

Which of the two
characters is stronger



Britain's empire is rapidly expanding.

With colonies such as India, we are the most advanced, wealthy and powerful state in the world. However, despite the fact that our Monarch was a woman, we had a primitive view as to the sexual equalities in life. The Queen, Victoria, was synonymous with the phrase 'we are not amused' and branded unmarried actresses as 'the line between entertainment and a whore, a line which is often crossed'. Even in everyday middle to upper class life, people were literally living by the ideals that women were second class citizens, inferior to men in all respects. With British books such as *Oliver Twist* depicting strong, heroic women such as 'Nancy', and the suffragette movement steadily gathering pace, it was inevitable that women were determined to be seen as equals. *The Stronger* was written by a Swede, August Strindberg and when first read it was met by differing degrees of acceptance by many who still held chauvinistic values. It is basically a monologue piece, with two characters but only one speaker.

Both are actresses, one respectably married, and one not, and as unmarried actresses were seen as 'whores' it's an interesting mix. Straight away we see the unmarried (Miss Y) drinking from 'a partly emptied bottle of beer' which straight away shows an attitude that, even in public, shows she does not care what people think, as it wasn't usual for a woman to drink beer. She is however reading an unworthy 'illustrated paper' as Mrs. X appears, so perhaps Strindberg was still trying to pander to the more traditional views of the time. 'Fancy seeing you like this!' this leads me to believe that X expected to see Y here, 'what an earth are you doing here, all by yourself?' what Mrs.

X doesn't understand is that while playing on the loneliness of Miss. Y, she is in fact being hypocritical, as she is also on her own. Miss. Y doesn't rise to this petty abuse, though one can only assume it hurt, leaving her stronger than an immature X. When X states her false concern ' You know, I'm really quite concerned, it's dreadful to find you on you're own like this – in a cafe, and on Christmas Eve' X gets the upper hand, preying on Y and again playing her only useful card, the loneliness.

Once she has knocked Y, X feels it useful to brag and make herself feel better than Y, for this she uses money and ' a wedding party in a Paris cafe.' She shows off that she has been to Paris, and that whilst there she attended an obviously rather extravagant wedding. At this point, X's onslaught leaves her the Stronger, however, when Y seems as if to speak, Mrs. X shows a distinct lack of strength by interrupting, not daring to hear Y's defence. Mrs. X's mocking of the lonely cafe dweller in Miss.

Y becomes embarrassing when, without ordering , the regular of this cafe (as now revealed) has her usual, a hot chocolate delivered to her at the table. Luckily, being an actress, she is able to ignore this and act like nothing has been unwantingly revealed. Mrs. X now believes she has the upper hand.

' As I told you at the time' reveals a slightly narcissistic side. She was right, she knows it, and wants other people to know. Mrs. X believes she stands tall above Y, she is obviously kicking Y while she is down, ' You'd have done a lot better to have stuck to him,' and sticks to the strict idealisms and etiquette of the day. She then mocks Y's life choices, ' Well dear, home is best, then theatre, then children but you wouldn't realise that.' Despite her ongoing

unpicking of Y's life, I can still sense X's underlying weakness and insecurity, the insecure bully, bullies.

The tide begins to turn when Miss Y throws a 'contemptuous' look. Mrs. X sees this and pulls out her big guns for attack. She brings forth the Christmas presents for her family. She shows off her wealth, which in those days really did mean happiness, to show the obviously poor Y. Perhaps this means that Mrs.

X is well off, or just has more people to buy for. The next lines in the script show the only point in my view, where X is truly dominant over Y. She points the pop-gun at her and shoots it, perhaps even living out some kind of sick fantasy by ridding herself of 'Y.' She then tries to be self-deprecating with her humour 'If you tried to shoot kill me – that wouldn't be at all surprising!' Sometimes, this kind of humour can show strength of character, being able to make fun of your idiosyncrasies however, in this case, shows an insecurity and weakness.

Y is now the Stronger. From this point on, Y is in complete control. When X refers to her husband as her 'Lord and Master,' she fills the typical Victorian woman role. Y is soon taken down memory lane.

X regurgitates all of the funny things about Bob, who Y obviously knows well. 'Weather like this!' is one of many impersonated comments X makes. She does however, now start on a long, realisation and self destructive line. 'I know he's faithful – so you needn't snigger,' suggests the denial she was previously in. It's now a mystery as to why Bob (the husband) told X about being a womaniser, but a man who turns them down.

Y is now in complete control, X begins to sense this and becomes condescending 'if only to prove you bear us no ill will.' Here, where Miss. Y considers Mrs. X curiously, I think she feels slightly sorry for her.

She now has cemented her strength over Mrs. X, and feels she maybe could use it for good to help X, up until the point where X goes into free fall. She first says how 'our acquaintance has been so odd, do you know I was afraid of you from the first?' However, the bombshell finally hits X, she says how Y and Bob hated each other up to the point where Y became engaged, and they mysteriously came to like each other. Mrs.

X at the time, briefly thought there may have been something going on, and to test the water she made them kiss at a christening. She misinterpreted their embarrassment as the fact that they were both spoken for. Where as their embarrassment was, I think, that they felt they were being tested by doing something they did together in private. At this point, she begins to quicken her pace and panic.

She is realising life-changing things all at once. She accuses Y of not speaking, though it is in fact her fault for not giving Y a chance to defend herself, not wanting to hear the fact that she is out of order, but Y has remained strong. X continues and asks 'Why did you break off your engagement?' and finally comes to realise the unconditional love that Bob has for Miss Y. Bob has made X into his perfect woman by making her do the things that Y does...

'That's why I had to work those detestable tulips on his slippers – your favourite tulips! That's why we go to Lake Malarn in the summer – because

you don't like salt water. Your father's name is Eskil – that's why our boy had to be called Eskil. And that's why I have to wear your colours, read your pet authors, eat your favourite food and drink your precious drinks – chocolate, for example! You have forced everything on me – even your tastes in making love!' Bob has turned Mrs. X into the love he lost, for whatever reason.

.. Y. When she leaves, X goes out very strongly, leaving the two possibly as strong as each other, she leaves with a brilliant line, one that will resound in Y's ears and leave her weakened.' Thank you Amelia, for you've taught me. And thank you for teaching my husband how to love.

Now I'm going home to love him.' X has realised that though she has to live by the life of Y, she has maybe benefited from it, benefited to the extent of having Bob. Throughout this play, Y is in overall control and generally the stronger. Mrs.

X is petty and childish, though she throws insults and preys on the loneliness of Y. Y is stronger, until the final two lines. It is said that the strongest of people realise they are weak, and X does this, and in the end, uses Y to her advantage. During this play she comes of age, and becomes, the stronger.