

Dearest mamma! - a comedietta in one act

T.H. Lacy - Full text of *Rocker*, a costume play in one

Before Dawn: The Early Stage Career of Janet Achurch, 1865-1889

An actress of Janet Achurch's name remains little remembered. Her innovative interpretation as Nora Helmer in the first uncopyrighted British production of Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House* at the Novello Theatre on 7 June 1889 brought her instant fame.¹ Indeed, such was the impact of *A Doll's House* on the course of British theatrical history that it is easy to forget that Achurch had a theatrical past before the famous Ibsenian role. This biographical account from her lifetime years has been so overwhelming that her pre-1889 period has almost vanished into oblivion. The paucity of information is evident in a plethora of readily available biographical summaries on Achurch that offer little of this early period.² The recovery of this undocumented past has enabled a study of Achurch's six-year apprenticeship from 1883 when she first came to the stage, up to the early notices for *A Doll's House* in 1889. During this period, Achurch worked under well-known managers, notably those of Gloucester Ward, Sarah Thorne, F. R. Benson, and Herbert Beerliohr Tree. On this journey of exploration are revealed not only the predictable peaks and troughs in fortune but also the relative strengths and weaknesses of Achurch's developing talent, and the emergence of performance style and artistic style that propelled the performer she became. In a wider context, and in recognition of the changing status of actresses in the last two decades of the nineteenth century, the impact of familial and gender issues on her career path demands consideration also. Attention is therefore drawn to Achurch's theatrical heritage and family connections (Figure 1), and to key personal relationships in her early acting years. These forces were central to the theatrical world that defined her career but they significantly influenced the direction she chose. Her first husband was the actor-dramatist Sir Aubrey Miller (1865-1929) whose mainstream artistic ambitions were incompatible

1

Description: -

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Notes: First produced at Royal Olympic Theatre, May, 1860.

This edition was published in 1860



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Ann

Is someone out there by that door? Besides, what was the use of you saving my life if I could not use your name? BRICK: No, I don't, I forgot it.

Cat on a Hot Tin Roof (Signet)

Have you brought him with you? Nora would play the fairy and dance for you in the moonlight, Torvald.

Ann

Her interpretation however was more enthusiastically received by the Era 9 Jun. For provincial runs, a performance day of the week is indicated where it is known, and the week number if a stay was extended beyond the usual six days.

Full text of chimney

I love Thee, with my whole heart and. . .

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. Bill Cryer, well, now, fancy finding the press secretary at his desk.

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