

## Feminist Modes of Resistance within the Dynamics of Sweethearting in Jeanne Thompson's *Father's Day*

A. Marie Sairsingh 0000-0003-3119-0583  
Rashay Forbes  
University of The Bahamas

doi: 10.15362/ijbs.v31i2.631

---

### Abstract

This paper examines Jeanne Thompson's one act play *Father's Day*, which satirizes gender disparities in Bahamian society and invites critical reflection on the power dynamics involved in *sweethearting*, a practice of emotional and sexual infidelity that is an entrenched cultural aspect of Bahamian society. Framed within this practice, the play proposes a dismantling of the system of gender inequality for women in such relationships who have been disempowered by male privilege within a patriarchally structured society. Thompson's play foregrounds women who represent images of violated womanhood but, importantly, it shows the intricate ways in which these women transcend the physical and psychic violation wrought by such predatory relationships. Refusing to be circumscribed by the limitations imposed upon them in these relationships, they shift the power dynamics and expand the ground of possibilities for more viable futures. Ultimately, they become architects of their own self-fashioning, achieving a measure of agency and self-determination by subverting the pernicious intent of patriarchy. This self-empowerment makes it possible for them to imagine a more equitable existence for themselves, and for the wider society.

---

Over the past several decades, scholars, critics, and creative writers have made notable contributions to the discourse on gender in The Bahamas. Bahamian playwright Jeanne Thompson, in her one act play *Father's Day* (1970), satirizes pervasive gender disparities in Bahamian society and invites critical reflection on the power dynamics involved in such relationships. Featuring the protagonist, Zeke, his wife, Rose, his sweetheart, Millicent, and his most recent love interest, an unnamed Young Sweetheart, Thompson's satirical play foregrounds *sweethearting*, a practice of emotional and sexual infidelity that is an

entrenched cultural practice in Bahamian society. Within the frame of *sweethearting*, Thompson's satirical play proposes a dismantling of the system of gender inequality as it pertains to the women in such relationships who have been disempowered by male privilege within this patriarchally structured society. Ironically, at the beginning and the end of the play, the central character, Zeke, declares directly to the audience, "Being a man is a bitch!" With this ejaculatory statement, the play commences, framing much of what ensues as an interrogation of existing gender norms and practices within male-female interpersonal relationships. The statement is declared once

again at the end, by a despondent and alienated Zeke, now rejected by all three women. By bookending her play with the central male character describing manhood as “a bitch,” the playwright features gender as the crux through which the dynamics of Bahamian sweethearting relationships are to be understood.

Thompson's satire explores the world of Zeke, the central character, who remains legally married to Rose, his wife of 25-years, though they no longer live together. He is simultaneously in an eight-year live-in relationship with his sweetheart, Millicent, and recently has formed a romantic liaison and visiting relationship with Young Sweetheart, a woman many years his junior and for whom this relationship is merely one of convenience rather than one based on genuine love. The plot turns on Zeke's maneuvering among these three women who are largely aware of each other and the respective roles each plays in his life. Zeke's nine children sired with Rose during their marriage are at varying stages of adulthood with the attending challenges of drug involvement, unwanted pregnancy, and defiant behaviour, most of them still living within the maternal home. He provides no support for that household which, having left it eight years earlier, he visits only in times of his own need – either for emotional solace or for financial help from his estranged wife or eldest son. Regarding his co-habitation with Millicent, we learn that he is similarly predatory and non-participatory in the core household responsibilities of their rented accommodations.

Sweethearting, according to Patricia Ginton Meicholas, refers to “the non-binding tie that is favoured by members of the middle class and above, who believe in polygamy or polyandry as the only way to true happiness, but somehow can't seem to get multiple,

concurrent marriages recognized by law” (quoted in Storr, 2009, p. 142). Storr himself refers to the practice as “serial adultery, something of a national pastime that involves men keeping mistresses” (2009, p. 147). If, as Fielding and Ballance assert, the term “describe[s] the phenomenon of married men who have extramarital intimate relationships with women who are not their wives” (2023, p. 46), there is the suggestion that it is predominantly a male-initiated behaviour stemming from a “gender double standard of sexual ethics” (Fielding & Ballance, 2023 p. 46). While women's role in this equation is not without culpability, these scholars suggest that women's participation is frequently a subordinated one, in which the will of the male holds sway. The practice frequently evinces an unequal relationship that is entered into by the woman for a host of reasons. In her study, Meshelle Grant (1999) cites among such reasons “sexual needs, emotional needs, marital dissatisfaction, revenge, financial assistance or dependence” (p. 6). In Thompson's play, sweethearting is complexified and diversified in its representation, as the sweethearts seek to circumvent the subordinate positionalities of sweethearting and exercise varying manifestations of agency. In doing so, they upend the gender and power binaries of this Bahamian cultural phenomenon, and thus render the male, would-be patriarch emasculated.

Thompson's *Father's Day* foregrounds discourses of gender inequity, depicting women who represent various images of violated womanhood and showing how these women transcend victimhood as they deal with ideological, physical and psychic violation wrought by the predatory relationship each has with Zeke. These women, refusing to be circumscribed by the limitations imposed by this predacious and destructive kind of relationship, create a

space in the uneven landscape, shift the power dynamics, and create the possibilities for different futures for themselves. In this feminist text, these female characters navigate the uneasy terrain of their compromised subjectivities yet, ultimately, they become architects of their own self-making, achieve a measure of agency and self-determination by subverting patriarchy. This raised consciousness and self-empowerment evinces growth in the characters and thus makes possible their envisioning of a more equitable society.

Feminist activism has achieved significant change in respect to women's rights in the United States, the Caribbean, and elsewhere, and gained ground as a social movement. However, in the 1970s and 1980s, around the time that *Father's Day* was written and performed, serious critiques of feminism began to emerge, specifically among women whose racial, ethnic, national, sexual and ideological identities seemed peripheral to the movement. Against the backdrop of the earlier feminist theorists, critiques of the essentialist position of Second Wave feminism were articulated by Third Wave feminists, expressed variously as, amongst others, transnational feminism (Mohanty, et al., 1991; Alexander, 1994), Black feminism (Collins, 1990), sex-positive feminism (Rubin, 1984), radical feminism (Rich, 1980) and lesbian-feminism (Lorde, 1984). Third Wave responses, then, encompassed multiple perspectives, problematizing many tenets and definitions within feminist theory, challenging hegemonic conceptualizations of gender and identity, and offering a corrective to the falsely universalized assumptions about women and the human condition (St. Hill, 2003, p. 47).

One of the most revolutionary paradigms to emerge out of the proliferation of feminist theory is transnational feminism as conceived

by M. Jacqui Alexander and Chandra Talpade Mohanty in their germinal work, *Feminist Genealogies, Colonial Legacies, Democratic Futures* (1997). This compendium of critical feminist theory focuses on gender, sexuality, nationhood, race, and economic exploitation, and how these factors intersect to impact women's advancement. Alexander and Mohanty contend that "the historical realities of colonization, slavery and imperialism have caused Caribbean theorists to find greater affinity with this strain of feminist thought than with mainstream Western feminist theory in addressing the political, economic, social and cultural consequences of the historical contexts within which Third World countries are positioned" (1997, xviii).

In the Bahamas, discourse on gender and feminism has garnered significant momentum over the past several decades. Commentators have expounded on the issue of gender inequality evidenced in many areas of our society—the economy, the political arena, the family structure, and interpersonal relations. They have explored ways to understand and ultimately combat the flagrant disparities and the potential and real dangers that are wrought by these inequities. Women have led the charge for transformation efforts through various means including examining gender through theoretical lenses.

After Bahamian women won the right to vote in 1962, the project of feminism in the 20th-century Bahamas was to discover the basis of women's subordination based on sex and to understand the origins of patriarchal thought and the persistence of male dominant ideology. Western philosophical thought had constructed masculinity and femininity as two oppositional sets of characteristics, positioning masculinity and men as superior, and femininity and women as inferior. These

strategic oppositions continuously privilege men in the hierarchy and place women in the inferior position, as the second sex. In his essay, “Envisioning a Politics of Change within Caribbean Gender Relations,” Linden Lewis asserts that “given the imbalance of power in favour of men, it is fairly axiomatic that men ought to play a pivotal role in the reconfiguration of gender relations—since everywhere, at some level, [they] benefit from what R. W. Connell called the patriarchal divide in society” (2002, p. 513). However, examples of patriarchal privilege abound and have become so commonplace that men often fail to recognize their privilege as such. Hence, it is women, with few exceptions, who are most reflective about engaging in activities to ensure civil and individual rights.

Bahamian women, in exploring how feminist theory and praxis can address the aforementioned inequities within the Bahamas, have engaged in activism through a variety of modalities: academics have investigated and offered incisive perspectives on gender issues within the Bahamian context (Bethel, 2003), in films (Bethel & Govan, 2012), and in literature (Thompson, 2019) in their effort to forefront and make visible some of the associated issues and concerns about gender disenfranchisement. Placing Jeanne Thompson’s *Father’s Day* within the frame of Bahamian feminist discourse highlights the ways in which the play’s dramatic representations evince gender ideologies and foregrounds women’s struggle for liberation within the structures of patriarchy. The interpersonal relationships of the play framed within the paradigm of sweethearting show women’s struggle to attain personal agency.

In her book, *Gender Inequality in the Bahamas*, Juliette Storr reveals that her motivation for writing the book was to “seek

answers to questions regarding why in contemporary societies, women are still demeaned and degraded within social institutions from the family and workplace to education and the media” (2023, p. 2). In framing her discussion, she refers to the patriarchal system which was imposed on men and women, and which instituted a hierarchy that still exists within the Bahamas and the wider Caribbean. “What,” she asks, “is our individual responsibility toward gender equality?” (Storr, 2023, p. 3). How in other words, do Caribbean, and, more pointedly, Bahamian feminists dismantle this system that perpetuates disparity?

As Bahamian feminism evolves, women are seen actively rebelling against traditionality, which is grounded in Christian principles. Christianity places the male as the head of the household. While this does not signify that men must take complete control of their wives, Bahamian Christian principles claim the female body as her husband’s property and foster not only patriarchal values, but misogynistic values, as well. These values are revealed by the dangerous and embarrassing continued exclusion of marital rape as a sexual offense in the Bahamas and the difficulty the country faces each time it attempts to rectify this antiquated yet pervasive remnant of colonial patriarchy (Wallace, 2025; Storr, 2023). *Father’s Day* shows that the issue with Bahamian Christian principles is that they strip the individual woman of a voice. She becomes a shadow of her husband who dares not step outside of societal norms if she wishes to remain respectable, a characteristic Nicolette Bethel states is crucial to femininity (2003, p. 76).

Throughout the play, Thompson presents feminism as a continuum, highlighting that the less a woman centers her identity in Christian patriarchy, the more humanized and liberated she becomes. This threatens and

emasculates Zeke, whose flawed masculinity is exposed and laid bare as ineffective.

After declaring the bitchiness of manhood at the opening of the play, Zeke goes on to say, “Women think is easy, but they don’t know. All they wan’ to do is get married and have children and then they don’t wan’ nothing to do with you no more except talk ‘bout low-cost house, paying bills, how the children doing in school and how doctor bills gone up” (Thompson, 2019, p. 81). In these lines, he insinuates that men are often objectified, neglected, and misunderstood. He portrays himself as emotionally estranged, expressing his frustrations with hegemonic masculinity that requires men to be providers for their wives and children. In Raewyn Connell and James Messerschmidt’s “Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept,” hegemonic masculinity is explained to be “the pattern of practice (i.e., things done, not just a set of role expectations or an identity) that allowed men’s dominance over women to continue” (2005, p. 832). While Zeke basks in his dominance over women, he is anxious about his inconsistent portrayal of masculinity being exposed because he fails to live up to the principle of hegemonic Bahamian masculinity that, “a real man can hold his own” (Bethel, 2003, p. 77). Upon realization that he cannot “hold his own,” financially or sexually, as a real man should, Zeke’s is confronted with an idea that he will lose his dominance over the women in this play, making him into their “bitch.”

Age is a significant factor in the development of Zeke’s anxieties, as can be seen through his relationships with women in different age brackets. When Millicent argues with Rose about her refusal to divorce Zeke so she can marry him, Millicent says, “If Zeke leave me he ain’t going back to your old behind. He ga go for somebody younger” (Thompson, 2019, p. 95). This assertion reveals that these women are aware that Zeke uses younger girls to boost his

ego and restore his masculinity, as seen through his relationship with Young Sweetheart and his boasting that he has her “eating outta [his] hand” (Thompson, p. 81). Zeke’s dependence on women to shore up his masculinity is revealed most poignantly in the impetus for his abandonment of Rose. In her opening monologue, Rose reveals, “when the doctor tell me that I had to have hysterectomy on account o’ my health, he even move out from home. Tell me say he couldn’t go to bed with no woman who wasn’t no woman no more” (Thompson, 2019, pp. 76-77). Rose goes on to say that although she did not expect Zeke to remain faithful to her from the outset of their marriage, she thought he would at least stay home and support their children (pp. 76-77). The hysterectomy, as explained by Rose, was a threat to Zeke’s ego. It took away his proof of being sexually active, which can alter societal views of his sexual prowess, since “appropriate activities for a man include... bedding women, and boasting about his prowess, both sexual and physical” (Bethel, 2003, p. 77).

Rose’s hysterectomy also complicates Zeke’s fragile sexuality, as Zeke appears to question whether he would remain a heterosexual man in the eyes of the public if he shared a bed with her. By asserting that she is no longer a woman, he projects a fear of being emasculated and disrespected for sharing a marital bed with a woman who is unable to do what patriarchal Bahamian society believes women’s bodies were created to do: have children. Men with inconsistent portrayals of masculinity, in the Bahamian public eye, are said to be a “bitch” or “sissy”. These words are the opposite of the idealized Bahamian man as described in Ian Strachan’s documentary, *I’s Man: Manhood in The Bahamas* (2013). Niambi Hall-Campbell, in Strachan’s documentary, states, “there’s a man box, and then within that man box there’s a Black man box that’s even smaller, and then within that Black man box,

there's the Bahamian man box. [...] It's very, very tight in terms of who you can actually be" (Strachan, 2013, min. 39:11-35). Therefore, since Bahamian men are required by this man box to have many children, Rose's hysterectomy threatens Zeke's already fragile ego and erupts insecurities about being seen as a fraud. Zeke speaks frequently about sex to highlight his position as patriarch, which is especially important since he cannot provide financially, but not being able to produce children with Rose ruins his reputation of being virile. He masks his sexual anxieties using sweethearting culture, leaving Rose and their nine children, moving on to have four children with Millicent, and he is aroused by the idea of starting another family with Young Sweetheart. Sweethearting then becomes a masculinity shield, protecting him from rejection while hiding his inability to adhere to hegemonic masculinity.

The three female characters in Thompson's play engage in existential quests framed within a politics of the self. They portray gendered dynamics that bring valuable perspectives to our understanding of the quest for selfhood and self-affirmation and foreground the importance of voice, agency, and autonomy in constructions of the female subject. The play pivots on a pernicious patriarchy and reveals the inherent destructiveness and evils of such a system. The recuperative elements of women-centeredness are foregrounded.

Unlike Rose and Millicent, Young Sweetheart does not have conventional expectations or desires for marriage and a home. Through her lack of demands to fulfill traditional expectations, she is the only woman who is not directly tethered to hegemonic masculinity. Paula Grace Anderson's "Paradigms of Power: Gender Analysis in Bahamian Literature" notes

"Bahamian women have addressed and manipulated intersections of power through the instrumentality" of sexual relations (2000, p. 90). She explains that while traditionally men hold the control in Bahamian society, women have adopted a concept to help them survive within patriarchy: sexual economics. In her relationship with Zeke, Young Sweetheart's stratagems for survival are fashioned from the resource of her sexual prowess. Her attractive appearance makes her the object of men's lust, and she exploits this power. While she could be read as a victim of male violation, given her relationship with Zeke (whom she calls Tiger), a much older man who is married with two sweethearts, a different reading reveals her as shrewd and expedient. She shifts from exploited to exploiter and takes advantage of her situation, declaring to the audience, as though they are her friend, that she is going to get money, a sports car, and whatever else she desires from Zeke. Her confidence that Zeke will support her transcends any feelings of insecurity or inadequacy that might otherwise plague her. In a kind of sordid compromise, she turns her early sexual experience, loss of innocence, and tutored eroticism into a strategy of survival, declaring that she will leverage her relationship with Zeke to shore up her relationship with Butch, her real love interest. While Thompson does not present Young Sweetheart as a paragon of virtue nor the epitome of morality, she does depict her as having agency, the power of self-fashioning and the power of choice within a space of broadening possibilities.

Young Sweetheart's approach to her relationship with Zeke emphasizes that women's survival in a patriarchal setting necessitates challenging social and economic forces to ensure their own stability and well-being. In situations where traditional options for economic independence are limited for

women, as can be seen through Millicent's complaints that she has to be married to get a home (Thompson, 2019, p. 79), the use of sexual and romantic relationships as a source of financial support might be viewed as a survival strategy. By presenting Young Sweetheart as an active agent who conveys the conditions of her relationship with Zeke in response to structural injustices, Thompson contradicts the often-stereotyped notion of women being merely subjects of male financial support, as Zeke whines about in his opening monologue (Thompson, 2019, p. 81).

Young Sweetheart rejects the idea of traditional womanhood that Zeke describes, focusing on her own sexual and monetary fulfillment rather than marriage and motherhood. For her, marriage and motherhood are not current goals; they are experiences meant for middle-aged women (Thompson, 2019, p. 105). She uses her freedom to prioritize her sexual needs and financial stability. The reclamation of female agency is seen by her reversing patriarchal gender roles when Zeke wants to start a family and she does not, opposing the traditional Bahamian definition of womanhood. Young Sweetheart provides a vision of female agency that enables women to negotiate relationships on their own terms, guaranteeing that their wants are satisfied in ways that reflect equality, while rejecting the constricting nature of Bahamian gender roles. By adopting these principles, she dispels Zeke's assumption that all women are simply interested in the traditional life that society expects them to lead.

Through her assertion that she only wants someone to support her financially, Young Sweetheart's and Zeke's relationship prioritizes her needs, which is different from his relationship with Rose and Millicent, where he is situated at the forefront. This

illustrates a precursor to Bahamian female autonomy: learning to take advantage of normative rules instead of breaking them. In doing so, women exercise agency under restrictive conditions to survive and not be subjected to psychological abuse. In taking advantage of these social norms, Young Sweetheart becomes the exploiter.

In her opening monologue, Millicent tells the audience, "I tell him I been to the Mortgage Corporation 'bout one o' dem houses in the new subdivision and I tell him the people woulda prefer if we was married. I never see a man don't like talk 'bout getting married like him" (Thompson, 2019, p. 79). Millicent can be read as more complex than a crassly materialistic woman. She plays a key role in the unmasking of Zeke's fragile masculinity by asserting her desires from the outset of the play. Millicent recognizes that her urge to become more than a sweetheart and legitimize their relationship, along with their four kids, forces Zeke into a process of emasculation. This is because he knows he cannot provide for Millicent and their kids in the way she requires, causing him to question his masculinity.

The complexity of Sweetheart Millicent's character certainly demands a more nuanced reading than seeing her merely as the pragmatic, mechanized woman who emasculates Zeke by her insistence on his participation in acquiring a home for their family. That she has seemingly acquired a hard, almost impenetrable outer crust as a shield against weak will is undeniable. But this veneer belies an emotional vulnerability that has consciously been repressed by the demand for toughness in the hostile world she inhabits. She desires to have a house and the security that comes with home ownership. She has been Zeke's sweetheart for eight years, following the deterioration of his marriage to Rose. She wears a mask with

which she conceals the hurt of daily defeats and humiliation. Emotional considerations are backgrounded within Sweetheart Millicent's success formula. She employs the strategies of the powerful to get ahead, staving off any threat to this all-important mission. In fact, she has no compunction about visiting Zeke's wife, Rose, to request that Rose file for divorce so that she, Millicent, can marry Zeke and thus become eligible for the mortgage to obtain her house. Her working-class sensibility does not allow the luxury of fantasy nor easy compassion, and she is painfully aware that she has to work hard for what she can get. Sweetheart Millicent is a realist and tough-nosed pragmatist who works to accelerate achievement of her goal—the purchase of a house.

Yet the mask Sweetheart Millicent wears is not impenetrable and occasionally allows us a fleeting glimpse of her vulnerability. In her confrontation with Rose, she reveals the ways in which Zeke manipulated her love for him and tricked her into believing that Rose was complicit in the sweethearting arrangement (Thompson, 2019, p. 96). Thompson tempers what could otherwise appear to be Sweetheart Millicent's ruthlessness by revealing her more human dimensions. Her self-fashioning is informed by the turbulent experiences of her formative years with Zeke. She uses the most immediate and available resources—memories of privation, continued uncertainty of Zeke's emotional and financial commitment, and a determination to forge a life for herself and her four children—as her impetus for social advancement. Her strategies for survival permeate all spheres of her life and have consequences for her present domestic arrangement. As the mainstay of her family, since her lover, Zeke, continually shirks his responsibilities in that realm, she is determined to broaden her vista and to look with fresh eyes at one of the

churchmen as a potential replacement for Zeke.

Millicent, through various acts of toughness—for example, her confrontation with Rose—takes on Zeke's role of the provider. Therefore, Zeke is further pushed into a process of emasculation because Millicent takes initiative to do what society states men should handle, such as suggest marriage and ensure her family has a roof over their heads. Throughout the play, Zeke is seen to be much more aggressive in tone with Millicent than he is with the other women. This illustrates that her desires arouse anger and discomfort in him as he is constantly reminded of his inability to provide. When she delivers the lines, “he really think I fool, but I could show him better than I could tell him if he ain't careful,” she predicts an upcoming emasculation of Zeke that propels her out of the constraints of his dominance (Thompson, 2019, p. 80).

The final act of emasculation is Millicent's pursuit of Mr. Black, a man from her church who “got a lil money and...ain't never been married” to take care of her and her children since “Zeke ain't paying [them] no mind [because] he thinking 'bout young gal” (Thompson, 2019, pp. 114 & 115). By giving another man Zeke's duties because he is incapable of meeting her desires, she highlights the faults in his portrayal of masculinity that he tries to hide and raises a question of why his family must be taken care of by another man. This ruins his reputation as the idealized Bahamian man who can “hold his own” (Bethel, 2003, p. 77).

Rose, who is the epitome of traditionality, is first introduced as a “woman who wasn't no woman no more” (Thompson, 2019, p. 78). Through her interactions with Zeke, and refusal to disintegrate their marriage, Rose plays an active role in her own

marginalization while upholding societal ideals of “respectability” (Bethel, 2003, p. 76). Rose’s self-fashioning draws on rich resources. She is an adherent to Christian principles including the precepts regarding marriage as a commitment “till death do us part,” this notwithstanding the fact that her husband left her eight years earlier for another woman. While she acknowledges his selfishness and his utterly despicable conduct vis-a-vis his children, she readily forgives his transgressions and understands his foibles. Her understanding of her husband and capacity for empathy with him is seen within the principles and precepts of Christianity. Yet, as we know, “the foreswearing of resentment in forgiveness is not always a virtue” (Scott, 2014, p. 167). As Scott reminds us, “a too hasty readiness to forgive can evince a lack of self-respect” (2014, p. 167) and can be warranted “only if there are good moral reasons for exercising the powers of forgiving” (2014, p. 167). Rose’s embrace of principles that seemingly disenfranchise her is questionable, except if understood within the wider frame of self-recuperation. Rose’s commitment to Zeke is entrapment rather than empowerment, because she cannot, or would not, navigate without him steering her. For most of the play, she is entrapped in patriarchal ideological positionalities.

Rose has created an identity out of her inability to let her marriage to Zeke go, despite his infidelity, using Christianity as an excuse. Her commitment to their marriage is a perpetuation of patriarchy itself, simply because she subjects herself to objectification by satisfying any wish he makes, although he fails to represent ideal masculine qualities, and despite many people frowning on their marriage (Thompson, 2019, p. 98). For instance, after his argument with Millicent about her need for marriage and a house, he returns to his marital home for food, and Rose

does not hesitate to let him in (Thompson, 2019, pp. 101-102). While both Rose and Zeke are fully aware of his ill-treatment of her, it is arguable that she takes on the role as her own enemy through demonstrations of submitting to patriarchal, Christian modalities.

There are various instances in the play where Rose proves her inability to make decisions herself, despite her having to “slave and struggle all by [her]self” because Zeke left her for Millicent and stopped supporting their children (Thompson, 2019, p. 78). For example, she asks Zeke if he thinks she should let Angela, their daughter, get an abortion, even though he would not supply the funds to get this abortion (Thompson, 2019, p. 90). Illustrated here, Rose still considers Zeke the head of the household even though he does not live with the family nor does he financially support her and their children; hence, in the play, she is an active participant in patriarchy, although she is its victim.

Patriarchal structures romanticize the hardships of women. By portraying the struggles of women as strength, these systems disguise self-sacrifice, suffering, and emotional labour as qualities of a virtuous, respectable woman. According to Fielding and Ballance, infidelity is often accompanied by violence. They state that adulterous husbands often subject their wives to psychological abuse (2023, p. 53). In each of Rose and Zeke’s interactions in the play, audiences are made to realize how manipulative Zeke is.

At the end of the play, Zeke is left by all three of his consorts, each forging a way forward for herself within a matrix that decidedly excludes him. After Millicent decides that she “best...fix up something different” and turns her attention to Mr. Black in her bid to

“look out for [herself] and her children,” she comes to terms with the fact that “Zeke ain’t ga be paying us no mind” now that he “thinking ‘bout young gal” (Thompson, 2019, p. 115). Yet Zeke is not naïve to the fact that “young gals like to play old man for sucker” (Thompson, 2019, p. 122). Young Sweetheart gives him his walking papers, shouting, “you might as well go from here and don’t bother to come back” (Thompson, 2019, p. 123).

Bereft of both sweethearts, Zeke attempts a reconciliation with his wife, Rose, bringing money to help defray the cost of their son, Cecil’s funeral, claiming that he needs her forgiveness for his errant ways. She responds: “If you know how many years I been waiting for you to say you wan’ come home you wouldn’t bother to ask. You’s my husband and is my duty as a wife to forgive you when you go astray” (Thompson, 2019, p. 125). The foregoing does not, however, mean an automatic rekindling of the relationship. Further conversation reveals how easily Zeke can abandon Millicent and her children which, for Rose, is a painful reminder of his callous selfishness and his earlier abandonment of her and their nine children. Realizing that it is Millicent who has ousted him, it becomes clear that his bid for reconciliation is a move of desperation. Rose “catches sense” at the end of the play and sees the wisdom of standing her ground against any further abuse by Zeke. The play ends with Zeke standing alone, the three women with their backs turned to him. Looking at the audience, he exclaims, “Being a man is a bitch!!” This utterance presents the moment in which patriarchal exploitative practice is turned on its head. The use of the female derogatory word, “bitch,” in reference to himself and to manhood in general heightens the effect of this climactic sequence. He suffers the indignity of the moniker, “bitch,” which signals the

culmination of his emasculation.

Thompson’s shrewd and cunning satire, *Father’s Day*, resonates with Bahamian audiences just as much today as it did when first presented. This is partly due to the fact that sweethearting remains an entrenched cultural phenomenon in The Bahamas, but also because her characterization of the gender dynamics of sweethearting still holds sway. Bahamian women who have lived through sweethearting recognize the ironic truth of her tale and, while Zeke’s children are voiceless in the play, Bahamians raised in households impacted by sweethearting recognize these truths, as well. They have witnessed the predatory and exploitative subjugation experienced by the women who find themselves caught up in this peculiar family structure, and they know the lengths these women have traversed to safeguard their stability and self-worth within the restrictive ideological, economic, and social structures that undergird these relationships. Bahamians know that the power dynamic of sweethearting is not one-sided victimization. Within and against the confines of the legal, cultural, and religious forces that paint men as the central and dominant figure in these relationships, the women carve themselves a path to self-determination and agency. They manipulate and lay bare the truth of the matter, that male dominance is a socially sanctioned defense mechanism designed to mask male fragility. Their knowledge of this offers opportunities for achieving the agency and self-determination necessary to survive the social alienation, financial insecurity, and psychic pain that is often part and parcel of enduring a familial love relationship with someone who is carrying on a familial love relationship with one or more others. As Thompson’s characters convey, wives and sweethearts suffer in sweethearting situations to some degree, but not necessarily always, because it is also true that these wives and

sweethearts seize power where and when they can and subvert patriarchy in order to build new possibilities for themselves. The result is often emasculating for the men, for whom this structure is designed to shore up their power and masculinity. But in light of the need to defend their self-worth, their futures, and the livelihood of their children, it is difficult not to see these women's

emasculating tactics as admirable, or at least ironic. Thompson invites us to laugh in the face of patriarchy as her brave characters turn their backs on Zeke, a bitch of a man who is finally made to feel the sting of sweethearting's alienation.

---

## References

- Alexander, M. J. (1994). Not just (any) body can be a citizen: The politics of law, sexuality and postcoloniality in Trinidad and Tobago and the Bahamas. *Feminist Review*, 48(1), 5–23.  
<https://doi.org/10.1057/fr.1994.39>
- Alexander, M. J., & Mohanty, C. T. (1997). *Feminist genealogies, colonial legacies, democratic futures*. Routledge.
- Anderson, P. G. (2000). Paradigms of power: Gender analysis in Bahamian literature. *Yinna*, 1, 88–103.
- Bethel, M., & Govan, M. (directors). (2012). *Womanish ways, freedom, human rights and democracy: The women's suffrage movement in the Bahamas, 1948-1962* [Video]. High Tide Ltd.
- Bethel, N. (2003). Engendering The Bahamas: A gendered examination of Bahamian nation making, or national identity and gender in the Bahamian context. *International Journal of Bahamian Studies*, 12, 72–84.  
<https://doi.org/10.15362/ijbs.v12i0.54>
- Collins, P. H. (1990). *Black feminist thought: Knowledge, consciousness, and the politics of empowerment*. Hyman.
- Connell, R. W., & Messerschmidt, J. W. (2005). Hegemonic masculinity: Rethinking the concept. *Gender & Society*, 19(6), 829–859.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0891243205278639>
- Fielding, W. J., & Ballance, V. C. (2023). Behaviours associated with male “sweethearting” (infidelity) in heterosexual relationships in The Bahamas. *International Journal of Bahamian Studies*, 29(2), 46–56.  
<https://doi.org/10.15362/ijbs.v29i2.521>
- Grant, M. T. (1999). *Sweethearting: A study of infidelity among married males and females in the Commonwealth of the Bahamas* [Doctoral dissertation, Clark Atlanta University].  
<https://radar.auctr.edu/sweethearting-study-infidelity-among-married-males-and-females-commonwealth-bahamas-1999>
- Lewis, L. (2002) Envisioning a politics of change in Caribbean gender relations. In P. Mohammed (Ed.) *Gendered realities: Essays in Caribbean feminist thought* (pp. 512–530). University of the West Indies Press.

- Lorde, A. (1984). Uses of the erotic: The erotic as power. In *Sister outsider: Essays and speeches* (pp. 53–59). Ten Speed Press. <https://jefvangestel.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/audre-Lorde-Uses-of-the-Erotc.pdf>
- Mohanty, C. T., Russo, A., & Torres, L. (Eds.). (1991). *Third world women and the politics of feminism*. Indiana University Press.
- Rich, A. (1980). Compulsory heterosexuality and lesbian existence. *Signs: Journal of women in culture and society*, 5(4), 631–660. <https://doi.org/10.1086/493756>
- Rubin, G. S. (1984). Thinking sex: Notes for a radical theory of the politics of sexuality. In C. S. Vance (Ed.) *Pleasure and danger: Exploring female sexuality* (pp. 267–319). Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Scott, D. (2014). *Omens of adversity: Tragedy, time, memory, justice*. Duke University Press.
- St. Hill, D. (2003). Women and difference in Caribbean gender theory: Notes towards a strategic universalist feminism. In E. Barriteau (Ed.), *Confronting power, theorizing gender: Interdisciplinary perspectives in the Caribbean* (pp. 46–74). University of the West Indies Press.
- Storr, J. (2023). *Gender inequality in the Bahamas: Violence, media, and law*. Rowman & Littlefield.
- Storr, V. H. (2009). B'Rabby as a “True-True Bahamian”: Rabbyism as Bahamian ethos and worldview in the Bahamas' folk tradition and the works of Strachan and Ginton-Meicholas. *Journal of Caribbean Literatures*, 6(1), 125–146. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40986304>
- Strachan, I. G. (2013). *I's man: Manhood in The Bahamas* [Video]. Marble Head Films. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UunVToSyHMU>
- Thompson, J. (2019). Father's day. In *Bahamian tapestry: 3 plays by Jeanne Thompson*. Guanima Press.
- Wallace, A., (2025, February 19). ‘Rape is rape’, except in our laws, it isn’t. *The Tribune*. <https://www.tribune242.com/news/2025/feb/19/alicia-wallace-rape-is-rape-except-in-our-laws-it-isnt/>