

the revolt of mother by mary wilkinsman

The Revolt of Mother by Mary Wilkins Freeman is a short story that encapsulates the themes of gender roles, the struggle for autonomy, and the quest for dignity within the confines of domestic life. First published in 1890, this narrative not only reflects the societal norms of its time but also challenges them through the character of Sarah Penn, a seemingly ordinary woman who embodies the complexities of motherhood and marital dynamics. This article delves into the plot, themes, character analysis, and the historical context of the story, offering a comprehensive understanding of Freeman's impactful work.

Plot Summary

The story revolves around Sarah Penn, a devoted wife and mother, who finds herself increasingly frustrated with her husband, Adna Penn. The narrative unfolds in a rural New England setting where Sarah has dedicated her life to supporting her husband and raising their children. However, as the story progresses, it becomes evident that Adna has little regard for her opinions or needs.

1. **The Setting:** The story opens with Sarah's dissatisfaction with their current living conditions, specifically the cramped and dilapidated home where they reside with their children. The tension escalates when Adna informs Sarah that he is planning to build a new barn instead of addressing their housing needs.
2. **The Conflict:** Sarah's desire for a new home is dismissed by Adna, who prioritizes his agricultural ambitions over his wife's emotional and physical comfort. This conflict serves as the catalyst for Sarah's eventual revolt against her husband's indifference.
3. **The Revolt:** In a moment of defiance, Sarah decides to take matters into her own hands. She confronts her husband and asserts her needs, ultimately leading to a revelation about her own strength and the power dynamics within their marriage.

Themes

Freeman's "The Revolt of Mother" explores several key themes that resonate with readers, both in the context of the late 19th century and today.

Gender Roles

The story highlights the prescribed roles of men and women during the 1800s. Adna embodies the traditional masculine archetype, focused on work and authority, while Sarah represents the submissive, nurturing woman. As the narrative progresses, Sarah's revolt symbolizes a challenge to these rigid gender roles.

- Sarah's growing assertiveness reflects the emerging feminist ideals of the time.
- Adna's dismissive attitude towards Sarah's desires illustrates the patriarchal structure that limits women's voices.

Autonomy and Empowerment

Sarah's rebellion is not merely a reaction to her husband's neglect but also a journey toward self-discovery and empowerment. Throughout the story, she grapples with her identity as a mother and a wife, ultimately realizing that her needs and desires are valid.

- Self-Assertion: Sarah's decision to confront Adna marks a pivotal shift in her character. She transitions from a passive figure to an active agent in her life.
- Symbolism of the Barn: The barn, which Adna prioritizes over their home, serves as a symbol of his control. Sarah's insistence on a new house symbolizes her quest for a space that acknowledges her existence and importance.

Societal Expectations

Freeman critiques societal expectations placed upon women and the domestic sphere. Sarah's initial compliance with her husband's wishes showcases the pressures women faced to conform to their roles as dutiful wives and mothers.

1. Isolation: Sarah's life is marked by isolation, as she is confined to her domestic responsibilities. The story reflects the limited avenues available for women to express their dissatisfaction.
2. Breaking Tradition: Sarah's revolt signifies a break from tradition, emphasizing the need for women to voice their needs and desires within the family structure.

Character Analysis

The characters in "The Revolt of Mother" are intricately crafted, each serving to illustrate the broader themes of the story.

Sarah Penn

Sarah is the protagonist whose development is central to the narrative. She embodies the struggles of many women of her time, caught between societal expectations and personal desires.

- Resilience: Despite her initial submission, Sarah's character demonstrates resilience and strength. Her revolt is a testament to her inner strength.
- Complexity: Freeman presents Sarah not as a one-dimensional character but as a complex individual capable of both love and defiance.

Adna Penn

Adna, Sarah's husband, represents the traditional male figure who upholds societal norms. His character serves as a foil to Sarah's journey.

- Complacency: Adna's indifference to Sarah's needs highlights his complacency and entitlement as a husband.
- Lack of Awareness: His failure to recognize Sarah's struggles underscores the lack of communication between the couple and the broader societal disregard for women's voices.

Historical Context

To fully appreciate "The Revolt of Mother," it is essential to consider the historical context in which Mary Wilkins Freeman wrote. The late 19th century was a period marked by significant social change, particularly regarding women's rights.

1. Feminism: The late 1800s saw the emergence of the early feminist movement, which sought to challenge the traditional roles of women in society. Freeman's story can be viewed as a precursor to the feminist literature that would follow.
2. Domesticity: The concept of the "cult of domesticity" dominated societal expectations for women, dictating that a woman's primary role was that of a wife and mother. Sarah's revolt can be interpreted as a rejection of this limited view of womanhood.

Conclusion

"The Revolt of Mother" by Mary Wilkins Freeman remains a poignant exploration of gender dynamics, autonomy, and societal expectations. Through the character of Sarah Penn, Freeman challenges the traditional roles assigned to women and calls for a recognition of their desires and needs. The story's relevance endures, resonating with contemporary discussions around gender equality and women's rights. As readers, we are invited to reflect on the progress made since the late 19th century while acknowledging the ongoing struggles many women still face in asserting their voices and identities within the family and society at large. Freeman's narrative is not only a tale of revolt but also a powerful assertion of the importance of recognizing women's autonomy and dignity.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the primary theme of 'The Revolt of Mother' by Mary Wilkins Freeman?

The primary theme of 'The Revolt of Mother' is the struggle for women's autonomy and the questioning of traditional gender roles in the context of marriage and domestic life.

How does the character of Sarah Penn challenge societal norms in the story?

Sarah Penn challenges societal norms by taking a stand against her husband's neglect of their needs and asserting her right to a proper home, demonstrating her strength and agency.

What role does setting play in 'The Revolt of Mother'?

The rural New England setting serves as a backdrop that emphasizes the isolation and traditional expectations placed on women, while also highlighting the close-knit community's reaction to Sarah's actions.

What is the significance of the title 'The Revolt of Mother'?

The title signifies a mother's uprising against her husband's authority and the societal norms that confine her, encapsulating the theme of female empowerment and resistance.

How does Freeman portray the relationship dynamics between Sarah and her husband, Adna?

Freeman portrays the relationship dynamics as one of tension and imbalance, with Adna embodying patriarchal authority, while Sarah's growing discontent leads to her eventual assertion of independence.

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