

## VICTORIAN DOCILITY NORMS SUBVERTED IN IBSEN'S *A DOLL'S HOUSE* AND SHAW'S *CANDIDA*

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### Abstract

*In the 19<sup>th</sup> century femininity was constructed upon docility norms and on the role played by a woman in the family either as wife to her husband or mother to her children. A docile woman is a woman who is submissive, devoid of freedom to decide on her body and self, and conforms to the de-fleshed image of femininity created by patriarchy. Nora in Henrik Ibsen's A Doll's House and Candida in Bernard Shaw's Candida are female characters who reject or subvert the docility norms of the 19<sup>th</sup> century by trying to build an independent identity for themselves and refusing the roles imposed on them by the traditional patriarchal society. Employing Luce Irigaray's term 'disruptive excess,' they represent 'disruptive excess' who do not conform to the image of femininity created by the 19<sup>th</sup> patriarchal ideology. This paper studies A Doll's House and Candida in terms of how Nora and Candida question patriarchal codes of thinking and subvert with their behavior, ideas, or personal change the docility norms they are expected to conform in the marriage institution of the late Victorian era.*

**Key words:** docility, subversion, patriarchal, social role

## IBSEN'İN *BİR BEBEK EVİ* VE SHAW'IN *CANDIDA* OYUNLARINDA VİKTORYA ÇAĞI UYSALLIK NÖRMLERİNİN İŞLEVSİZ KILINMASI

### Öz

*19. yüzyılda kadınlık, uysallık normlarına ve kadının aile içinde eş ve anne olarak oynadığı role göre şekilleniyordu. Uysal kadın, erkek egemen sistemin bedeninden soyutlayarak şekillendirdiği kadın imgesini davranış biçimi olarak kabullenen, bedeni ve kişiliği üzerinde karar verme özgürlüğünden yoksun bırakılmış kadındır. Henrik Ibsen'in Bir Bebek Evi oyunundaki Nora karakteriyle Bernard Shaw'un Candida adlı oyunundaki Candida karakteri bağımsız bir kimlik oluşturup geleneksel ataerkil toplumun kendilerine biçtiği rolleri reddederek 19. Yüzyılın uysallık*

*Victorian Docility Norms Subverted in Ibsen's a Doll's House and Shaw's  
Candida*

normlarını işlevsiz kılarlar. Luce Irigaray'ın 'bozan aşırılık' terimi kullanılarak ifade edildiğinde, Nora ve Candida 19. yüzyıl ataerkil ideolojinin yarattığı kadın imgesini 'bozan aşırılığı' temsil etmektedirler. Bu çalışma Henrik Ibsen'in Bir Bebek Evi ve Bernard Shaw'ın Candida adlı eserlerindeki kadın kahramanları ele almakta ve bu kahramanların erkek egemen sistemin düşünce kodlarını sorgulatan ve Viktorya Çağı evlilik kurumunda bir kadının uyması beklenen uysallık normlarının bozumuna neden olan davranış, düşünce veya kişisel dönüşümlerini ele almaktadır.

**Anahtar sözcükler:** uysallık, işlevsiz kılmak, ataerkil, sosyal rol

In *Discipline and Punish* Michel Foucault argues that docility signifies the socio-symbolic power exercised on the body, especially the body of a woman. Foucault contends that the body has been throughout history a battleground for power relations and an object of pressure enactments. However, the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries were outstanding with their docility norms. Docility is a socio-symbolic disciplining of the body, that is, the constrictions, prohibitions and obligations imposed on the body. A body is docile "that may be subjected, used, transformed, and improved," so that it becomes a political puppet, a small-scale model of power (Foucault, 1995: 136). The important point in the enforcements exercised on the body is the methods of discipline used for "the meticulous control of the operations of the body" and for "the constant subjection of its forces" (1995: 137). These methods are called 'disciplines' that had long been in existence—in monasteries, armies, and workshops. However, in the 17<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup>, and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, these disciplinary methods began to produce subjected and docile bodies. A body is made docile by depriving it of its power to act, "by reversing the course of its energy, the power that may result from it, and turning it into a relation of strict subjection (1995: 138). Thus, docility is a disciplinary method exercised on the body, putting confinements on it, drawing the limits within which it can act, and depriving it of its power to act in a way that can make it pose a threat to patriarchy.

Docility is mostly related to women and signifies the type of behavior she must exhibit in the society and the family, and the constraints she must exercise over her body. As Foucault says, the 19<sup>th</sup> century Victorian period was outstanding in its enactments of docility. In *The Madwoman in the Attic* Gilbert and Gubar argue that in the 19<sup>th</sup> century women are represented either as docile, submissive and domestic, or as monsters. Subjection, confinement, and disciplining the body were norms that were expected from women in the Victorian period. Angelic women who conformed to those norms were constant images in 19<sup>th</sup> century literature, while those who did not conform were labeled as monsters. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, as Moi (1985: 58) contends, "woman was assumed to be a vision of angelic beauty and sweetness; the ideal woman is seen as a passive, docile and above all a selfless creature." Behind this angel there is the monster woman, who represents "the obverse of the male idealization of women" and "the male fear of femininity". The monster woman is the woman "who refuses to be selfless, acts on her own initiative,

*Firat Karadaş*

who has a story to tell – in short, a woman who rejects the submissive role patriarchy has reserved for her” (Moi, 1985: 58). In sharp contrast to the Victorian image of ‘angelic beauty’ who lives within the confinements of docility as “a political puppet, a small-scale model of power” (Foucault, 1995: 136), Nora in Ibsen’s *A Doll’s House* and *Candida* in Shaw’s *Candida* reject the confinements of docility and subvert the Victorian docility norms prescribed for a woman in her domestic and social lives. Employing Luce Irigaray’s term ‘disruptive excess,’ they represent ‘disruptive excess’ who do not conform to the image of femininity created by the 19<sup>th</sup> patriarchal ideology. This paper aims to study *A Doll’s House* and *Candida* in terms of how Nora and *Candida* question patriarchal codes of thinking and subvert with their behavior, ideas, or personal change the docility norms they are expected to conform in the marriage institution of the late Victorian era.

Henrik Ibsen was a realist playwright who criticized in his work the Victorian values and its institutions and their effects on individual identity and freedom. The social institutions and problems he mainly dealt with were marriage, religion, family, property rights, the relationship between the sexes, and social conditions. His intention was to point out that if literature was to have any useful function at all, it had to come to grips with these institutions and problems that invade and determine the concrete existence of the individual. Literature, as he put it, “was to deal with ‘our life’, not with ‘our dreams’” (In Hemmer, 1994: 71). Ibsen illustrates in his plays the individual’s conflict with social institutions such as marriage, family and property rights, and with social values concerning the roles different sexes are supposed to play. And since women suffer more than men from these institutions and values, women characters play a central role in Ibsen’s plays. *A Doll’s House* is one of these plays; it is a play in which the central character, Nora, acts as a ‘disruptive excess’ that endangers the male authority in domestic life and refuses the Victorian docility norms.

In *A Doll’s House*, even though Nora seems in the beginning to fit the woman model of the Victorian era, she actually does not, and she is one of the most interesting heroines of the history of drama. The play questions the Victorian society, morals and social roles, and, through her relationship with her husband Torvald, it shows how the Victorian society views a woman. Torvald always calls Nora with pet names, treats her as a senseless doll in the house, and tells her what a woman should do or not. He does not see Nora as an individual with an equal status in the house but as a doll only made for himself. Torvald indicates his view of Nora as a wife in the house from the beginning of the play. Using pet names, he chides her as if she were a child: “my pretty little pet is very sweet, but it runs away with an awful lot of money. It’s incredible how expensive it is for a man to keep such a pet (Ibsen p.4). In the first act, a perfect middle class family is shown and Nora is represented as a dependent, weak and a stupid woman. In beginning of the play, she conforms to the Victorian docility norms.

*Victorian Docility Norms Subverted in Ibsen's a Doll's House and Shaw's  
Candida*

However, as the play progresses we realize that Nora is not as simple and naive as she seems to be in the beginning of the play and that her life is deeper than the reader supposed it to be. She experiences *peripeteia*, which means reversal of fate in literature and is particularly featured in drama as the transformation of the tragic hero's destiny. Going through an epiphany, she transforms to a human being and realizes her power in the house and in the society. Like many of Ibsen's women, she also has a secret about her past which is gradually revealed in the course of the play. The reader comes to know this past when she partly reveals it to Kristine Linde, who comes to ask Nora to help her find a job in the bank by using her influence on her husband.

Although her speech with Mrs. Linde caused Nora to think on her past with a critical view, the most critical point in the play that leads to her awakening is Krogstad's appearing in the play to use her influence on her husband not to fire him from the bank. He blackmails her to tell her husband she borrowed money from him and to show him the loan bond on which she forged her father's signature. After Krogstad blackmails her, Nora begins to question her sacrificial role as a wife in the house and begins to reject the Victorian norms imposed on her as a wife. She acts as a docile figure before Krogstad appears, but begins to be aware of the lies of her marriage after Krogstad threatens her. Krogstad's appearance in the play also reveals Torvald's character traits and his opinion of Nora as a wife. His persistent treatment of Nora as a doll and his inability to comprehend her positive and deep role in the family signify that he cannot develop as a character and is static throughout the play, while Nora develops and changes in the course of the play. All the characters in the play have secrets; the only character who has not is Torvald, which shows his shallowness.

The last act of the play is crucial for understanding Nora's *peripeteia* and epiphany, after Torvald learns the secret of her life. Before he learns the secret from a letter Krogstad has left in the mail box, Torvald approaches her as a sexual object, signifying that the docility of the female body implies disciplining it to be an appropriate "prize possession," that is, to be ready for satisfying male desire when it is needed by its 'owner'; When Nora says to him to stop it, he protests saying: "Can't I look at my treasured possession? At all this loveliness that's mine and mine alone, completely and utterly mine" (Ibsen, 1998: 69). He changes all of a sudden when he discovers Krogstad's letter, returning the room in fury, and blaming Nora for ruining his life and his happiness. "Oh, what a terrible awakening this is [...] this woman who was my pride and joy ... a hypocrite, a liar, worse than that, a criminal!" he says angrily (Ibsen, 1998: 75); continuing to disregard Nora's predicament and thinking only his social outlook, he goes on: "Now you have ruined my entire happiness, jeopardized my whole future [...] I'm done for, a miserable failure, and it's all the fault of a feather-brained woman! (1998: 75-6). When Nora says she wants to leave, all Torvald thinks is his social face and protecting it. The family must pretend nothing has changed, but Nora will no longer be allowed to see or look after the children.

Nora is shocked to see the discrepancy between her expectation of Torvald at such a time of trouble for her and Torvald's selfish behavior. Nora's "desperate self-assurances that Torvald will defend her, reveal that in her heart of hearts she is terrified that he will not" (Templeton, 2015: 141). By this point, Nora protects her calmness, stands still, and is frozen with a fixed gaze on her face as she begins to recognize the truth about her marriage. The doorbell rings, and another letter from Krogstad is left in the mail box, which includes the bond of loan with Nora's forged signature that Krogstad uses as a means of blackmail. Upon seeing the bond and realizing that Krogstad has decided to stop blackmailing them, Torvald, all of a sudden, changes attitude, tears up the bond, and returns to her former attitude towards Nora, trying to calm her with a fatherly language and using pet names. Calling her "my frightened little song-bird," he says "get some rest" and have "a long sleep" because he says: "you know you are safe and sound under my wing ... Here I shall hold you like a haunted dove I have rescued unscathed from the cruel talons of the hawk" (Ibsen, 1998: 78). Continuing his fatherly language, he says he has forgiven her, and for a man nothing is so moving and satisfying as to know that "he has forgiven his wife," which is "as though it made her his property in a double sense" (1998: 78). These expressions of Torvald are important in that they sum up Torvald's view of his marriage, Nora, and his patriarchal role in the family. Thus, he sees himself in accord with the Victorian values that saw the man as the sole authority in the house. However, with a change in the play: Nora is not the same person; she has grown and developed as a character, and is fully aware of Torvald's selfishness and his lack of concern about her fate, though she borrowed the money and committed the crime of feigned signature to save his life.

She is no longer the docile figure, the angel-like soul-less doll in the house; using Gilbert and Gubar's terminology, she turns into a monster who rejects to be the doll in the house. She says to Torvald "I have never understood you until tonight;" it is time to have "a serious talk together," husband and wife (Ibsen, 1998: 79). She has realized, she explains, that for her entire life she has been loved for the role she plays: first the role of a daughter-doll to her father and, after being married, the role of a wife-doll to Torvald. After marrying him, she says to Torvald: "I passed out of Daddy's hands into yours. You arranged everything to your tastes, and I acquired the same tastes. Or pretended to" (1998: 80). He and her father did here wrong for treating her as a doll and not letting her develop an independent personality. She confesses that she has never been happy with Torvald, but has deceived herself into thinking she is happy. After this confession, still not aware of Nora's epiphany and still unable to see that Nora does no longer accept his authority in the house, he offers to teach her about life matters and about being a good wife, to which Nora responds she will teach herself and thus insists on leaving him. Still unable to comprehend Nora's awakening and her rejection to continue living within the confinements of docility, he forbids her to leave, reminding her sacred duties as a wife and mother. As Bernard Shaw puts it, Torvald "presents the course most agreeable to him - that of her staying at home and avoiding a scandal - as her duty

to her husband, to her children, and to her religion" (Shaw, 1986: 88). Nora states that she is no longer concerned with what people say or think, or what it says in books; instead, she discusses, she has to think things out for herself and "get things clear (1986: 82). She no longer believes Torvald's stand, as being wife to him and mother to the children above everything else.

Thus, *A Doll's House* can be said to be about a "quite immature woman who suddenly wakes up and sees her marital situation, sees the 'the life-lie' on which she has based her life; she deluded herself to be happy, but "discovers that this kind of happiness was based on a much more comprehensive masquerade than the one she herself had invented" (Hemmer, 1994: 82). With this awakening, in the second half of the play, she is no longer the angel in the house and the plaything of her husband; to allude to Gilbert and Gubar's idea, she turns into a monster who does not conform to Victorian gender norms. No longer a submissive, a docile figure, she removes the patriarchal confinements over her body and refuses her body to be a possession of her husband and a battleground of power struggle for him.

Like Ibsen, Bernard Shaw was also a critic of Victorian values and social institutions that pervade the life of the individual and impose on him/her some roles to play. Like Ibsen, Shaw thought that women suffered most from the Victorian values and institutions. As Ögünç puts it, Shaw's plays deal with the woman question, a much debated issue of the period; "his plays question the role and rights of women along with proposing a new woman type which would carry out the suffragette movement at the turn of the century (Ögünç, 2017: 56). In *The Quintessence of Ibsenism*, which was originally published in 1891, Shaw questions the traditional roles imposed on women and criticizes the idea that domestic management and care for the children are a woman's duty, and a woman who lacks them is not a woman at all; he states:

The domestic career is no more natural to all women than the military career is natural to all men; although it may be necessary that every able-bodied woman should be called on to risk her life in childbed just as it may be necessary that every man should be called on to risk his life in the battlefield. (Shaw, 1986: 60)

He argues that considering some roles as specific to women is imprisoning them or putting constraints on their freedom; for instance, "if we come to think that the nursery and the kitchen are the natural sphere of a woman, we have done so exactly as English children come to think that a cage is the natural sphere of a parrot - because they have never seen one anywhere else (1986: 60). According to Shaw, freedom comes to women only when they begin to refuse the traditional roles imposed on them:

Unless woman repudiates her womanliness, her duty to her husband, to her children, to society, to the law, and to everyone but herself, she cannot emancipate herself. (1986: 61)

Thus, like Ibsen's plays, the central characters in Shaw's plays are usually women. As Rodelle Weintraub observes in his introduction to *Fabian Feminist*, "in his plays, Shaw created perhaps the most fascinating gallery of women in modern drama, female characters who usually prove more interesting and more vital than his male characters" (Weintraub, 1977: p.8).

What makes Shaw's female characters different from Ibsen's is that while in Ibsen's plays the woman characters are their husbands 'dolls' and submissive in the beginning and reach a self-realization only towards the end, in Shaw's plays female characters are more powerful than men; here women toy with men and treat them as if they were 'dolls' or children. Besides, in Shawian drama, women are portrayed as representing the New Woman who takes her own initiative, makes her own decisions, declares her love instead of waiting the man to do it, and is open in expressing her ideas on life, gender issues, and power relationships between genders. Shaw's *Candida* is such kind of play. The play is written as a rewriting of Voltaire's *Candide*, which focuses on the enlightenment of a very young naïve man, and the *Candide* means sincere, frank, or open. Shaw's play, in contrast, handles the enlightenment of a woman, but in accord with the meaning of her name, she is open, frank, and strong in speech. *Candida* is about Candida-- the central character--about her relationship with her husband James Morell and Eugene Marchbanks, the young poet, and her manipulation of them. From the very beginning of the play to the end, Candida is portrayed as subverting Victorian morality and refusing the docility norms of the period. She is depicted as a 'disruptive excess' who repudiates her social as well as her domestic roles and behaves in a way contradicting the traditional code of behavior expected from a woman at that period.

*Candida* is a three-act play of domestic comedy written by Shaw in 1894 and published in *Plays Pleasant* in 1898. The play questions the Victorian ideas of love and marriage and the roles a woman is expected to play in that period. *Candida* features the relationship between three characters: Candida, Morell and Marchbanks. Morell is Candida's husband and Marchbank is an aristocrat-poet who is in love with Candida and declares his love to her in front of her husband. The play does not only question marriage and love but also the out-of-datedness of Morell's notion of life and the unrealism of Marchbanks, the poet who is always chasing rainbows. Morell, Candida's husband, is described by Shaw as a good and very respectable parson who has socialist tendencies. He is also a very good preacher who preaches in various circles about certain Christian values such as charity, benevolence, sympathy for the poor, about fighting against exploitation and injustice. Thus, he is very respected by the society. Candida has lived throughout her life according to the Christian principles set forward by him. However, he is criticized by Marchbanks—who is also in love with Candida—that he is a liar and is not the kind of person who can meet the needs of a woman like Candida. He says: "A woman, with a great soul, craving for reality, truth, freedom; and being fed on metaphors, sermons, stale perorations, mere rhetoric" (Shaw, 1898: 117). He also tells him that

*Victorian Docility Norms Subverted in Ibsen's a Doll's House and Shaw's  
Candida*

Candia does not believe in fact to his lies; he tells: "Sermons and scrubbing brushes! With you to preach the sermon and your wife to scrub" (1898: 129). Candida also comes to realize the emptiness of his preachings and the life of illusion she has lived with him. She says: "Why, you're spoiled with love and worship" (1898: 134).

However, what is important is that although Morell is an authority in social life, he is treated as a little boy at home. Candida is seen as a powerful woman and mother figure from her first appearance in the play: she comes and looks at them "with an amused maternal indulgence which is her characteristic expression" (Shaw, 1898: 107). She is a woman of 33, well-built, matronly, and having the charm of motherhood. She is so self-assured "she can always manage people by engaging their affection" and she is a woman "who is just clever enough to make the most of her sexual attractions for trivially selfish ends (1898: 107). She is practical in housework and in domestic life. She is a mother not only to her children but also to her husband; she is "her husband's mother, and this is tea for three. Morell's secretary complains that "a man ought to be able to be fond of his wife without making a fool of himself" (Gilmartin, 1965: 97). She is a "tiger-mother" who not only "strips away from the man she has married every covering of decency," but also puts Marchbanks, the poet aristocrat, "to peeling onions and polishing boots, human dignity being a luxury not stocked in her market" (Gilmartin, 1965: 97). For Elsie Adams, "Candida is one of the best examples of Shaw's mother-women; throughout the play she babies and bullies her two 'boys,' Morell and Marchbanks, and the boys take turns sitting in a child's chair at her feet" (Adams, 1977: 158). The phrases "silly boy" and "my boy" (Shaw, 1898: 133) she uses to call them indicate her mothering attitude.

When Morell says "I thought of your goodness, of your purity. That is what I confide in" and expects her to conform to the docility norms of her society, she answers him: "what a nasty uncomfortable thing to say to me. Oh, you are a clergyman James: a thorough clergyman" (Shaw, 1898: 134). Like Torvald in Ibsen's play, Morell represents the traditional values and sees himself as the provider, owner, and teacher of his wife. He is the one to teach his wife how to be a good woman because he is her economic provider. When Morell says to Marchbanks that he has not taken the moment on credit, Marchbanks replies: "I have no doubt you conducted as honestly as if you were buying a pound of cheese" (Shaw, 1898: 146). Her being considered as a possession in love and marriage is a constant object of derision and criticism for Candida. When the two men quarrel about whom she belongs to, she answers: "I suppose it is quite settled that I must belong to one or the other" (156); continuing her sarcastic tone, she adds:

I mean that, and a good deal more, Master Eugene [Marchbanks], as you will both find out presently. And pray, my lords and masters, what have you to offer for my choice? I am up for auction, it seems. What do you bid, James. (Shaw, 1898: 156).

Still not aware of Candida's derision of the Victorian values he represents, Morell replies, echoing Torvald's notion of the roles of husband and wife in marriage in A



Firat Karadağ

*Doll's House*: "I have nothing to offer you but my strength for your defense, my honesty for your surety, my ability and industry for your livelihood, and my authority and position for your dignity" (156-7).

Similar to the drama of arguments in *A Doll's House*, in *Candida*, too, there is towards the end a sort of "let's sit and talk over it" expression in which the heroine discusses the patriarchal roles imposed on her and the way she is conceived as a woman in love and marriage. She says "let's sit and talk comfortable over it like three friends" (1898: 157). First beginning with Morell, she reminded him how she had become his sister and mother to relieve his loneliness and remorse because nobody, not even his real mother and father, cared for him. Then, turning to Morell, she has also been sister and mother to her husband throughout her marriage life as Morell was the hero of the household and the house of his family was full of his pictures: Morell the baby, Morell at the age of eight holding his first school prize, Morell in his first frock coat, Morell under all sorts of glorious circumstances, Morell who did not need do anything in the family but be strong, clever, and happy. He was the center of attraction for his mother and three sisters. After marriage, Candida says, "ask me what it costs to be James's mother and three sisters and wife and mother to his children all in one" (Shaw, 1898: 158). She has built a castle of comfort, indulgence, and love for him, and made him a master in the house. And when Morell thought she might go with Marchbanks, Candida discusses, his only thought was what would become of him. Thou she, not him, is the builder of everything in the house due to the many roles she plays in the family, Morell thinks he is the all-powerful presence in the house and has offered her his defense, strength, and authority to tempt her stay with him. The difference of Shaw's play from Ibsen's, as Shaw himself puts it, is "turning Ibsen's *A Doll's House* upside down and revealing the doll in the house to be the man" (Holroyd, 1979: 18). *Candida* turns Morell and Marchbanks into playthings and reveals that none of the men can possess her because she has personal superiority over them. Towards the end of the play, like Nora in *A Doll's House*, she rejects Victorian values such as purity of the wife, the role of the husband as a protector and the woman as a passive agent.

As it is seen, Nora in *A Doll's House* and *Candida* in *Candida* are female characters who do not conform to the de-fleshed image of woman created by the patriarchal ideology of the late Victorian era. In the Victorian Era, an ideal woman is a docile one who is submissive, has no freedom to decide over her body, and is deprived of the power or energy to act as a 'disruptive excess' against patriarchy. An ideal woman is one who plays the roles prescribed for her by the Victorian docility norms. Nora conforms the docility norm of the period in the beginning of the play. She is a good wife and a good mother; she is the plaything of her husband, a puppet or a small-scale model representing the authority of the husband. She appears to be a subjected figure and deprived of her energies to act in the family. However, as we come to understand later on in the play, she is not so simple and has played an important role for the family. As in *Candida*, though Torvald thinks that the family

*Victorian Docility Norms Subverted in Ibsen's a Doll's House and Shaw's  
Candida*

exists because of him, in fact, it is Nora on whom the family comfort depends. As she realizes the real face of Torvald and her marriage lie, she puts to question all the traditional norms on which her marriage depends, particularly the docility norms she is expected to conform in family and social life. She rejects the authoritative role of Torvald in the family, and even goes to the limit of refusing the 'sacred' roles of being first and foremost a wife to her husband and a mother to her children and decides to cease being the doll of someone and leave the house to form herself an independent identity.

In *Candida*, Candida is a 'disruptive excess' from the very beginning of the play. She is described as a motherly figure who mothers not only her children but also her husband and the aristocrat-poet Marchbanks. She treats them as if they were children, authorize them, and plays with them. Contradicting the traditional values of the late Victorian period, Marchbanks declares that he is in love with Candida in front of her husband, and then a power struggle proceeds between the two concerning the possession of Candida. Candida plays with their emotions, derides their quarrel on her possession and questions the marriage institution of the Victorian period that regards the woman as a possession for her husband and as subjected to her husband's authority economically, socially, and spiritually. Thus, Candida subverts the Victorian docility norms with her conduct and ideas throughout the play and features a female figure who is in total contradiction with the late 19<sup>th</sup> century patriarchal ideology. Somewhat differently from the portrayal of Nora, Candida is depicted as a representative of the New Woman who takes her own initiative, makes her own decisions, declares her love instead of waiting the man to do it, and is open in expressing her ideas on life, gender issues, power relationships between genders. To sum up, in both plays the women characters reject the social roles imposed on them by the society and subvert the image of femininity and the docility norms of that period. However, while Nora abandons her husband and children to build an independent identity in the end, in *Candida* Candida does not leave and she reforms her marriage and enact absolute power over her husband.

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*Firat Karadaş*

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