

Free essay on being a father in the victorian age

[Family](#), [Father](#)



Sometimes the world of theatre and literature may seem straightforward in what it aims to tell the target audience, but usually there is a hidden meaning to what is told or shown on the stage. In other words, every play needs a deep analysis in terms of context and author's intentions. The aim of this essay is to analyse August Strindberg's play "The Father." The play is analysed in terms of the sociological and gender issues posed in it.

One of the most important themes discussed in the play is the process of infantilisation of young adults by their parents. In this play, the process is shown on the example of Bertha, who is treated by her parents like a child that has no opinion of her own. It is up to her parents to decide her career and future life. While her father wants her to become a teacher in a town, her mother wants Bertha to become an artist (Strindberg 3). In this regard, although each parent has an idea of their daughter's future, none of them gave an independent choice or other options. Each of them is convinced that she wants to do what each of them says. Although Bertha tells her father that she would like to leave their house and follow his will, she does not have enough strength to oppose her mother and she pleads father to influence her: "You must ask her very nicely; she wouldn't pay any attention to my asking" (Strindberg 14). The very process of infantilisation in this play is in deprivation of a young adult of freedom in decision-making and independence. Although Captain wants Bertha to leave the house for a better future it is still already decided for her, including the amount of knowledge she is allowed to gain before getting married. So, she is never going to grow up, she is destined to stay a child that will change father house to her husband's home, and her husband will continue making

decisions for her instead of parents. So, it can be argued that the described process of infantilisation was complicated with suppression of female emancipation.

A description of the process of infantilisation with the addition of the problem of female emancipation was a step forward in demonstration of the late nineteenth-century reality. Although Strindberg was not as critical as the first feminist writers of 19th century like Charlotte Perkins Gilman and her short story “ Yellow Wallpaper”, his opinions in this play were emblematic for that time. For instance, his main argument in the play was that the natural order of family’s development is to follow man’s will and that women need to agree with their patriarchs. Therefore, the only purpose for a woman is to get married and come from father’s house to husband’s. The only reason why Bertha is allowed to leave her house for studies is because her father wants to impose his will over Laura and to demonstrate that there can be no emancipation for woman in his house, and he will not follow his wife’s will:

“ But the worst of it is, it strikes me that Bertha’s future is being decided from spiteful

motives. They hint that men better be careful, because women can do this or that now-

a-days. All day long, incessantly it is a conflict between man and woman”
(Strindberg 5).

This paragraph demonstrates the place a woman in nineteenth-century society. In other words, women were entirely subordinate to men and had very little options but marriage. On the other hand, unlike in the previous centuries, the end of the 19th century was showing the beginning of female

disobedience to matrimonial and gender roles. Although the author is not supportive of female emancipation and demonstrated it to be evil and ruinous for the very notion of patriarchy and family values, he still showed that the struggle was there. Although it was yet within a family and did not get to the reach the scale of the social movement, it was there. In other words, his opinions of female emancipation were emblematic to the time he lived in, yet his play also demonstrated the beginning of the modern era of feminism and gender equality.

Analysing the play from the point of selfishness, the closest comparison would be with Shakespeare's character of Iago. In this regard, both Laura and Iago are ready to achieve their goals with all means available. They simply do not care about consequences of their actions and that people can get hurt or die. They are driven by their desires. However, the nature of their desires and motives is different. Iago is driven by a male desire to compete and win the prize that is Desdemona. He just wants to ruin the man he hates, and that is it. This is entirely evil and criminal intention. In the case of Laura, the situation is more complicated. She does not follow her desire to kill her husband because she hates him. She wants to show him her strengths. She rebels against socially-imposed norms of female behaviour and demonstrates that even in her limited position she has a power to rule over her husband. With her intelligence, she overruled him, used for the purpose society prescribed to him and then simply disposed of him:

“ Now you have fulfilled your function as an unfortunately necessary father and

breadwinner, you are not needed any longer and you must go. You must go, since you

have realized that my intellect is as strong as my will, and since you will not stay and

acknowledge it.” (Strindberg 29).

Although this revelation demonstrates Laura’s rebellion against gender roles imposed on her and shows her ability to find a solution even in the society where women are deprived of emancipation, the author creates a negative impression of her. He does support her actions. He demonstrates how the father of a family is cruelly deprived of his duties and responsibilities; how he is used by his wife in order to provide for the family and then is simply thrown away. In this regard, the author is on the side of a man who was following his role as a head of the family and was a breadwinner, as society and religion asked for. So, he considers women to be vicious in their attempt to function outside their socially-imposed roles. He thinks of women in a stereotypical ways of witches and the root of all evils particularly for rational and thoughtful men. The best example of this is his references to witchcraft and talking to spirits, which Bertha tell her father as a great secret and as something he would not be able to understand (Strindberg). Therefore, it can be concluded that the overall intention of the play was misogynistic in its nature and purpose. In other words, the author’s message to the target audience is that in order to avoid tragedies like Captain’s, women have to act in terms of roles society and religion have chosen for them.

Another important conflict described in the play is the role of religion and

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science in the society of that time. In this regard, religion becomes a tool with which Laura fights Captain. For him, religion is of little matter since he is interested in science and its potential to discover new areas where humankind has not dreaded yet. To a certain extent, the author makes religion and science gendered in his play. He shows that for a man of action like Captain, religion is of a little use since it provides the answers. For him, science gives an opportunity to explore and find something new to conquer, in his case it was new knowledge to gain and proclaim his name in years to come. So for him and men of his time science was similar to the path of honour, because it could unravel new knowledge about the world people live in. On the other hand, for a military man religion matter little, it was the same as superstition of women, so it was left for women to deal with it. In other words, in the nineteenth-century society, it was essential to preserve the image of following religious prescriptions, but did not mean that men of science were limited by religious believes they were prescribed to follow. Overall, from all mentioned above, it can be concluded that the play “ The Father” is detailed description of Victorian gender stereotypes in the late nineteenth-century society. The author has also shown the gradual increase of the struggle between men and women in an attempt to overrule gender roles imposed on both sexes. Although the author considers female emancipation abnormality, his play demonstrates the degree of internal struggle gender roles can cause.

Work Cited

Strindberg August. The Father. New York, NY: Dover Publications. 2003. Print.