Psycho-analysis of disturbed identity in post-modern civilization as depicted in modern American drama

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Abstract

This article discusses the concept of disturbed identity and impaired identity and loss of status amid psychopaths in modern American drama. It touches upon a convocation of themes and issues related to the concept of disturbed identity to explore an ongoing debate about modern drama with reference to some works of prominent American playwrights such as Eugene O'Neill, Edward Albee, and Tennessee Williams. Such concept is discussed in terms of their tragic vision, influences, and thematic concerns. The article shows that what is common is that the protagonists of this drama attempt to invest their lives with meaning in a context in which they seek to rediscover their lost or disturbed identities as they suffer from the pressure of loss of meaning in life. What has also been discovered in this article and is so common in modern American drama is the sense that the past pressed unbearably on the present. That past may be the disturbing history of a family or a community or even a country. The tragic mode allows dramatists to go beyond the exploration of personal psychology and to take on more universal and political themes. The plays in modern American drama create an environment where empathy is demanded, where catharsis can occur, where the tension between the decisions and actions of individuals and the needs of their communities matters, where our modern drama plays out against the backdrop and demands of the American dream in all its forms; such plays whose themes, plots and symbolism touched upon the dehumanizing impact of capitalism in post-modern states in which the unyielding pursuit of wealth and power distorts one's worth as a human being, eventually showing that with this attitude to life, one is likely to lose a true feeling of the mere value of life. In this vein, this article focuses more generally on personality transformations, particularly the impact and outcomes of the relentless pursuit for money from a culturally critical and psycho-analytical perspective. The fanciful storylines in such plays archetypally depicts the cruel involuntary journey of modern man in which he suffers the unrestrained disorder of moral incoherence. Thus, the article seeks to explain the paradox of modern man being equally suffering in society both as a victim and victimizer of modern life. This image of modern men delineated as purely money-wise is well put in exemplar modern American drama. Many examples of such plays provide ample opportunity for discussing and reflecting on psychological issues that make prominent the image of the modern soul-less man in post-modern, post-industrial society, and it well presents men's relationships towards the others, highlighting much of the venomous picture of human relationships in capitalist societies.

Keywords: modern American drama; disturbed identity; capitalist system; dehumanization; post-modernism; psycho-analysis; cultural criticism

1. Introduction

Modern American drama shows the social reality of (post) modern civilization through a cynical and sarcastic depiction of the death of soul and the rise of materialism that is going in modern capitalist society, pointing out at the same time the possible consequences of being fallen as a man (Boggs & Pollard, 2003). The different genres of modern American drama have their own political composure inasmuch as it has its socio-political reflections and psychological depictions of modern life and its complexities. The plots and stories forming the core themes of modern American drama bring in chaos and conflagration, ignited by the agonies and crimes of the time. Now the country is crowded with a mass of upset penury-driven people, all sporting masks and inflicting the protagonists' revenge indiscriminately on anyone they think is rich and merciless. We're not far from the blazing climax of types of heroes who are suffering from psychiatric problems and laughing their way to hell. Many exemplar plays of such drama appearing in U.S. cinema theatres since the mid-50's at a time when the public has become overly and expressly sensitive to the problem of violence and directly confronted with the question of how to deal with it, and in such an atmosphere the satire itself that dominates these plays and prototypical genres over the transformed lot of modern man. For example, the TIME's film critic Stephanie Zacharek wrote: "In America, there's a mass shooting or attempted act of violence … practically every other week. And yet we're supposed to feel some sympathy for [the protagonists], the troubled lambs; they have just haven't had enough love."

However, despite that, many such plays achieved great success and could capture the title of cult literature and televised or cinematized cult drama. The main reason is that the theatre opens a space for thinking about social phenomena from which it is dangerous to turn our heads violent psychopaths who are ready to kill relentlessly for money in a society that overrates private wealth over personal worth to the detriment of a clean, pure life.

In Bigsby's work, *Modern American Drama* 1945-1990, the author explores "the anxieties, the tensions and the myths of a nation *en route* from a world war to the end of a millennium." Bigsby investigates playwrights in light of the American cultural history of which they were a part and about which they wrote. The eras depicted along the past few decades in early 20th century up to the turn of the century and across recent time, images of modern man as sporting disturbed identities have been recorded down in the works of modern American dramatists, For instance, Miller and Williams have produced their works in light of the Great Depression and McCarthyism; Albee's early plays are placed within the Kennedy years, which encouraged self-criticism for national cultural security; and Mamet's contributions explain the 1970s, "a decade that had the air of the day after the party." Within the fabric of American history Bigsby looks for the myths which both animate and decimate. The fictions and mythos of America explain the work of American playwrights for him. With Mamet, Bigsby (1990) believes that "America . . . is a fiction" and that sometimes such fictions contaminate a country and alienate its citizens. That icon of American failed dreams, Death of a Salesman, for Bigsby "does dramatise . . . the power of myth to confer a spurious significance"; and speaking of Shepard, Bigsby observes, "This gap between American values to which he is drawn and an American present-- fragmented, incoherent, attenuated--from which he is repelled generates an energy which is discharged through his plays." In the 1960s "the absurd was in radical conflict with basic American myths having to do with the integral self and the inevitability of progress."

The selves of Mamet's characters, argues Bigsby, have "been invaded by the language and assumptions of an aggressive capitalism in which value is determined by price and relationships turn on commodity exchange." No wonder then, for Bigsby, that Mamet's characters, unable to connect with one another, do not exist apart from the masks they wear. Eugene O'Neill's mature work, one might conclude, reveals a 'new expository version realistic drama' in which 'the past is not prior to the present but central to it'. Thornton Wilder, like O'Neill, dramatized the past as more than a sequence of preceding events; for him the problem was bow to dramatize 'two times at once'; the 'present' as characters perceive it and the 'past' as history records it. In Arthur Miller's plays, too, 'the past is always a crucial defining the elements of the present' as his characters search through their memories to locate the events that have shaped their lives'. Furthermore, Tennessee Williams's plays also demonstrate the immediacy of the past as well as its inevitable collision with the present, conducing to disturbances in personality.

Among many useful queries which this article might seek to examine, let one notes, but two: (i) Why do modem dramatists depict a past that interacts with the preset in many complex ways? Is there an historical explanation? Is there a possible psychological perspective? (ii) Since the past is a component of the present not only in American drama but also in much world theatre as well (surely, we are aware of 'the presence of the past' in Oedipus Rex), might it not have been appropriate to define or redefine just what 'past' and 'present' have come to mean in the works of O'Neill, Wilder, Miller, and Williams (especially in a post-Hegelian universe)? As William Faulkner understood, "The past is not dead. It is not even past'.

2. Statement of the Problem

Many instances of modern American drama over the past decades have produced a very strong effect on the audience and quickly making many of them gain the status of cult literature and cult cinematic depictions of such drama. Consequently, many plays in modern American drama produce different and very contradictory reactions among cultural theorists. In this paper, the author will first present the negative criticisms that this drama is interpreted from the outside, taking into account the different audiences that "delineate" the disturbed identity in post-modern civilization as depicted in modern American drama, and this is where the main focus in interpretation is set. The writer will then present a completely opposite approach in literature analysis by focusing on the various symbols that this drama offers, which remain largely unnoticed. This analysis, although more complex and focused on exemplar representations of this drama, ignores the aspect of the plays' relationship with different audience profiles, as well as the possible impact that the drama can have on the masses. However, although quite the opposite in the assessment, these two different interpretations result in the same conclusion, emphasizing the importance of seeking out wealth rather than human worth. In order to draw a conclusion from the presented interpretations by different authors, within the paper the writer will offer an analysis of the phenomenon of disturbed identity and loss of soul in the context of the crisis of man in modern society through explanations offered by social ontology.

3. Objective of Research

As the main concept in the interpretations is the dehumanization of modern man in his perennial quest for private wealth, I will try to find a connection between the idea and

symbolism that the modern American drama offers with the dictums of psycho-analysis theory and social psychology theory. The analysis posits that empathizing with and glorifying characters that ultimately terrorize society because this society did not accept them could be the appropriate message that audiences of modern day really need.

4. Research Questions

The main research question that informs the present research is:

What psychoanalysis of disturbed identity does the movie Joker reveal in post-modernist civilization?

This main question bears out the following sub-questions:

1. How does modern American drama demonstrate the social reality of (post) modern civilization?
2. What is the message and morale disseminated in modern American drama?
3. How is the image of impaired identity and loss of status is pictured in amid psychopaths in example plays?
4. How does modern American drama emphasize the ignorant attitude and denial of social phenomena of neoliberal society?

5. Methodology

This article follows a psychoanalytical critical approach to the scrutiny and analysis of the *modern American drama*. In addition, psychoanalytic criticism re-reads the scenario of the drama from the perspective of interpretations of the human psyche as explained by Freud and later theorists to interpret literature and movies. This approach contends that texts of literature or scripts of movies, like dreams, express the undisclosed unconscious desires and anxieties of the author, suggesting that the movie is a manifestation of the author's own neuroses and assume that all characters in the movie are projections of the author's psyche. The cultural criticism approach also employed scrutinizes the work of art, the modern American drama in this case, in a way that shows how political views and economic capitalist states affect the way the story-lines and scripts of the plays were created or interpreted, dealing with the mob as a cultural group being prone to the instigations of the drama.

6. Issues and Topics in Modern American Drama

In presenting a critique of this very negative tone, I will mostly refer to the argumentation that emphasizes the danger of the effects that modern American drama leaves on the masses in the context of the so-called "public pedagogy". Thus, Giroux's concept of public pedagogy can primarily be withdrawn to reflect on the messages transmitted in plays that are generically classified as modern American drama, which he defines as "the production of moral indifference."(3) The main focus of criticism is directed against the neoliberal discourse to which, in the playwrights' opinions, this literature, although critical, did not remain immune or immaculate as to dealing with the malaises of the American society. In neoliberal discourse, freedom is negatively reduced to freedom from authority, especially the parental authority's interference and the right of individuals to become as they wish. Profit rises as the purpose of social and individual existence, and the ideals of social justice remain only in the service of profit-oriented, without independent value. As profit means more consumerism, consumption itself in such a world serves humanity as a measure of the value of the lives of individuals. Such a value matrix leads to individuals being encouraged to spend more in order to feel valued more and gain status in society. A free market economy and corporate culture turn everything

into an object of consumption, and even spirituality is completely turned into a commodity, as shown in the film, as Giroux observes, e.g. when Arthur buys everything with a symbol representing the dehumanizing effects of a capitalistic system that greases the economic ladder, blurring the line between private wealth and personal worth until life itself loses its absolute value. However, as Giroux argues, while criticizing only the surface of consumer society, post-modern life with its capitalist economy completely ignores very important social phenomena such as job insecurity, reduced public spending, structural violence and unemployment (4). According to Giroux's public pedagogy in modern American drama, many plays that belong to this category subtly suggest that in the midst of capitalism, humans feel like losers turned to empty consumerism, where traditional masculinity has lost its "primordial" purpose and status.

According to Giroux, the plays characterized as modern drama in the States focuses on a heterosexual privileged (white) middle-class man who suffers from blocked hyper-masculinity and, from this point of view, considers that the literature indicates and emphasizes specific characteristics of capitalist violence perceived as an attack on traditional notions of masculinity (9). The main criticism is that many instances of this drama naively reserve the nature of the crisis far from the economic, political and social conditions of life produced by the capitalist system, with the main focus on the growing culture of consumption in which man is allegedly domesticated and emasculated. Giroux finds arguments for this in generic scenes of such plays, while hating consumerism, values the "Just Do It" ideology of marketing strategies, where success is simply a matter of individual initiative that is beyond institutional constraints and social relations (Giroux 11). Giroux further shows insensitivity to the complexity of the power relationship in society, the chances of success of individual social actors and consequently how structural and institutional violence is repressive and degrading to human life. As the main focus is consumption, profit and investment opportunities, the public sphere is constitutively lost, and Giroux in his critique of modern drama points out that in this way neoliberalism and corporate culture thrive on a culture of cynicism, boredom and belittling, and the populist form emphasizing the dominance and superiority of privileged white heterosexuality within the dominant logic of stylized brutality and male connection in the "war against all that is feminine" (Giroux 5), but also generally different and different.

Several plays have, for instance, dealt with the issue of absence and the existence of unseen forces and voices in works for the theatre, possibly leading the main characters to suffer as a result of the death or absence of someone dear to them, or a beloved character whom the protagonists have lost or have not seen for some long time. Though absent, such people have profound influence on the way we feel and think. The absence of our beloved breaks our hearts and forces us to keep thinking of them and talking about them since "Absence makes the heart grow fonder." It is a human tendency to soften the bad and polish the good past events through recollection. We accept as powerful monitors and guides the influence of philosophies and theologies formulated centuries ago. Noble personages like emperors, kings, world leaders, thinkers, and scientists influence our lives though they died a long time ago. Absence does not mean people, ideas, and decisions do not profoundly affect us personally or collectively.

Yet the presence of an absent character in the theater can be as arresting as it is influential on the outcome. When a playwright includes such a figure who is never observed, but is only referred to by those we can see on stage, it is to motivate or

significantly, alter them. Absent characters, whether dead, missing, or imaginary, are causal figures. They are not a friend remembered from long ago who exists only as that. Those we do not glimpse on stage are still there, because they motivate the actors to take a certain course of action and advance the plot, but their physical presence is unnecessary. In fact, their absence may make them look as if more powerful to us simply because we only know them by inference. For example, influenced by his European peers, Byrd (2000) remarks, Eugene O'Neill vigorously used the absent character to bring forth the theme of disturbed identity as an established device in the American theatrical scene. Conder argues that while Freud considers absence as a psychological paradigm, American dramatists like O'Neill and Shepard tend to see it as features of character, story-line, and theatricality.

Other researchers, such as Sarah Morrow have also applied causation theories to the analysis of absence as a cause of disturbed identity in American dramatic texts. The present article discusses absence as a theatrical device employed by five American dramatists: Eugene O'Neill, Tennessee Williams, Arthur Miller, Edward Albee, and Sam Shepard, generally without delving deep into the details of the works. As literature is supposed to be the looking glass of society, causation is thus appropriate to delineate absence in incidents that occur in real life. Certainly, causation theories seem appropriate to the discussion of all characteristics of real life. The demise of someone dear to one, considered in this case the cause of absence, fills one's heart with sorrow, anguish and perhaps impairment of identity and makes one's soul haunted for some time even long after the death of a relative or a friend. The miserable memories we have for the dead, missing, or absent, and the suffering we have to endure as a result of their absence constitute the effect that is generated by the cause of death or loss, resulting in the disturbance of identity as a concomitant outcome.

In modern American drama, the characters categorically with various dramatic manifestations and functions pervade the twentieth-century American dramatic canon. Tracing all manifestations of absence in modern American drama is prevalent in many instances. In dramaturgy, an absent character refers to an unseen person, lost by death or immigration, who does not appear throughout the entire action of the play, but is spoken of by the in-performance characters because of the thoughtful effect he or she has on the onstage action. The phenomenon of absence in American drama is still a fresh topic though such characters have received scant attention. Even researchers who have explored disturbed identity characters in American drama have not discussed them with the loss of identity or its impairment being a recurring dramatic device within the conflicts of contemporary drama.

To ignore the significance of the functions, characters with disturbed identities perform as impetus of causative dramatic actions in their respective plays in order to overlook the entire dramatic structure of such plays. Gamer defines proximate cause as "a cause that directly produces an event and without which the event would not have occurred" (88). Although such characters who exhibit disturbance in identity are physically removed from the dramatic action, such characters continually seem to be moving towards active presence in action or the motivator of dramatic action. Though they appear on the stage in mostly most scenes, disturbed identity characters serve as the "proximate cause" for the onstage action.

In addition to serving as proximate cause for the entire onstage action in their respective plays, some other figures perform other functions to show their psychological disturbance and the distortion of identity. In Eugene O'Neill's *Desire Under the Elms* the identity-disturbed characters act as dramatic contrast for the other onstage characters. The prostitute Minnie mirrors Abbie's sensuality and the Maw's tenderness contrasts with Ephraim's rigidity. As Byrd notes, their profound influence stands in sharp contrast to the paralysis and passivity of the other secondary characters {Unseen, 60). In some plays pertaining to modern American drama, the unseen character functions as a savior for the tormented character that suffers from identity disturbances. In moments of misery and lost hope, the identity-disturbed character yearns for the absent character and the salvation (s)he would bring with him. This applies well to the wealthy imaginary businessman Shep Huntleigh in A Streetcar Named Desire. Shortly before Blanche is taken to the mental asylum, she conjures up the story of the unseen wealthy businessman who would take her on a sea cruise. But actually, he cannot save her simply because he only lives in her exhausted mind. One interesting function of unseen characters is intensifying the empathy between the onstage characters and the audience. Like the other secondary characters, members of the audience are perplexed with the mystery surrounding the disturbed identity characters. Modern American playwrights seem to share O'Neill's notion of "mystery" and "identity disturbance" which stands at the heart of modem tragedy (Fambrough, 26). Guilt, a self-inflicted pain, that might have been induced by identity loss or disturbance, constitutes a bond between the tormented characters and their beloved absent ones. To escape from the nerve-racking memories and unbearable loss of identity, some dramatic characters become psychologically disturbed, to cite one example, Laura Wingfield of Williams's *Glass Menagerie*, others lapse into prostitution like Blanche of Streetcar, while others turn to excessive alcoholism like Brick of *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*.

Many chains of events related to the dramatic action are causally triggered and motivated by disturbed identity characters. In many instances, the structural integrity of a play would collapse, the crux of the conflict would be lost and the catalysts of action would disappear if such disturbed identity characters were to step foot on stage for acting their roles. In all American plays that center around disturbed identity or loss of identity in characters create a sense of presence, loom over much of the action and catalyze the conflicts in these plays. Functioning as the absent other, such identity disturbed characters guide the onstage action and contribute to the conflicts in their respective plays.

Theoretically speaking, identity disturbance in modern American drama links up with the center of postmodern discourse. The center is constantly displaced and dispersed to form what Foucault calls "center of consciousness" (Archeology, 13). Fuery states that though it is the taxonomic opposite of psychological normality, disturbance in identity acts as a formation and formulation of a strong dramatic presence in the acts of the characters. Further, in Fuery's view the disturbed identity character is figured as potentially psychologically normal, that is "held in readiness" and is so depicted to indicated the pressures of life (2). Dramatists who create disturbed identity characters in their plays often portray such characters through indirect characterization. These characters frequently keep mentioning absent characters in their lives or dislocation or immigration

and talk about their predicaments in details, thus bringing them back to life from their crypts and hideouts.

For many post-modernist theorists "the center no longer completely holds" (Hassan, 59). From the decentered perspective the marginal, which Linda Hutcheon (1988) calls "the eccentric" (12) or the "off-center (41) has indeed gained a prominent place in all literary genres. Though Hutcheon does not include the absent character in her list of the marginal eccentrics, which is limited to the eccentric in class, race, gender, sexual orientation or ethnicity, the absent character can be indeed added to this list. The absent character, which is considered as "the alienated other" or the marginal "eccentric" in post-modernist poetics, has been transformed into a unifying and coherent subject on the decentralized American stage. The postmodernist idea of the narrative's action dispersing the center and moving the margins into the multiple centers seems applicable when discussing absence in American drama.

Some silenced characters who suffer from disturbed identities also play a major role in altering the relationships between the main characters in a play. In *Desire Under the Elms*, O'Neill uses the mother as a catalyst for action and as a proximate cause for the onstage action; a destructive force that disrupts the relations among her son Eben and his stepmother Abbie thus entrapping them in a tragic incestuous relationship causing identity disturbances and even psychological disturbances. In some plays, disturbed identity characters affect the onstage characters' personalities and accordingly control their trajectory of action. In O'Neill's *The Iceman Cometh*, for instance, the onstage men are conscience-stricken and their lives are destroyed by guilty relations with women showing psychopathology or identity loss.

Some characters represent certain forces within their respective plays. Gerould and Kosicka argue that modern American dramatists populate their plays with loss or disturbance of identity characters to theatricalize the symbolic unseen forces that control man's destiny and specifically modern man's loss/disturbance of identity due to wars, social predicaments and immigration.

Women, themselves one of the margins in traditional thought, have helped develop the postmodern valuing of the margins and the eccentric to get rid of the power problematic centers. Likewise, women in modern American drama have gained a centralized position in the problematic centers of the plays' characters to show how identity disturbance or loss could lead to the climax of action. Haiping Liu observes that most of O'Neill's invisible characters that serve as catalysts for action are female figures such as Yvette of *A Wife for Life*, Maw of *Elms*, and Rosa and Evelyn of *The Iceman Cometh*. Bette Mandl discusses O'Neill's female disturbed identity figures mainly those of *The Iceman Cometh* in feminist terms stressing the fact that the main characters displayed as men look to these catalyst women as the "other" and tend to place them in a symbolic aura to recenter their way and to help them regain their old identity (10-14).

Though the identity-disturbed character is centralized and brought alive with action onstage, it is still a fiction regardless of its profound influence on the other characters in the play. Foucault asserts that the center becomes a fiction, necessary, desired, but still a fiction nonetheless. The absent, missing child whom Martha and George keep fighting over in Edward Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf* symbolically reflects the dead relationship between the couple. The imaginary lost son constitutes the illusory world of fantasy the couple dwells in and causes them disturbance in identity. Both feel proud that

"He was a healthy child . . . with slippery firm limbs" (Woolf 218). In Williams's *Streetcar*, Allan is still fictitious though much of his personality is delineated through Blanche's direct talk with Stella, Stanley, and Mitch. For the other main characters, Allan is only a fictitious image from Blanche's glorious past. Blanche keeps talking about Allan to the extent that she makes him a major character in the play though he is dead.

In some plays dialogue about the unseen character perplexes the audiences since it entails differing unreliable views. Derrida states that when the center starts to recognize the margins, and when totalizing universalization begins to self-deconstruct, the complex contradictions in the text become obvious. Williams's *The Rose Tattoo* is only but one example of such contradictory portrait of the absent character. Serafina della Rose portrays her amorous truck driver husband as a faithful husband who never betrayed her. However, the other residents of this immigrant Sicilian community assert that Rosario was wild like a Gypsy, a dope smuggler, and a regular customer of a public whorehouse. As the main characters' accounts of "absent figures might be unreliable, distorted, and even contradictory, the audiences have to choose the right image for the influential character that causes identity disturbance to the protagonist. For instance, Blanche's delineation of her homosexual husband and how he took his own life might not be true, given that she keeps telling lies and exaggerates things.

Disturbed identity in modern American drama aesthetically distances the subject, disperses the center and expands the meaning of the narrative and the themes dealt with in a play. Elinor Fuchs states that "the theatre of absence and disturbed identity disperses the center, displaces the subject and destabilizes meaning" (165), and Gombrich asserts that disturbed identity by dint of absence, immigration, social crisis or wars as a theatrical device invokes "the beholder's share" (179) in the sense that it involves the audience's participation by invoking their imagination or their reflection on their own cases. The paradoxical absent presence of a disturbed identity character attracts the attention of the audience to such character as a means to find meaning in the play's narrative. Rosefeldt argues that incorporating disturbed identity characters into a play's narrative is quite important since, as he points out, "the character's actions are always filtered through someone else's point of view" (3). It is clear that the audience forms a mental image of the play's characters based on how the main characters portray their own disturbances in identity or psychology due to their psychological absence. Because their voice is not heard and they remain silent throughout the course of the play, disturbed identity characters cannot agree with or refute how they are portrayed by the other characters. Rosefeldt states:

Although all characters in a drama are subject to the interpretation of other characters, the absent character is different because such a character cannot explain his or her actions nor can the absent character contradict the representation that others construct. The absent character, thus, becomes . . . an other that becomes reflected and refracted throughout the dramatic environment. (3)

These characters with disturbed identities are not only doomed to be silenced, but are also made to oscillate between presence and absence, between their old identities and their newly acquired, often twisted identities. Removed one step from deferred old identity, the disturbed identity character, to quote Rosefeldt, "by its very nature maintains a liminal space between absence and presence and is both outside and inside of the drama" (3-4). Such a character not only contributes to the conflicts of the play and

develops its plot, but it also constitutes a focal center in the play and, to quote Rosefeldt, "can take on symbolic significance" (4). As Valency notes, in some plays, a disturbed identity character is called into presence to the extent that absence and presence seem undistinguishable, or in other words, the old and the new identities are blurred by the urgency of the present situation. Along the same line of argument, Gonder classifies dead and missing characters as "absent presence" causing disturbance in identity as does dislocation, relocation or immigration (16).

In some plays the disturbed identity characters cause the primary tension in the drama and constitute the central subject. Their influence is powerful, mysterious and omnipresent on the onstage action. Lucia Sander stresses the "invisibility effect" of characters' disturbed identity in conflict with their old identities which entails "a character who is central to the plot of the plays [but] is denied a stage presence" (26). The imaginary, absent son in Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* not only comprises the central tension between George and Martha, but he also drives them towards the climax of their reciprocal torture pastime. The child Martha keeps referring to might be the same child she conceived by her secret lawn boy. For George, the imaginary lost son is nothing but his novel that has not been allowed to be published by Daddy. In fact, Martha's father is behind both Martha's abortion of her son by the lawn boy whom he did not consider a suitable suitor for his daughter and the withdrawal of George's novel from publication for it did not live up to his conservative ideals and literary taste. George's pretended murder of the son sets both Martha and himself free from the shackles of the absent father. In fictitiously killing an imaginary son, George is killing the absent other.

As these American plays based on the theme of disturbed identity suggest, both onstage characters and the audiences join in a quest for the unseen characters in an attempt to unravel their identities. Despite their absence, these unseen characters who always yearn for a recapture of their old past and their original identities act as driving forces of the dramatic onstage action. Thus, ignoring the importance of the characters would certainly leave their respective plays rather incomplete and dramatically unsound. These characters function as a proximate cause for the onstage action in attempts to regain their purity and their first nature, and without them all of the plays discussed would lose their vivacity and their structural integrity would collapse. The figures in our individual and collective lives often have similar causative functions.

The old character or the old identity of the main character in a play, is defined as the Other, or the id in psychoanalysis literature; as a character in the drama, a disturbed identity character has no identity outside the voice of the main character, because we only know about this character onstage is what (s)he explains to us, facts about their life that are relevant to them. Giroux interprets such a character as the antithesis of domestic security, comfort and sexual passivity, portrayed exclusively as neurosis and guilt, and believes that such a character appears to make the narrator unhappy and satisfy sexual needs, and concludes that the stereotypical notion of female and male violence and its alleged affirmation in the drama legitimizes the pedagogical conditions for violence against women to continue to occur.

Similarly, theorist Sisco King emphasizes in her analysis that "modern American drama" gives double meaning to the figuration of masculinity and thus creates new life with the privileges of hegemonic masculinity, using the ability to expand, absorb and assimilate

everything (Sisco 366) that seems "other". In her analysis, she tries to unmask the strategy of maintaining the hegemonic system, and claims that the dominant privilege is alloyed masculinity is a manipulative ideological formation and, although the character is portrayed as a domesticated, feminized version of the new age yuppie, as a stereotype of men of late capitalism; Sisco further believes that the depiction of internal contradictions allows a new form of domination to be created. The modern American dramatists emphasize that plays such as "ones on disturbed identity" create new life and continue the privilege of hegemonic masculinity (Butler 21).

Giroux claims that post-modern American drama, instead of shedding critical light on key social issues, trivialize them through a stylized aesthetic that exudes irony, cynicism and excessive violence, emphasizing and portraying acts of senseless brutality, pathology and indifference to human suffering. The middle-class people, portrayed in the drama, disciplined to withdraw and turn their heads in situations of potential conflict, is limited to immediate sensations: it turns into collective impotence" (Giroux 13).

As a main argument, he points out that Hollywood films portraying modern American drama become important through the role of public pedagogy, through the power to mobilize meaning, pleasure and identification. Although he is aware and acknowledges that Joker can be read differently by different audiences, he emphasizes that educational and social approaches must be critical of how such texts work pedagogically because they have the power to legitimize meanings, evoke certain desires and exclude others by the fear, uncertainty, sexism, and political despair in which many people live their lives today. The main argument he makes is that the depiction of violence, masculinity and gender stereotypes in the film depicts the pathologies of individuals and institutional violence and glorifies paramilitary and pro-fascist subcultures and hate crimes.

Modern American drama, ironically, instead of liberating people, reproduces the same effects of capitalism, creating the illusion of freedom through demands for self-regulation and self-punishment – the very common reasons that create a disturbed identity in fiction or in real life. The satire in this drama emphasizes the fact that individuals often seek liberation from the oppressive capitalist order by means that are both conformist and repressive.

7. Impaired identity and loss of status amid psychopaths

From the perspectives of psycho-analysis and cultural criticism, the crisis of characters in modern American drama could be interpreted as the result of a contradictory experience of power imposed by hegemonic patriarchy and maternity, i.e., as a sense of disparity between men's life experience and their inherited personalities. Men are powerless in their struggles to conform to the ideals set by hegemonic parental authority, and at the same time they feel that they are losing their status.

Psycho-analytically, as a typical protagonist falls into a contradictory experience of reality and phantasy caused by the 'other's whims and lies and the consequences of dual personality, impossible ideals of a normal life, and individual impotence will unconsciously present in some characters' puerile and adult lives, which causes anger and agony, leaving them to suffer all their life. The privileges of hegemonic parental authority require a process that leads such characters to suppress emotions, needs, block opportunities and abilities through alienation and ignorance of emotions, feelings, needs and potentials for human connection and empathy. Accordingly, the modern American drama shows nostalgic

efforts to overcome the crisis of alienation through hypermasculine reactions such as violence so that the heroes can strengthen the characters' alienated traditional sense of masculinity.

At this point, it is useful to use reflections in the field of social ontology to understand the process of creation and the identity crisis in the "century of rearrangement" in which we find ourselves as a society and as individuals. In the gaps between traditional beliefs and values and changed social relations, knowledge engineering and the ring of political power creates more interactive levels of manipulation within which identity is faced with the question of whether to remain in the traditional or local framework and change only from the outside, or to remain mobile and change in moving towards those values that are themselves mobile and belong to a broader framework.

The ontology of the social world is questionable, subject to change and disappearance, but it is presented to us as universal, natural and absolute, because without a subjective ontology, human society cannot survive. On the other hand, an identity that defends itself from the pressure of change through the conservation of a dominant identity leads to the creation of an isolated identity and the creation of subcultures and internal differentiations and hierarchies due to narrowing the space that can be filled and protected by such one spatial-temporal unit.

Searle through critical-cultural analysis tries to arrive at the basic structure of status functions by studying the logical structure of human civilization. In this attempt, the terms collective intentionality, status function and institutional facts are used (Searle 10). He wonders how we create "social" reality and in response to this question offers an explanation in terms of collective acceptance, which he explains as recognition or recognition that is a condition of social reality. Although social facts are facts dependent on the observer, unlike natural facts, because they require conscious subjects for their existence, Searle emphasizes that the existence of consciousness and intentionality, which are the basis of facts dependent on the observer, is a phenomenon independent of the observer. The mental states of the observer are not dependent on him.

8. Conclusion

Different interpretations of modern American drama, specially plays portraying loss of identity, although with different focus in analysis and tone of criticism, emphasize that in the struggle against the identity crisis, and the gulf between the inner thoughts and outer appearances could include individuals within post-industrial society, reviving the patriarchal paradigm of confrontation through hypermasculine, violent reactions, leading to brutality and violence, wrong and toxic, and that it must eventually turn into self-violence.

Modern American drama, in many aspects, emphasizes the ignorant attitude and denial of social phenomena of neoliberal society, as well as the problems that turning heads can cause, and because of its capacity to open a significant space for reflection and discussion is of great importance. However, we must also take into account the fact that after the screening of the modern American drama, several plays with similar story-lines started to be created and considered as cult films or recreations of the classics of these works.

Accordingly, the question needs to be asked whether violence is really a necessary tool to portray certain topics and if so, whether they are needed and what can be effective measures to control possible negative effects on the audience and the masses. Violence is ubiquitous in the media today and easily accessible even to minors. However, we cannot deny that the modern American drama thematizes and initiates significant discussions in a

society in which there is a recognized problem of strengthening right-wing, fundamentalist, pro-fascist paramilitary groups everywhere in the world and should not be ignored (Svetkey 24-25).

The crisis of traditional settings of gender and other identities and the creation of subcultures that express their rebellion through hyper-masculine reactions full of violence and destruction is a response that rejects self-reflection and leads to self-isolation in modern American drama. In the context of the creation and crisis of traditional identities, but also the relationship to the other and different, it is necessary to realize that: without a world that divides and without another in it cannot know anything about himself, in its contents and symbolic forms by which it represents them. The identity that arises in isolation, cultural, linguistic and ontological closedness is the identity of closed eyes, an inner reaction that does not manifest itself in front of others and others in order to be able to compare, evaluate and evaluate.

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