
| RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Defective Image of Man in Modern Drama: A Critical Study of August Strindberg's *The Father*

Suaad Abdali Kareem

Department of History, College of Education, Mustansiriyah University, Baghdad, Iraq

Corresponding Author: Suaad Abdali Kareem, **E-mail:** suaad.a.kareem@uomustansiriyah.edu.iq

| ABSTRACT

As a matter of fact, the "defective male" is a new form of masculinity that appeared in late 19th-century modern drama, while traditional ideals portrayed strong, heroic men driven by reason and duty. Strindberg's *The Father* introduced complex male characters who faced inner conflicts and social pressures. Captain Adolph struggles hard to establish a male-identity not only as a good father but also as a loyal, sincere husband, hard-working researcher and scholar and eventually a man with strong morality and convictions. His tragic victimization by his extremely dominant wife, Laura, the monstrous mother, and how her domination leads to the madness of the father. Strindberg challenges traditional notions of paternal authority, exposing the helplessness that lies beneath the surface of apparent strength. The purpose of this study is to highlight the negative effect of a mother's dominance over her children and others. It critically examines the portrayal of man and the father figure in *The Father* by August Strindberg, focusing on the portrayal of defective masculinity and the challenges to traditional gender roles. The play digs deeply into the complexities of human relationships, particularly the breakdown of the paternal figure and the psychological turmoil. The narrative reveals Captain Adolph, a once authoritative and confident father, conflicts with the loss of his identity and the destruction of his reality. It is nothing compared to a father's tormented suffering.

| KEYWORDS

Defected male, Dominant wife, Gender roles, Masculinity.

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1. Introduction

As a playwright, Strindberg contributed much to the modern World Drama. August Strindberg's *The Father* serves as a notable example of a modern drama that explores the defective image of man. First performed in 1887, the play delves into the complexities of masculinity and the challenges faced by the protagonist, Captain Adolf, a military officer and patriarch of his household. As the play unfolds, Captain Adolf finds himself at odds with his wife, Laura, and the wider society, questioning his own sanity and the legitimacy of his position as the father figure. Strindberg portrays Captain Adolf as a complex character grappling with identity, emotional instability, and societal pressures. Through this portrayal, Strindberg challenges conventional notions of the authoritative and stoic father figure, presenting a defective and defenseless image of manhood.

The Father is a classic play written by the Swedish playwright August Strindberg, first premiered in 1887. It is considered one of his major works and a significant piece of naturalistic drama. The play explores themes of gender roles, power dynamics, and the struggle for control within a family setting. Strindberg's depiction of Captain Adolf highlights the internal struggles faced by men in conforming to rigid gender roles and the societal pressures that can lead to a defective image of manhood (Newton, 2008).

At the heart of *The Father* is a severe exploration of gender roles and the power dynamics between men and women in a patriarchal society. The character of Captain Adolph represents the traditional male figure, while his wife, Laura, challenges societal

expectations. The play unfolds as a power struggle between the two, highlighting the constraints imposed by societal norms and the consequences of rebelling against them. The play remains a significant work in the realm of modern drama, as it reflects the evolving understanding of masculinity and the exploration of flawed and complex images of manhood. By examining this play, we can gain deeper insights into the multifaceted nature of masculinity and its portrayal in contemporary theater. This study critically examines the portrayal of man and the father figure in this play, focusing on the portrayal of flawed masculinity and the challenges to traditional gender roles.

2. Literature Review:

2.1. Historical and Cultural Context

In order to fully understand the significance of *The Father* and its portrayal of defective masculinity, it is crucial to dig deep into the historical and cultural context of the late 19th century, when the play was written. This period was marked by significant shifts in societal norms, gender roles, and the understanding of masculinity. During the late 19th century, Western society experienced a period of rapid industrialization, urbanization, and social change. The Industrial Revolution brought about new challenges and anxieties, disrupting traditional structures and values. Men faced a transition from agrarian labor to industrial jobs, which often required physical endurance and emotional detachment. Simultaneously, the late 19th century saw the emergence of the women's vote movement and a growing push for gender equality. Women began to challenge traditional gender roles, seeking greater autonomy and opportunities beyond the domestic domain. This shifting power dynamic had implications for men, who felt pressure to assert their authority and maintain their dominance.

2.2 The Societal Norms and Expectations Regarding Masculinity and Fatherhood during that Period

During the late 19th century, societal norms and expectations surrounding masculinity and fatherhood were deeply rooted in traditional gender roles and patriarchal ideologies. Men were expected to embody strength, authority, and control while fulfilling their roles as providers and protectors within the family unit. Fatherhood held significant importance, as men were responsible for shaping the moral and intellectual development of their children. Society placed a strong emphasis on maintaining clear distinctions between gender roles, with men expected to display physical ability, assertiveness, and emotional endurance. Women, on the other hand, were confined to the domestic scope, tasked with nurturing and caring for the family. These rigid gender norms established a hierarchical power dynamic that reinforced male dominance and authority (Szalczar, 2011).

To gain better insights into the attitudes towards masculinity and fatherhood during this period, Smith's study on "*The Construction of Masculinity and Fatherhood in 19th Century Society*" (2018) offers valuable analysis. By examining historical texts, diaries, and personal accounts, the study sheds light on societal expectations and pressures faced by men, providing a deeper understanding of the construction of masculinity and fatherhood. Fathers held a position of power within the family, representing the ultimate authority figure. They were expected to exercise control over their wives and children, make important decisions and enforce discipline. Paternal authority was closely linked to maintaining societal order and upholding traditional values.

The Victorian Era serves as a real-life example of strict gender roles and notions of fatherhood. The concept of the "cult of domesticity" emphasized the father's role as the moral extent of the family, responsible for proper values and discipline. Letters, diaries, and literature from the time provide specific insights into the societal expectations placed on fathers. Men were also expected to exhibit emotional limits and display a sense of control at all times. Emotional expression was often viewed as a sign of weakness and incompatible with the ideal of masculinity (Strindberg, 1958). Analyzing the portrayal of emotional suppression in August Strindberg's *The Father* can further illuminate these societal expectations. By closely examining scenes and dialogue, one can identify instances where Captain Adolf's emotional struggles are suppressed or dismissed, reflecting the societal expectation of emotional restraint. Symbolism and characterization can be employed to provide a nuanced understanding of emotional suppression within the play (Newton, 2008).

Psychological theories and philosophical ideas also influenced the understanding of masculinity during this period. Strindberg's depiction of damaged masculinity in *The Father* may draw inspiration from psychological theories and existentialist thought popular during the late 19th century. Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theories challenged traditional notions of masculinity by emphasizing weakness and emotional struggles, as well as exploring the unconscious mind, repression, and the influence of early childhood experiences. His *Interpretation of Dreams* (1900) was a major influence on the new aesthetic, as were Einstein's theory of relativity, Dostoyevsky's novels, and the philosophy of Henri Bergson. These ideas challenged traditional notions of masculinity, highlighting the presence of vulnerability and emotional struggles in all individuals.

Existentialist philosophies, popularized by thinkers like Friedrich Nietzsche and Søren Kierkegaard, emphasized individual freedom, authenticity, and the existential agony of human existence. These philosophical ideas provided a framework for exploring the complexities of masculinity and the search for meaning in an uncertain world (Bressler, 2003). Expressionism is generally applied to the 20th century viewpoint that declares the primacy of emotion in all the arts. Expressionists, whether a painter, sculptor, or

even an architect, subordinate formal and technical considerations to the communication of intense feeling. Literature, as in art, was an attempt to widen the frontiers of aesthetic consciousness by exploring aspects of the mind unaccounted for by realism or naturalism. Exterior forms, so important in 19th-century literature, were suppressed in favor of the subconscious and unconscious mind. By analyzing the play through an existentialist lens, we can uncover themes of individual freedom, authenticity, and existential trouble. This approach allows us to identify instances where the father figure's struggles with identity and purpose align with existentialist thought, providing a deeper understanding of Strindberg's portrayal (Guerin, Labor, Morgan, Reesman, & Willingham, 2005).

2.3. Examination of the influence of socio-cultural factors on Strindberg's depiction of the father figure

August Strindberg's depiction of the father figure in *The Father* is deeply influenced by various socio-cultural factors prevalent during the late 19th century. These factors shaped the playwright's understanding of masculinity, fatherhood, and the dynamics within the family structure. By examining these influences, we can gain insights into Strindberg's portrayal of flawed masculinity in the play.

August Strindberg (1849-1912) is a Swedish playwright and novelist, generally recognized as the first expressionist playwright. He lived in Switzerland much of the time and was active as a socialist with revolutionary tendencies. His belief was that the economic and social conditions of the age were constantly driving women into an increasingly selfish and immoral position. He was violent and hatred of women in general. By 1890, Strindberg had completely passed out of his socialistic stage and into that of anarchic individualism, in which he was strongly influenced by Nietzsche. (Pishkar & Moridi, 1974).

Another influential factor during that period was Social Darwinism, which emphasized the concept of "survival of the fittest" and natural selection. This ideology had a profound impact on societal attitudes towards masculinity, portraying men as inherently dominant and competitive. Strindberg's portrayal of the father figure may be influenced by these ideas, reflecting the struggle for dominance within the family structure. To illustrate this influence, we can examine real-life examples of how Social Darwinism shaped societal attitudes towards masculinity and fatherhood. Accounts of prominent figures or popular publications of the time can shed light on the prevalence of these ideas and their impact on the portrayal of the father figure in the play. (Karlsson, 2009).

The Father is often associated with the naturalistic movement in literature, which emerged in the late 19th century. Strindberg, influenced by the works of French naturalist writers like Émile Zola, sought to portray life with scientific objectivity, depicting characters as products of their environment. The play delves into the psychology of its characters, especially the central figure, Captain Adolph. Strindberg masterfully captures the complexities of the human mind and the impact of societal norms on individual behavior. Naturalism is extreme realism that suggests the roles of family, social conditions, and environment in shaping human character. Thus, naturalistic writers write stories based on the idea that environmental forces determine man's fate and make him act and react in a particular way. Generally, naturalistic works expose the dark sides of life, such as prejudice, racism, poverty, prostitution, filth, and disease. Despite the echoing pessimism in this literary output, naturalists are generally concerned with improving human conditions around the world.

Strindberg's insights into naturalism in early plays such as *The Father* and *Miss Julie* were central in the shaping of that dramatic movement, while his later experiments with expressionism, in such works as *The Road to Damascus* and *A Dream Play* have profoundly affected nonrealistic approaches to the modern stage. In *The Father*, he discusses deeply the concept of a mother's domination over her children and its bad effects upon them, which lead to the downfall of the family. Strindberg's depiction of the father figure is deeply influenced by various socio-cultural factors prevalent during the late 19th century. These factors shaped the playwright's understanding of masculinity, fatherhood, and the dynamics within the family structure. By examining these influences, we can gain insights into Strindberg's portrayal of defective masculinity in the play.

Moreover, during the late 19th century, there were significant shifts in gender roles, with the emergence of the women's vote movement and growing demands for gender equality. Strindberg's depiction of the father figure can be seen as a response to these changing dynamics, reflecting anxieties and resistance towards evolving gender roles. The influence of shifting gender roles can be explored through Anderson's study on "*Gender Transformations in Late 19th Century Europe*," which provides a comprehensive understanding of the socio-cultural factors influencing Strindberg's portrayal. By examining historical sources and cultural artifacts, we can explore the impact of shifting gender roles on the play's depiction of flawed masculinity (Krasner, 2012).

Historical evidence from the late 19th century can be utilized to support the exploration of power dynamics within the family. Documentation of legal and social structures that uphold male authority, such as marriage laws and gender norms, can provide real-life examples to strengthen the analysis. These examples demonstrate how Captain Adolf's flawed representation of manhood is a product of the socio-cultural context in which he exists (Fahlgren, 2009).

3. Discussion and Analysis:

3.1 Exploration of the protagonist, Captain Adolf, as a flawed representation of manhood

In *The Father*, Captain Adolf serves as the central character and a flawed representation of manhood. Strindberg's portrayal of Captain Adolf highlights the societal pressures and expectations placed upon men during the late 19th century while also presenting the destructive consequences of adhering to rigid gender roles.

In late 19th-century modern drama, a new type of masculinity emerged, known as the "defective male." While traditional ideals portrayed strong, heroic men driven by reason and duty. The depiction of men in modern drama has undergone a significant shift, challenged traditional notions of masculinity and presented damaged and complex images of manhood, focusing on how male characters are portrayed in contemporary theatrical works as well. By examining this portrayal, we can gain insights into the understanding of masculinity and its impact on the realm of modern theater (Mills, 2003). Strindberg's *The Father*, a tragic drama in three acts published in 1887, introduced complex male characters who faced inner conflicts and social pressures. Through these multi-dimensional figures, writers challenged rigid social norms and acknowledged the diverse experiences of humanity (Foucault, 1988).

As a playwright, Strindberg led an unfortunate life in the sense that it was fueled by many sad events as well as recurrent failures. Strindberg was married three times. As a result of the unhappy life he lived, he was threatened with insanity. It is crucial to mention that Strindberg's life and his works are nearly inseparable, and this particularly becomes the case with *The Father* (1887). Even Strindberg recognized the close association between the two when, on November 12, 1887, during the crisis of his marriage to Siri von Essen, he wrote: "It seems to me as if I'm walking in my sleep—as if creation and life were mingled. I do not know whether *The Father* is a creative work, or whether that was my real life." (Meyer 1987). In this play, Strindberg wants to say that because of women, men can be driven to mental instability. Accordingly, *The Father* is a mirror of his own life due to his wife's accusations that he was insane. (Lane 1998).

August Strindberg had come to believe that life is a series of struggles between weaker and stronger wills, and the influence of Strindberg's misogyny and naturalistic fiction is evident in this play, which is one of his most important works. The unworkable circumstance occurs to Captain Adolf in Strindberg's *The Father* because he is unable to escape the situation that he finds himself in. All he does is false and serves as an indication of his bad or insanity; he is the play's victim and its insane character. Captain Adolf is a scientist and free thinker whose marriage has gone sour; he is engaged in a power struggle with his wife, Laura, over their daughter. He wants to send the girl away to school, but Laura is determined to keep her daughter at home on her own.

The life of the working-class is represented in his play. Strindberg was the fourth child of the family. His mother is a bar-maid, and his father is a merchant. He suffers from bankruptcy. He went to university but did not get a degree. He married an actress, but she was a countess, while he is a servant's son. He wrote a series of short stories called "*Married*" and "*The Son of Servant*" about his childhood. He presented a picture of a woman as he understood her. *The Father* is the first of his major plays; it could be applied to any man, a man with no name. Laura is also applicable to any manipulated woman. The woman defeats the man not by poison or stabbing but by using a subtler weapon of spiritual murder through suggestion. The wife in the play always suggests to the man that "you are mad", and he gradually comes to believe it. Captain Adolf dies of tension. She is the stronger in the battle of sex. This situation is a war between the sexes, which was a fundamental law of life and marriage. The play portrays the tragedy of a man and a woman struggling for the possession of their child. "The father is a military captain, intellectual, and a man of ideas, while his wife is narrow, selfish, and dishonest in her speech", as Emma Goldman remarks (45).

The Father has often been called a modern Greek tragedy in which the characters destroy each other psychologically. Ancient Greek society's expectations of men and women and the significance of these roles come to the forefront in Agamemnon's central character. In this society, men were expected to be strong, decisive, and honorable, while women were thought to be passive and were expected to be submissive and silent. Furthermore, Strindberg intended his play to be his Agamemnon, the tragedy of the Greek king, who fell victim to his wife's hatred and was then killed by a conspiracy between his wife and her lover. And it is true that in its classical economy and headlong rush to the final moment when Captain Adolf is cajoled into a straitjacket. (Styan 1988).

3.2. Discussion of Captain Adolf's struggle with his identity and role as a father

Strindberg delves into Captain Adolf's internal conflict, shedding light on his struggles to establish a sense of authority and maintain control within his family. The main character is Captain Adolf, who attempts to rule a female-dominated household. The central issue of what constitutes fatherhood, as contrasted to biological paternity, concerns all the characters in some way. Captain Adolf, a proud military man, is a cavalry commander. His pride includes his role as patriarch, attempting to rule his daughter, Bertha; his wife, Laura; and his former nurse, Margaret. Through the course of the play, his role as father slips from his grasp as he regresses to a childlike state through physical and mental collapse, thus becoming dependent on the women. Bertha wants to leave home to study, as her father suggests, and comes into conflict with her mother over this awaiting decision. She later changes

sides and rejects him as a father based on his behavior, regardless of biology. This reversal causes the final onset of madness, indicated by his declared intent to kill her.

Laura, Captain Adolf's wife, is also the Pastor's sister. Highly critical of her husband and resentful of his attitude of ruthless control, she attempts to frustrate all his plans, cruelly involving Bertha's paternity. The Pastor was Laura's tool to gain what she wanted. She first challenges it to destabilize his mind, then affirms it to secure her hold on Bertha's inheritance. Margaret, Captain Adolf's old nurse, is a surrogate mother figure who comforts the defeated Captain. Emma, the housemaid, is pregnant. The question of the unborn child's paternity sets the ball rolling for the larger questions of fatherhood. Dr. Östermark, the doctor in the village, tells Laura of his suspicions about Captain Adolf's declining mental health. Once convinced of Captain Adolf's madness, he also finalizes his defeat by bringing a straitjacket to confine him. The Pastor, Laura's brother, is asked to counsel Njold on the paternity issues. His agreement with the young man and suspicions about Laura's motive and actions create a gap between them.

The sexual power struggle that takes place between husband and wife when the two disagree on the future of their daughter, Bertha, forms the dramatic center of the play. Determined to have her way, Laura devises ways of undermining her husband's credibility and confidence. Her goal is to have Captain Adolf certified insane so that he loses his legal claim to their daughter. Her method is psychological torment: Only she, not he, can know whether Bertha is his natural child. Made suspicious by her suggestion, Captain Adolf becomes obsessed with the need to know, devising biological, experiential, and literary tests to affirm his paternity, only to be driven to madness by the impossibility of knowing. In the final scene, the straitjacketed Captain, surrounded by the women in the household, lies helpless at the nurse's breast, rejecting his child, then falling in a fatal stroke; his wife, embracing Bertha, cries, "My child! My own child!".

Laura wants her daughter to have religious raising up rather than being a free thinker. This foreshadows the single headed families, which have become gradually not accepted but now is a wide spread phenomenon in Western societies. This sounds rather strange when considering a healthy environment in which to live. Captain Adolf has battled with controlling ladies all of his life. His mother rejects him first, followed by his wife, who drives him insane with hysterics. The father wishes to protect his daughter from the influence of her grandmother, who wants to instill spiritualism in her, as well as her mother. If his daughter stays at home, he believes she will suffer the same fate as he did, saying:

This house is full of women who all want to have their say about the child. My mother-in-law wants to make a Spiritualist of her. Laura wants her to be an artist; the governess wants her to be a Methodist; old Margret a Baptist, and the servant-girls want her to join the Salvation Army! It won't do to try to make a soul in patches like that. I, who have the chief right to try to form her character, am constantly opposed in my efforts. And that's why I have decided to send her away from home.

Oland Edith says, "It is very difficult to live in a house dominated by a woman, referring to the Captain's complaint from living in a house filled with dominating women, not only his wife but his mother-in-law and the childhood nurse; "..... He is sensible, rational and sensitive but not shrewd, unlike all the women who are confined to religious or spiritualism." This means that he and his daughter are under the violent domination of the mother. He wants her to educate and support herself so she can grow up in a healthy environment. "I want her to be a teacher. If she remains unmarried, she will be able to support herself..... If she marries, she can use her knowledge in the education of her children." He goes too far in his desire to protect or serve both his wife and his daughter. But because of his wife's domination, he becomes a frustrated father and husband as well.

The Father focuses on family conflict over control. Here, Captain Adolf refuses his wife's forces, both spiritual and physical, i.e. the interference in the future of their daughter. Therefore, she completely turns against him. She is willing to overwhelm anyone who hinders accomplishing her desire; thus, the evil and the force controlled all over the house. She refuses to send their daughter to the town as she wants to keep her at home under her own complete influence and dominance. Here, we notice that the father is more liberal and rational than the mother as he gives his daughter the chance to build herself away from any interference. Whereas we find the mother is so restricted, and her behaviors are based on traditional beliefs of society of not allowing women to be free and stay at home. Indirectly, Laura serves to internalize these old traditional beliefs. She is intended to ruin the father's life by making him believe Bertha is not his daughter.

Through skillful scheming, she also drives him into insanity, persuading everyone, including the family doctor, that the father is actually insane. It is obvious that Laura makes their innocent daughter involved in the conflict regardless of the harm she may cause to her. Laura's only aim is to see him wearing the straitjacket so she can get rid of him. This act is harmful and might affect the reputation of her daughter in society. She even does not care about her reputation. In fact, she ruins her daughter indirectly. In this case, the mother is more conventional and oppressive than the rest of society. She rejects the rights of the younger

generation to self-actualization and personal growth. By denying the daughter the opportunity to become independent and take control of her own destiny without the help of others, the female characters absorb the stereotypical view of women.

The Pastor, Laura's brother, tells her that she is a very strong woman, "Let me see your hand! Not one incriminating spot of blood to give you away!" then he adds, "One little innocent murder that the law can't touch; an unconscious crime!". By proving his total insanity, Laura will achieve her full control over her daughter without the interference of the father. Furthermore, all the women in the house against him, even his elderly nurse, betray him; it is she who puts on the straitjacket over him. She provides the final details of deception and lying in this terrible action. As a scientist, Captain Adolf uses the sitting room as his private room for studying. It is filled with newspapers and magazines. All the women in the house never consider this room his private one, so they enter without knocking on the door.

Throughout the play, Captain Adolf stays in the same place. The dramatist uses the same setting to reveal the monotony and the boredom of his life. Moreover, it is meant to show the fact that he is really a helpless prisoner in his own home. This fact is shown in the first act when the Pastor says, "There are too many women here governing the house," immediately, Captain Adolf replies, "Yes, aren't there? It is like going into a cage full of tigers". Additionally, using one setting emphasizes Strindberg's message that Captain Adolf, like many other fathers, is a victim of the mother's domination. He is like a prisoner or a soldier desperately holding out in an old decaying castle. He is deprived of his privacy and peace of mind even in his own home (Strindberg 1983, 62). Captain Adolf cannot stand this terrible thing from his family and dies as a broken man spiritually. He is considered the victim of cruel motherhood, which kills him.

It is crucial to note that the mother, in this play, is the main cause that drives the father to insanity and self-destruction. The most horrible thing is that she never feels guilty about what she has done to him. On the contrary, she neither tries to relieve his pain nor to console him. Even his daughter does not sympathize with him or feel sorry for his tragic end. All the time, she takes sides with her mother against her father and follows her blindly. This shows the alienation of the children from their father. According to John Ward, "Strindberg presents a weak father who does not have the ability to withstand and face a mother's power. Moreover, the sadness of the father is due to the mother's force, which makes him desperate and completely disappointed."

It is worth noting that Strindberg's *The Father* is a reply to Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House*, and Laura is a contrast to Nora. Ibsen shows women revolting against tyrannical males, while Strindberg shows men revolting against tyrannical women. Nora suffers in a male-dominated society, not only her husband. According to Strindberg, it is too personal; the lamb in Ibsen's *A Doll's House* is a symbol of enlightenment, while in Strindberg's, it symbolizes violence when Captain Adolf throws it on his wife. The house resembles a jungle; the wife wants to dominate and destroy her husband. Captain Adolf becomes jealous, suspicious, insane, and impotent. Strindberg presents women in his works as different from Ibsen. Although Captain Adolf leaves his army work to devote himself to his scientific research and family, he fails to have a happy life. He suffers from his bitter marriage due to the struggle with the mother, who seeks to gain full control over their daughter. Therefore, Strindberg attacks the injustice of life and the ultimate cruelty of the mother.

3.3. Analysis of Captain Adolf's emotional instability, insecurities, and destructive behavior

Captain Adolf exhibits emotional instability, deep-seated insecurities, and destructive behavior throughout the play. Strindberg's portrayal of these traits underscores the detrimental effects of toxic masculinity and the pressures faced by men in conforming to societal expectations. Captain Adolf serves as an example of the defective archetype in *The Father*. From the beginning, subtle indications reveal that beneath his confident external, he carries inner struggles as a military officer. His constant smoking and pacing hint at an underlying unease, suggesting a fully developed psyche that experiences doubts. Strindberg goes beyond presenting an idealized character, instead creating Captain Adolf as a well-rounded individual who exhibits both weaknesses and strengths. He strongly adheres to ideals that promote masculinity through logic and rationality. As a respected nobleman and father, his identity and worldview are shaped by reason. However, there are moments when suppressed emotions contradict this rigid façade, such as when he angrily rejects Bertha's perspectives. Strindberg examines the contradictions between societal expectations and the complex inner lives of individuals, acknowledging that humans are capable of both thinking and feeling (Fahlgren, 2009).

His insecurities play a central role in his emotional instability. Captain Adolf constantly seeks validation and affirmation from others, particularly his wife and daughter. His deep-seated fear of losing control and being emasculated fuels his insecurities, leading him to constantly doubt his wife's fidelity and question the legitimacy of his daughter. These insecurities drive him to engage in manipulative tactics and emotionally abusive behavior, further exacerbating the toxic dynamics within his family.

Captain Adolf's destructive behavior stems from his insecurities and emotional instability. He resorts to controlling and manipulative tactics in his attempts to maintain dominance over his wife and daughter. His actions include gaslighting, emotional

manipulation, and isolation, all of which contribute to the breakdown of trust and the disintegration of his family. His destructive behavior is a manifestation of his desperate struggle to preserve his fragile sense of masculinity and control. Captain Adolf's heavy responsibilities, both to his family and his country, define him but also restrict his freedom. When faced with changing circumstances, such as Laura's pursuit of emancipation, his repressed frustrations manifest as destructive aggression rather than reasoned responses. Strindberg critiques how strict definitions of identity can become dysfunctional when they are over-relied upon, leaving little room for individual growth. Captain Adolf's inflexibility hinders his personal development and prevents him from finding fulfillment (Foucault, 2006).

As gender roles and women's rights change, Captain Adolf's beliefs become unstable, and his power dynamic becomes shaky, but he refuses to compromise. He cannot accept Laura becoming more empowered, which makes his breakdown worse as he loses his authority. Strindberg connects this decline to Captain Adolf's inability to adapt his outdated beliefs as relationships and society move forward (Newton, 2008). He isolates himself and clings to fragile structures instead of finding purpose through change and community. Without a solid identity beyond superficial appearances, he feels lost and purposeless. Captain Adolf prioritizes his reputation over his relationships. Captain Adolf firmly believes that "the father is in charge in his own home," and he values intellect over empathy as a form of leadership (Strindberg 1). Strindberg also challenges the limits placed on women by portraying strong female characters. Laura asserts her independence by gaining guardianship and putting their daughter's needs before Captain Adolf's authority. By showing that both men and women can make their own choices, Strindberg validates diverse experiences and breaks free from restrictive stereotypes (Edith, 1912). This authoritarian mindset is evident again when Laura disagrees with doctors' diagnoses regarding their daughter. Captain Adolf dismisses her concerns as "womanish fancies," prioritizing his own logic over her caring perspective (4).

LAURA: (To Adolf) I am worried about Bertha. She has been acting strangely lately.

ADOLF: (Dismissively) It is nothing. She is just a child.

LAURA: (Persistently) But she has been having nightmares and talking to herself.

ADOLF: (Angrily) You are imagining things!

When Laura asks for a divorce because of Captain Adolf's instability, he refuses based on his perceived duty and pride as an "officer" rather than considering their failing marriage. Without a stable identity beyond these fading structures, Captain Adolf becomes lost and disconnected from meaning. His decline comes from being unable to move beyond rigid identities that no longer fit with society's changes. Through realistic portrayals of psychology, Strindberg encourages us to reevaluate the limitations imposed by society. *The Father* recognizes the influence of culture while presenting personal issues as complex rather than simply a result of being flawed. The play promotes flexibility and values inner complexity over superficial labels alone.

Strindberg's pioneering naturalistic approach allows him to explore masculinity through characters who face modern challenges with empathy and understanding. Beyond surface appearances, his works recognize that all humans have the capacity for both greatness and imperfection. He challenges rigid categories through timeless examination. *The Father* (1887) explores how men's roles changed as society modernized. It was groundbreaking in depicting ordinary struggles in the face of social change, offering vital insights into diverse experiences. The play depicts the breakdown of Captain Adolf, a military officer, as he sticks to traditional ideas of masculinity despite new perspectives. Through Captain Adolf's complexity, Strindberg was one of the first to show the inner struggles men faced beneath their surface personas (Karlsson, 2009).

When we first meet Captain Adolf, he appears confident as a naval captain, embodying the masculine ideals of his time. However, there are subtle hints that he has deeper conflicts. His constant smoking and pacing suggest an underlying unease hidden behind his respected position and his responsibilities as a provider for his family. This implies that there is more to him than meets the eye (Krasner, 2012). Captain Adolf strongly believes that being a man means relying on logic and reason above all else. As an officer and father, he shapes his daughter's future based on rationality. However, there are moments when his suppressed emotions contradict his rigid mindset, such as when he angrily challenges the doctor's perspective. This shows that humanity is capable of both thinking and feeling. His sense of self is completely occupied by his duties to his family, the military, and the nation. He finds meaning through others rather than seeking inner fulfillment. As the times change and challenge his control, such as when Laura desires independence, Captain Adolf loses stability because he is faced with societies that no longer align with his limited identity constructs. When he cannot control the changing realities, Captain Adolf's bottled-up frustrations come out through angry words instead of calm discussion. Strindberg suggests that sticking too rigidly to social expectations can hinder personal growth and harm mental well-being by not allowing room for individuality (Szalczar, 2011).

Captain Adolf also feels a sense of duty to keep his family together, but does not allow for any independence. He sees children merely as a means to "increase the population" rather than acknowledging their individual development (15). By reducing relationships to mere obligations, Strindberg suggests that Captain Adolf finds no fulfillment through emotional connections.

ADOLF: (To Laura) We need to have more children. We need to increase the population.

LAURA: (Surprised) But why?

ADOLF: (Matter-of-factly) It is our duty.

As a result, Captain Adolf's suppressed emotions manifest destructively when he starts losing control. When Laura expresses her desire for independence through work, it threatens his authority, and he responds with anger instead of discussing their needs compassionately. He exclaims, "This house will become a madhouse if you have your way!" (9). Strindberg emphasizes how rigidly constrained expressions of emotions destroy understanding.

LAURA: (To Adolf) I want to get a job.

ADOLF: (Angrily) What? Why?

LAURA: (Calmly) I want to be independent. I want to have my own money.

ADOLF: (Shouting) This house will become a madhouse if you have your way!

Captain Adolf's devotion to societal codes also prevents him from compromising even as his relationship declines. When Laura requests a divorce, he refuses based on the notion that "an officer cannot separate from his wife," prioritizing appearances over addressing the problems in their failing marriage (21). Clinging to superficial duties prevents them from resolving their differences politely and understanding each other. His inflexibility only fuels his anger as Laura gains independence. When they dispute guardianship, Captain Adolf lashes out, accusing her of trying to ruin him and bring him misery and disgrace (19). Rigidity breeds hostility instead of fostering open communication. Through detailed portrayals, Strindberg suggests that repressing human complexity and resisting change can harm well-being. By creating a character like Captain Adolf with empathy, he helps us understand the internal struggles constrained by inflexible societal expectations, even as relationships fall apart.

While Captain Adolf embodies the masculine virtues of his time, his strict adherence to societal norms leaves no room for emotional depth or the ability to adapt to evolving realities. He suppresses his feelings until they explode destructively, communicating only through anger and threats, lacking intimacy. When we first meet Captain Adolf, he asserts complete patriarchal authority, believing that logical duty is more important than empathy (1). However, dismissing Laura's perspectives as "womanish" damages their connection as caretakers (4). Viewing children as mere servants to the nation rather than individuals with their own development leads to a lack of fulfillment within the family (15). As a result, suppressed frustrations emerge harmfully. When faced with changing gender roles, Captain Adolf responds with hostility instead of engaging in constructive discussions about needs. He sees flexibility as "lunacy" (9). Prioritizing superficial rules and reputation over crumbling relationships intensifies rigidity and causes misery for everyone involved. Strindberg's sensitive characterizations acknowledge cultural expectations while advocating for empowerment through acceptance, growth, and valuing inner lives over external appearances alone.

3.4. The Father Figure and Traditional Gender Roles

In *The Father*, Strindberg examines the authority of men in society through the strained relationship between Captain Adolf and his wife, Laura, as she asserts her independence against his control. Right from the start, their dynamic shows a shift towards gender equality, which destabilizes the traditional power dynamics that he refuses to let go of. That is to say, he strongly believes in the hierarchical power of men. He asserts that "the father is in charge in his own home," claiming complete authority over the household and family matters (Strindberg 1). However, Laura gradually challenges this power structure. When Laura diagnoses their daughter's illness differently from Captain Adolf and the doctors, she argues that she has a feeling or intuition as a woman, which she cannot explain but possesses nonetheless (6). By confirming feminine intuition, she places her perspectives on an equal footing with masculine logic. As Laura gains independence through her career aspirations, she directly threatens Captain Adolf's control. By requesting separation to pursue work, she destabilizes his absolute authority, stating, "I cannot live with a madman; I must take care of myself" (8). Prioritizing her autonomy counters his rigid control. Adolf's control further weakens when Laura obtains legal guardianship over their daughter, asserting that she will take charge of her education from now on (14).

By exercising her maternal rights, awakened by progress, she directly undermines his traditional patriarchal parenting model. When divorce is requested due to Adolf's instability, he stubbornly refuses, citing social codes and his status as an officer. However, prioritizing superficial status over their relational needs intensifies their conflict. Strindberg portrays the process of redefining gender roles thoughtfully, validating the changing realities (Badinter, 1981).

LAURA: I want a divorce.

ADOLF: (Angrily) You cannot divorce me! I am your husband.

LAURA: (With determination) I am leaving you, Adolf. I cannot live with you anymore.

ADOLF: (Shouting) You cannot leave me! I will not let you go.

In further disputes, Captain Adolf angrily accuses Laura of attempting to ruin and disgrace him through her empowerment (19). Strindberg implies that threatened patriarchal identities respond with hostility when faced with advancing equality that dismantles dominance-submission paradigms.

ADOLF: (To Laura) You are trying to ruin me! You are trying to disgrace me!

LAURA: (Calmly) No, Adolf. I am not trying to ruin you. I am trying to save myself.

In *The Father*, Strindberg portrays Captain Adolf's mental decline due to his inability to adapt to changing relationships and gender dynamics. From the beginning, Captain Adolf believes that his authority as a father provides stable meaning through his dominance over his family, without considering any variation (Bhasin, 2006).

LAURA: (To Adolf) You are always so strong and unyielding. Can't you ever show your emotions?

ADOLF: (Angrily) What do you mean? Of course, I have emotions! I'm a man!

LAURA: (Sadly) But you never show them. You're always so bottled up.

Over a century later, Strindberg's progressive exploration of power dynamics in the face of modern conflicts through realistic characters remains profoundly insightful for addressing ongoing barriers to achieving equitable relationships and self-determination (Benjamin, 1988). When Captain Adolf is introduced, he establishes himself as the "master" of the household, relying solely on rational authority and duty (Strindberg 1). However, emerging ideas of equality challenge this narrow definition, which relies on a fixed hierarchy while disregarding other perspectives. The first signs of Captain Adolf's inflexible approach cracking appear when Laura diagnoses their daughter differently from the doctors, citing valid feminine "premonitions" that challenge his narrow view of gender roles (6). Feeling threatened but unable to accept fluidity, his anxieties surface, yet his rigidity remains unchanged.

ADOLF: (To Laura) You are changing. You are not the woman I married.

LAURA: (Calmly) Yes, Adolf. I am changing. I am growing.

ADOLF: (Angrily) You are growing away from me!

Tensions intensify even further as Laura seeks financial independence through a job, which directly undermines Captain Adolf's strong patriarchal control and his sense of being a man (8). He desperately clings to dominance and sees changing perspectives as attacks rather than opportunities for personal growth (Biggsy, 2004). Captain Adolf becomes even more destabilized when Laura gains full legal guardianship, completely reversing the traditional model of his role as a father (14). He cannot see autonomy in a positive light and accuses Laura of trying to destroy him through her inflexibility.

DOLF: (To Laura) I am the master of this house. You will do as I say.

LAURA: (Calmly) I am not your servant, Adolf. I am your wife.

ADOLF: (Angrily) You will obey me!

His rigidity reaches its peak when Laura proposes a divorce. He refuses to compromise because he values his reputation and pride more than addressing their relationship needs with understanding and care (21). Unable to define himself beyond the rigid patriarchal structures that are crumbling in the face of progress, he becomes isolated and desolate (Bressler, 2003). Captain Adolf's breakdown stems from his inability to let go of rigid notions of masculinity and control, which prevents personal growth. By remaining trapped in fading hierarchies, he experiences a sense of purposelessness because he cannot find meaning through evolving relationships. Strindberg advocates for empowerment by promoting understanding, empathy, and a commitment to progress (Burgoyne Dieckman & Brayshaw, 1983).

DOCTOR: (To Adolf) You are not as strong as you think you are, Adolf. You are a very sick man.

ADOLF: (Angrily) I am not sick! I am perfectly well!

DOCTOR: (Patiently) You are suffering from a nervous breakdown.

Captain Adolf strongly clings to the idea of masculine "reason" (4), but his repressed passions contradict this inflexibility. When he angrily rejects the doctor's perspective, Strindberg recognizes that intellect and emotions are both integral to being human, especially during uncertain times when there is limited guidance on how to process emotions constructively. By acknowledging this complexity, Strindberg challenges the rigid gender expectations that only allow for detached rationality.

ADOLF: (To Laura) I am a man of reason. I do not believe in emotions.

LAURA: (Sadly) But you have emotions, Adolf. You just don't want to admit it.

Unable to accept the changing dynamics in his relationships, Captain Adolf's stresses manifest as "violent outbursts" rather than meaningful discussions (8). Strindberg suggests that rigid societal constructs harm well-being by suppressing the expression of emotions and interiority often associated with femininity (4). He highlights how these aspects of human nature are integral to our overall well-being.

LAURA: (To Adolf) We need to talk about our relationship.

ADOLF: (Angrily) There is nothing to talk about!

LAURA: (Patiently) Yes, there is. We need to find a way to work things out.

ADOLF: (Shouting) I don't want to work things out! I want you to obey me!

Although Captain Adolf maintains his paternal duty, he finds no personal fulfillment in relationships reduced to mere obligations. He states, "Children are given us to increase population, not for our own pleasure" (15). By illustrating the absence of intimacy, Strindberg implies that strict gender roles, which prioritize provision over emotional richness, deprive lives of meaningful connections.

ADOLF: (To Laura) I am a good husband and father. I provide for my family.

LAURA: (Sadly) But you don't love me, Adolf. You don't even like me.

ADOLF: (Angrily) Of course I love you! I am your husband!

Captain Adolf's heartfelt speech reveals his loneliness and hopelessness: "What have I done with my life? [...] Everything is a disaster!" (25). Strindberg shows how external changes can dismantle identities while people remain trapped internally. By acknowledging and validating different experiences, Strindberg promotes empathy.

ADOLF: (To himself) What have I done with my life? I have worked hard. I have provided for my family. But what have I gotten in return? Nothing but misery and heartache.

In *The Father*, Strindberg criticizes the rigid gender expectations of the Victorian era that limited self-expression. Instead, he advocates for flexibility by examining characters in an ongoing manner. Unlike previous works that reinforced fixed roles, Strindberg presents a range of characters that challenge prescribed constructs.

LAURA: (To Adolf) I am not your property. I am my own person.

DOCTOR: (To Adolf) You need to change your ways. You cannot keep treating your family like this.

At first, Captain Adolf embodies the stoic duties of a husband and father. However, cracks appear in his inflexibility when he dismisses perspectives that challenge patriarchal rationality alone. When Laura diagnoses their daughter differently from the doctors and attributes it to her feminine "premonitions," Captain Adolf dismissively calls them her "fancies" and implies she doesn't understand science (Strindberg 4). Yet, Strindberg recognizes the merit of intuitive caretaking and the importance of respecting different viewpoints. Captain Adolf's breakdown intensifies as Laura seeks autonomy, renegotiating their relationship. He desperately protests, saying, "You want to undermine my authority as a father and as a man" (8).

Strindberg goes beyond simplistic portrayals to depict the complexity of humanity navigating societal changes with limited guidance (Clark, 1914). Furthermore, Strindberg directly critiques restrictive constructs through Laura's gradual empowerment and her pursuit of maternal fulfillment in opposition to patriarchal dominance. When she seeks legal guardianship, she declares, "From now on, I will take care of her education myself" (14). We have an idea of skepticism here; Laura plants the seeds of suspicion in her husband. She is not that ignorant woman; if she is, she would not be able to deceive an intelligent man. By validating autonomy, Strindberg challenges dependence on rigidly defined roles alone. Laura broke all convictions as a mother and as a wife; she hates him as a man who wants to spread his control over her. It is no longer a marriage but a slavery or enslavement life. Captain Adolf ultimately surrenders to his diabolical wife, saying, "I'm helpless as a child crying to my mother. I'm a sick creature" She murders him by the power of will. It is the struggle over power. She is supposed to be a friend, but the wife becomes an enemy.

In her article *The Continental Drama of Today*, Barrett H. Clark states that Strindberg criticizes the idea of emancipating women in marriage as he feels that such a woman seeks not only equality with a man but domination over him. For him, the ideal role of a woman is that of wife and mother only, and any other thing or role can be destructive, meaning excessive domination. Therefore, the evil nature of women is completely rejected. Strindberg wants mothers to understand that fathers have a vital role in the lives of their children as the mothers. Such a realization would help very much to minimize the conflict between them (77). Clark adds that Strindberg portrays the father as a nervous man and the mother as a cruel and evil abnormal woman in order to expose her wicked and destructive nature. According to him, life is a series of struggles between weaker and stronger wills. Excessive

desires to control destroy not only the father, family and the children but the mother herself as well. To achieve her desires, she might commit a crime such as the destruction of her children.

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, August Strindberg's *The Father* stands as a powerful exploration of human psychology, gender dynamics, and societal norms. Its naturalistic approach, symbolic elements, and innovative theatrical techniques make it a timeless and influential work in the realm of dramatic literature. It sparked significant debate and controversy upon its release due to its challenging themes and unconventional narrative. Critics and audiences were divided over its portrayal of gender roles and the psychological unraveling of the protagonist. However, its impact on the development of modern drama cannot be overstated, influencing later playwrights and contributing to the evolution of theatrical techniques.

The Father is largely symbolic, as the characters are symbols of masculine heroism versus feminine deceit. Strindberg employs symbolism and allegory throughout the play to convey deeper meanings. The character of Captain Adolf can be seen as a symbol of the threatened patriarchal order, and his descent into madness becomes a metaphor for the disintegration of traditional power structures. The locked room in the play becomes a symbol of secrets, confinement, and the struggle for control over knowledge.

There is almost a Darwinian struggle between those two principles. It is a play that victimizes men and puts a negative spotlight on women and their manipulation of men. It is a well-constructed play. It contains one idea that is clearly stated, logically, and dramatically developed. The purpose of the play is twofold: to paint the picture of Laura and to tell the story of Captain Adolf as victimized by his wife. Strindberg's realistic portrayal in *The Father* still resonates today by recognizing the intricate nature of humanity that goes beyond outward appearances. Through well-rounded characters navigating inner complexities and societal pressures, Strindberg acknowledges the diverse experiences people have in dealing with modern conflicts and change. Instead of relying on simplistic stereotypes, understanding and empathy arise from acknowledging our shared vulnerabilities during times of transition.

The Father explores how embracing flexibility rather than rigidity leads to more fulfilling lives, fostering understanding and compassion despite our differences. By looking beyond superficial labels, Strindberg encourages us to appreciate the depth of our experiences that bring communities together in times of change. His works inspire hope by empowering personal growth and embracing diverse perspectives rather than limiting ourselves. Even after more than a century, *The Father* remains relevant as it thoughtfully examines identity, relationships, and society. Strindberg's nuanced portrayals, like Captain Adolf, delve into the resilience of humanity as we navigate evolving structures with empathy and understanding.

With emotional commentary on gender roles, societal expectations, and the frailty of the human psyche, Strindberg skillfully creates a compelling investigation of the flawed image of man. He invites the audience to consider the negative effects of social expectations and the breakdown of individual action. Reevaluating the subtle nature of human identity, the play leaves a lasting impression on the audience and offers a timeless critique of the societal frameworks that influence our views of gender and power. Through his compassionate storytelling, Strindberg sheds light on the challenges of navigating change and finding meaning in our lives. By capturing the timeless complexity of humanity amidst cultural turbulence, Strindberg offers empowering insights through a careful examination of identities and societies in change. He actually asking all men to wake up to put an end to women's domineering acts, "A wake Hercules", Captain Adolf said.

4.1 Suggestions for Future Research

1-It is worth conducting a study of most of Strindberg 's works, such as *Miss Julie* and *The Dance of Death*, as they depict "the battle of sexes."

2- A contrastive study can be carried out to investigate how the characterization of Laura and the Captain reflects the playwright's inner conflict in his unconscious mind that makes him a misogynist

3- A study can be carried out to compare *The Father* by August Strindberg and *A Doll's House* by Henrik Ibsen since they were written at the end of the 19th century. Ibsen and Strindberg reflected on topical problems of society in their works. Moreover, it is also possible to say that the issue of feminism is also touched on in these works.

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