
The True Role of Women

There has always been a huge debate on the role of women in society. Women are seen as dependent on men, women are belittled, women are inferior to men, women have a “place and role” to follow, and women are considered second class to men. This isn’t something new, in fact the plays we read this week showed us the different roles women had even in early times. Roles that might be similar to the women roles now. Although much has changed, ever so often, we see how women still can be belittled.

Back then, women were considered only to be home keepers. They would stay home, cook, clean, take care of the children, and be submissive to their husbands. Women were considered weaker and unequal to men. This would all start from a young age. As a young girl, women are controlled by their fathers and perhaps their brothers. Then when they leave the house, their husbands take over that controlling role. For example, if a woman owned any type of property that her father had left her, the husband would take ownership of the property. This shows that men had a right to access everything that a woman had. Back then, this was just the “normal” thing. Women were used to it and they knew their place. The authors of these plays wanted to do just that; show the roles of women in society.

In the play, “Stronger” by August Strindberg, we get introduced to two women: Miss X and Miss Y. These two women hold very different lives in the play. Miss Y is a single, lonely sad, quiet woman, and Miss X is married, has a home and children. Miss X has the typical life a woman is “supposed to have.” We learn more into the play that Miss X’s life isn’t as perfect as it may seem and she is afraid to disrupt the false perfection of her life and marriage.

“That’s the reason I had to embroider tulips – which I hate – on his slippers, because you are fond of tulips” (Strindberg 157). After we learn that Miss Y encountered in an affair with Bob (Miss X’s husband), we see how Miss X had to do certain things in her life that were based on her husband’s knowledge of Miss Y’s interests. When Miss X says, “Thank you, Amelie, for all your good lessons. Thanks for teaching my husband how to love. Now I’m going home to love him.” (Strindberg 158), I believe she says that because she basically started to change everything about herself to things that Miss Y would do. She basically became the person that Miss Y was, knowing that it was those things that interested Bob about her. Bob learned to love Amelie for the things she was and the things she liked, so Miss X started doing those exact things and liking those exact things, so that her husband could love her the same way perhaps.

Strindberg was trying to show the role of two different women, and as a reader, a big question I asked myself was who really the “stronger” one was. Some may say the stronger one is Miss X

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because she was able to continue her marriage and keep her life together even after finding out her husband was having an affair. Some may say that Miss Y was the stronger one because she remained quiet, not saying one word back to all the stuff Miss X was telling her, and everyone knows that staying quiet is hard sometimes. I personally think that the stronger one in the story was the character that didn't even appear in the play, Bob. This play shows the control a man can have over a woman, and in this story he had the control over not only one, but two. He is a womanizer, he has these two women basically competing over him, because they are both in love with him.

In the play, "Trifles" by Susan Glaspell, we get to see how women are ignored, and in some ways as mentioned before, belittled. Right off the back Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peters begin to look around the house for any clues, just as they were told by the two men investigating. I can see that Mrs. Hale is rather tired of being treated as they are, most women just take whatever they are told and stay quiet. We see a few times in the play that Mrs. Hale does just the opposite.

MRS. HALE: There's a great deal of work to be done on a farm.

COUNTY ATTORNEY: To be sure. And yet (with a little bow to her) I know there are some Dickson County farmhouses which do not have such roller towels.

MRS. HALE: Those towels get dirty awful quick. Men's hands aren't always as clean as they might be.

COUNTY ATTORNEY: Ah, loyal to your sex I see... (1202)

These lines are significant because we see how women are called out for things such as not having everything in the house "perfectly" clean and organized as a woman should be expected to have. Mrs. Hale defends Mrs. Wright because as a woman, she understands that not only is it not easy to keep up with everything, but it isn't easy to deal with the continuous criticism from men. Somehow every time the attorney tries to say something negative about the house, Mrs. Hale argues against it in such a way that makes it seem like it's a man's fault. But she does so very calmly remaining in the role of a subtle woman.

Glaspell also wants us to see how being belittled by men can affect a woman. Mrs. Hale is in jail for murdering her husband, but what pushed her to do such thing? I think it was the years and years of her husband controlling her and emotionally abusing her. She finally got fed up and did something about it. Of course, not every woman is willing to go that far, but Mrs. Wright did. Glaspell made it very clear in the play that the male-dominated society in the era of that time was a problem.

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John Patrick Shanley's play, "Doubt: A Parable" shows a huge theme with power and the roles of women. In this play, the character Aloysius has authority and power because she is the principal of the school. That power is belittled by the priest, Flynn. She as a nun must not question him, because he is the leader of the parish. Sister Aloysius is very suspicious about Father Flynn, especially after the incident she noticed with the African-American choir boy. But once again, Shanley shows us that somehow men always have more power than women. "Here there's no man I can go to. Men run everything. We are going to have to stop this ourselves" (Shanley 890). This line explains that she would need the help of a man to take him down, but there is no man around to help them because they either help each other out, or somehow get away with their poor actions. Father Flynn just that and ends us going to another church after Sister Aloysius confronts him about his wrong-doings. He leaving only shows her accusations were right, and it shows how easy it is for a man to escape his problems and just simply move on. After all, men think: who would listen to or believe a women anyways. It's his word against hers.

I believe that the playwright that had the most compelling point has to be "The Stronger" by Strindberg. I think what really stuck out to me and caught my attention was that the female characters didn't even have names, they aren't labeled, they're simply just letters. As to why Strindberg may have done this, maybe it was to show that his characters don't even need to have stage names to prove his point. What also caught my attention was that he was showing the control a man can have over a woman's life, and he did so, not even needing an actual male character present in the playwright.

I would assume that the goal of these three writers was to show us the gender roles in society and the power between the two. This topic will always be endless, as I am sure there are many more plays, (or other works of literature), that may cover these themes as well. These are real life situations. Of course, the problem isn't as big as it used to be, but it is still a problem that occurs. I think the belittlement of women mostly occurs in the workforce nowadays. Now that women are chasing jobs that are meant to be "man-made" men feel threatened and choose to make women feel less powerful by insulting them and belittling them. I came across an article by The Huffington Post titled: "Women, You're Not the Problem – Our Sexist Workplace Culture Is." This article proves that it's still an occurring problem, and covers the roles of men and women in society, specifically in the workforce.

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