How are the Relationships between Fathers and Daughters Presented in An Inspector Calls and Romeo and Juliet?

In this essay I will be discussing how father and daughter relationships are portrayed in multiple parts of both plays. I will be comparing and analysing what each quote means in full detail. Romeo and Juliet is written by William Shakespeare. He wrote this play during this time period as he wanted to show how love was portrayed and how it can affect your lifestyle. During this era, you were seen to marry as soon as you start maturing which is very young so Shakespeare wrote his play on how love was seen by many and how forceful your family would be for you to marry. An Inspector Calls is written by J.B. Priestley and touches on family relationships. Priestley decided to write this play to show how fathers had full control over their daughters and their wishes due to the patriarchy system during this era. Both texts convey tensed father-daughter relationships in patriarchal families.

During act 1, scene 2 in Romeo and Juliet, Lord Capulet is seen as being very protective over his child. Juliet is very sentimental to Lord Capulet so he wants her to have a bright and wealthy future ahead of her as previously he had children but “the earth hath swallow’d all my hopes but she, she is the hopeful lady of my earth” so he wants her to be special as she is the final part of his life that can show how successful his family is and will be for the coming future. The word ‘hopes’ has multiple meanings to it, it portrays that he had good intentions for the future for his name being known or businesses being carried on due to the outstanding leadership of the Capulets but these had been crushed due to his children dying which he had no control of and couldn’t prevent from happening. His attitude during this scene could mean two things: either he is selfish and only wants his daughter to reflect on how successful he is compared to other men or that he really is delighted to have such a wonderful daughter like Juliet and he treasures her and wants the best for his daughter. Shakespeare’s purpose of this scene was to show that fathers had a say in how their daughters should be brought up and who they were marrying. During the Elizabethan era, it was a vital part of life that you carried on family pride as that is all you had to show for as many people only cared about how outstanding you and your family were.

Similarly, in act 1 of An Inspector Calls, Mr birling’s attitude towards his daughter is rather positive and he expects a man to carry his daughter forward with wealth and fortune as he wants his daughter to be known of and to be happy for the rest of her life. However, Birling seems quite narcissistic and has an ability to lose track of what really matters in his life. Although he says to Gerald “that your engagement to Shelia means a tremendous lot to me” this could mean 2 things that you can interpret: either that he does really feel happy that his daughter is engaged to a rather first class man who will treat her appropriately or that he knows that Gerald’s father is high up in the industry business so if his daughter marries Gerald then, he will find himself doing great deeds with Gerald’s father. Birling will be a more successful man than he was and will earning a whole lot more money making him very wealthy so he can please himself and his family. The word ‘me’ only really says one thing, that he wants it all for himself and that he doesn’t really take notice the fact that Sheila has someone who she loves and cares for but he is only happy that she will carry on the pride of
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the family and will continue to outshine his name some more when she begins to become a women with high standards and authority. Priestley’s purpose of this scene was to show that father’s, no matter how much they love their daughters, still look at the business aspect of things and how they can improve their social status. During the Edwardian era which this play was set in, like Romeo and Juliet, family pride was still a big thing and to have this, you were an exceptional family.

In act 3, scene 5 of Romeo and Juliet, male authority is a key figure as they are predominately the ones in charge of the whole family and who make the decisions for the household. Capulet wants to be able to show that he has full power of his family and by telling his daughter that she is a “Disobedient wretch! I tell thee what; get thee to church o’Thursday or never after look me in the face” is showing that he has authority over her and by telling Juliet who to marry and demanding that she be at church when he says to. He is enforcing that he is in charge with a sharp command of ‘get thee to church’. Lord Capulets motive throughout this scene is to try to embarrass Juliet by calling her a ‘disobedient wretch’ and to make her look like the stupid one of all this. The word ‘disobedient’ means that she isn’t following her father’s orders in which she should and she is not submitting to what is requested of her. Shakespeare’s purpose of Lord Capulet is to make him come across as quite an aggressive father after he is pushed by his daughter not obeying him so finally he becomes verbally abusive towards her. During the Elizabethan era, if you didn’t listen to your father like you should have, your father would look like a fool as the male should have full authority over his child due to the patriarchy system in place.

In contrast with this, in Act 2 of An Inspector Calls, Birling is not aggressive like Lord Capulet he seems to handle the situation quite well by keeping calm and always being polite to his daughter. It seems in An Inspector Calls, the real aggressive one is Sheila by arguing back with her dad and not listening to what he has to say. During this scene, Priestley’s purpose is to show the reader what marriage can do to relationships with your family if they are not the right person to marry and your family pays more attention to your love. Birling claims that “[He’s] not defending him.” to make the situation seem a little less bad than it is becoming. By using the word ‘defending’, he is breaking the social convention by saying he’s not defending him when really he is showing he is defending him and the whole family can see it. Birling’s motivation in this scene is to try and preserve his daughters’ marriage because equally, Lord Capulet and Mr Birling want to preserve their daughters’ marriage as they know that it will help them with their social status and the men they have picked will forever make her happy with wealth and she will see it soon. During the Edwardian era, you should get married quite young as it reflects very positive on you to your surroundings.

As we reach the final relationship in the play of Romeo and Juliet, Lord Capulet’s attitude seems to change all together from a negative attitude towards his daughter to a more positive attitude as a father should be all the time not just when his daughter has died. He
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expresses “Dead art thou! Alack! My child is dead; and with my child my joys are buried” to show his grief towards his child’s death and with such a dramatic part in the scene. Juliet’s other family members are quite upset but not as shocked as Lord Capulet is. Lord Capulet’s motive is to show how remorseful and devastated he is for the fatal death of his child; the only thing he had to show for himself. Capulet in the final relationship finally shows his true colours for his daughter but he chooses the wrong time to express them. The word ‘joys’ shows that she means everything to him and without Juliet, he has no joys and nothing which pleases him in life. Shakespeare’s purpose in this scene is to show despite him showing little interest in Juliet when she was alive, he still thought of her and he still loved her even if he didn’t show it all the time and now he is ruined to the fact she is gone. In the Elizabethan era, a child carrying on the family pride was very important to an extent and now that Juliet has died, that importance has dissolved.

In comparison to Lord Capulet, in the final relationship of the play, Mr Birling is quite cold hearted in the way he addresses his daughter and the way he deals with her responses to him but Sheila is quite like her father in this category. Shakespeare’s purpose of this part of the play was to show that Sheila’s father is rather selfish in the way he responds to his daughter and doesn’t care what her opinion is, the only thing he cares about is what he thinks. Sheila reminds her father that “it frightens me the way you talk” to show that she is flabbergasted with how her father approaches situations. The word ‘frightens’ is a strong word to use when she talks to her father as you wouldn’t expect that to come from a daughter; you don’t want your daughter to be scared of the you, you want her to feel comfortable with her father’s attitude. Similarly, both father’s in each play both ruined their relationships with their daughter for the worst. Lord Capulet decided to change the way he showed his true feelings for his daughter by expressing them through words but he only decided to do this when Juliet died; Juliet died thinking that her father is a horrible man who doesn’t care about her perspective on life and her surroundings. Also, Mr Birling broke his relationship with his daughter by ignoring what the inspector had to say about the girl who died. Sheila thinks that her father doesn’t take life seriously. Now, Sheila doesn’t trust her father as much as she did before. During the Elizabethan era, daughters were supposed to be able to look up to their fathers but how was Sheila able to when her father is not a very trust worthy man.

Tension builds up throughout the play of Romeo and Juliet. At the beginning of the play, Lord Capulet doesn’t make the atmosphere seem very tense as he has a very loving relationship with his daughter, he tries to brush over all what Paris says about letting him be the one to marry his daughter by politely saying “Let two more summer’s wither in pride, ere we may think her ripe to be a bride” in order for nothing to erupt which will cause him to become angry. Throughout the play, Lord Capulet realises that Paris is the perfect Groom for his daughter Juliet but Juliet does the worst thing she could do by disagreeing with her father’s choice, she should obey his wishes due to the patriarchy. When Juliet disapproves
of marrying Paris to her father, she makes tension build up by making her father angry. He shouts “I will drag thee on a hurdle thither. Out, you green-sickness carrion, out you baggage” all because she doesn’t want to marry Paris. Marriage itself is the main issue of tension because if her father didn’t believe that Paris was right for Juliet, then, all of this wouldn’t have been the result and Juliet could have married who she wanted as long as she had her father’s approval. Lord Capulet is ashamed of Juliet as she knows she has to follow the patriarchy but she ignored it and did what she wanted to do therefore her father had to speak for it. The tension rises as Capulet goes from showing he cares about his daughter to totally disregarding her and not showing her what he really wants to feel for her so she takes his attitude in a different form to what it really is.

However, tension rises in An Inspector calls in a whole new manner. Mr Birling’s relationship with his daughter is quite a stable joke related relationship where they can say things which each other do not take offense to and will laugh it off. During the first scene, Sheila discusses her engagement and insinuates her father is a purple face old man, which he gracefully rejects “Here, I’m not a purple faced old man” like how a comedy act at a theatre would talk to each other so Sheila, as she would say to her father “no, not yet” like a sarcastic comment back so you can see that tension isn’t an issue at the start of an Inspector Calls. The inspector is the main reason why tension rises in this play because if he didn’t know what all of them had done and made them confess, it would have been kept quiet and their lives would have been just the same as before. Mr Birling shows that he’s still willing to let what happen with the inspector slide, by saying “Nonsense! You’ll have a good laugh over it yet” which shows that he thought that it was quite funny. He thinks he knows the way his daughter takes things but she replies to her father “You’re pretending everything’s just as it was before” showing that she is taking this as a very serious matter and she is ashamed of her father. Tension in this part of the play is at a very high level as Birling’s daughter can’t even take her father seriously anymore so what relationship do they really have. Equally, in both play’s the fathers don’t care about their daughter’s opinions which makes tension rise a lot as they want their say but they don’t get this so they rebel against their father and the patriarchy.

In conclusion, father-daughter relationships are presented in An Inspector Calls and Romeo and Juliet negatively, as fathers disregard their daughters as they think that they are more superior because of the patriarchy put in to system during the era’s they lived in. Both authors of the plays show that they want to get the point across that father’s and daughter during both times were supposed to be fairly close but arguments always take place through disagreements. Although both families put on the façade of a happy family, behind closed doors it couldn’t be much different. In comparison, the father’s in each play both neglect their daughter’s wants and needs and replace it with what can benefit them.