

The relationships
between fathers and
daughters in 'titus
andronicus' and 'the
wi...



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Explore the relationship between fathers and sons, or fathers and daughters, in two of the plays we have studied. Freud hypothesized that, “ The earliest affection of the girl-child is lavished on the father”[1] Shakespeare seems to explore the father-daughter dynamic in intimate detail, perhaps as a way of emphasising the themes of gender and generation, and how these things impact individuals within a family setting, particularly in the context of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. In both *Titus Andronicus*[2] and *The Winter’s Tale*[3], we see the father-daughter dynamic exemplified and thrown into the spotlight. In *Titus Andronicus*, it is the titular character’s relationship with his only daughter Lavinia which allows the audience to empathise with both Lavinia and her distraught father, Titus. In *The Winter’s Tale*, we see a far more complex relationship between Perdita and her biological father, King Leontes, and in contrast a more nurturing relationship between Perdita and the shepherd who raised her.

The Winter’s Tale, first listed as a comedy by Shakespeare, is now considered to be in fact a Romantic play, as it portrays the key themes of love, separation and reunion, all of which can be seen in the relationship between Leontes and his daughter Perdita. The relationship between King Leontes and Perdita is perhaps one of the most complex father-daughter relationships in Shakespeare’s works. This is because Leontes refuses to accept the fact that Perdita is his daughter when she is first born, and instead chooses to believe that she is the product of his wife’s adultery with the King of Bohemia, Polixenes. His disgust towards his daughter is shown when he states, “ This brat is none of mine” (Shakespeare, *The Winter’s Tale*, 2. 3. 94), showing his utter contempt for his daughter, which therefore

justifies his decision to have her banished from the kingdom. However, when Leontes is informed by the Oracle that his wife has been faithful, and the Oracle's words are proven true by the deaths of his wife and son, Leontes immediately becomes remorseful and grief-stricken, " I have deserved all tongues to talk their bitt'rest." (Shakespeare, *The Winter's Tale*, 3. 2. 213-214), mourning the loss of his son and wife, but also the abandonment of his last remaining heir, " is't not the tenor of his oracle that King Leontes shall not have an heir till his lost child be found?" (Shakespeare, *The Winter's Tale*, 5. 1. 38-40). The idea that Shakespeare, " employed this one metaphor- the father-daughter relationship with all its variation – to interrogate gender, generational and familial issues"[4] is further highlighted when Leontes is reunited with Perdita; he fails to realise that he is in the presence of his lost heir, stating to Florizel, " O, alas, I lost a couple that 'twixt heaven and earth might have stood, begetting wonder, as you." (Shakespeare, *The Winter's Tale*, 5. 1. 130-133), referencing his late son and lost daughter. He then continues to insult Perdita, claiming to Florizel, " your choice is not so rich in worth as in beauty, that you might well enjoy her" (Shakespeare, *The Winter's Tale*, 5. 1. 213-214), showing his complete naivety and inability to recognize Perdita as his own daughter, and adding a further level of complication to the already complex relationship between the two. However, we later hear that upon the news of his daughter returning, the " King being ready to leap out of himself for joy of his found daughter, as if that joy were now a loss cries, ' O, thy mother, thy mother!'" (Shakespeare, *The Winter's Tale*, 5. 2. 49-52), showing not only the joy at his rekindled relationship with his daughter, but also his utter remorse and self-reproach for what he has done to Hermione. Lenker states that, " The father-
<https://assignbuster.com/the-relationships-between-fathers-and-daughters-in-titus-andronicus-and-the-winters-tale/>

daughter relationship...served as a vehicle for dramatizing inherently oppositional themes and ideas" 4, and here we see the father-daughter dynamic portraying conflicting ideas or both joy and regret. Overall then, the relationship between Leontes and Perdita is shown by Shakespeare to be complicated and the cause of opposition within Leontes' reaction to the reunion of himself and his daughter.

The other father-daughter relationship in *The Winter's Tale* is that of Perdita and the Old Shepherd who raises her. As soon as the shepherd finds Perdita, he immediately accepts her and is willing to raise her as his own, with the help of his son, " They were warmer that got this than the poor thing is here. I'll take it up for pity; yet I'll tarry till my son come" (Shakespeare, *The Winter's Tale*, 3. 3. 73-75). This therefore shows the shepherds ability to look past biology and simply nurture the child and show it some pity, something that the King could not do. This is perhaps Shakespeare's way of suggesting that the lower classes are kinder and more loving, while those in power are fueled by jealousy and bitterness and are unable to show compassion toward something as innocent as a baby. It would seem then, that Shakespeare uses the shepherd to embody a sense of the pastoral- the idea that life in the countryside is an ideal in comparison to the harder life of more urban settings, and a type of simplicity and emotion that the characters of Sicily seem to be lacking. It is portrayed that Perdita's relationship with her non-biological father is extremely close, with him speaking very highly of her to Polixenes, " If young Doricles do light upon her she shall bring him that which he not dreams of" (Shakespeare, *The Winter's Tale*, 4. 4. 179-181), which shows the shepherd's own admiration for his adoptive daughter and his

thoughts that she can make any man happier than they can dream of being. It is interesting that Perdita chooses to be with Florizel, especially when he is dressed as the countryman Doricles, because as stated by Boose, “ the daughter’s association of father with husband is so strong that even when a woman... thinks about the man she will eventually marry, her thoughts immediately call to mind her father.”[5], and therefore Perdita’s choice to marry Doricles proves this theory correct as her supposed father is a man of the country, and it remains correct even as Doricles reveals himself as Prince Florizel, as Perdita’s biological father is in fact royalty. On the whole, Perdita’s relationship with her supposed father, the shepherd, is one of closeness, compassion and love. He selflessly takes Perdita under his wing as a child, perhaps suggesting the ability of the working class to put emotion and love before anger and bitterness as the higher classes do.

Another father-daughter relationship which seems to show themes of compassion and love, is that between Titus and Lavinia in Shakespeare’s Titus Andronicus. Lavinia is presented by Shakespeare as the ideal woman of his time, as she obeys her father, apart from when it comes to who she wishes to marry, she maintains her chastity and she is relatively powerless in her relationships with the male characters of the play. Lavinia’s relationship with her father could be a result of the fact that Lavinia’s mother is not around, “ fathers and daughter and sons performing their familial roles are frequently represented throughout the canon. In contrast very few mothers appear in...the more major plays”[6]. This therefore suggests that the lack of a mother is common practice in Shakespeare’s plays and could perhaps account for Lavinia’s close relationship with her father. The closeness of their

relationship is portrayed by Shakespeare when Titus first sees Lavinia after her mutilation and states, “ he that wounded her hath hurt me more than had he killed me dead”. (Shakespeare, Titus Andronicus, 3. 1. 91-92). This therefore seems to suggest that Titus views Lavinia’s suffering as his own, and perhaps suggests that their feelings are so intertwined that Titus cannot seem to separate her emotions and pain from his own. Such a pained emotional response from Titus is rare and therefore allows the audience to empathise with him, and to see him on a more human level than we have perhaps seen him up to this point, whereby he has been murderous and unforgiving, showing the real importance of the father-daughter dynamic, and the difference this can make to a characters’ portrayal. Titus’ level of empathy for his daughter is further shown when he takes it upon himself to end her suffering by murdering her, “ Die, die, Lavinia, and thy shame with thee, and with thy shame thy father’s sorrow die.” (Shakespeare, Titus Andronicus, 5. 3. 45-46). The father-daughter relationship between Lavinia and Titus is one of mutual respect and a seemingly tight bond, shown particularly through Titus’ reaction to his daughters mutilation and perhaps brought on by Lavinia’s lack of female guidance through her life.

Overall, Shakespeare’s decision to focus particularly on the relationship between fathers and daughters in the context of the renaissance period, is interesting, as this rather uncommon dynamic allows for a different type of insight into the personalities of both the father and the daughter, and the affect they have on one another. Leontes’ immediate dismissal of Perdita shows the audience his overwhelming lack of compassion and sympathy, while his conflicting reaction at their reunion seems to suggest his guilt and

remorse for his actions. Perdita's relationship with her non-biological father the shepherd, portrays a level of humanity, kindness and tolerance from the shepherd as he takes pity on the infant and raises her as his own, something that Leontes could not do. Titus' relationship with his daughter also shows a level of empathy and humanity as he reacts to her attack as if he himself has been attacked, and eventually sacrifices her to end her shame and suffering. These relationships all portray a different type of dynamic, but seem to all explore the key themes of gender, generation and family.

- [1] Diane Elizabeth Draher, *Domination and Defiance: Fathers and Daughters in Shakespeare* (Kentucky: University Press of Kentucky, 2015), p. 1. [2] William Shakespeare, 'Titus Andronicus' in *The Oxford Shakespeare: The Complete Works*, ed. by Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor (New York: Oxford University Press Inc., 1998), pp. 127-152. Further references (to this work), are given after quotations in the text [3] William Shakespeare, 'The Winter's Tale' in *The Oxford Shakespeare: The Complete Works*, ed. by Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor (New York: Oxford University Press Inc, 1998), pp. 1103-1130. Further references (to this work), are given after quotations in the text [4] Lagretta Tallent Lenker, *Fathers and Daughters in Shakespeare and Shaw* (Connecticut: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2001), p. 2. [5] Lynda E. Boose, 'The Father and Bride in Shakespeare', *PMLA*, Vol. 97, No. 3, (1982), p. 327 [6] Mary Beth Rose, 'Where are the Mothers in Shakespeare? Options for Gender Representation in the English Renaissance.', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, Vol. 42, No. 3 (1991), p. 292.