ mental and emotional senses. The character’s inner captivity reaches a climax where a decision must be made to break the chains of captivity or forever remain enslaved. In Ibsen’s characters often the theme of captivity is observed through relationships. He has created a large number of father daughter relationships with the daughter as the replica of the father. The daughter is often kept captive to the memory, expectation or person of the father. Nora is the best illustration of the woman who lives in a society where the male oppresses the female and reduces her to a mere doll or plaything. Nora is a doll living in her fake doll house, which reinforces the fragile idea of a stable family living under a patriarchal and a traditional roof.

### **Demonstrating a Feminist Style**

Both these playwrights Euripides and Henrik Ibsen shocked the audience during their times with the way they had portrayed their women characters. *Medea* and *A Doll’s House* depict the life of a young married couple and what happens when the women, Medea and Nora, choose

to take destiny into their own hands. Although the two plays were written almost 2000 years apart, they both demonstrate a feminist style that was unheard of at the time. The roles between male and female characters within the play show how society treated each gender. Both plays also include significant male characters that show shocking similarities as they dramatically influence the plot of the plays. Both Jason and Torvald Helmer are extremely similar in their attitudes and thoughts toward women. They express their stereotypical opinions about women. They perceive women as defenseless creatures who have no power within society.

From the times of Ancient Greece, women have been questioning their unequal role in society. In *Medea* and *A Doll's House*, Euripides and Ibsen respectively create two lead female characters, Medea and Nora, who confront society's expectations of women in fundamentally different ways. Medea takes her revenge against Jason out of anger at his betrayal. Medea's revenge against Jason consists of cutting him off from relationships with others through a complete severance of his homosocial bonds. She accomplishes this first by destroying his marriage bond: she kills the Princess, the object which Creon and Jason had exchanged to cement their relationship, and incidentally kills Creon himself. Secondly, she cuts Jason off from his patriline: she kills Jason's children (who are also her own), ending his relationship with them and isolating him further and finally she escapes to Athens in a dragon chariot given by her grandfather. Nora on the other hand goes against the grain of middle class society by first forging her father's signature and then deceiving her husband, Torvald, throughout their marriage. Although Medea and Nora share some comparable personality traits, like being strong willed and self – motivated, they confront the men in their lives and their comparable societies in two distinctive ways, which, as a result, leads to two differing denouements.

### **Important Differences**

Nearly every society dictates a specific place or purpose for women, and while Medea and Nora's respective societies possess some similarities regarding women's place and purpose, they contain several important differences. In *Medea*, for example, the relative worth and status of women in Greek society seems clear; women are to submit to the rule of man. Medea suggests this submissive attribute of women in Greek society when she tells women of Corinth: "we women are the unhappiest species" (Med. 42). In *A Doll's House*, Nora is a tragic heroine of the

society. She is dominated by her husband Torvald who fails to respect the individuality and freedom of his life partner on account of his sense of superiority sanctioned and approved by the convention-ridden society. The tragedy of Nora is not caused by fate or by any supernatural agent but by her husband's male-chauvinism and selfishness.

The tragic play *Medea* is a struggle between reason and violence. Medea is deliberately portrayed as not a 'normal woman', but excessive in her passions. She is a torment to herself and to others; that is why Euripides shows her blazing her way through life leaving wreckage behind her. Euripides has presented Medea as a figure previously thought of exclusively as a male- hero. Her balance of character is a combination of the outstanding qualities of Achilles and Odysseus. The problem set at the beginning of the play is that Jason has decided to marry another wife, Glauce. Medea is angered and will not let Jason off without punishment. The loss of Jason is not only a matter of passion; Medea has been completely humiliated by Jason's decision to take a new bride. Her pride shows again when she refuses Jason's aid. Though her situation is difficult, she would rather destroy all than accept help from one who has wronged her so horribly. Living as a barbarian among Greeks has made her more defensive, more full of hurt pride. Medea is not without feeling, nor is she a sociopath. She comprehends the difference between right and wrong, but chooses to follow the dictates of rage.

In *A Doll's House*, the central conflict revolves around Torvald's controlling and demeaning treatment of his wife. Nora, the heroine of the play is modern in the sense that she readily abandons her traditional role of a puppet wife and a doll-mother for the sake of gaining self-liberation, individuality and independence. The final slamming of the door by Nora as she walks out of Helmer's household was very shocking to the audience of Ibsen's Norway as its echo was felt through the corridors of the European theatres of his time. Nora's bold decision at the end of the play shows that a man has no business to treat his wife as an item of property or a possession of his. A woman has a mind of her own, and an individuality to sustain her soul. She needs a conducive environment in which she can think for herself and can make her wishes known to her husband. Helmer has revealed himself to be a complete egoist, a self-centered man, a self-complacent husband who thinks that a wife is intended to be the source of warmth and comfort in the household and all that matters is the ideas, opinions and tastes of the husband to

which a wife must conform. Nora by her revolutionary decision to walk out champions the liberation of women undergoing bonded slavery in the name of so-called marriage.

Medea and Nora suffer badly at the hands of their husbands, the former in ancient Greece, and the latter in nineteenth century Norway. Medea's culture dictated that women had almost no rights, and were regarded as little more than possessions: "we must pay a great dowry to a husband who will be the tyrant of our bodies (that's a further aggravation of the evil) and there is another fearful hazard whether we shall get a good man or a bad" (Med. 42). Although Nora's culture allowed women more rights, they were still forbidden certain privileges; for example, "a wife can't borrow money without her husband's consent" (DH 27). This shows the male dominated societies the two women lived in, and the inferior role the wife was expected to play.

### **Strong and Weak Traits**

Medea and Nora have their strong and weak traits. They sacrificed their lives for their husbands. Medea made sacrifices because her heart was "pierced with love for Jason" (Med. 37). She helps Jason to get the Golden Fleece. The sacrifices made by Medea for her husband Jason are considered "evil arts" in her society, and cause her banishment. But in the end of the play, Medea's love turns into hatred towards her husband when he decides to marry Glauce. She takes revenge against him by even killing her own children and escapes into Athens. In *A Doll's House*, Nora forges her father's signature and borrows money in order to save her husband's life, then she works secretly behind his back in order to pay back the money that she had borrowed. She hopes that when he finds out what she has done, he will claim responsibility and pay off the loan himself, thereby protecting her. But at the end of the play, she comes to realize that Helmer is not the man that she had made up in her mind; she realizes that she can't stay with him anymore. So she walks out of his house for self-liberation. Besides determining social position, money affects human relationships. Women are dependent upon men because it is the men who are trained for jobs and have the money. Christine Linde marries a rich man to be able to care for her mother and brothers. Helmer asks Christina whether she is a widow before considering her for work at the bank; if she had a husband he probably would not employ her. Anna takes a job as a nanny when her lover does not support their child.

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In both the plays, the protagonists demonstrate their ability to face up to difficulties and seek authentic solutions. At first, Medea and Nora love their husbands but their love turns into hatred at the end of the play when their husbands betray them. Medea and Nora's love save their husbands' lives, but their hatred and anger destroy their entire family at the end of the play. Therefore a woman can either build her family or can even destroy her family.

T. S. Eliot in his poem *Little Gidding* writes, "What we call the beginning is often the end / And to make an end is to make a beginning. / The end is where we start from." (10). For the end of a work to be dramatically effective, the audience must believe that the end of a play is believable, based on what has built up to that conclusion. Although the endings of *Medea* and *A Doll's House* are unconventional, it is not difficult for an audience to accept the dramatic departure of Medea in her dragon-drawn chariot provided by the sun god, nor Nora's astounding exit from both her marriage and societal norms. Henrik Ibsen and Euripides both create endings that have a dramatic effect that adds to the play as a whole. The endings of both *Medea* and *A Doll's House* are not what the reader expects, but Euripides and Ibsen foreshadow plot twists at their conclusion. The dramatic events at the end of these plays represent the achievements of the main characters' primary objectives; also, the endings allow for dramatic exits that will remain with an audience and emphasize important themes.

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