

# British Theatre Guide

News, reviews, features and podcast on theatre across the UK

## The Father

August Strindberg, adapted by Mike Poulton  
Minerva Theatre, Chichester  
(2006)

Artistic Director Jonathon Church is impressively achieving his aim of turning around the fortunes of Chichesters theatres. He judges his potential audience well and now, having wooed them with some splendidly enjoyable productions this season, he now throws at them a vicious battle of the sexes, each in pursuit of power and ready to fight to the death or worse!

I had been expecting a rather grim and unrelenting story of a once loving wife convincing everyone that her husband was insane in order to have him locked up in a lunatic asylum, thus gaining complete control over her daughters upbringing, but the story begins with plenty of humour, the exceptionally well adapted writing containing clever and witty dialogue, and almost lulling us into a feeling that we might be watching a domestic sitcom.

Gradually, however, the tension builds until the play reaches the tragic and dramatic climax, and every moment is enthralling, gripping and thrilling theatre, with the action tightly controlled by director Angus Jackson.

Adolf, a cavalry officer and a scientist, is in control of his family - or so he thinks - and he is convinced that the only way to obtain a good education for his daughter is to send her away to the city, away from the conflicting religious influences of the three women in the household wife, mother-in-law, and his old nanny. It is arranged daughter Bertha will leave in a fortnight.

And the mother has no say in the matter?" asks his indignant wife Laura. None whatever, replies Adolf. By law she surrenders all her rights and possessions to her husband and he takes on the responsibilities!

This is his mistake he is forcing a mother to part with her child. She must find some way to take control and she does. Stealthily and insidiously she convinces everyone that her husband has lost his mind, until eventually he believes it himself and becomes so overcome with anger and frustration that he finally throws a lighted oil lamp in her face. Proof, if proof were needed, that he has gone over the edge.

Published in 1887, and supposedly semi-autographical, the play examines how the weaker sex can psychologically destroy the stronger. Strindberg was totally against the Ibsenian ideal of the emancipated woman yet he was constantly drawn to strong, independent women and his three marriages each ended in bitter divorce. Sexual love is a field of battle, says wife Laura in this play, and Strindberg, surrounded all his life by women, believed it to be so.

Jasper Brittons portrayal of Adolf is mesmerising, ranging from a firm but fair husband and father in charge and in control of his family, his life and his work, to a man beginning to doubt his beliefs, even questioning his own sanity, and culminating in the anger and frustration that the one who

finally betrays him is the one he most trusted, as his Nanny (Sandra Voe) dresses him as she would a child but in a strait-jacket. .

Teresa Banhams Laura increases the tension as she constantly paces to and fro, agitated, nervous, giving accounts of the changes she has noticed in her husband to the new doctor and appearing to be a concerned and loving but troubled wife, while having instigated the changes herself.

The emotional content is such that the cast must be completely exhausted after each performance. I know I was!

**Reviewer:** [Sheila Connor](#)