Behind the Scenes – American Modernist Drama in Its Historical and Cultural Context

Horvat, Ivan

Master's thesis / Diplomski rad

2013

Degree Grantor / Ustanova koja je dodijelila akademski / stručni stupanj: **Josip Juraj Strossmayer University of Osijek, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences / Sveučilište Josipa Jurja Strossmayera u Osijeku, Filozofski fakultet**

Permanent link / Trajna poveznica: https://urn.nsk.hr/urn:nbn:hr:142:447062

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Download date / Datum preuzimanja: **2024-03-29**

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Sveučilište Josipa Jurja Strossmayera u Osijeku
Filozofski fakultet

Diplomski studij povijesti i engleskog jezika filološkog usmjerenja

Ivan Horvat

Behind the Scenes – American Modernist Drama in Its Historical and Cultural Context

Diplomski rad

Mentor:
doc. dr. sc. Biljana Oklopčić

Osijek, 2013.

ABSTRACT

The subject of this paper is American Modernist drama and its disputed place in the canon of American literature. Various aspects of American Modernist drama are analyzed, namely its status in the academic and critical circles, the themes it explores, the features which make it unique compared to its predecessors and successors, its utilization of the artistic and scientific trends and discoveries of its time, and its correlation with the American Dream myth as its organizing principle. These analyses are aimed towards finding the analogies between the features of American Modernist drama and those of other recognized literary forms of American Modernism, most notably American Modernist novel. Subsequently, these analogies and their implications should prove useful for discerning the inherent value of American Modernist drama as a form of literature in the historical and cultural context of American Modernism.

KEY WORDS: American drama, American Modernism, the American Dream myth, Eugene O'Neill, Tennessee Williams, Arthur Miller

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INTRODUCTION

"Stammering is the native eloquence of us fog people."

- Eugene O'Neill, *Long Day's Journey into Night*

The need to create a mimetic representation of life, and imitate natural phenomena in order to explain them and put them under our control, so as to shed light on the human condition, is a phenomenon that has followed mankind since the first Homo sapiens made his mark on a cave wall. From the first religious rituals and rites of passage, through reenactments of historical events and believed cosmic processes of ever-growing complexity, drama finally attained the status of art in Ancient Greece, and is to no small extent one of the reasons why this particular culture is considered to be the cradle of the Western civilization. The most concise definition of drama would describe it as a form of literature written with the intention of being performed on stage, and regardless of the form, theme, or time period a play was written in, this is the fundamental idea that, at least in most cases, all of dramatic theory and criticism boils down to. It comes as a great surprise, then, that unlike the dramatic theory and criticism concerning European drama, which traces its lineage to Ancient Greece and is considered to have birthed American dramatic traditions, American drama is hard pressed to prove and defend its artistic status and its place in the canon of American literature.

As a matter of fact, the great majority of literary theorists and critics, although with a few notable exceptions, often go out of their way in their writings to deny American drama its place in the country's literary canon. However, the redefining of the frames of the term "American" seen in the last few decades, aimed to include previously neglected or dismissed literary works, genres, and authors, brought about the reconsideration of the rightful place of American drama as well. Among others, the works of literary theorists such as Brenda Murphy, Susan Harris Smith, and Christopher Bigsby set new standards by which to view and value American drama, by putting it into a context broader than the commercial success of a particular play, on which most of the critics seem to base their evaluations. In order to get to the core of the problem at hand, these advocates of American drama are turning to interdisciplinary studies which put drama into historical, ideological,

social, economic, political, philosophical, psychoanalytical, and other contexts, to try and determine the points of convergence between particular characteristics of American drama[1] and other recognized forms of literature in America. The aforementioned literary theorists are making strong cases for the defense of American drama since its first beginnings, and as Susan Harris Smith puts it: "American drama should be evaluated in relation to dramatic theory in general and to American literature and culture in particular" (55). However, due to the sheer volume of dramatic works written in the USA in the last century and their thematic amplitude, the plays which are to be analyzed here all belong to the first half of the 20th century. Accordingly, all the theoretical and critical foundation applied to selected examples from American drama and other literary works pertains to the literary tradition of the Modernist movement. In the words of George Parker Anderson: "Increasingly, critics see Modernism not as a single movement but as a field of intersecting subtraditions and movements" (66). Consequently, the intention of this paper is to put the selected plays of the first half of the 20th century into a broader cultural and historical context of literary Modernism, by indicating the traits and elements shared by American drama and other literary genres, with a special emphasis on the novel, which would legitimize the claim that American drama should be given the same artistic and cultural status as other literary forms.

Since no analysis can even come close to encompass the whole body of American drama due to the sheer quantity of works, a selection of some sort has to be made. For the purposes of the analysis of the correlation between the drama and novel of American Modernism, three plays and three novels are taken on the principle of their cultural significance, popularity, and acceptance into the American literary canon. Furthermore, to make the case as strong as possible, these plays, novels, and their authors have to be the principal representatives of the period, i.e. roughly the first half of the 20th century. Due to their indisputable contribution to American drama in general, the playwrights chosen for the purposes of this analysis of American Modernist drama are as follows: Eugene O'Neill, Tennessee Williams, and Arthur Miller. On the other hand, in the novelist circles, there are three names that immediately jump out of a myriad of perhaps equally important names, specifically: Francis Scott Fitzgerald, William Faulkner, and Ernest Hemingway.

The exploration and comparison of the themes and narrative methods in the

[1] In order to avoid the possibility of a misunderstanding, the term "American" in this paper pertains to the United States of America.

selected novels and plays form the bulk of this analysis aimed to point out the justification of the often disputed artistic status of American drama. As Sanja Nikčević clarifies it: "Contemporary American drama has its coherency and continuity of development in which the repetition of certain characteristics can be found, which reveal the existence of legitimate trends" (*Subverzivna* 17).[2] Therefore, the first goal of this paper is to find these coherencies and present them as a part of the broader Modernist movement. The second goal of the analysis would be to find an anchoring element in all of the selected plays, in form of a national myth, whose workings could be deduced from the plays. More importantly, the relationship between American Modernist drama and the national myth would reveal their themes as parts of the same historical, cultural, and philosophical whole, rather than just a sequence of peculiar coincidences. This anchor would not only have to encompass all of the traits shared by both Modernist drama and novel, but its very existence would have to depend on their interrelation on a symbolic level, while being only implied by the plot and its execution on the stage.

Finding an organizing principle in the whole body of American drama, as Nikčević does in the American Dream myth, greatly helps in this endeavor, since it can be used to form a figurative backbone for the analysis, and this proposed anchor, which would indicate that the above-mentioned themes and narrative methods shared by the novelists and playwrights reflect the authors' attitude toward the myth and what it stands for. This concept is perhaps the single most important notion for this analysis of American Modernist drama, because it disregards the previously established principle of chronology as a starting point for any study on the subject. According to Nikčević: "Drama compendiums are published, but their classification principle is, as Frye puts it - 'the one and only organizing principle in literature discovered until now, the principle of chronology'" (*Subverzivna* 13). The shortcomings of such a classification are evident in that they do not allow for a broader perspective on the subject, and individual literary works have to be considered as isolated elements. The theory of the American Dream myth as an organizing principle that Nikčević proposes, takes into account the entire body of American drama as a whole, rather than a sequence of isolated works which, in turn, enables us to place it among other established literary genres in the context of large literary movements, in this case American Modernism.

To augment these arguments, and keeping with the notion of the need for an

[2] All quotations from *Subverzivna američka drama ili simpatija za losere* and *Afirmativna američka drama ili živjeli Puritanci* by Sanja Nikčević are translated into English by I.H.

interdisciplinary approach to American drama, in addition to the works of literary theory and criticism, this analysis makes use of theoretical works from other scientific fields associated with Modernism, namely psychoanalysis and semiotics. The analysis of themes and protagonists of the selected plays is aimed towards finding certain archetypical representations found in all dramatic works of the period, which have their analogies in other forms of literature, most notably the novel. Furthermore, it has to be recognized that, like many affirmed literary works of American Modernism, American drama too cannot be completely separated from European influences. Since many of the narrative techniques and themes, as well as the Modernist outlooks on the roots of the human condition, originated in Europe and found their way across the Atlantic, European heritage, therefore, represents an important factor for defining America in Modernist terms. Seeing how great many authors had to come to Europe in order to be able to contextualize America at the time, as is evident from the works of the authors of the Expatriate movement, so did American playwrights make use of originally European concepts such as the Expressionist theatre, to be able to get their ideas across to the audience in the states.

Lastly, this paper will attempt to demonstrate that American drama written in the first half of the 20th century rightfully belongs to the canon of American Modernist literature. This will be done by using the same methodology used to analyze other literary forms. Starting with examples from selected plays and novels, inductive methods which are used are aimed towards proving the existence of particular patterns in all of American Modernist drama. This includes discovering shared traits of American Modernist plays, finding their analogies in other literary forms - most notably novel - and determining the implications of those analogies through established theoretical and critical literature. Since the true purpose of any work of literature cannot be found in the words that are written, but in what they imply on a symbolic level and in a broader cultural context, drama is no exception to this rule. These staged symbolic representations of the processes which take place in the collective subconscious mind of America shape the direction of the whole nation, while being approachable only to a certain degree. As with any work of literature, the true meaning of a play lies in these processes that play out on a subconscious level, beyond what the spectator is able to see and hear on the stage, and only by searching for these processes one can begin to approach the truth that hides behind the scenes.

1. THE POSITION OF AMERICAN DRAMA TODAY

Before beginning any kind of analysis of American drama there is a need to define its current place among other literary forms in America, and determine what implications its position entails. When broaching the subject of American drama even the most cursory of glances at the established theoretical and critical literature reveals that the indifference or even contempt towards the subject within scholarly circles greatly outnumbers the attempts to support its place in the literary canon. The rationalizations for such outlooks vary from source to source. The more abridged ones, such as numerous outline histories of American literature and theatre, use statistical records of the numbers of theatre goers and box office proceeds to determine the success or failure of a particular play, correlating these figures with the cultural significance of the play. For instance, statements that: "In 1922, an entire year of movie going numbered some 40 million Americans; by 1930 the total was close to 100 million per week. Legitimate theater in the United States has never enjoyed such success" (Ruland and Bradbury 325).

On the other hand, the in-depth analyses of the works of American playwrights, even those which begrudgingly recognize the literary status of a narrow number of American plays, present their own arguments why American drama on the whole cannot be considered literature, or cannot claim any considerable cultural significance for the entire nation. As Eric Bentley argues in his essay "The Innocence of Arthur Miller": "The theatre is provincial. Few events on Broadway have any importance whatsoever except to that small section of the community – neither an élite nor a cross section – that sees Broadway plays" (62). These types of arguments, however, do not take into account that the so-called provinciality of the theatre originates from the necessities and particularities of any theatrical production, which can only move venues under certain circumstances, due to which theatre centers such as Broadway were established, and which, according to Brenda Murphy, "created a strong incentive if not necessity for many playwrights to conform to its values rather than to write out of a literary or dramatic tradition" (26). Furthermore, these technical peculiarities and necessities also represent the main reason why, when it comes to drama, the audience is forced to seek it, as opposed to other literary forms, which are able to seek their audience by the virtue of having only a written form, i.e. not having the "stage dimension." Besides, while these theatrical centers can be considered as somewhat provincial from a strictly geographical point of view, even if they are the most densely populated metropolitan areas in the United States, the literary and philosophical ideas that

originate from and are explored by the plays being staged in these places are not limited by such boundaries.

Theorists and critics who are of the opinion that the status of American drama is worthy of defending, who have become more prominent in the last two decades of the 20th century, and continue to grow in numbers today, find the roots of disdain for American drama in the whole structure of the academic circles in the United States. Susan Harris Smith explains this particular issue, noting that the disdain for drama has become a maxim of sorts in the academic circles and is still enforced for the fear of undermining the position of established academic hierarchy:

> It is my contention that, to a significant degree, the contested and uncertain location of American drama is the consequence of the rise of disciplinary fields in English and American literary studies and has far less to do with the intrinsic merits or demerits of the genre than with the struggles for authority and legitimation of emerging professionalisms. (1-2)

In other words, Smith argues that the reasons for such reluctance to give American drama the status of literature, lie in the notions of the separation of "high" and "low" literary forms, and the academia as the institution endowed with the power to make such distinctions. Ironically enough, the trends of Modernism, and especially Postmodernism, if we are to consider 20th century American drama from the viewpoint of today, make this kind of classification completely obsolete and irrelevant. Furthermore, Smith claims that, "American drama has been written almost out of the American literary canon because of enduring hostile evaluations and proscriptions that themselves need to be reassessed" (3), which is only fair, since it would be unjust, to say the least, to deny American drama the status that prose and poetry enjoy in the academic and critical circles, and claiming it is culturally insignificant, while keeping to the completely different and outdated methodology of classification.

1.1. The Casual Disregard

There is no lack of claims and arguments used to deride American drama to a greater or smaller extent, but since there are counterarguments to be found against any of them, these attacks are not the worst issue advocates of drama have to cope with. The much bigger problem is the ignoring of drama by its adversaries, who often do not deign to

consider it at all. The way the critical establishment has been treating American drama is perhaps best described by Christopher Bigsby:

> Any account of American drama must begin by noting the casual disregard with which it has been treated by the critical establishment. There is no single history of its development, no truly comprehensive analysis of its achievement. (*Modern American Drama* 1)

Walter J. Meserve agrees with Bigsby on this point as, according to him, "American drama is the most neglected part of the study of American literature" (qtd. in Nikčević, *Afirmativna* 35). Again, the double standards drama finds itself pressed against present themselves as the leading problem, rather than arguments about its provinciality, insignificance, or lack of following. Meserve continues: "Nearly a third of a century has passed since anyone has attempted a historical assessment of American drama." (qtd. in Nikčević, *Afirmativna* 35). Furthermore, in *An Outline History of American Drama*, Meserve comes to the conclusion that, "only by the end of the Thirties, in fact, does there appear the beginning of a serious literary criticism of drama, American plays at the outbreak of World War II assumed a new importance" (214). Additionally, other sources prefer to accept only a small number of plays as exceptions which prove the rule, so as to legitimize the claims that, for instance: "The work of O'Neill, Odets, Maxwell Anderson, Wilder, Saroyan – and later Arthur Miller and Tennessee Williams – represents for the most part the nation's only serious achievement in the world of dramatic literature" (Ruland and Bradbury 330).

In *American Drama – The Bastard Art*, Susan Harris Smith goes to great lengths in analyzing the exclusion of American drama from American literature anthologies, magazines, and scholarly journals, or their demeaning approach to drama when they do tackle the subject. She finds the roots of this attitude in "culturally dominant puritan distaste for and suspicion of the theatre; in part because of a persistent, unwavering allegiance to European models, slavish Anglophilia, and a predilection for heightened language" (3). Smith also notes that even the most esteemed anthologies such as the 1979 edition of the *Norton Anthology of American Literature* did not include a single play written in the United States up to that moment. As she puts it: "Any student using the two volumes of the 1979 edition during the six years they were current could have assumed there was no such thing as American drama in the entire history of American literature" (41). Furthermore, she reports that "in a 1980 symposium on American playwrights, critics . . . concluded that 'American drama is very non-literary,' and suffers from a lack of ideas,

moral basis, humanist tradition, or analytical thrust" (44). Even the most casual of drama enthusiasts should probably find this argumentation lacking conviction, since it comes across as populist and unfounded, especially considering the year the symposium was held, when the corpus of American drama had already consisted of practically innumerous plays, many of which were recognized to be of value even by the staunchest opponents of drama as art.

To put the argumentation presented in this particular symposium in perspective and examine it in some detail, the lack of ideas that American drama is accused of represents a purely subjective view. Furthermore, this statement cannot really be methodically proven, since "idea" is an unquantifiable category, and its merits depend on the context into which it is introduced. Additionally, morality is in its entirety a social construct within which subjective attitudes play a significant role in its interpretations. Moreover, it could even be considered absurd to scrutinize the moral implications of modern American drama in a negative context, while venerating those of Classical drama, seeing how many of the moral values of Ancient Greek civilization reflected in its drama are in a direct clash with those in America today. Lastly, since the search for the roots of the human condition lie at the core of all Modernist drama, the claim that there is no humanist tradition in American drama can be easily dismissed. Even more so, considering how the themes that Modernist drama explores pit the protagonists against themselves rather than external elements, and how the very nature of drama presumes its execution on stage as a social phenomenon, bringing people together.

Concerning the analytical thrust of drama, or rather the alleged lack thereof, the further chapters should elaborate on that in more detail, in an effort to unveil some of the symbolism behind the themes of the selected plays, and the possible interpretations of the processes the protagonists are going through. These processes, most of which do not occur on stage, in no small part due to technical constraints, can however be read from the context and symbolism of a play, and they strongly indicate the playwrights' utilization of the theories of psychoanalysis and semiotics, also developed at the turn of the 20th century, which challenges any claim of the lack of analytical thrust. The aforementioned double standards used against American drama are rather ironic, considering how they are used to deny drama its place within the Modernist movement, while being opposite to everything Modernism stands for, referring to artistic hierarchy of sorts. This attitude is the main reason for the need for an interdisciplinary approach to American drama, using the same methodology and analytical tools utilized when analyzing other literary forms.

1.2. Ambiguity of Terminology

As was mentioned before, there are critics who generally condemn American drama, but at the same time recognize that some playwrights and their works can find their place in the American literary canon. These kinds of compromise solutions are usually found in most of abbreviated outline histories of American literature. For example: "Even at the height of their power and influence, none of these writers, not even the best of them, Eugene O'Neill, could be thought of as an important cultural force in the nation's life" (Ruland and Bradbury 330). They usually use commercial success of a particular play and the popularity of a certain playwright as parameters, but what they fail to point out is that these are not the categories by which literary works are valued. Lavish productions and commercial success are categories important in show business, but the commercial success of any work of literature cannot be used as a foundation for its placement or omitting from the literary canon.

Some of these issues have their roots in the casual flexibility with which critics sometimes use the terminology that concerns drama. For instance, the term "drama" is in some cases used to mean "theatre," and in others sometimes it stands for just the written text of the play, the staged play, or both. The term "theatre" in many cases encompasses both the written play and its execution on stage, assuming that the commercial failure of a particular staged drama is the direct result of the assumed failure or cultural irrelevance of the written text of the play. The same can be said for the term "play" as well. Even when steps are taken to avoid such misunderstandings, the written text of the play is rarely considered more than a series of directions for the director and actors, who are then allegedly supposed to imbue meaning to written words, giving rise to claims such as:

> If we distinguish between theatrical production and dramatic literature, we can say that America has a long history of theater but few playwrights and only a handful of plays that perennially hold the interest of both audiences and thoughtful readers. (Ruland and Bradbury 326)

Another point to consider is that of which theatrical forms should be considered drama in a sense of a work of literature, and which, while associated with theatre, belong to the sphere of show business. There is perhaps an intentional misunderstanding between theatre critics when arguing about what is meant by the term "American drama." The more vocal and numerous group, those who deny it its literary and artistic status use the term to indicate all distinctly American theatrical forms, which include, among others, the minstrel

show, vaudeville, and burlesque, which, although they represented popular forms of entertainment in America at various time periods, one would have to go to great lengths to find a deeper cultural significance to them. If anything, and especially from today's point of view, the only significance these would entail is the undisguised racism, sexism, and elitism displayed by such shows. The other group, i.e. those who are still struggling to vindicate the artistic status of American drama, use the term to encompass works written by American authors, regardless of their reception or popularity, which were written for the stage, and which reflect the *Zeitgeist* of the moment they were written in, and make use of the current developments in scientific and artistic fields in order to better unveil the reasons for the human condition.

Since theatrical production is, after all, the intended purpose of any play, the stage component of a theatric production cannot be completely omitted from the consideration of the literary value of a particular play, but parameters other than those of commercial success and attendance, by which to do that, have to be set. As Smith proposes:

> I believe that American dramatic literature has as much claim to literary status as any other genre, but I believe, as well, that although a study of dramatic literature should place the text at the center, dramatic literature must be understood in its widest possible manifestations and contexts, from production of texts to reception of performances. (2)

The reason why text should be at the center of studies, apart from the obvious reason that without the text there would not be a staged play to begin with, is that the text carries most of the weight of the idea behind the play, and the stage arrangement and the actors' performance and interpretation of the text serve to amplify the implications of the written work. Smith considers the correlation between the popularity of a particular theatrical production and the acceptance of the written text of that same play as a legitimate reading material, as a basis for its establishment in the national literary canon:

> I recognize that this is a difficult point of separation, a play being as much a script for full realization in production as it is a literary text. I feel strongly, however, that one great attraction of a play's printed text is that it can serve two masters, the reader and the audience, and that the dissemination of a text through print and through critical reception is as vital to its survival as is a well-received production, especially when one of the vexed questions is the literary status of the genre. (6)

Therefore, this ambiguity of drama should, more than anything, be considered its leading artistic advantage, and another argument why it is justified to claim that the literary value of drama is equal to those of prose and poetry. However, seeing how a play's realization on stage can, and usually does, vary from production to production, sometimes even to a great extent from the playwright's original intention, this dimension of drama, although important, should take a back seat before the written text of the play. Along these lines, while keeping the stage dimension of drama in mind, the very term "drama" should primarily be used in the context of the written text, since the text is the carrier of the idea and all its implications. Nevertheless, the importance of the play's production on stage should not be understated, as it represents the social component of drama, whose aim is to bring people together in the age-old tradition that goes back to civilization's earliest days.

1.3. Vindication

Fortunately, or rather against its critics' best efforts, in the last two decades of the 20th century and continued today, American drama has been able to keep its hard-earned recognition, and its support in the scholarly circles continues to grow. Susan Harris Smith argues that there is just a small part of the corpus of American drama that is considered canon, but "what the canon does reflect is an ideological and aesthetic consistency in interpretive values" (57). She also points out that dramatic criticism never fully established itself as a discipline in the scholarly circles, once again revealing the double standards in academia's attitude towards American drama: "American drama in particular did not make a strong appeal to the literary scholar, and the tradition of criticism of American drama remained largely journalistic rather than academic or scholarly" (Smith 314).

This issue puts a question mark over any statement demeaning the value and status of American drama, putting the legitimacy of such claims under scrutiny, since a journalistic approach to criticism cannot claim the same status as a scholarly approach. Given that other literary forms are given a fully academic attention, denying it to drama, while classifying it as sub-literary, cannot be accepted as valid argumentation. If anything, such claims do no discredit drama, but those who make them. Moreover, this journalistic approach to dramatic criticism is also the one responsible for equating drama with show business and its commercial components, as it uses demographics, statistics, and numbers of theatre and cinema goers as the main criteria.

Nonetheless, as Meserve notices in *An Outline History of American Drama*: "By 1940, the movies had become more than a threat to the stage, but, although fewer plays were being produced, quality was sustained" (320). The term "produced," however, should not be confused with the term "written," as the number of written plays kept growing at a considerable rate. Furthermore, although the production of a play depends on its commercial viability, the value of the written text cannot be determined by such statistics. Besides, theatre and cinema perhaps could have been so bluntly compared at the turn of the 20th century, when film was little more than the recording of a staged play. Nevertheless, even only a few decades in, when both Broadway and Hollywood went through the period known as their Golden Age, i.e. roughly the second third of the 20th century, these two theatrical categories shared little more than a textual basis in form of a script, a director who oversaw the production, and actors to play out the scenes.

Similarly, Eric Bentley's aforementioned statement of theatre being provincial which, according to him, is why American drama cannot be considered of great cultural importance for the nation (62), can be countered as well. There is a great difference of the meaning of "provincial" when used in a geographic context, and when used in a cultural one. Broadway, for instance, a great theatrical center such as it is, can be considered provincial if we only take into account its geographical position as a street in New York. On the other hand, seen as a beacon of "Americanness," and the catalyst of all of the nation's cultural processes, which draws people and ideas from every corner of the United States and beyond, Broadway represents the hub of the nation's cultural life. This alleged provinciality, again, reveals itself to be a byproduct of equating drama with show business, which cannot be claimed for drama as a form of literature.

Representative examples from other forms of literature can also be considered provincial in the themes they explore, and often are, but are still held in high esteem by both experts on the subject and casual readers. William Faulkner, for instance, deals with problems inherent only to the American South, not only in geographic, but also in historical and cultural terms, and his works are considered to be among the peak contributions to not only American, but world literature as well. The same can be said for drama. The ideas and problems that plays, as literary texts, present to the reader and, in their staged form, to the viewer, are not bound by any physical boundaries which would limit their significance or impact. As a matter of fact, as Fred Koch notices: "If you draw the locality with which you are most familiar, and interpret it faithfully, it will show you the way to the universal" (qtd. in Meserve 241), making provincial themes, for the lack of

a better term, a necessity for writing an introspective work of literature. Only by writing about the world and the social milieu which immediately surround them are playwrights, or writers of any form of literature for that matter, able to delve into the roots of a particular problem to a sufficient extent so that the work would obtain any kind of cultural significance.

While giving an overview of American drama since its beginnings, with argumentation why it should be given a place in the nation's literary canon, with a special emphasis on the isolation of American dramatic literature from American literature in general, Susan Harris Smith refers to Arthur Hobson Quinn:

> 'One of the common errors in the discussion of American drama,' he wrote, 'is to assume its divorce from the main current of our literature.' He points out the involvement of Irving, Willis, Bird, Boker, Longfellow, and Mrs. Howe with the pre-Civil War rise of romantic drama that paralleled the rise of other forms of romantic literature, and addresses the attempts of Twain, Harte, and Howells to write plays as an index of their regard for and attachment to the drama. (37)

The same can be said for some of the most prominent writers of the Modernist period known mostly as novelists or poets, who occasionally made attempts at writing plays, for instance Gertrude Stein, William Faulkner, F. Scott Fitzgerald, T. S. Eliot, William Carlos Williams, and E. E. Cummings, to name but a few.

Consequently, claiming that the prose works and poetry they wrote belong to the most representative works of American Modernism due to the way they deal with the problems contemporary to their times, but their plays do not, comes across as not just unfounded, but hypocritical. Perhaps because the literary forms of prose and poetry had had a head start, churning out representative specimens of their kind before American drama started reflecting Modernist features, it has been left behind and has not been considered as equally important for more than half a century. According to Meserve, "in any safe and sensible view, of course, a perspective of a hundred-odd years is always necessary for one to assess a drama accurately" (360). From the point of view of the 21st century, with all the benefits of hindsight that allow us to put it into a broader context of the times it was created, and enable us to reflect on the development and path of American drama since, it is undeniable that representative works of American Modernist drama can stand shoulder to shoulder with any other literary work contemporary to their time. Not only on the domestic scene, but even outside the United States of America, as Walter J.

Meserve concedes: “By the end of the Thirties, however, American drama had assumed a position of some stature in world drama. At mid-century, it became a recognized force” (327).

2. THE TROUBLE WITH TRADITIONS

Modernism, as a cultural movement, originated in Western Europe and since American drama, as Nikčević states "belongs to the Western-European circle" (*Subverzivna* 14), it is to be expected that elements of European drama could be found at its core. American playwrights then, naturally, imbued this tradition with themes, styles, and techniques inherent to their own worldviews, but the problems that beset man in the post-World War I world, remained generally the same, albeit with some local flavoring. However, as advantageous to have an already established dramatic tradition to fall back on might seem, this tradition proved to be as much of an encumbrance as it was helpful when trying to prove the originality of American drama. On the one hand, this causality helped critics to find coherencies in American drama which are in accordance with its European counterpart, but on the other it raises the question of American drama being a mere imitation of the European one. Since this latter perspective is still dominant in scholarly circles, the need for establishing a new set of conventions for analyzing American drama presents itself.

As with all Modernist literature, the linear approach that the traditional methods of classification require, cannot be applied to Modernist drama, because if there is one dominant feature shared by all literature of the period it is the break with tradition, which makes any traditionally developed analytic tools obsolete. Accordingly, by the end of the 20th century, the search for new analytic tools and techniques became the prominent feature of all literary criticism. As Susan Harris Smith puts it: "More than the paradigm must change; the methodology and the field need to be redefined because the whole worldview has changed" (200-1). To view all literature and, by extension, drama as well, as a part of a greater whole upon which numerous factors impose their influence, became more than just the dominant analytical method, it became a necessity of the changing times.

2.1. The European Heritage

Questioning the accepted methods of analyzing American drama, Nikčević gives an explanation as to why European trends are still used as a template for its analysis. She states that "it is, at the first glance, quite a practical and appropriate solution: in a stroke, an already established tradition expressed by clear conventions of trends, and an established

legitimacy is acquired" (*Subverzivna* 14). Though this kind of classification does give American drama a certain amount of legitimacy, it opens the way for criticizers to dismiss it as an imitation without having to make thorough analyses, as they would otherwise be obliged to perform. This problem also goes along the lines of Smith's conclusion:

> It is important to remember that American drama, of course, is not 'American,' even though what happened to it in academic and cultural institutions has been peculiarly American. American drama began by imitating European models, expanded widely with waves of immigrants from all over the world, has participated in all the major movements, and has, conversely, exerted its own influence on the drama of other countries and cultures, an influence too often overlooked in standard histories, even those that acknowledge hyphenated or hybridized Americans. (200)

Smith also stresses the importance of the academia's hierarchical classification of literature into "high" and "low," especially up to the 1980s, which does not allow American drama to break free of its classification and become a recognized literary form in its own right. Despite of the foundations that European drama lends to the American, in order to advance this particular theoretical field, a break with tradition was needed. As Susan Harris Smith explains: "One important advance in the development of an indigenous if not a superior dramatic literature was the necessary separation from European models and influence" (96).

This separation does not have to, nor could it, negate the European influences on the whole, they should just stop being characterized as dominant, especially in the times when there is an already well developed literary tradition established in America. This does not imply that the European component ceased to be important in American Modernist drama, as a matter of fact, Smith claims that it was not only important but also necessary:

> Gassner's appraisal of O'Neill in *Masters of the Drama* (1954) . . . is more representative and indicative of the necessity for a European component to legitimate American drama: 'In him Europe and America interbred, the one providing the chromosomes of thought and experiment, the other the genes of grappling vitality' (640). (100)

Quite fittingly, this train of thought is reflective of the whole history of America in general – its European roots, i.e. cultural, philosophical, historical, political, and other civilizational traits rooted in the Anglo-Saxon heritage. These roots had then undergone an organic evolution, which was brought about by necessity in an unprecedented situation.

The evolution of American drama into something truly unique and separated from its European predecessor, therefore, mimics the nation's overall evolution and development into a separate entity. Rather than being an imitation of the European model, American drama became its child, and concerning all the negative press it is still getting, the supposed lack of ideas, its moral ambiguity, and the alleged innovation for the sake of innovation, a rebellious child at that. One that, as the test of time would prove, acknowledges where it came from, but which has made its own path in life.

2.2. The Organizing Principle

After establishing that the principle of chronology should not be considered the only organizing principle which can lead to coherency in any body of literary works, the need to find another organizing principle of American drama logically presents itself. Due to the linearity of the principle of chronology, a significant portion of any body of works has to be put under consideration to get veritable results. When presented with a smaller number of literary texts, however, the principle of chronology cannot lead to consistent results because it presupposes that literature, i.e. "that heterogeneous pile," as Northrop Frye calls it, "when put in a chronological order, acquires a coherency due to plain sequence" (qtd. in Nikčević, *Subverzivna* 13). Nevertheless, what if "that heterogeneous pile" was not so heterogeneous after all, and the apparent heterogeneity stemmed from the linearity of the organizing principle, which would not occur had literary works of a particular period been considered as parts of a greater whole? In Frye's defense, though, this other type of classification requires the benefits of hindsight of the "hundred-odd" years that Meserve suggests.

The attitude towards the American Dream myth that Sanja Nikčević proposes as an organizing principle can prove advantageous in this case, and can also be used to help determine the rightful place of American drama in the national literary canon, regardless of its break with the European tradition. As Nikčević explains:

> The coherency and continuity of development in contemporary American drama that Frye strives for can be found if we introduce the *attitude towards the American Dream*, the fundamental motivating and defining myth of American society, as the fundamental organizational principle of classification of American drama. (*Afirmativna* 39)

Furthermore, this attitude towards the American Dream myth can manifest itself in two modes – the subversion of the American Dream myth, i.e. depicting its failure that gives rise to the *subversive line* of American drama, and the affirmation of the American Dream myth, i.e. depicting its achievability, which represents the origin of the *affirmative line* of American drama. Additionally, concerning the claim that this type of classification can help American drama prove its rightful place in the canon of American literature, Sanja Nikčević explains:

> Only from the perspective of this type of classification based on the cohesive factor (of the attitude towards the American Dream as an organizing principle), can American drama be given the possibility of a theoretical, rather than a critical approach. It would also allow it to find its legitimate place within American literature, as well as a position within the Western-European circle. (*Afirmativna* 44)

In this particular case, the attitude towards the American Dream myth as an organizing principle can be utilized to prove that Modernist drama shares its characteristics and traits with Modernist novel, and should, therefore, be classified as equally important in a historical, cultural, and artistic sense.

Because it is not linear like the principle of chronology, the attitude towards the American Dream principle allows us to apply the same approach to analyzing all American drama and search for cohesive factors between the plays, regardless of their place in the chronology, their genre, techniques used in staging the play, etc. Moreover, the validity of this type of classification can be verified by utilizing the same approach to analyzing other literary forms as well, in this case American Modernist novel, where the subversive and affirmative lines can also be found, i.e. the theory of the American Dream myth as the organizing principle can also be utilized when analyzing American novel, making it a distinct contribution to world literature, with its own unique features, merits, and shortcomings. Another reason, perhaps even the most important one, i.e. why the non-linear nature of the American Dream principle helps in defining American Modernist drama, is due to the simple fact that Modernists downright despise linearity. Linearity goes against the very nature of Modernism.

This is evident not only from the non-linear approach to the plot in literary texts, or the psychoanalytical take on the characterization of protagonists through stream-of-consciousness techniques, but it can also be found in other forms of art of the Modernist period. In cubist painting, for instance, where the object is observed from a multitude of

viewpoints at the same time. In music as well – jazz, for instance, mimics the stream-of-consciousness methods of creating art in its affinity for improvisation and its attitude towards structure in musical compositions, where breaking the established rules becomes the only standard. This trend is apparent in science as well, where it became insufficient to know everything there is to know on a subject in order to further develop it - this knowledge had to be cross-referenced with that from a multitude of other disciplines and contextualized in order to be able to delve into the essence of a particular issue. So does the attitude towards the American Dream principle consider American literature in a much larger historical, cultural, and artistic context, as opposed to the principle of chronology, keeping tradition in mind but remaining unencumbered by it. Lastly, although these concepts can be applied to both subversive and affirmative lines, all of the plays and novels used for the purposes of this analysis belong to the subversive line of American literature.

3. THE BIG THREES

As Susan Harris Smith proposes in *American Drama – The Bastard Art*, it is undeniable that there is a need for the reevaluation and reconsideration of the status of American drama from its very beginnings to the present day. Although the general sentiment about American drama can be found in Michael Earley's claims that "you can see novelists and poets practicing similar traditions, using similar forms, even using similar themes. Yet, it is very hard to make the same connections in American playwriting" (qtd. in Nikčević, *Subverzivna* 12), steps can be taken to prove these claims as unfounded. A step in that direction can be made by analyzing a number of already established and critically acclaimed plays, and putting them into a broader cultural context of the times they were written in, in this case American Modernism, as represented by the also well established and acclaimed novels of the period. Consequently, the question of how many plays and novels should be taken into consideration to give conclusive results logically presents itself. Keeping in mind how, unlike Frye's organizing principle of chronology, the attitude towards the American Dream myth principle does not require a very large number of analyzed works to yield credible results, three Modernist plays and three Modernist novels should prove sufficient for the purposes of this analysis. Furthermore, since "the three decades after the First World War loom large as the golden years of American drama," (Ruland and Bradbury 330), all of the selected plays and novels belong to this particular time period.

3.1. The Inventor, the Pseudonym, and the Myth Killer

As unsurprising as it is necessary, no analysis of American drama which is attempting to depict its subject in a broader cultural context can afford to omit Eugene O'Neill; one who is considered by advocates of American drama as the most important playwright of the 20th century, and by those who degrade drama, as the only important American playwright. Before O'Neill, the search for a redeeming figure of American drama was at the forefront of American dramatic criticism. As Susan Harris Smith states:

> As a general rule, the critics, sensitive always to the shortcomings of the present-day writers who are forever being compared unflatteringly to their European antecedents or sometimes even to their American predecessors, anxiously scanned the theatrical horizon looking for the savior who must be

> on the verge of emerging to redeem American drama from its provincialism, crudeness, lack of poetry, and so on. (95)

In *An Outline History of American Drama*, Walter J. Meserve describes O'Neill on the principle of his contribution to American drama in general: "In many ways, of course, O'Neill *is* Promethean. To the American drama, he brought a knowledge of the theater and a creative desire to examine its potentials when America most urgently needed his talents" (231). Christopher Bigsby, on the other hand, gives his opinion on O'Neill by claiming that "no other playwright has committed himself so completely to the 'how' of literature, restlessly testing every style, strategy, concept of character, linguistic mode, theatrical device. And the 'how' does indeed lead him towards the 'why'" (*Modern American Drama* 3). Additionally, Nikčević comments on those critics who do acknowledge O'Neill, albeit as the only American playwright worth mentioning in the entire history of American literature. She notes how those critics believe that one of the "perpetual tasks" of drama is "to find a new O'Neill," and remain firmly convicted "that the real image, the real feel of America in drama can be uttered by a singular voice" (*Afirmativna* 29).

However, had only one man been able to provide such a voice for an entire nation, that would imply that he is the exception which proves the rule, i.e. that there is no such thing as dramatic literature in America. Therefore, in order to challenge such claims of a singular voice, other playwrights, who have written stylistically vastly different plays than O'Neill, but whose plays can be analyzed using the same methodology, have to be considered. Due to their undisputable artistic prowess and significance as playwrights, as well as the themes of their works that display, as Louis Broussard calls it, "a concern for the problem-beset man of their age" (104), Thomas Lanier Williams, known to the broad public by the alias "Tennessee," and Arthur Miller, present themselves as perfect candidates. Perfect because, not only do they stand as great playwrights in their own right, but their works also display a return to the themes and sensibilities of the 1920s, a decade associated with the greatest achievements of Modernist literature, and held in high regard in the scholarly circles today. As Meserve elaborates on the importance of the 1920s in the field of American Drama: "The experimentation in form (particularly expressionism), the range of ideas, and, quite simply, the quality of the plays distinguished the Twenties from past American drama" (324).

Furthermore, Louis Broussard elaborates on the thematic connection between these three playwrights in his *American Drama – Contemporary Allegory from Eugene O'Neill to Tennessee Williams*:

> Both Tennessee Williams and Arthur Miller, like O'Neill before them . . . came forth in the beginning of their careers with an allegorical commentary on man's maladjustment here and now. Both are in the tradition of despair which originates in the plays of O'Neill, but other influences have played their part also. Williams and Miller returned to influences from the twenties apart from O'Neill. (105)

This Big Three of American drama epitomizes the best Modernist drama has to offer, and their plays, which are to be analyzed further on, are as follows: Eugene O'Neill's *Long Day's Journey into Night*, Tennessee Williams' *A Streetcar Named Desire*, and Arthur Miller's *Death of A Salesman*. Keeping in mind Miller's and Williams' return to the dramatic traditions which started with O'Neill, both *Salesman* and *Streetcar* can be considered effectively a product of the 1920s, despite being written in the latter half of the 1940s. Though limited as it may seem, these three plays should prove sufficient, as they are paradigmatic for the reason that the majority of other plays, especially those of the same period, but even to the present day, are measured and valued according to them.

In addition to the idea of an organizing principle as an anchoring element for all American drama, there is another prerequisite for the cross-examination of drama, namely an already critically and theoretically established body of works to which drama could be compared. Consequently, finding the correlation and analogies between them, while employing the same methodology of analysis, would imply that they can be considered as equal representatives of the same period in literary history. Furthermore, being able to apply the same organizing principle to both groups of literary works would corroborate these implications even further, as they would then effectively tell the same story of unperceived America that is being played out behind the scenes of the country's vibrant modernity. Seeing how it is well established in the history of American literature, and even represents a unique and vital contribution to world literature, American Modernist novel presents itself as a perfect candidate as a control group for the analysis of American drama in the first half of the 20th century.

3.2. The Southron, the Socialite, and the Expatriate

As has been mentioned, although their works vary greatly in their styles, O'Neill, Williams, and Miller exhibit the same sensibilities in their themes, and therefore can be considered as parts of the same cultural sphere. The same can be said for the Modernist

novel which, due to its acceptance in the literary canon, does not have to prove its value, but can be utilized to verify the value of American drama. To make the analysis of Modernist drama as conclusive as possible, the novels used as cross-references to drama all belong to the 1920s since, as has been established, Williams and Miller returned to the influences of this particular decade, and the culturally defining work that started with O'Neill. Moreover, and concerning the position of the Modernist novel in the literary canon:

> The achievement of the American novel of the 1920s (. . . .) represents one of the most remarkable periods of American literary history (. . . .). It took up European experiments and assimilated some of the cultural despair and the sense of psychic and historical crisis we recognize as part of what was coming to be called the Modern temper. (Ruland and Bradbury 314)

No names are as synonymous with the American Modernist novel as those of another Big Three that consists of William Faulkner, Francis Scott Fitzgerald, and Ernest Hemingway, making them the authors whose novels would serve perfectly for backing up the themes of the selected American Modernist plays. These are as follows: William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury*, F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, and Ernest Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises*. Despite being the representatives of three quite dissimilar cultural spheres of post-World War I America, i.e. the South with its broken pre-Civil War legacy, the Jazz Age era North East, and the self-imposed exile of the Expatriate movement, there is a fundamental connection between these three authors that penetrates to the core of the Modernist outlooks:

> The writing of the 1920s abounds in images of fragmentation, waste, castration and sterility – not just in Pound's *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley* or Eliot's *The Waste Land*, but in the Valley of Ashes that darkens Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* (1925), the genital wound that dominates Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises* (1926). (Ruland and Bradbury 296)

Additionally, more than just being the Big Threes of American Modernist drama and novel, the written works of these two groups of authors reveal that they exhibit the same sensibilities, worldviews, and attitudes towards the world they find themselves living in, as well as share the same feelings about the human condition, which makes them perfect candidates for comparison. For instance, looking at American literature as a whole, and keeping the intrinsic interconnectedness of American novel and drama in mind:

> In the novel . . . the line that linked James to Stein and then Stein to Anderson, Hemingway, and Faulkner gave fiction an innovative and experimental tradition . . . In theater, the influence of Ibsen, Strindberg and Maeterlinck would revivify the American drama of Eugene O'Neill, and Elmer Rice. (Ruland and Bradbury 268)

This same line can be found between the other two playwrights and novelists as well. For example, Broussard notices analogies between the works of Williams and Hemingway: "If Williams represents a compromise with the world as *Waste Land*, he takes his place with other writers . . . particularly Ernest Hemingway in the novel, and Robert E. Sherwood in drama" (105-6). Walter J. Meserve, on the other hand, explains that the techniques Arthur Miller utilizes in his plays belong to the category of the best literary achievements of his time. In Meserve's words:

> His concern for dramatic theory, his effective combination of the realistic and the expressionistic in his plays, and his basic interest in the dignity of man . . . combine to make him America's outstanding dramatist at mid-century. (332)

As David Krasner claims in "Eugene O'Neill: American Drama and American Modernism": "To be a modern American dramatist was to be an experimenter, often examining the features of theatricality, how they worked to convey emotion" (144), it is in this experimental attempts that the aforementioned connections between the playwrights and novelists make themselves apparent. These correspondences and coherencies can be found in the themes of both plays and novels, and what these themes imply, as well as in the experimental approach to writing where, for instance the stream of consciousness technique of the novel can find its analogies in the experimental expressionist techniques the playwrights had developed. The expressionist techniques in drama are important here since, as Broussard explains: "It established for drama an alliance with other forms of twentieth-century expressionism – with the symbolist movement in poetry, with the stream of consciousness novel, and with the impressionistic forms in music and painting" (5). These points of convergence between drama and novel, combined with their mutual organizing principle, should be enough to disprove claims such as Krasner's that "there was no unifying feature one can identify in modern American drama" (144), that he, perhaps ironically, also states, because not only is there a unifying principle in American drama, it is the same one found in the novel.

4. MODERNIST THEMES IN AMERICAN DRAMA

As its name suggests, Modernism, as a literary trend, stands for the break with tradition, new outlooks on the world in general, the consideration of the "here and now" the authors find themselves in as opposed to the grandiose narratives of the past time periods, and the redefinition of accepted value and moral systems. Nevertheless, despite change being usually a desired occurrence, and at least proverbially strived for, Modernist literature displays a not-always rational fear of change; and an unyielding reluctance to let go of the crumbling past which used to define us, but is now a burden holding an individual back psychologically, emotionally, and socially. People who were raised to believe in a set of particular doctrines, philosophies, and traditions, found themselves in a world they could not comprehend anymore and, even more frustratingly, their rationales, which were based on those doctrines and traditions, could not be applied to understanding why this change had occurred. Consequently, this incomprehensibility made itself apparent in their works: "As the nineteenth-century synthesis shattered, as the tradition collapsed and the underlying value systems that had shaped centuries of art were challenged or dissolved, the whole basis of artistic enterprise had, it seemed, to be re-created" (Ruland and Bradbury 240).

The reasons for these issues are manifold, penetrating every layer of human existence, and as such cannot not be approached from a single perspective, field of research, or point of authority, but have to be considered as a cumulative result of historical, political, economic, social, philosophical, and other factors. As the theoretical disciplines in all these fields had to change in order to grasp reality, so did the arts as well, if they were to approach the scattered truth and piece it together. As George Parker Anderson puts it:

> Writers who sought to find ways to explore this evolving sensibility pioneered the experimental literary approaches associated with literary Modernism—ambiguity and multiple interpretations of events; the use of myth as a structural device; the sophisticated probing of the unconscious and subconscious of the individual psyche; the incorporation of dreamlike or surreal sequences; experimentation with forms, styles, voices, and the use of language; and techniques such as interior monologues, stream of consciousness, fragmentation, flashbacks, and other manipulations of time. (64)

Additionally, not only is Modernism hard to define in the sense of its features, it is also ambiguous in terms of the time period it dominates. For some the turn of the 20th century represents the point where it all started, or rather ended according to the modernist sentiment; for most, however, the beginning of World War I signifies this historical turn. The Great War redefined America's place and role in the world on the political, social, ideological, and economic planes, changing it from the comfortable indifference of isolationism of the pre-war years, to the uncertainty of being just one cog in the global machine. This change naturally necessitated the shift of the American collective frame of mind as well, but since these new circumstances proved to be in a complete opposition to the established moral value systems, the ensuing clash of ideals birthed the collective sentiment of being lost in the modern world. The same uncertainty can be claimed for the perceived end date of Modernism, when it was succeeded by Postmodernism. In George Parker Anderson's words:

> Modernism . . . as a literary movement defies a consensus definition, particularly when it comes to its beginning and ending (. . . .). While some critics have used the end of World War II as a line to divide Modernism from Postmodernism, for others the spirit that prompted Modernism did not end with the war and indeed continues to shape the literature of the present. (64)

Since modernist outlooks are primarily evident from the sentiment displayed in the works of art of the period, and cannot be fully defined by the dates of historical turning points, such rigid periodization does not do it justice. Therefore, literary works of the post-World War II years, even those written well after the war, in the 1950s, can be described as Modernist.

As with all literary forms, the themes of American drama of the period had also become fraught with the sense of loss, fragmentation, uncertainty, frustration, confusing morality, and disconnectedness from the times. Its greatest achievements, like other signature texts of American Modernism, like T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, expressed these issues through a "mix of allusions to myth and contemporary imagery" (Anderson, 8). Accordingly, American drama's respect for the legacy of previous periods as a point of reference, as well as its experimental drive, which was at the core of all Modernist literature, bear the same cultural weight as any other literary form, and represent a mirror for the mood of the period. According to Thomas Postlewait in his essay "The Hieroglyphic Stage: American Theatre and Society, Post-Civil War to 1945," where he

discusses Eugene O'Neill's utilization of modernist techniques which reflect the sentiment of the times beneath the surface of the plots of his plays:

> From crises to hypocrises, he charted his vision of the American scene - those vistas that began to trouble Whitman after the Civil War. And to some, O'Neill's achievement, however flawed, has suggested a line of development in American theatre: an arc of aesthetic improvement, moral seriousness, and social conscience that reflects upon the conditions of American life (and accords with the history of Modernism in the arts). (114)

Furthermore, according to Meserve: "The period in American drama began in some confusion and ended with a sense of achievement and distinction that the drama in America had never before experienced" (324). This makes American Modernist drama the best example of its kind for staking an argument why American drama in general deserves its place in the nation's literary canon, because its "accordance with the history of Modernism in the arts," in this case, represents the bottom line that all of the advocates of the literary value of American drama are stressing. Consequently, further analysis of the selected plays and novels will show that the connection between the Modernist novel and drama goes deeper than their simple coexistence at a specific moment in time. There is a synchronicity between them as evidenced by the themes that permeate them both, making them equally important elements of the same cultural and literary whole.

4.1. Picking up the Pieces - Fragmentation and the Burden of the Past

Ever since T. S. Eliot gave his depiction of the modern world as *the waste land* in the poem with the same title, which became one of the defining texts of American Modernism, the notion of fragmentation, i.e. the disconnectedness from the past, and the fragmentation of narrative as a mirror of the fragmentation of character, became one of the fundamental features of Modernist literature. As Roger Lathbury puts it in *American Modernism 1910 - 1945*: "All the modernist artistic categories . . . seem deliberately chaotic. Not surprisingly, first reactions to works of modernist art can be disorienting because it is often difficult to know even where they begin" (6). The past, where the roots of tradition stem from, became more of a mythologized ideal than a memory of factual occurrences, and as such could not provide logical explanations for the state of the world in the 20th century. Consequently, the relentless passage of time and the problem of how to

cope with the changes it brings, became the burning questions to which all Modernist authors yearned to learn the answers.

This sense of being lost and confused by the new circumstances, evident in the non-linear narratives of the Modernist novel and poetry, has its equivalence in American drama as well. According to Louis Broussard:

> The allegorical theme of twentieth-century man journeying through the confusion of his period is the most unifying element to appear thus far in American drama, and it is this element which most closely identifies American drama with other forms of artistic expression in our time. (4)

Furthermore, concerning the question of the modern man's attempts to conform to the new circumstances of life, but with regard for his yearning for something more, in *The Cambridge Companion to Modern American Culture*, Bigsby claims that:

> The modern may be what they embrace, what they are certain they want above all, but it is the other America that pulls them, an America which exists outside of time. This is the happiness they are sure lies somewhere ahead, the happiness they pursue but in truth never possess, not least because it lies behind them in the trackless land they once took for possibility. (3)

Like Jay Gatsby who keeps on gazing at the promising green light across the water, the romantic in us yearns for something better, while our modern streak, one which does not fool itself with romantic notions of our role in society, tries to live to the best of its abilities, while accepting that something greater may not ever be achieved.

More than being just presented through the dialogues, in Modernist plays, these issues are imbued with power by the utilization of expressionist techniques that playwrights of the era had pioneered. Sights and sounds from the stage, thus, become more than merely a feature of the world the actors inhabit on the stage, they become subconscious triggers for the audience as well. For instance, the sound of the flute in *Salesman* which signifies the moments when Willy Loman gets disconnected from reality, represents for the audience the moment when they become aware of a greater world that exists behind the scenes, with all its historical weight behind it. Also, Willy's reliving of the past concerning his teenage sons and his brother Ben, who at the same time represents Willy's unfulfilled past and the promise of a better future which is now unattainable for him, depicts the fragmented state of his character in its non-linear approach to the narrative. Moreover, on a subconscious level, it serves as a remainder of the discrepancy

between Willy's aspirations and his failure to understand that his misconceived ethical code, which he imprints on his sons, is what prevents him from achieving greatness.

The cyclical nature of the plot of *Long Day's Journey into Night* is also reflective of this fragmentation, where the same mistakes, whose origins lie in the characters' inability to accept reality, repeat themselves on a daily basis. The same can be said for the symbolic cyclical journey of the streetcar in *A Streetcar Named Desire*, which carries its passengers in a closed loop where the only escapes are desire, i.e. a form of madness or a neurosis in a Freudian sense, and cemeteries, i.e. death. As Foster explains in her essay "Desire, Death, and Laughter: Tragicomic Dramaturgy in *A Streetcar Named Desire*":

> After a sexual encounter with a young male student, Blanche is sent away by her school principal, Mr. Graves. Arriving in New Orleans, she takes a streetcar named Desire, transfers to Cemeteries, and arrives at Elysian Fields. Both psychologically and symbolically, Blanche's sexual experiences lead her on a journey to death. (117)

American drama of the period also abounds with fragmented characters searching for something to cling to, which they usually find in the idealized past. In such circumstances, the characters of Modernist drama display the inability to cope with life, and try to cling to the ideals of the past which are of questionable validity, while living in a world where such ideals do not apply. Concerning this issue, in *A Streetcar Named Desire*, Thomas Porter states that "Blanche's dilemma, and Williams', is that of a southerner, who has lost a culture and a way of life and who is caught between two worlds, one gone with the wind, the other barely worth having" (176). In the same essay, Porter also connects this issue with the issue of the passage of time that troubles people living in modern times: "The sense of alienation from proper place is joined to a preoccupation with time (. . . .). Williams like his compatriots, attempts to cope with these contraries in his plays without, however, offering easy 'solutions'" (158). While this is true, the loss of the way of life, or failure to understand life, is not a problem inherent only to the South. In *Death of a Salesman*, as well, this problem can be seen in the notable discrepancy between Willy Loman's belief that the reputation of being "well liked" plays a key role in obtaining material wealth; especially if we keep in mind the morally dubious methods through which his brother Ben gained his. The preoccupation with time is also of the essence here, seen how Ben is always in a hurry, glancing at his watch, constantly reminding Willy that he had missed his opportunity.

Opposite to Blanche who, although destitute, uses her appearance to present herself as a member of high society in the fashion of the Old South landowners, James Tyrone from *Long Day's Journey into Night*, who has obtained the land he had strived for his whole life, does not understand that his appearance and the way he runs his household are the reasons why he cannot integrate into that society. A fact that his wife Mary, due to her upbringing, understands: "He thinks money spent on a home is money wasted. He's lived too much in hotels (. . . .). He doesn't understand a home. He doesn't feel at home in it. And yet, he wants a home" (O'Neill 2.1. 61).

Among the expressionist techniques which help the reader and audience perceive these issues, the foghorn heard throughout *Long Day's Journey into* Night, which implies the existence of a fog that surrounds the Tyrone summer home, serves as a constant remainder of the feeling of being lost that the characters are trying to deal with, and their inability to see a way out of their suffering. This can also be said for the "blue piano" music heard in *A Streetcar Named Desire*, evoking the melancholy sentiment of the loss of the mythologized grandeur of the Old South; as well as for the color symbolism where Blanche's name and her white apparel stands for the illusion of her upholding of the Old South moral values. Similarly, in *Death of a Salesman*, the apartment houses that box Willy Loman's skeletal home with "bricks and windows, windows and bricks" (Miller 1.1. 17), stand for the suffocating feeling of the modern world crushing the individual, and the disintegration of the intimacy and comfort of the "little house on the prairie" that every hard-working American is axiomatically entitled to. Applied to the plays, these expressionist techniques devised in Europe and employed by American Modernist playwrights do not only help the audience or the reader understand the characters' frame of mind, but serving as subconscious triggers, in a way also pull them into the plot, making them the part of the same narrative thread.

As was mentioned, since the 1920s have birthed some of the most recognized works of the Modernist period, all ideas in Modernist literature in one way or another can be traced to this particular decade. In her essay "Plays and Playwrights: 1915-1945," Brenda Murphy states the following:

> Perhaps the most deeply modernist element of O'Neill's work during the twenties was his consciousness of the loss of religious faith and the lack of connection with the past in modern American culture, and his attempt to overcome these ruptures by remaking myth and mythicizing history. (297-8)

Despite the fact that O'Neill wrote his *Long Day's Journey into Night* in 1940 which, due to its deeply intimate nature, was published after his death, in 1956, the roots of the themes of all his plays can be found in the general sentiment of the 1920s. Consequently, the ideas and worldviews depicted in his plays correspond to those of the authors of the so-called Lost Generation. As David Krasner explains:

> Freudian and Jungian psychoanalysis, as well as Nietzsche's Dionysian philosophy of ritual and eternal recurrence, also played an important role in shaping O'Neill's plays. O'Neill often became immersed in the modernist movements of his time and applied them to his dramas, thereby ensuring his place as literary representative of modernism. (144-5)

For instance, clinging to non-existent ideals and philosophies that did not stand the test of time, James Tyrone is appalled by his son Edmund's nihilism. For Edmund, "God is dead: of his pity for man hath God died" (O'Neill 2.2. 78). This is the exact sentiment that Ernest Hemingway would come to in his "A Clean, Well Lighted Place," where he evokes: "Our *nada* who art in *nada*, *nada* be thy name thy kingdom *nada* thy will be *nada* in *nada* as it is in *nada*" (323). This nihilism that Edmund has accepted reminds Tyrone of his failure despite of what he considers his best efforts to succeed in life, making him resent his son. On a similar note, James Tyrone mythicizes the past and his Irish ancestry, taking for granted the completely arbitrary rules that one's genealogy plays a part in his or her chances to succeed or fail in life.

> TYRONE: And keep your dirty tongue off Ireland! You're a fine one to sneer, with the map of it on your face!
>
> JAMIE: Not after I wash my face. (O'Neill 2.2. 80)

Jamie too has become disillusioned by life, and accepts the break with tradition that enables him to see the broader picture of life, which his father is missing through his stubbornness. For him, the past is dirt which needs to be washed away and not clung to, in order to be able to move forward in the modern world.

The same attitude towards the passage of time and the relationship with the past can be found in the works of Arthur Miller and Tennessee Williams as well. According to Bigsby, "*Death of a Salesman* and *The Crucible*, *The Glass Menagerie* and *A Streetcar Named Desire*, seemed to suggest the end of a particular model of America" (*Modern American Drama* 31). Additionally, when it comes to Blanche's attitude towards the passage of time in *A Streetcar Named Desire*, Bigsby concludes:

> Blanche, too, in *A Streetcar Named Desire*, resists the pull of time, terrified of the first signs of age, aware that something has ended and that it can only be recovered at the level of story, only through the roles that she so desperately performs and which finally offer her no immunity. (*Modern American Drama* 32)

The loss of Belle Reve in *Streetcar*, therefore, stands for the loss of the mythicized Old South, which now exists only as an idea in the hands of those who cannot truly understand what it means to be a Southron, as they do not share the same legacy.

> BLANCHE: Here all of them are, all papers! I hereby endow you with them! Take them, peruse them – commit them to memory even! I think it's wonderfully fitting that Belle Reve should finally be this bunch of old papers in your big, capable hands! (Williams 1.2. 44)

Willy Loman, on the other hand, does not only mythicize the past, he invents it, and turning a blind eye towards the truth, while being aware of it at the same time, results in his increasingly disturbing split personality disorder and mood swings. By not accepting the need for a change in his attitude, he dooms his sons to a life of similar delusions: "How the hell did I ever get the idea I was a salesman there? I even believed myself that I'd been a salesman for him! And then he gave me one look and – I realized what a ridiculous lie my whole life has been" (Miller 2.1. 104). Similarly, the image of Willy's brother Ben – an image he strives to imitate, an original rags-to-riches story and the promise of the American Dream, which Willy did not have the courage to grasp but cannot let go of, is fleeting in the modern world: "But I've only a few minutes" (Miller 1.1. 48). The dream of success, therefore, if it was ever achievable, has passed, and the only thing left to Willy is to reflect on his missed opportunities.

Combined with the fading image of the past, it makes the modern man torn by the thought that it is too late to start from nothing, and that the past was the only time when man could achieve happiness, even though that past might be a myth in itself. Blanche claims that: "I don't want realism. I want magic! Yes, yes, magic! I try to give that to people. I misrepresent things for them. I don't tell truth, I tell what *ought* to be truth" (Williams 1.9. 145). Bigsby states that "art alone, it seems, has the power to halt, however momentarily, the rush towards extinction" (*Modern American Drama* 42). In a way, to keep a part of the past alive, Modernist authors turned to writing characters who still live in that past, while trying to carry the burden of their problems in the modern age. Just like the last line of F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*: "So we beat on, boats against the

current, borne back ceaselessly into the past" (115), this fight against the current is a theme which bonds American Modernist playwrights with other authors of their time, who tried to depict the ongoing struggles of the modern man, without offering easy solutions. Using expressionist techniques in their plays, not only Williams, but O'Neill and Miller as well bridge the gap between their characters and the audience, making them empathize with the Tyrones, DuBois, and Lomans of America, so that they might momentarily halt the rush towards their own extinction.

4.2. Moral Ambiguity

The questions of morality, its arbitrariness and ambiguity in the modern world, stand at the core of all Modernist texts; however, although moral imperatives are in no small part a driving force behind the characters' actions, they usually are not explicitly stated, but have to be read from the context of a novel or play. What happened in the proverbial jungle to the self-made man in *Salesman* between the age of seventeen and twenty-one always remains a mystery but, as Miller assures us, when he walked out he had obtained not only what he wanted, but what he deserved according to accepted moral and ethical principles of enterprise. Due to the discrepancy of traditional moral values and behavior displayed by the characters, the modern times are often described as the times of "double morality;" nevertheless, it would not be fair to claim that this particular issue is a product of modern times. The moral implications of a nation "where all men are created equal," but which condoned slavery and would remain racially segregated well into the second half of the 20th century, where secular laws have their roots in the perceived God-given rights, and where one's "pursuit of happiness" entailed nothing short of genocide of the natives, cannot be described in absolute terms. On the contrary, it could even be claimed that the modern era brought with it the liberation from the hypocritical moral standards, as Modernists revealed them to be corrupt, false, and discriminatory.

Nevertheless, the supposed lack of moral values is not the real problem that modernist works point out; the problem occurs when these false values are applied to life situations just by virtue of being traditionally accepted, and impede progress due to the lack of any logical connection between what is considered to be the right thing to do, and what ought to be done. O'Neill exemplifies this issue in *Long Day's Journey into Night* by having Tyrone exclaim: "Your dirty Zola! And your Dante Gabriel Rossetti who was a dope fiend" (O'Neill 4.1. 135). Tyrone's system of moral values prevents him to accept the

realities of life that Zola describes and, ironically, that he himself had experienced working in a machine shop as a child. More importantly, had he accepted his wife's morphine addiction, which he also hypocritically criticizes in others, instead of indulging her out of guilt and shame, he might have been able to save both her and the rest of his family from disintegrating.

Furthermore, seeking escape in death, Mary Tyrone hopes to overdose herself, but the moral values she cannot let go of, despite not really upholding them for decades, keep her living in denial instead of seeking help: "I hope, sometime, without meaning it, I would take an overdose. I never could do it deliberately. The Blessed Virgin would never forgive me then" (O'Neill 3.1. 121). Jamie Tyrone, on the other hand, flawed as he may be, is able to put these traditional moral notions aside, and find humanity which his parents cannot find, despite all their heritage they are so proud of, and the social status they covet. In an ironic twist, he shows more humanity in helping out a down-on-her-luck prostitute by sleeping with her, describing it as an act of mercy, concluding that: "Fat Violet's a good kid. Glad I stayed with her. Christian act. Cured her blues" (O'Neill 4.1. 161). Although cynically framed by Jamie, there is truth to his words, and in this regard he is quite like Jake Barnes from *The Sun Also Rises*. Rather than preaching morality he does not believe in, he acts according to his own moral code, which is uninhibited by preconceived arbitrary rules.

Tennessee Williams addresses the issues of morality mainly through his female characters, and their misconceptions of their position in society. As Hedwig Bock explains in "Tennessee Williams, Southern Playwright":

> The reflection of the human condition through these characters, outsiders in a modern society, who still cling to internalized values of a no longer existent society and still act out a sociologically narrow superstructure of the 'Southern Lady,' the 'lovely woman of the Southland' (. . . .). This produced a double morality which gave white men all the power and an oriental freedom concerning women (. . . .). His presentation of extremely infantile women also reflects this double morality. (6)

Unlike Faulkner's Caddy, who accepts her womanhood and sexuality, Blanche is still mentally a sixteen year old *belle*, and tries to keep that appearance by wearing white and lying about her age, although nobody is fooled by her antics. The moral values she has been taught to uphold stand in the direct opposition to her promiscuous behavior, but since she does not know any other mode of social existence, she feels she has to hide her

troubles and desires from others. Her harsh reaction to Stella spilling coke on her white dress, therefore, comes from her realization that she is living a life that is the direct opposite of the life she is pretending to live: “Right on my pretty white skirt” (Williams 1.5. 94). Consequently, on a symbolic level, the long baths she takes stand for her attempts to wash away what she considers to be sin and immorality.

Additionally, her snide attitude towards Stanley, whom she describes as ape-like, but at the same time desires and flirts with, also depicts the clash of her moral values and that which she desires the most: “What such a man has to offer is animal force and he gave a wonderful exhibition of that! But the only way to live with such a man is to – go to bed with him” (Williams 1.4. 79). When confronted with this notion by Stella, she denies that her life has been defined by her sexuality, because the acceptance that she is not the image of the “Southern lady,” she tries so hard to present herself as, would mean that the state she finds herself in is her own fault, and the result of her own actions; and she cannot bring herself to accept that.

> BLANCHE: What you are talking about is brute desire – just – Desire! – the name of that rattle-trap street-car that bangs through the Quarter, up one old narrow street and down another…
>
> STELLA: Haven’t you ever ridden on that streetcar?
>
> BLANCHE: It brought me here. – Where I’m not wanted and where I’m ashamed to be… (Williams 1.4. 81)

Here, her delusions are revealed beyond a doubt, because this “streetcar” she is talking about is not the one that has brought her to Stella and Stanley’s home, but the one that has brought her to this point in her life, where she is “not clean enough” for a gentleman “to bring in the house with his mother” (Williams 1.9. 150).

The moral implications of Arthur Miller’s *Death of a Salesman*, on the other hand, are those of the importance of moral values for developing work ethics, and whether the American Dream is achievable through such ethics of hard work. Teaching his sons wrong work ethics, or rather no ethics at all, although he himself is a hard-working man, Willy Loman instilled no sense of morality in them as well. This is not only evident from his son Biff’s attitude towards work, but also from the kleptomania he had developed as a way of getting even with those who had, in his mind, unjustly wronged him. Similarly, his other son Happy’s objectifying attitude towards women is a direct result of the lack of moral values that his father had not instilled in him during childhood.

> BIFF: Naa. I’d like to find a girl – steady, somebody with substance

HAPPY: That's what I long for.

BIFF: Go on! You'd never come home.

HAPPY: That girl Charlotte I was with tonight is engaged to be married in five weeks. (Miller 1.1. 25)

Happy considers his promiscuous behavior to be the result of the lack of women eligible for a stable relationship when, in fact, he is the one treating them as purely sexual objects.

In *Modern American Playwrights*, on the subject of Arthur Miller, Gould states:

> The playwright not only placed on trial the moral values of his central character–Willy Loman, the salesman-but a society that by competition compels its individuals to forsake native talents in favor of achieving material success, at the price of human dignity. (252)

Willy, therefore, does not understand the competitive nature of business, and while he glorifies his brother Ben's accomplishments, he does not see the moral implications of the manner in which Ben had achieved his wealth: "The man knew what he wanted and went out and got it! Walked into a jungle, and comes out, the age of twenty-one, and he's rich! The world is an oyster, but you don't crack it open on a mattress" (Miller 1.1. 41). Willy's notions of being "well liked" as the prerequisite for success appear quite absurd considering that Ben, as interesting a man as he might seem, is not a likeable character at all. He takes what he wants and is not interested in being fair to anyone. Like Jay Gatsby, he is a success story which has more in common with Al Capone than Benjamin Franklin: "Never fight fair with a stranger, boy. You'll never get out of the jungle that way" (Miller 1.1. 49).

Besides, Willy and his sons are already too late to go into the wild and start from nothing; the world has been conquered, and Biff has to seek out his old employer to ask for a loan to start a business. Ben is the embodiment of the American Dream myth because he had the courage to venture into the darkness of the jungle, the equivalent of the classical hero venturing into the underworld, both as physical place and the metaphysical representation of his subconscious mind, to rediscover and reinvent himself. If we were to view Ben as the representation of the early American pioneer, and Willy his 20th century successor, *Death of a Salesman* becomes a commentary on how the American Dream had been achievable for those who were ready to risk it all for the chance of success, and since Willy is not ready to do that, it becomes unattainable for him.

In the words of Carl Gustav Jung: "If we are to see things in their right perspective, we need to understand the past of man as well as his present. That is why an understanding

of myths and symbols is of essential importance" (58). This theory goes hand in hand with what Christopher Bigsby has to say on the subject:

> It is that the past is a kind of nether world. It exists somewhere beneath the civilities of the present. It is a place where truths bubble relentlessly and uncensored to the surface. The past is the key to a world whose coherences only become fully apparent with distance and with time. (*Modern American Drama* 22)

Knowing Ben for what he really is reveals the futility of Willy's efforts, and gives the answer to why the modern world, built by people like Ben, is crushing the individual and why a "well liked" traveling salesman cannot find an open door anywhere: "He drives seven hundred miles, and when he gets there no one knows him anymore, no one welcomes him" (Miller 1.1. 57).

4.3. Acceptance into Society

As opposed to the need to "light out for the Territory" (Twain 283) like so many Huckleberry Finns of the past, the inability to cope with the world he does not understand, leaves the modern man desperate to integrate into the society which he despises, often quite overtly at that. As Walter J. Meserve explains this phenomenon: "If this 'sickness of today' permeates the forces of society which make sensitive man miserable and finally destroy him, the desire to 'belong' is man's frustrating response – frustrating because man is doomed never to 'belong'" (226). All Modernist literature abounds with characters yearning to belong; like Fitzgerald's Jay Gatsby who organizes lavish parties to draw the social elite but is never really accepted by them; Faulkner's Quentin Compson who carries the burden of upholding the declining social status of his family, but does not realize that his social and moral standards do not apply anymore; or Hemingway's Lady Bret Ashley, whose need for a high society status makes her forsake her emotional connection with Jake Barnes.

In Modernist drama as well, the need to integrate can be found as one of the most important driving forces behind the characters' actions. James Tyrone's compulsive purchase of land in *Long Day's Journey into Night* is reflective of his need to belong somewhere after a life spent on the road, as much as it is a result of his aspiration to be perceived as a member of high society, which is due to his very humble origins. For the Tyrones, owning land represents the only way they could be perceived as equal to the

people they want to socialize with. As Mary concedes: “Still, the Chatfields and people like them stand for something. I mean, they have decent, presentable homes they don’t have to be ashamed of. They have friends who entertain them and whom they entertain” (O’Neill 1.1. 44). Keeping in mind how James Tyrone sacrifices his son Edmund’s medical treatment to buy another tract of land, even more so considering how Edmund displays an affinity for finding himself on his travels, well away from society, James Tyrone’s actions reflect his need to belong no matter the consequences. Ironically, as seen from the way he runs his household and appears in public, the house he managed to provide for himself and his family never becomes their home.

According to Meserve, this element of O’Neill’s plays is reflective of some of the greatest achievements of American literature in general, since it pierces into the core questions about the human condition in Modernist times:

> When he does portray, as in *Long Day’s Journey into Night*, a stranger who never feels at home, who does not really want and is not really wanted, who can never belong, he is expressing a basic modern conflict, a struggle which places him with Herman Melville, Thomas Mann, and Albert Camus. (231-2)

The constant reminders throughout the play of the Tyrones’ Irish origins are also symptomatic of their need to belong. Because the only time they could identify with any social group is the mythologized past, the Tyrones, especially James, imbue Ireland with almost supernatural powers, as the land to which they owe everything they are.

Similarly, in *A Streetcar Named Desire*, the old stereotypes about various national minorities which comprise America today are only thinly veiled by the uniform American identity that the characters claim to be the only one important to them. The old prejudices about their countries of origin still loom large in the characters’ minds, and are easily brought to the surface as in the poker night scene of *Streetcar*, where the players comment on Mitch’s parsimony as reflective of his Scottish origin: “Sure he’s got ants now. Seven five-dollar bills in his pants pocket folded up tight as spitballs” (Williams 1.3. 56). Similarly, the reason for Stanley’s lashing out at Blanche also lies in this fact, as she constantly reminds him that he does not belong in the South, making him aware of his own inferiority complex: “I’m not a Polack. People from Poland are Poles, not Polacks. But what I am is a one hundred percent American, born and raised in the greatest country on earth and proud as hell of it, so don’t ever call me a Polack” (Williams 1.8. 134).

In the "Foreword to *Death of a Salesman*," Arthur Miller himself gives the explanation as to why the question of social integration plays such an important role in human lives, and why he made it a point to address these issues as a theme in his plays:

> The confusion of some critics viewing *Death of a Salesman* in this regard is that they do not see that Willy Loman has broken a law without whose protection life is insupportable if not incomprehensible to him and to many others: it is the law that says that a failure in society and in business has no right to live. Unlike the law against incest, the law of success is not administered by statute or church, but it is very nearly as powerful in his grip upon men. (144)

Like Jay Gatsby who came from nothing and obtained wealth but had not been able to integrate, or Quentin Compson who had always had a high social status, but was unable to use it to his advantage, Willy Loman becomes the victim of this unwritten law of social success. Because his social standards have their roots in the aforementioned moral values which stem from the arbitrary traditions of the mythicized past, and in reality do not have a rational justification, he does not understand the errors in judgment he is making, but only sees what he perceives to be a proper social conduct.

According to Thomas E. Porter in "Acres of Diamonds: *Death of a Salesman*":

> The salesman's version of the success myth - the cult of personality - is shown to be a tissue of false values that lead only to frustration. Miller dramatizes the problem of guilt and the reality of Willy's suffering because of his values, but, try as he may, he can neither bring Willy to an insight by which he understands his failure nor find a societal strategy that can absolve him of it. (151)

Because the salesman has to sell himself before he can sell his wares, Willy believes that the reason for his troubles of late is that people do not take to him as they used to, when in fact it is because the capitalist society thrives on easily available consumable goods, making the traveling salesman a relic of the past, with no place in the social hierarchy of the modern world. Also, his awareness of his delusions about being liked is apparent from his mood swings, but he cannot bring himself to acknowledge it.

> WILLY: America is full of beautiful towns and fine, upstanding people. And they know me, boys, they know me up and down New England. The finest people. And when I bring you fellas up, there'll be open sesame for all of us,

> ‘cause one thing, boys: I have friends. I can park my car in any street in New England, and the cops protect it like their own. (Miller 1.1. 31)

By teaching his sons that being “well liked” is everything they need in order to be accepted, he is condemning them to the same fate of ending up as social outcasts. People living in the modern world, which has been built and is run not by people akin to Willy, but those similar to his brother Ben, do not have the time or interest in socializing with someone like him. There are no more open doors or welcoming patrons, only disillusioned people suspicious of the trickster that had rung their doorbell trying to push on them goods they either do not need or can obtain more conveniently at the supermarket.

4.4. Painting the Familiar

As has been mentioned, one of the arguments against American drama’s cultural significance is its supposed provincialism and regionalism, i.e. that theatre goers can be found only in certain places in America, so that drama on the whole communicates to a too small a portion of the nation to be considered to be of national importance. Nevertheless, while this argument is somewhat true if we were to consider only the theatric production of a play, when it comes to the themes that American drama covers, even the most regionally-oriented plays display their regionalism as a path that points to particular universal truths. Accordingly, southern playwrights wrote plays which tackled the same problems of the American South that novelists such as Faulkner explored. Those playwrights based in the northeast of the USA depicted the failing of human relationships and identity due to socio-economic circumstances. On the other hand, those who sought an outsider’s perspective to put life back at home into a context, travelled the world in order to find it. Regionalism, thus, can be defined as more than just a geographical term, but a term which describes the methods by which Modernist authors wrote their works, regardless of the form or genre, be it novel, poetry, or play. Without putting themselves in a position of an omniscient narrator, but playing the role of an observer who is limited by what he can see, hear, or feel, they pointed to the problems that concern us all.

Meserve points out that “perhaps the most significant aspect of American drama between the world wars is the concern of the dramatists for ideas of a spiritual and universal import” (325). These ideas of “universal import,” however, are not depicted from the outside with thorough understanding, which would imply that the playwright knows the way of transcending them, but from a limited perspective of a person who finds himself in

the middle of a struggle. Just like his characters, the author is also struggling with the questions which bother the Everyman – an archetype of sorts of the modern man, who gives these problems their "universality," since he could stand for any one of us. In *Modern American Playwrights*, Jean Gould comments on the subject of Tennessee Williams' using of the social milieu he was most familiar with, which he uses as a background for his characters' struggles, and which constitutes one of the most iconic recurring themes in his plays:

> Here the must-be playwright met up with the "shadow people," creatures without roots, who lived in utter loneliness. Like Eugene O'Neill, he felt a certain kinship with them, for he realized that the grim emotions he had been suffering were shared by a whole segment of human life. (236)

This "regionalism," therefore, does not only stand for the theme of the South in a geographical sense, but for every other aspect of the playwright's life – the people he socialized with, the worldviews he shared with them, the existential questions which bothered them all, which were consequently reflected in his plays.

Similarly, O'Neill's familiarity with the world of theatre, issues of mental illness, New England settings, where he found analogies to human struggles that went back to ancient Greek times etc. also became a form of regionalism in his plays, as these matters represented the world he was most familiar with. Combined with the issues of social acceptance, identity, and problems of finding a place in the world that he had experienced during his travels outside the USA, his work had also gained an expatriate dimension. Similarly, the disconnectedness of the French Quarter of New Orleans, where the plot of *A Streetcar Named Desire* takes place, from the mid-20th century mainstream American culture, also gives the impression of an outsider's look into the social dynamics of America as the expatriate novels do; although ironically, here the Southrons are the ones feeling as outsiders in their own land, unable to grasp the realities of the New South with which they do not feel any connection.

STELLA: They're a mixed lot, Blanche.

BLANCHE: Heterogeneous – types? (Williams 1.1. 17)

Furthermore, in "Tennessee Williams, Southern Playwright," Hedwig Bock explains the impact of Williams' regionalist themes on the image of the American South both in and outside America, noting that "Europeans' and Americans' views of the South have been greatly influenced by Tennessee Williams' gothic descriptions of that part of the United States" (5).

Concerning the regionalist themes which are of importance to the whole nation:

> Unlike the nostalgic sectionalism of the post-Civil War local-color movement, this regionalism saw in the local and the specific the only source of general, human value, either social or artistic; regionalism is thus one answer to the era's search for the usable past, a mode of radical literary discovery of materials and themes that speak through the particular to the needs of the entire nation. (Ruland and Bradbury 323)

In "The Passing of the Old South: *A Streetcar Named Desire*," Thomas E. Porter explains this issue of the specific being a gateway towards the universal on the example of Arthur Miller, and Tennessee Williams:

> Both playwrights are concerned with a specific cultural milieu and both concentrate on an interpretation of that milieu for the audience (. . . .). The death of Willy Loman represents the passing of an American dream; the confinement of Blanche DuBois is a legend about the passing of the Old South. (153)

Both Arthur Miller and Tennessee Williams deal with intrinsically American myths, namely the success myth, and the plantation myth, but what is interesting to point out here is the fact that, while both myths represent a distinctly American perspective on life philosophies, these two myths belong to two quite opposite social milieus which hold them to be true, and steer their lives according to them.

In the same essay, Porter gives an accurate description of a Southron as somebody to whom the plantation myth pertains: "The Southerner had a sense of identification with a given segment of the earth, of belonging on the ancestral estate that the transient Northerner can only admire" (157). The success myth, on the other hand, assumes quite the opposite subject, one of humble origins, whose aspiration is to achieve wealth and social recognition through hard work. When these two notions intersect, a conflict ensues. Unlike Faulkner who, according to George Parker Anderson, "merged Regionalist and Modernist sensibilities" (6) in *The Sound and the Fury*, in *A Streetcar Named Desire* Tennessee Williams depicts these sensibilities as opposing cultural forces in a clash, which is evident from Blanche's condescending attitudes towards Stanley and his friends, neither of whom is a Southron: "Oh, I guess he's just not the type that goes for jasmine perfume, but maybe he's what we need to mix with our blood now that we've lost Belle Reve" (Williams 1.2. 45). She even puts herself in the role of a cultural anthropologist, studying the society of the "ape-like" brutes that her sister had married into.

STEVE: That rutting hunk!

BLANCHE: I must jot that down in my notebook. Ha-ha! I'm compiling a notebook of quaint little words and phrases I've picked up here. (Williams 1.5. 88)

As distinctly American phenomena, the success myth and the plantation myth represent two modes of America; each of them relying on a set of distinct cultural symbols, which ultimately lead to the same desired outcome. The first states that a common man may achieve wealth and greatness through hard work and abiding by the ethical principles set forth by Benjamin Franklin, and the other claims that social status and wealth is one's right by virtue of being born in an upper-class Southern society. Although they appear contrary, their ultimate goal is the same, with the difference being the methods of approaching each myth, and their symbolic representations. Considering how myth is an intricate set of cultural symbols which we all, consciously or not, use to cope with reality, Jung notes that there is distinction between natural and cultural symbols:

> The cultural symbols . . . are those that have been used to express "eternal truths," and that are still used in many religions. They have gone through many transformations and even a long process of more or less conscious development, and have thus become collective images accepted by civilized societies (. . . .). They are important constituents of our mental make-up and vital forces in the building up of human society; and they cannot be eradicated without serious loss. Where they are repressed or neglected, their specific energy disappears into the unconscious with unaccountable consequences. (93)

These sets of symbols and their influence on the individual can be found throughout Modernist literature, and in the case of the selected plays in the particularities of Blanche DuBois' mental breakdown, and Stanley Kowalski's attitude towards his Polish heritage and American nationality; in James Tyrone's acquiring of land and the pride he takes from his Irish heritage, and Mary Tyrone's hypocritical moral standards; in Willy Loman's obsession with success and material wealth, and his brother Ben's methods of achieving those. Finding this connection between the plays of Williams and Miller, in "The Passing of the Old South: *A Streetcar Named Desire*," Thomas Porter states the following:

> Tennessee Williams writes his plays out of the matrix of this tradition. He not only uses the plantation myth as an artistic point of departure, as Miller

> uses the success myth, the attitudes which shape his drama derive from his background, his education and his temperament. (161)

Therefore, no matter what the playwright's origins, worldviews, or social status may be, particular national myths have a firm hold over him, ultimately leading to same conclusions. By describing the world they are most familiar with, all of these authors contribute to painting a broader picture of the modern world as a whole, where nobody has the insight into the whole picture, only the bits and pieces of it which surround them.

4.5. The Tragicomedy of Cynicism

While it might seem that there is no place for humor in a world in which one's identity is fragmented, the past an idealized myth, and a better future all but unachievable, humor in the form of tragicomedy or cynical irony constitutes one of Modernist literature's perpetual themes. It can be found in some of the most highly esteemed examples of the Modernist novel, for instance *The Sun Also Rises*, in the cynical way Hemingway portrays Robert Cohn, a romantic with outdated and even absurd notions of chivalry and masculinity. Likewise, in *The Great Gatsby*, Gatsby's fumbling with words when trying to talk to Daisy, and his obsession with his appearance and clothes, speak volumes about his character, which is anything but masculine, as what he is trying to be perceived. Faulkner, in *The Sound and the Fury*, brings irony to an extreme for a tragicomic effect when Quentin claims he had committed incest with Caddy in order to preserve her honor.

As harsh as these examples might seem, it cannot be denied that they are laced with cynical humor; one that does not make a person laugh, but rather sneer in contempt and disbelief at the incredulity of what he has read or seen on stage. The humorous effect, therefore, comes across almost as a reflex, an involuntary reaction which should not have been allowed to occur by any rule of common sense, "decent behavior," or "good taste," and which is made all the more shocking by the uneasy feeling of truth hiding behind a protagonist's actions. It is natural, then, that Modernist drama will show the same affinity for ironic twists, and cynical outlooks on the world as a way of creating a humorous moment which would make the tragedy all the more tragic. Interestingly, it is not that Modernists imbue otherwise somber or tragic situations with humor, the tragicomic elements of the life in a modern society were always there, but due to the strict moral and societal structures they were either overlooked or ignored.

Similarly to Jay Gatsby, Mitch from *Streetcar*, the only one of Stanley's friends who nurtures romantic ideals of masculinity and femininity, breaks into a banter about his physical appearance in an ironic attempt to portray himself as the opposite of a mama's boy that his friends consider him to be: "I weigh two hundred and seven pounds and I'm six feet one and one half inches tall in my bare feet – without shoes on. And that is what I weigh stripped" (Williams 1.6. 107). Regarding Williams' use of humor in the play, in his essay "The Passing of the Old South: *A Streetcar Named Desire*," Thomas Porter states: "The ironic use of the comic structure that underlies the plantation myth functions as a bond of union (. . . .). The resonances that this structural pattern calls up are reminiscent of, for example, Faulkner's wry humor-mixed-with-pathos" (175). As opposed to the South being invaded by the northern culture which is foreign to it, Blanche's descent on the Kowalskis is described by Porter in the same essay with the following: "In an ironic reversal of the romance, it is the Old South that invades the lower-middle-class American society" (168). According to Verna Foster in "Desire, Death, and Laughter: Tragicomic Dramaturgy in *A Streetcar Named Desire*": "The tragic and the comic function symbiotically, the comic modifies, and by subverting, also protects what is tragic from becoming either melodramatic or laughable and, indeed, renders the tragic more bitter" (111).

This symbiotic nature of humor and tragedy constitutes an important feature of all Modernist literature. When there is nothing stable in the world to hold on to, and with no understanding of why things are such as they are, the only thing left to us is to laugh at the absurdity of our own misery. Concerning Blanche's tragic end, Verna Foster concludes that "she is tragic in her attempt to expiate her guilt over her young husband's death and to find consolation in 'intimacies with strangers' (118), and in her self-destructive sexual game-playing with Stanley that leads him finally to rape her" (112-3). This cruel sense of irony is a cynic's form of humor, and Williams here treads the fine line of flirting with the notion that, while Stanley might be the ape-like brute as Blanche had characterized him from the first, it was Blanche that brought this situation upon herself.

A Streetcar Named Desire, however, is not the only play where the symbiotic relationship between humor and tragedy can be found. For instance, after learning about her coquettish nature as a young woman from her husband, Mary Tyrone's lamentations about her aspirations to become a nun in *Long Day's Journey into Night* seem comically absurd, without diminishing the tragic nature of her ordeal. The gags and the drunken slur of Jamie Tyrone's moment of honesty with his brother Edmund, as well, add a bittersweet

undertone to a genuinely positive moment of brothers bonding. Combined with all the ironies about the Tyrones' social aspirations while being a disintegrating family, and their blaming of external factors for their cycle of mistakes, makes cynical humor as a foundation for tragedy one of the main features of *Long Day's Journey into Night.*

In *Death of a Salesman*, the tragicomic effect is achieved by the two Willy Lomans, one who is a dreamer, and the other a realist, the two of whom are constantly fighting each other. One claims that "There's one thing about Biff – he's not lazy" (Miller 1.1. 16), but the other rebukes him that "Biff is a lazy bum (Miller 1.1. 16). One exults with the notion that "Chevrolet is the greatest car ever built" (Miller 1.1. 34), and the other sneers at "that Goddamn Chevrolet," and concludes that "they ought to prohibit the manufacture of that car" (Miller 1.1. 36). The most tragic aspect of this type of humor, however, is that Willy himself is aware of his dichotomies: "Well, I figure, what the hell, life is short, a couple of jokes. *To himself*: I joke too much" (Miller 1.1. 37). Finally, by not heeding his own advice, Willy is the only one left to blame for the greatest tragicomic irony of *Death of a Salesman* – by doing everything in his power to be "well liked," Willy ends up being not liked at all, neither by his customers, nor by the audience witnessing his tribulation.

5. THE EVERYMAN - AN ARCHETYPE OF THE MODERNIST HERO

Due to all the things which trouble him, i.e. the fragmented state of his identity and the world in general, the moral ambiguity which does not help steer him in the right direction, the need to be accepted as an equal by the society, the modern hero is hard pressed to justify being referred to with this term. In fact, he is not even the antihero, one who goes through denial and rejection of his "destiny" to reluctantly accept his purpose, and break through the social and moral constraints, emerging victorious at the end. There is nothing extraordinary about him or her, the modern hero is one of us - common, flawed, scared, and scarred. To consider the Everyman in greater detail, and keeping in mind how Modernist playwrights utilized Jungian and Freudian psychoanalysis as a tool for character development and portrayal, Jung's archetype theory would prove useful for examining the notion of the Everyman. Consequently, on the note of archetypes in general, according to Jung, "the archetype is a tendency to form such representations of a motif – representations that can vary a great deal in detail without losing their basic pattern" (67). Keeping that in mind, we can say that this type of hero, one who embodies us all, this Everyman, represents the archetype of the modern American man.

Regarding the importance of archetypes on the psychological and emotional plains of life of an individual, which has an impact on the whole society, Jung states that "archetypes create myths, religions, and philosophies that influence and characterize whole nations and epochs of history" (79). Accordingly, Jung also claims that the creation of myths and archetypes in people's collective consciousness amounts to a form of "mental therapy" aimed towards alleviating the sufferings and anxieties of mankind:

> The ordinary man can be liberated from his personal impotence and misery and endowed at least temporarily with an almost superhuman quality. Often enough such a conviction will sustain him for a long time and give a certain style to his life. It may even set the tone of a whole society. (79)

These "superhuman qualities," which belong to a hero in a traditional sense, are also echoed in Modernist literature, in the character types of Jay Gatsby, Ben Loman, Pedro Romero, etc., but their achievements are impossible for the Everyman to catch up to, making the Everyman the only archetype the modern man can identify with. This element of identification with a character represents a crucial element for classifying the Everyman as an archetype:

> Archetypes are, at the same time, both images and emotions. One can speak of an archetype only when these two aspects are simultaneous (. . . .). By being charged with emotion, the image gains numinosity (or psychic energy); it becomes dynamic, and consequences of some kind must follow it. (96)

In order for us to be able to identify with the Everyman, his image has to evoke an emotional response from us so, on a symbolic level, his struggles could represent our own struggles. In these terms, the Everyman is more of an archetype than the apparent heroes in the forms of Jay Gatsbys and Ben Lomans because, while we might admire their achievements, we cannot identify with them. Furthermore, Jung's archetype theory goes hand in hand with the aforementioned notion of the importance of the context in which a particular Modernist novel or play takes place. This context, however, can only be indicated by the plot, and various interpretations of a certain work of literature depend on it to a great degree:

> They [archetypes] are pieces of life itself – images that are integrally connected to the living individual by the bridge of emotions. That is why it is impossible to give an arbitrary (or universal) interpretation of any archetype. It must be explained in the manner indicated by the whole life-situation of the particular individual to whom it relates. (96)

Therefore, American Modernist drama, and all contemporary drama for that matter, is in its essence the drama of the Everyman, who is thrown by forces he cannot control into the maw of the national myth, which ultimately makes or breaks him; the latter being the more common outcome. The Everyman is iconic because he is the new archetype, devoid of all greatness, the "touch of destiny" that is usually the burden of a hero. However, this quality of the Everyman should not be considered as an intrinsically negative aspect of the archetype because this is actually the only way the American Dream can function as a national myth – in order to be applicable to all, it can leave no place for an individual inherently predisposed to succeed. Moreover, since he is at the center of both American Modernist novel and drama, the Everyman as a modern archetype testifies to the historical, cultural, and artistic significance of American drama, equal to that of other literary forms. According to Louis Broussard:

> Hardly an American playwright had not yielded to the influence to produce his own "Everyman" in which he dramatized from his point of view the struggle of contemporary man with the forces of his age, the depiction of

> which brought together in one play the themes from the author's other works. (7)

For instance, as opposed to the salesman in Theodore Dreiser's novel *Sister Carrie*, from 1900, where the salesman stood for "an American prototype, the traveling salesman or 'drummer,' a new naturalist character" (Ruland and Bradbury 241), Arthur Miller's Everyman, Willy Loman in the case of *Death of a Salesman*, represents the disillusionment from the notions of the salesman as the iconic American archetype of success and the embodiment of the American Dream. While "*Sister Carrie* displays the power of this material super-world" (Ruland and Bradbury 242), Miller reveals it as a façade behind which the beaten-down middle-class American man hides. Although the sentiment of *Sister Carrie* is echoed even in *Salesman* itself, in the never-seen character of Dave Singleman, whose very name implies that he is one in a million, Willy Loman, on the other hand, is at the end reminded by his own son that: "Pop! I'm a dime a dozen, and so are you" (Miller 2.1. 132). According to Thomas Porter "he [Willy Loman] is also representative of an American type, the Salesman, who has accepted an ideal shaped for him and pressed on him by forces in his culture" (127). Being a modern archetype, this Everyman, who is not in charge of his own destiny, makes us realize the uncomfortable truth, that just like Willy, we are also put at the mercy of external forces we cannot control and, as such, a dime a dozen as well.

Similarly, in another essay "The Passing of the Old South: *A Streetcar Named Desire*," Thomas Porter finds a connection between two Everymen - Miller's Willy Loman, and Williams' Blanche DuBois:

> Willy and Blanche represent types, and they express those cultural attitudes that generated the type. Just as Willy brings the values of the drummer into a now-hostile business world, so Blanche is a sensitive, romantic soul who tries to adjust to the melting-pot environment of the big city. Both dramatists explore this cultural situation; it is the relation of the type to a hostile milieu that provides the structure, the cast of characters and ultimately the action of the drama. (153)

As was mentioned before, the importance of the author's milieu plays a crucial part in the development of his or her sensibilities, and here the bond between those milieus which shaped the playwrights' outlooks and the archetypical representations of the characters from their plays, as embodied in the Everyman, can be found. As has also been stated, Williams and Miller display the same sensibilities found in the earlier works of O'Neill

who, unsurprisingly, uses the Everyman archetype in his plays as well. In her essay "Plays and Playwrights: 1915-1945," Brenda Murphy states that: "rather than creating characters that were abstractions, O'Neill sought emotional identification from the audience" (294). Again, the emotional connection between the audience and the characters constitutes the basis for them being classified as an archetype. Consequently, as flawed as James Tyrone may be, being an archetypical representation makes him relatable to the audience, and this connection only intensifies the tragedy of his inability to break the cycle of his family's disintegration: "He may have his faults. Who hasn't? But he's worked hard all his life. He made his way up from ignorance and poverty to the top of his profession" (O'Neill 2.1. 60).

5.1. The Impotent Hero and the Stoic Observer

A notable feature of Modernist literature, drama included, is that it seems to present two types of heroes, often put together as opposing forces locked in a tug-of-war of morals and philosophies, between which the reader, or the audience in the case of drama, have to find the right balance. First of these is the apparent hero; someone untouchable either by the other characters in the play or by the reader/audience, someone whose story is unclear or ambiguous, who is doing everything in his or her power to be perceived as the hero, but ultimately fails. The other type of hero is a character who struggles with the problems of modern times and, failing to find answers to them, stoically accepts the uncertainty of all things as the only state of being, usually serving as an impartial observer to the struggles of others. This latter category is also the more important one for the notion of the Everyman as an American archetype, as this type of character is the one we can relate to.

In the selected Modernist novels, the representatives of the former type of hero would be Jay Gatsby, Robert Cohn, and Quentin Compson, who have their counterparts in the selected plays in the characters of James Tyrone, Willy Loman, and Blanche DuBois. These are the characters that are constantly in a state of cramped frustration, hiding their impotence (usually, but not always symbolic) and self-consciousness behind a veil of overconfidence. The latter type of hero, the stoic observer, is found in the three novels in the forms of Nick Carraway, Jake Barnes, and Dilsey of the Compson household. Their attitudes are also mirrored by the characters from Modernist plays, in this case Edmund and Jamie Tyrone, Linda Loman, and Stella Kowalski. They are the ones who accept their

shortcomings, and serve as a voice of reason when confronted with the other hero type's misguided outlooks.

Accordingly, O'Neill's characters' attitudes towards life display a philosophical indecisiveness and ambiguity in moral imperatives. According to Krasner:

> His characters are caught in a conflict between Nietzschean live-for-the moment and Catholicism's emphasis on responsibility and altruism. Hedonism and commitment – selfishness and selflessness – struggle within virtually all of his characters. Like most modernists, he saw heroism in these struggles, culling out the character's emotions and deepest fears. (156)

This is the exact attitude that characters such as Nick Carraway in *The Great Gatsby*, Jake Barnes in *The Sun Also Rises*, and Dilsey in *The Sound and the Fury* display. Rather than masking and denying their insecurities, they embrace them as part of who they are, which enables them to make peace primarily with themselves and then, as a result of that, with the world they find themselves living in.

Holding his mythologized and idealized Irish heritage as the most important element of his identity, and compensating for not having anything in his youth by compulsively buying land he and his family do not really need, James Tyrone is out of contact with reality, believing these are the things that will bring him the social recognition he covets. This disconnectedness from the realities of life constitutes his most prominent character flaw. As a consequence, while he completely understands his position in life, and has a decent moral compass, Tyrone's unrealistic expectations and unwise handling of financial affairs only accelerate the disintegration of his family. As Mary Tyrone concedes regarding her husband's inability to grasp the reality of his auto-destructive ways:

> But I suppose life has made him like that, and he can't help it. None of us can help the things life has done to us. They're done before you realize it, and once they're done they make you do other things until at last everything comes between you and what you'd like to be, and you've lost your true self forever. (O'Neill 2.1. 61)

His son Edmund, on the other hand, displays a type of stoic courage and acceptance of life's circumstances, even in the face of a potentially fatal illness. Like his father, Edmund also understands the severity of the situation he finds himself in, but he does not delude himself with grand schemes. He takes the lot he was given in life, and tries to make the most of it. For him life is a habit, a routine which cannot be changed, but whose obstacles

can be overcome by accepting things at their face value. Seeing his father's delusions for what they are, nihilism is the only philosophy left to him:

> The *makings* of a poet? No, I'm like a guy who's always penhandling for a smoke. He hasn't even got the makings. He's got only the habit. I couldn't touch what I tried to tell you just now. I just stammered. That's the best I'll ever do, I mean, if I live. (O'Neill 4.1. 154)

Tennessee Williams and Arthur Miller's characters also fit into these two categories; the one of the impotent hero/heroine, where the feminine wiles of Blanche DuBois are revealed as a last resort of a desperate neurotic to hold on to the only way of life known to her. Likewise, the male ideal in the traditional sense of the term, in the form of Stanley Kowalski, with his rugged appearance and masculine bravado, which turns into a defeated shriek of impotence, reveals his true nature: "Stella! My baby doll's left me! Eunice? I want my baby! I'll keep ringin' until I talk with my baby! Stell-lahhhhh" (Williams 1.3. 65-6). Not to mention Stanley's need to affirm his position by further humiliating the already raped and beaten down Blanche, by having her marched off to a mental hospital in front of his friends, an act unworthy of the man Stanley holds himself to be, making him a great deal more contemptible than his submissive antithesis in the form of Mitch. Thus, the classic masculine hero, in this case, is revealed to be a frustrated shadow of what he traditionally stands for. Christopher Bigsby comments on Williams's attitude towards the dying off of the Old South, and the connection that this theme shares with the themes of other Modernist authors with the following:

> His [Williams'] is the romantic's sense of doom. That was why he was drawn to F. Scott Fitzgerald, to Hart Crane and to Byron. Jay Gatsby and Dick Diver both tried to remake the world in their own image; both were destroyed by the hard-edged realities of American power, as they were, more profoundly, by the ultimate futility of their attempts to resist natural process and the pull of time. Much the same could be said of Blanche in *A Streetcar Named Desire*, of Laura in *The Glass Menagerie*, of Alma in *Summer and Smoke*, or of Shannon in *The Night of the Iguana*. (*Modern American Drama* 38)

On the other hand, Stella Kowalski, a character who has accepted the changing of the times, the redefining of social and moral values, and the new way of life in general, is able to find balance in her life. She was able to let go of the world both she and Blanche came from, and to integrate into Stanley's modern world. By bringing a child into this

chaos, she serves as a provider of hope that the melding of these seemingly irreconcilable worlds she and her husband stand for could be possible. She, like Linda Loman in *Death of a Salesman*, or Edmund and Jamie Tyrone in *Long Day's Journey into Night*, keeps on the sidelines of the main conflict, remaining a disillusioned character, one who works with what she or he is given, and perseveres no matter what might come next. Depending on reason instead of passion for guidance, these types of characters are able to put the past behind them, and usher in a new age.

Nevertheless, as the Everyman, regardless whether he or she is a character from American Modernist drama or novel, is not above the flaws displayed by the misguided "hero," the price they pay for their insight is often an escape strategy as a way of alleviating the pressure of the world which surrounds them. This escape is sometimes literal like, for instance, in the cases of Edmund Tyrone and Jake Barnes, who have a hard time staying in one place, and when they do it threatens to destroy the peace they made with life. At times the escape is symbolic, such as Jamie Tyrone's alcoholism, or Nick Carraway's distancing from the people who surround him by claiming to holding to a higher moral standard. Sometimes, though, in order to overcome the pressures of the world, the observer is forced to overlook much bigger issues in their immediate surroundings, and turns a blind eye to them, with potentially grievous consequences. For example, in the case of Linda Loman, who does not prevent her husband's suicide despite all the signs that led up to it, or Stella Kowalski who, disturbingly enough, continues to try to make the most of her life, married to a rapist, who had condemned her sister to a life in a mental asylum.

On the whole, these qualities put the characters from American Modernist drama in the same category of stoic observers found in the Modernist novel, who are companions to the apparent hero, and who in the end prove to be more of a hero than the ones who fit the romantic stereotype. Consequently, the observer is thus the one who either gives the reader and audience the insight into the "hero's" state of mind, or the one who reveals the "hero's" impotence, through the "hero's" behavior towards him or her. As such, and keeping in mind that they are someone the reader or the audience can relate to, they ultimately become the carrier of the moral of the story, if such a thing exists in the modern world. More importantly, and especially so for Modernist drama, these roles of the observer make it possible for us to discern the implications of the psychological processes going on in the both the "hero's" and the observer's minds, which represent the driving force behind their actions.

6. ACCORDING TO FREUD – THE PSYCHOANALYTICAL APPROACH

In the spirit of the need for an interdisciplinary approach to any subject in order to be able to approach the truth, in this case the deserved status of American drama, analyses from the perspective of artistic and scientific fields outside of literary theory and criticism have to be conducted. As was mentioned before, to create literature which adhered to the principles of life in the post-World War I world, Modernist writers turned to the discoveries in scientific fields to both imbue their work with a sense of accuracy and truth, and to try and delve into the essence of all things, which can never be explicitly stated, but can be implied on a symbolic level. Psychoanalysis, whose gaining of a scientific status more or less coincided with the advent of Modernism, thus became an important tool for Modernist writers to explore the mechanisms of the human psyche. The fragmentation of character, the ambiguous moral values, the need to belong, etc., all have their roots in the psychological processes which cannot be fully comprehended, but which can be glimpsed into by trying to decipher what the motivation behind the characters' actions is, and what drives their mental and emotional processes.

Since drama constitutes a specific form of literature, one which relies on dialogue instead of description, as is the case with novel, to portray the character's emotional states, motivations, and worldviews, the application of psychoanalytic methods became much more important for playwrights than it has ever been for novelists. Roger Lathbury elaborates on this issue:

> Twentieth-century drama enthusiastically embraced Freudian themes, not least because through them playwrights could escape from the hackneyed traditions of melodrama that had virtually monopolized the American stage. Because, at least in theory, Freud's concepts transcended the limits of historical time and space, they empowered a dramatist such as Eugene O'Neill to envision his works not only as period pieces but also as occasions for exploring the eternal tragedy of the human condition. (4)

Of course, Freudian approach to psychoanalysis, namely his method of free association, is not the only relevant technique of psychoanalysis, but considering that a great number of other psychoanalytical methods use Freud's techniques as a point of reference, his theories seem the most appropriate ones to apply to this analysis of American Modernist drama.

Freud being somewhat of a contemporary of the Modernist playwrights whose plays are analyzed here, and the psychoanalyst whose most provocative and insightful

psychoanalytical discoveries more or less coincide with some of the best achievements of American Modernism, makes him the perfect candidate. Moreover, seen how most of his theories use examples from classical Greek drama and mythology to exemplify his notions, Freud and the utilization of his theories by Modernist playwrights could be perceived as the missing link between modern American drama and its classical forebears, whose alleged absence American drama's critics use as an argument for claims that there is no such thing as dramatic tradition in America. The applicability of examples that go back thousands of years to Modernist scientific notions testifies to the timelessness of the human condition and the questions that go with it, which only change their modes of representation, but never their substance. Keeping this in mind helps to corroborate the claim that American drama belongs to the same cultural sphere of all American literature and art, which is nothing but an organic continuation of the western-European civilizational thread that goes back to ancient Greece.

However, being a prolific scientist, to utilize the entire body of Freud's works would demand a thorough research and analysis of its own, which would prove highly complicated and nigh on unmanageable for the purposes of this paper, which uses Freudian psychoanalysis only as a means to support the claim that American drama deserves the same status as other literary forms in America have obtained. Consequently, only a small fraction of Freud's works can be used here, and only certain aspects of Freudian psychoanalysis are to be addressed in relation to American Modernist drama. Nevertheless, this small number of Freudian notions, chosen on merit of their direct relevance to the case in question, should prove sufficient to indicate the intrinsic connections between Freudian psychoanalytic theories and American Modernist drama. In turn, this should indicate the strong possibility, to say the least, of further links between the two, and open the way for further research.

Concerning the more generalized theories about drama that Freud proposes, he claims that theatre allows man to "displace his ambition to stand in his own person at the hub of world affairs" and that "the playwright and actor enable him to do this by allowing him *to identify himself* with a hero" ("Psychopathic Characters on the Stage," 1607). Despite being a commonsensical conclusion, here it is important to note the correlation between this statement and Jung's – one of Freud's most distinguished contemporaries, students, followers and, on occasion, adversaries – aforementioned Archetype theory, where the identification of the spectator with the character plays a crucial role in classifying the Everyman as an archetype. Furthermore, according to Freud's theory that

all artistic creation is a way of dealing with frustration: “The mild narcosis induced in us by art can do no more than bring about a transient withdrawal from the pressure of vital needs, and it is not strong enough to make us forget real misery” (*Civilization and Its Discontents* 4480). This notion goes hand in hand with Bigsby’s conclusion that art “has the power to halt, however momentarily, the rush towards extinction” (*Modern American Drama* 42), meaning that the escape drama, or any other type of art provides, is temporary at best.

Additionally, Freud elaborates in more detail on the role of drama as a way to alleviate suffering of our daily lives, and the novelties that modern writers introduced to this concept:

> Suffering of every kind is thus the subject-matter of drama, and from this suffering it promises to give the audience pleasure. Thus we arrive at a first precondition of this form of art: that it should not cause suffering to the audience, that it should know how to compensate, by means of the possible satisfactions involved, for the sympathetic suffering which is aroused. (“Psychopathic Characters on the Stage,” 1609)

However, seeing how Modernist literature shows little regard for rules and conventions, unconcerned with fulfilling the reader’s expectations and hopes for the character, Freud goes forth to state that “modern writers have particularly often failed to obey this rule” (“Psychopathic Characters on the Stage,” 1609).

This last claim goes hand in hand with the major traits of American Modernist drama as well, because not giving the audience the satisfaction of a relieved suffering is a trait of any Modernist tragedy, whose role is to only describe the state of the human condition at the time it was written. It does not presume to offer any solution to the problems at hand, because that would require certain rules, and the failure and shattering of all traditionally acceptable social norms, as well as the inapplicability of traditionally accepted rules, form the backbone of Modernism in any sense of the term. Through identifying with them, the struggles of the Tyrones, Lomans, and DuBois, thus become our struggles, and the relief because they, and not us, are the ones “standing at the hub of world affairs,” is nowhere in evidence - their failures become the projections of our own failures. In Freud’s words: “It would seem to be the dramatist’s business to induce the same illness in us; and this can best be achieved if we are made to follow the development of the illness along with the sufferer” (“Psychopathic Characters on the Stage,” 1612).

6.1. Frustrations, Neuroses, and Other Ordinary Things

To understand how some of Freud's psychoanalytical notions relate to the selected Modernist plays, these plays should be analyzed using particular theories and methods of psychoanalysis which Freud introduced. Eugene O'Neill's *Long Day's Journey into Night* should prove the best candidate to start with:

> O'Neill was from the first an experimental – if independent – Modernist. His wide reading, especially in Freud, Jung, and Adler, gradually led him to attempt dramatizing the inner struggles and conflicts that govern the search for existential meaning. (Ruland and Bradbury 328)

Quite fittingly, Freud's essay titled "Mourning and Melancholia," should serve as a good starting point for this analysis, since these two concepts could be perceived as the most prominent emotional processes underlying the lives of O'Neill's characters in *Long Day's Journey into Night*. According to Freud, "mourning is regularly the reaction to the loss of a loved person or to the loss of some abstraction which has taken the place of one, such as one's country, liberty, an ideal, and so on" ("Mourning and Melancholia," 3041). Furthermore, on the subject of melancholia as the direct result of the mourning for the lost object of desire, which shares some of the symptoms found in mourning, but display's a much stronger hold over an individual, Freud states the following:

> The distinguishing mental features of melancholia are a profoundly painful dejection, cessation of interest in the outside world, loss of the capacity to love, inhibition of all activity, and a lowering of the self-regarding feelings to a degree that finds utterance in self-reproaches and self-revilings. ("Mourning and Melancholia," 3042)

Since each of them are mourning for a different object of desire that is now lost to them, every member of the Tyrone household could be diagnosed with a chronic case of these two conditions. James Tyrone, the patriarch of the family, with his romanticized and mythologized notions of Ireland, and his need to be identified with the people living in the vicinity of their summer home; Edmund, who cannot stay in one place for a long time, and seeks to find himself on his trips around the world; and Jamie, who despises himself so badly that he cannot stand anyone around him to have a moment of happiness. Mary Tyrone, however, does not only mourn the loss of her infant son, she is in a state of constant melancholia, intensified by her morphine addiction. Since, according to Freudian theory, the libido – usually defined as the ego's (not always sexual) energy directed

towards the object of desire - has to be directed towards an object, Mary's self-destructive way of life is explained with her ego directing its libido towards itself, i.e. for the lack of an external object, it has become internalized.

Freud's libido theory elaborates on this phenomenon in which a person starts to identify himself with the lost object of desire, because he or she cannot find another object to direct his libido towards:

> The free libido was not displaced on to another object; it was withdrawn into the ego. There . . . it served to establish an identification of the ego with the abandoned object (. . . .). In this way an object-loss was transformed into an ego-loss. ("Mourning and Melancholia," 3047)

Whatever the lost object might be, the inability of the ego to obtain it turns to frustration with the object, followed by the subconscious desire to hurt or destroy it for causing the ego pain. "We perceive that the self-reproaches are reproaches against a loved object which have been shifted away from it on to the patient's own ego" (Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," 3046). Since Mary Tyrone's lost object of desire has been internalized, this has led to the subconscious self-destruction of her ego itself, making Mary's drug addiction the direct result of her ego turning against itself.

Freud continues to expand this theory of what he calls a "narcissistic object-loss," designating those whose ego had internalized its libido as narcissists, with regard to why narcissists display such strong affinity for self-tormenting:

> If the love for the object - a love which cannot be given up though the object itself is given up - takes refuge in narcissistic identification, then the hate comes into operation on this substitutive object, abusing it, debasing it, making it suffer and deriving sadistic satisfaction from its suffering. The self-tormenting in melancholia, which is without doubt enjoyable, signifies, just like the corresponding phenomenon in obsessional neurosis, a satisfaction of trends of sadism and hate which relate to an object, and which have been turned round upon the subject's own self . . . In both disorders the patients usually still succeed, by the circuitous path of self-punishment, in taking revenge on the original object and in tormenting their loved one through their illness. ("Mourning and Melancholia," 3048)

Additionally, while not as self-destructive as his mother, Jamie Tyrone's alcoholism is also an example of the Freudian narcissistic object-loss, although Jamie's lost object of desire is not a person as in the case of Mary, but one of the abstractions that Freud mentions,

namely his personal identity. This is the reason why Jamie turns on Edmund, who out of all of the Tyrones has the firmest notions of who he is. Jamie loves his brother, but on a subconscious level his frustrated ego turns his libido against that in others which he cannot obtain for himself:

> What I wanted to say is, I'd like to see you become the greatest success in the world. But you'd better be on your guard. Because I'll do my damnedest to make you fail. Can't help it. I hate myself. Got to take revenge. On anyone else. Especially you. (O'Neill 4.1. 166)

Nevertheless, as has been stated, when the ego lacks an external object it internalizes that object, i.e. it draws its libido (the energy aimed towards the object) into itself, becoming itself the symbolic representation of that very object. Since the ego is frustrated with the lost object and wants to hurt or destroy it, it turns on itself instead. Mary's frustration and mourning over the loss of her infant have led her to the point of anger so hard she wishes to kill the reason of her suffering, i.e. the lost object of her desire. However, since that object is lost, and her libido has been drawn into the ego, rather than to another object, killing the object is equaled with killing the subject, in a word – suicide; which explains her wish to take an overdose. Freudian theory of mourning and melancholia explains this concept:

> It is this sadism alone that solves the riddle of the tendency to suicide (. . . .). No neurotic harbors thoughts of suicide which he has not turned back upon himself from murderous impulses against others . . . The analysis of melancholia now shows that the ego can kill itself only if, owing to the return of the object-cathexis, it can treat itself as an object. ("Mourning and Melancholia," 3049)

The theme of suicide due to Freudian object loss, however, is not only a feature of *Long Day's Journey into Night*, it can also be found in *Death of a Salesman*, and *A Streetcar Named Desire*. Not only is Willy Loman's suicide absurd, as he believes he is doing it for a noble cause, i.e. so his family could inherit the insurance money, the dramatic irony created by the fact that the audience knows they would not receive it because of his suicidal tendencies, makes it an example of the aforementioned cynical tragicomedy of Modernist drama. At first, Willy is turning his frustrations with the object of his desire, i.e. his materialistic ideals which have become unobtainable for him, into frustration with his son Biff, whom he sees as a projection of himself, so the loved/hated object is still externalized. As Biff reveals: "Everything I say there's a twist of mockery on his face. I

can't get near him" (Miller 1.1. 21). However, when Willy turns this animosity towards Biff into self-reproaches, internalizing the object he is frustrated with, according to Freudian object-loss theory, suicide is the only option left to him.

Blanche from *A Streetcar Named Desire*, goes through the same processes of mourning, melancholia, and suicidal tendencies, whereas her lost object of desire is her identity as a Southern belle. As Freud elaborates on this kind of object-loss:

> Loss of love and failure leave behind them a permanent injury to self-regard in the form of a narcissistic scar, which . . . contributes more than anything to the 'sense of inferiority' which is so common in neurotics. ("Beyond the Pleasure Principle," 3725)

Although she does not go so far as to commit suicide, her mental unhinging as a way of escaping reality at the end of the play stands for the same thing. As Nikčević explains: "Escape is also a quite common end for the **old subversive drama**, but as a metaphor for death, because it represents an expulsion from the reality that surrounds the *loser*" (*Subverzivna* 52). Hedwig Bock backs up this theory up further in her essay "Tennessee Williams, Southern Playwright" with the following: "Her only way out of these conflicts which she is unable to solve, is insanity, the asylum, withdrawal from this world into peace and infantlity until death, the last refuge of purity" (9). Moreover, this infantile behavior that Blanche displays in her neurotic behavior is also explained by Freud in his "Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality," where he gives thorough explanations on his views of the workings of the libido and its influence on human behavior.

> An adult who has become neurotic owing to his libido being unsatisfied behaves in his anxiety like a child: he begins to be frightened when he is alone, that is to say when he is away from someone of whose love he had felt secure, and he seeks to assuage this fear by the most childish measures. (1537)

Furthermore, another Freudian disorder is apparent in all three select plays, namely that of mania, a temporary placebo for melancholia, which displays peculiarities of its own. Freud elaborates on the connection between melancholia and mania with the following:

> Both disorders are wrestling with the same 'complex,' but that probably in melancholia the ego has succumbed to the complex whereas in mania it has mastered it or pushed it aside (. . . .). The manic subject plainly demonstrates his liberation from the object which was the cause of his suffering, by seeking like a ravenously hungry man for new object-cathexes.

("Mourning and Melancholia," 3050-1)

This searching for new objects to direct their libido towards, as a symptom of mania, is evident in the plays in Blanche's promiscuity, otherwise known as nymphomania, as well as her compulsive lying and exaggeration tendencies i.e. mythomania. Willy Loman's sudden obsession with planting, as he also slips from neurosis to full-blown psychosis is a trait of a manic person, as is his son Biff's kleptomania that he developed as a coping mechanism for not managing to achieve what he had intended. Additionally, James Tyrone's obsessive-compulsive buying of land throughout the years can be interpreted as a form of mania, as well, not to mention his wife Mary's morphine addiction, commonly known as narcomania.

Another psychological process evident in these three selected plays is the one of regression, the process of mentally returning to an earlier stage of life when the desired object was not yet lost, and pleasure or satisfaction could still be achieved. In *Long Day's Journey into Night* this issue is exemplified by Mary Tyrone's daily reliving of her adolescence and youth when her baby Eugene was still alive. In *A Streetcar Named Desire*, Blanche's disconnectedness from reality and fantasies about "kind strangers" who treat her as a Southern belle stand for her mental regression to the times of her youth as well. In *Death of a Salesman*, on the other hand, Willy Loman's constant skipping between the present and the past, whose boundaries get more blurred as the play progresses, represents this ongoing process in Willy's subconscious mind. According to Freudian theory, mental regression manifests itself through the surfacing of repressed memories and feelings, which Freud explains with the following:

> The patient cannot remember the whole of what is repressed in him, and what he cannot remember may be precisely the essential part of it (. . . .). He is obliged to repeat the repressed material as a contemporary experience instead of, as the physician would prefer to see, remembering it as something belonging to the past. ("Beyond the Pleasure Principle" 3723)

Since the memories and feelings they have repressed cannot be purged from their subconscious minds, the protagonists from all three plays are faced with them as if these issues were still ongoing in the present.

All of these aforementioned psychological processes, however, form just a small fraction of psychoanalytical theories utilized by these three Modernist playwrights. As was mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, further examples would require an in depth analysis of all psychoanalytical methods, which would have to constitute a separate

research of its own. Nevertheless, the notions of frustration with the lost or unobtainable object of desire as the driving force behind the mental processes in form of mourning, melancholia, mania, and regression found in these three plays, indicate the strong possibility of the existence of other psychological concepts, and psychoanalytical methods utilized by Modernist playwrights. Moreover, not only do these psychological notions used by Eugene O'Neill, Tennessee Williams, and Arthur Miller, indicate the probability of existence of other psychological notions in their plays, they provide credibility for the claim that the plays of other Modernist playwrights could be analyzed using the same methods.

6.2. Subconscious Triggers

The fact that drama does not have the access to descriptive tools found in novel and relies on the instrumental identification of the spectator with the characters raises the question of how Modernist playwrights enabled the spectator to enter the mind of their characters, so they could sympathize and empathize with them. To illustrate these psychoanalytical concepts to the audience, apart from imbuing their plays with dialogues which hinted at the psychological processes played out in their characters' minds, Modernist playwrights also turned to utilizing expressionist techniques in form of the stage set and the visual and auditory stimuli directed at the audience. To explain their reasons for doing so, Walter J. Meserve gives an account of Thornton Wilder, one of the pioneers of expressionist theatre in America, and his experimentation with expressionist techniques:

> He believed that a primary objective in drama was to stimulate the spectators' imagination. Therefore, through bare stage realism, imaginary scenery, and colloquial but strongly suggestive speech, he intended that the events of the play be raised from the specific to the general. (307)

Consequently, the utilization of these expressionist methods in their plays enabled Modernist playwrights to draw the audience into the plots of their plays, and make them inhabit the same world their characters live in. The symbolic representations they have written into their plays serve as subconscious triggers for the audience to put themselves in the shoes of the protagonists, and create a broader mental image of the geographical, historical, ideological, and moral contexts that is only implied by what can be seen and heard on the stage. Walter J. Meserve elaborates on this issue in greater detail:

> One reaction to realism in the theater would be expressionism, whose use is consistent with the experimental attitude of the Twenties (. . . .). According to Ludwig Lewisohn in a review of *The Adding Machine* (*Nation*, April 4, 1923), 'expressionism has two chief aims: to fling the inner life of the dramatic figures immediately upon the stage; to synthesize, instead of describing, their world and their universe into symbolic visions that shall sum up whole histories, moralities, cosmogonies in a brief minute and a fleeting scene.' (237)

These expressionist techniques, for instance, in the form of the foghorn in *Long Day's Journey into Night*, the "blue piano" and "polka" music and the color symbolism in *Streetcar*, Willy Loman's transparent house that is being slowly crushed by the modern world outside which, according to Thomas E. Porter in "Acres of Diamonds: Death of a Salesman," "symbolizes the encroachment of urban economics on the family" (132), all contribute to making the audience feel the sense of immediate reality in the plays. Additionally, these expressionist techniques also provide a back story for the plot in form of a context in which the story takes place, making the actions of the characters understandable and, more importantly, relatable to the audience, which makes the characters' failures in life all the more tragic. This approach to storytelling in a play is understandable since, as David Krasner explains it in "Eugene O'Neill: American Drama and American Modernism," "Modernism requires 'depth'" (156). As all modernists, these three playwrights too are trying to delve into the roots of particular problems, for which audience or reader participation is required. Concerning Williams' expressionistic methods, according to Hedwig Bock:

> What makes Tennessee Williams' *A Streetcar Named Desire* one of the great American plays is the poetic devices of the plastic theatre as well as the imagery and symbols used to explicate the often subconscious levels of meaning in the play: the meaning of colors, lighting, noises, the clothes people wear and the water symbolism. (10)

Reflecting on Williams' characters, who have lost a great part of their identities, Bigsby, in *Modern American Drama 1945-2000*, concludes: "That incompletion is vital to his work. At its best it moves him away from metaphor and towards the symbolic whose essence lies in its inexhaustible significations" (34). Since the characters of Modernist plays are unfulfilled, and the plots abound with holes which the audience has to fill from the implied context, the expressionist techniques become vital to understanding the whole

picture behind a play. Like Benjy's wandering mind in Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury*, which makes his reality skip back and forth in time through the free association of stimuli from his surroundings in the form of sounds, smells, and tactile feedback; the expressionist visual and auditory stimuli that the playwrights imbue their plays with, take the audience into the broader world, of which the play is a mirror.

Also, just as the flute music in *Salesman* takes Willy out of the "here and now," the audience and readership of the play are able to re-experience the whole history of the United States through the appearance of Willy's brother Ben and what his character stands for. The same goes for the polka music which haunts Blanche, not just by being the remainder of her young husband's suicide, but because it feels so absurdly out of place in the American South, evoking the lost legacy sentiment the Southrons nurture. Not to mention the clash between traditional moral values which Blanche pretends to uphold, and the fact that her husband was a homosexual, for which Blanche has no frame of reference to put it in. Similarly, the foghorn and references to both classical and modern literary works in *Long Day's Journey into Night* evoke the sense of being lost in the modern world, with its clash of traditional and modern ideas and ideals.

Furthermore, through audience participation, Modernist drama evokes one other important feature of Modernist novel, namely that of the truth that is insinuated, but not explicitly stated. Thus, the war wound that Jake Barnes in *The Sun Also Rises* carries, which makes him sexually impotent, symbolically also stands for the impotence of mankind to find meaning and direction in the modern world. Similarly, the circumstances of Mary Tyrone's morphine addiction, which represent one of the main reasons for the disintegration of the Tyrone family, have to be pieced together by the audience from the implicative dialogues and the playwright's expressionist techniques. This is also the case with Willy Loman, where the audience has to read into Willy's reactions to his sons' actions, to be able to discern the reasons behind his mood swings and ever-increasing loss of contact with reality.

Living in the time disconnected from history, many of these characters also display an unclear past, usually quite different from what they claim it to be. Like Jay Gatsby, who by all implications seems to be involved in bootlegging of liquor during the prohibition of the 1920s, Willy's brother Ben claims: "Why, boys, when I was seventeen I walked into the jungle, and when I was twenty-one I walked out. And by God I was rich" (Miller 1.1. 48). More than anything, this lack of an explicit statement about the state of the world, and relying on implication is what fundamentally bonds Modernist drama and novel. The

ambiguity of right and wrong, true and false, myth and reality, leaves the audience to question the justification of the price that has to be paid in order to achieve the American Dream in the manner Jay Gatsby and Ben Loman had achieved it. What is more, these issues also plant the seeds of doubt in the audience's mind that the American Dream can be achieved at all and that its status as the national myth stems from the fact that in reality myth can only be pursued, but never caught up with.

7. THE DREAM THAT ANCHORS A NATION

From what has been determined in the previous chapters, it is unambiguous that American Modernist novel and drama share traits on all levels. Thematically, both of them describe a fragmented world where the only certainty is that everything is uncertain and, concerning the playwrights' and novelists' methods of writing, they apply the discoveries from a myriad of scientific and artistic fields to try and delve into the core of the modern world issues. Most of all, concerning how there are no more heroes left, except in myth, both Modernist novel and drama make their protagonists a mirror image of themselves and, by extension - us. Nevertheless, while these analogies strongly indicate that these two belong to the same category of literature, what is necessary for augmenting this hypothesis is an all-encompassing element, one whose purpose would be to anchor all these analogies in a single, unified notion. To unite them into a single concept, and corroborate the claim that all Modernist literature can be perceived as a single whole, bypassing Frye's principle of chronology as the only organizing principle of American drama, this anchor would not only have to encompass all of the traits shared by both Modernist drama and novel, but its existence would have to depend on the interrelation of these elements on a symbolic level.

According to the theory set by Sanja Nikčević in her *Subversive American Drama or Sympathy for Losers*, and *Affirmative American Drama or Long Live the Puritans*, the American Dream myth as the organizing principle of all American drama, would serve as a perfect such anchor, as it is a fundamentally American concept, which has an impact on intellectual, emotional, psychological, cultural, historical, and economic levels, to name but a few. Since both American novel and drama abound with the notions pertaining to the myth, it - as a concept - is of an immense cultural significance and as such is often used to define the nation as a whole, what it stands for, and what the direction of its evolution is. Logically, the question that this approach to analyzing American drama raises is the one of what exactly constitutes a myth. When it comes to the American Dream myth, or any myth for that matter, it is usually perceived as a narrative, in form of a story or a series of iconic images, which explain how certain facts of life came to be, why a particular tradition should be honored, and why the order of all things is such as it is. To approach the true meaning of the term "myth," however, and to be as thorough as possible in the analysis of why and how it constitutes the organizing principle of American drama, it should be examined using a particular set of tools, in this case provided by semiotics, which can be used to break myth down to its constituent elements.

7.1. Not What, but How – Style is Substance

The theoretical basis for this analysis can be found in Roland Barthes' *Mythologies*, a pivotal work in the fields of cultural studies and semiotics, where he elaborates on the structure of myth, which he defines as an interrelated series of signifiers. As Barthes states: "Myth is not defined by the object of its message, but by the way in which it utters this message" (107). In other words, what we perceive as the American Dream myth, i.e. the mental images of modernity and prosperity that the term evokes, are not as important for our understanding of the myth as are the signifiers in form of symbolic representations which point to the myth. Rather than giving a socio-historical background as the basis for the meaning of the American Dream myth, Barthes' myth theory can be used to deconstruct it on the level of signifiers and signifieds, and the relationships between the two. For Barthes this is a much more important aspect than any historical, cultural, psychological, or any other aspect of the myth itself. While these "less important" aspects of myths are certainly relevant to the overall understanding of the defining features of a particular myth, Barthes' theory indicates that they are nothing more than superficial. Concerning the post-modernist outlook on the inner workings of any facet of life that science is attempting to define and put under our control, he claims that all fields of science which deal with the problem of meaning "are no longer concerned with facts except inasmuch as they are endowed with significance (. . . .). They are not content with meeting the facts: they define and explore them as tokens for something else" (110).

Barthes deconstructs myth as a paradigm made up of a series of *signifiers* and what they signify, which consequently leads to them forming *signs* together, which then again in turn become *signifiers* on a higher-tier level of signification. The relationship between these elements of the myth is, as he puts it, metonymical, where the *sign*, which is the sum of the *signifier* and the *signified* - and the final stage of a lower-tier level of signification - becomes another *signifier*, i.e. the first stage of a higher-tier level of signification. At a higher-tier of signification this *sign* becomes only what Barthes styles *form* which then in turn signifies something else, much broader than itself, which is called *concept*. Barthes further elaborates on this calling language, to paraphrase - a *first-order semiological system* - constituted of the *signifier* and the *signified*. For him the *signifier* is what he calls *acoustic image* (mental image), and the correlation between it and what it signifies constitutes a *sign* (115). These elements form the plane of language as a lower-tier level of signification, which is in itself a self-sufficient closed system. However, when it comes to

the structure of myth, which Barthes calls a *second-order semiological system*, this closed circle of language which constitutes a *sign* "will become the first term of the greater system which it builds and of which it is only a part" (115). In turn, it signifies something much larger than itself, i.e. myth. Language, therefore, as a first-order semiological system is used to describe myth, but it does not define myth. The only way myth can be defined is by correlating language (as just another *signifier* or *form*) which describes myth to what the myth promises as *concept*.

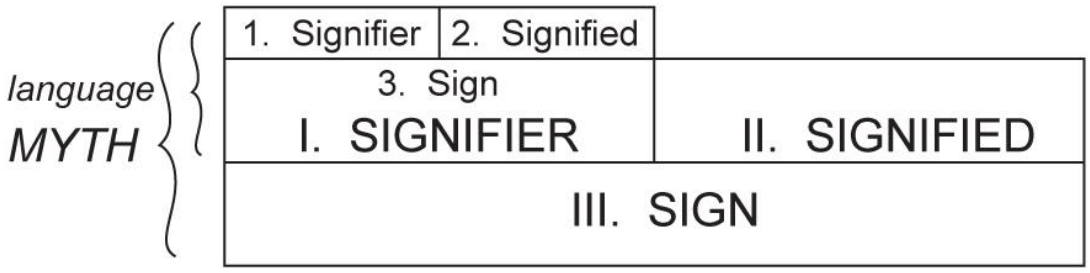


Fig. 1. The structure of myth with regard to the relationship between the two orders of semiological systems (Barthes, *Mythologies* 113)

To illustrate his meaning Barthes uses an image from the cover of *Paris-Match* magazine where:

> A young Negro in a French uniform is saluting, his eyes uplifted, probably fixed on a fold of the tricolor. All this is the *meaning* of the picture. But, whether naively or not, I see very well what it signifies to me: that France is a great Empire, that all her sons, without any color discrimination, faithfully serve under her flag. (115)

To paraphrase the rest of his description of what the photograph entails, substituting his "saluting Negro" example, with the examples relevant for this analysis of American Modernist drama, and clarify why this should be relevant for the analysis of the American Dream myth, we should first focus on the lower-tier level of signification. According to Fig. 1., in the case of drama, what we can see and hear on the stage constitutes "1. Signifier," and what that implies to the audience represents "2. Signified." Together they form "3. Sign," i.e. the context of the play - the state of the world in which the plot of the play takes place, for instance. On the plane of myth, however, according to Fig. 1., this "3. Sign" becomes only a new signifier, what Barthes calls "*form*" (I. SIGNIFIER), which signifies the *"concept,*" (II. SIGNIFIED), and they in turn create a new III. SIGN, which is on the plane of myth known as "*signification*" (115). Finally, to

apply this structure of myth to American Modernist drama, and to illustrate the applicability of this theory to any of the selected plays, the saluting Negro analogy Barthes uses should and - if the applicability of this theory to drama proves to be correct - could be replaced with examples from *Long Day's Journey into Night*, *A Streetcar Named Desire*, and *Death of a Salesman*.

As was mentioned, everything we can see or hear on the stage represents the lower-tier level of signification. This includes, for instance, an expressionistic setting of "a skeletonized house," in *Death of a Salesman*, "which symbolizes the encroachment of urban economics on the family" (Porter 132), and the flute music which indicates a skip in time. The foghorn in *Long Day's Journey into Night*, which symbolizes the sense of being lost that all members of the Tyrone family feel, is another example. In *A Streetcar Named Desire*, these *signifiers* are exemplified by the polka music which makes Blanche relive the most traumatic moments of her life, and stops only when she drains the bottle, and by the white she wears, indicating her moral hypocrisy. All of these features of the selected Modernist plays, which are only an example – a more in-depth analysis would turn up more - can be found on the same plane as language, as a *first-order semiological system*, and they constitute the *sign*, i.e. the context of the play. On the plane of myth, however, this context becomes just another *signifier*, i.e. *form*, signifying a larger, more encompassing meaning.

Barthes' myth structure theory also explains the issue of why it is important to note that language constitutes a lower-tier level of signification, and this further advocates the applicability of this theory to American drama. Concerning this question, Barthes makes an observation with regard to the nature of myth:

> Myth is a type of speech chosen by history: it cannot possibly evolve from the 'nature' of things. Speech of this kind is a message. It is therefore by no means confined to oral speech. It can consist of modes of writing or of representations; not only written discourse, but also photography, cinema, reporting, sport, shows, publicity, all these can serve as a support to mythical speech. (108)

This notion is extremely important for Modernist literature in general where style becomes substance – what a written word describes is not as important as how it describes it. For instance, the unorthodox use of punctuation and the stream-of-consciousness approach to storytelling that Faulkner uses in *The Sound and The Fury* becomes the representation of the general sense of confusion, disorientation, and fragmentation of the

modern world. Hemingway's quick succession of short pointed sentences in *The Sun Also Rises* confuses the reader as to who is saying what, implying that it does not really matter who the speaker at a particular moment is, because, as Hemingway puts it: "Everybody's sick. I'm sick too" (*The Sun Also Rises* 16). Likewise, Fitzgerald's retelling of Nick Carraway and Jay Gatsby's story from a point in time distanced from the events which take place in the novel evokes the vagueness of the past, and the loss of objectivity as to what had really transpired, and what it had meant at the time. Just like what Barthes claims to be the case with myth, these novels are not defined by what is written (in the case of myth the images it evokes – modernity, wealth, etc.), but by how they get their point across to the reader, as modes of representation inherent to American Modernism.

Drama too can be one of these modes of representation, and Modernist playwrights, sure enough, use it to relate to the American Dream myth, albeit indirectly, so it cannot be straightforwardly pulled from what is happening on the stage, but can be deduced by perceiving it as a series of interrelated *signifiers* and what they signify. Since playwrights are not given the benefits of the same descriptive tools that novelists have, they turn to the techniques of expressionist theatre to imply more than can be seen or heard on the stage, and evoke these subconscious processes in the audience. As Barthes explains: "Myth cannot possibly be an object, a concept, or an idea; it is a mode of signification, a form" (107). Modernist playwrights, therefore, do not explicitly depict the American Dream myth or any of its features in their plays, but make us aware of their existence through the carefully organized stage sets, and visual and auditory stimuli, from which the audience has to decipher the underlying connotations.

To get back to Barthes' structure of the myth, he elaborates:

> As a total of linguistic signs, the meaning of the myth has its own value, it belongs to a history: in the meaning, a signification is already built, and could very well be self-sufficient if myth did not take hold of it and did not turn it suddenly into an empty, parasitical form. The meaning is already complete, it postulates a kind of knowledge, a past, a memory, a comparative order of facts, ideas, decisions. (116)

This notion relates to American drama in the way the context of a particular play, which constitutes a *sign* on the lower-tier level of signification, is emptied of that abundance of meaning when we start to perceive this context on the plane of myth, i.e. the higher-tier level of signification. By being taken over by the much larger concept, i.e. the American Dream myth, especially considering how American Modernist plays in general, and

especially when it comes to tragedy, depict an opposite image of America than what the myth would have us believe, these plays are put in a sort of a contextual limbo, where it is up to the audience to decipher a particular meaning that is significant to them, from a myriad of other possible meanings.

Having perhaps an infinite number of possible meanings, however, could beg the question of whether the author's meaning is actually lost but this, as Barthes would have us believe, is not the case. The ambiguity of meaning actually corroborates the applicability of Barthes' theory to American drama, as it goes hand in hand with Jung's archetype theory where he claims that archetypical representations "can vary a great deal in detail without losing their basic pattern" (67). This would mean that there could be practically innumerous interpretations of a single play, while still remaining grounded in the national myth. Furthermore, as Barthes explains, "the form does not suppress the meaning, it only impoverishes it, it puts it at a distance, it holds it at one's disposal" (117).

As was stated, as a *sign* on the lower-tier level of signification, all these possible meanings constitute the context of a particular play, which can vary from one interpretation to another; however, when we start to analyze a play on a higher-tier level of signification, the level of myth, this *sign* becomes just another *signifier*, which Barthes calls *form*, and here is where, according to him, something interesting happens. "When it becomes form, the meaning leaves its contingency behind; it empties itself, it becomes impoverished, history evaporates, only the letter remains (. . . .). The form of myth is not a symbol" (116-7). As *form*, the context of a particular play, for instance the feeling of being lost in the modern world that the members of the Tyrone family go through, Willy Loman's misguided ethical code, or the dying off of Southern traditions, etc., is not a symbolic representation of America.

> They [the various contexts of a play] have too much presence, they appear as rich, fully experienced, spontaneous, innocent, *indisputable* image. But at the same time this presence is tamed, put at a distance, made almost transparent; it recedes a little, it becomes an accomplice of a concept which comes to it fully armed" (117)

This "fully armed concept" in the case of American drama is the American Dream myth, to which context of the play – any context, concerning how there can be a multitude of them – represents *form*. However, if this *form* is emptied of meaning, as Barthes claims, it raises the question of how it is possible that *form* could signify something as complex and deeply rooted into the American grain as the American Dream myth.

Nevertheless, the answer to this conundrum might be quite simpler than this complex theory would let us believe. When it comes to Modernist literature, some of its defining features are the disconnectedness from the past, the rejection of tradition, the sense of fragmentation, loss, and general confusion, in short - the lack of meaning. To paraphrase Barthes even further, using American Modernist drama as an analogy of his Negro-giving-salute photograph:

> [The various contexts of a play] as form, their meaning is shallow, isolated, impoverished; as the concept of the [American Dream] here is again tied to the totality of the world: to the general history of [America, its defining features, etc.] . . . Truth to tell, what is invested in the concept is less reality than a certain knowledge of reality. (117-8)

Consequently, what we know, or at least think we know, about America, with regards to the elements of the American Dream myth, namely the vibrant modernity, the material success, high culture, personal freedoms, etc., is always more than what reality seems to offer us. That leads us to the conclusion that the American Dream is something to be pursued at all times, but never achieved. We can approach it, even claim we have reached it, but there is always more of it that is just outside our grasp, and American Modernist drama reflects this notion.

The context of a particular Modernist play as *form*, with its meaning impoverished by the multitude of possible interpretations, is diametrically opposed to the notion of the *concept*, constituted by the aforementioned preconceptions of modern America, which promise us nothing but grandeur, wealth, and modernity. Together these two notions constitute the American Dream myth, which appeals to us, but is unreachable at the same time. It does not stand for an America as it is, or as it is likely to ever be, but the America of iconic representations - the America of iconic buildings and vistas, neon and glass, cars and airplanes, and rags to riches. Furthermore, regarding the question of how American Modernist plays, regardless of their theme, suggest to us such richness beneath the *form* which is seemingly devoid of a single unifying context, or meaning, Barthes' theory states the following:

> A signified can have several signifiers (. . . .). This means that *quantitatively*, the concept is much poorer than the signifier, it often does nothing but re-present itself (. . . .). This repetition of the concept through different forms is precious to a mythologist, it allows him to decipher the myth. (118-9)

Applying this notion to American drama, on the lower-tier level of signification (what we can see and hear on the stage) the feeling of being lost in *Long Day's Journey into Night*, for instance, can be pointed to by a number of different *signifiers*, and this, in turn, can lead to different interpretations of the play in an economic, social, moral, psychological, or any other context, so that the *sign* becomes, as Barthes puts it, quantitatively rich. As *form*, on the other hand, only a single interpretation can be used at the time to point out to a larger *concept*, which is again a complex notion made up of a multitude of interrelating factors, but much less ambiguous than the *signifier*; i.e. while *signifiers* can vary a great deal and still constitute a part of that same *concept*, the *concept* itself is a single, unifying notion that carries a certain promise to which the *form* points. To exemplify, the Tyrones' feeling of being lost, for instance, is in the direct opposition of what we would expect, what the myth promises us, namely their satisfaction with the wealth and apparent social status they have achieved, indicating the inner workings of the American Dream myth below. This notion that life in general is, in reality, not what it is supposed to be according to the national myth, or the "fully armed concept," as Barthes styles it, makes the *form* only an indication of the myth beneath, but not a symbol of it. That is the reason why Barthes claims that *form* "is not a symbol," and that its meaning is "shallow, isolated, impoverished" (117).

To sum up this application of Barthes' myth structure theory to American drama up, on a lower-tier level of signification, as a *first-order semiological system*, what the audience sees and hears on the stage constitutes the *signifier*, and what this *signifier* represents, for instance the sense of being lost, confused, regressing, spiraling into madness, etc., constitutes the *signified*. Together they form the *sign*, which is the overall context of the play – the state of the world we find ourselves in, for instance. This *sign* is not fixed for everyone and for each play, which means that there can be as many different interpretations of a play as there are members of the audience. On the plane of myth, which constitutes a higher-tier level of signification, a *second-order semiological system*, however, the *sign* becomes *form*, which is drained of the sign's multitude of meanings. It is there simply as a single fact of life, devoid of all the connotations it has as the final product of its *signifiers* on the lower-tier level of signification. Nevertheless, seeing how this emptiness of meaning lies in a direct opposition to the richness of *concept* - which is the *signified* on the plane of myth, comprised of all the preconceptions about the workings of a particular myth, in this case, the modernity, success, and materialism of America – which according to the ethical principles set forth by Benjamin Franklin should have been

obtainable to every American but, in reality, are not, reveals the American Dream myth to be nigh on impossible to achieve. Consequently, and to illustrate the notions discussed here, applied to not only American Modernist drama but all American drama, for that matter, Barthes' myth structure theory would appear as follows:

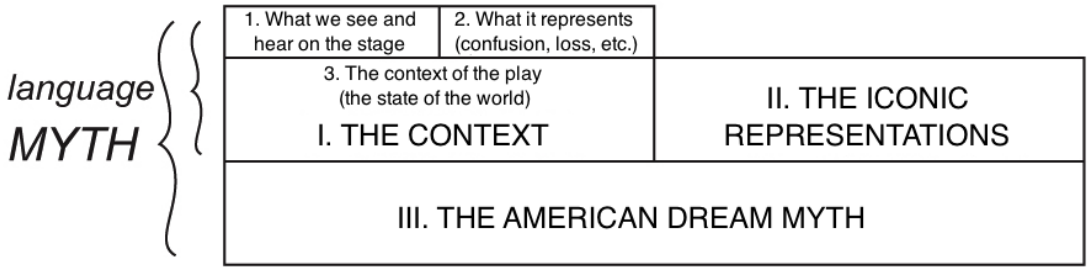


Fig. 2. Barthes' myth structure applied to American drama

The issue of how American Modernist drama evokes the American Dream myth with such force, even if it never explicitly expresses the philosophies behind it, is perhaps the most appropriate issue to conclude this chapter with. The question which naturally presents itself is the question of why not simply put all that, which is otherwise only insinuated, directly and unambiguously on stage, and assign a particular context to a particular play? Barthes provides the answer for this problem as well:

> A *complete* image would exclude myth, or at least would compel it to seize only its very completeness (. . . .). But in general myth prefers to work with poor, incomplete images, where the meaning is already relieved of its fat, and ready for a signification, such as caricatures, pastiches, symbols, etc. (125)

The moment the myth is revealed and unveiled for all to see, it ceases to be a myth. It is no longer out of our grasp and something to aspire to. Paradoxically enough, it becomes demythologized. The only way an American Modernist drama may depict a myth without destroying it, is through a series of *signifiers* which allude to something much grander than they themselves are, while never directly pointing at it.

Just like American Modernist novelists, whose writings helped define their age through the way they put their words to paper, rather than what those words told the reader, the innovations American Modernist playwrights introduced to drama redefined the way in which the world can be portrayed on stage. Their style became the true substance of their plays, of which the plot of a particular play is merely a glimpse seen through the fourth wall. The ideas that American Modernist drama alludes to always remain behind the

scenes, so to speak; physically on the plane of language, as things we can see and hear on the stage, and contextually on the plane of myth, as philosophies and images in the collective mind of America. Since the American Dream myth is the only unifying concept of all American drama, it anchors the whole nation by pulling it towards itself with a gravitational force in the shape of its *signifiers* and *signifieds*, and its *forms* and *concepts*. No matter how deep one might go in trying to reach it, there is just something more to be had, whether it is material, philosophical, emotional, or psychological. No matter how hard he tried and how far he went to reach it, the American Dream myth always stays one step ahead of the modern American man; and a good thing too because, as is the case with any dream, once the pursued object is reached, the only thing left to do is – wake up.

CONCLUSION

As has been stated at the beginning of the paper, American drama in general is slowly beginning to reap the benefits of the new outlooks on art and science, as the previously accepted paradigm of academic hierarchy, with its rigid boundaries and the division of particular subjects into "high" and "low" categories, is gradually being replaced by the more accepting interdisciplinary approach to academic agency. This shift in the theoretical and critical approach enabled American drama to be correlated not only to the cultural, social, historical and other notions pertaining to theatre and literature, but to virtually any field of art or science. If anything, since the Postmodernist outlook on any subject does not permit a single, unambiguous definition of any kind, but demands a many-sided perspective on all issues, new studies of American drama are proving to be of great help in discerning the justification of placing it in the nation's literary canon, where it would stand shoulder to shoulder with other literary forms. Furthermore, this multi-faceted approach to analyzing American drama opened the way for drama theorists and critics to find new ways of defining it, revealing its cultural role, and valuing its merits in reflecting and shaping the image of America.

The most notable innovation that American Modernist drama brought to the domestic scene is surely the utilization of expressionist techniques which enabled it to become more than mere entertainment or even a reflection of the nation's immediate reality. Expressionism empowered American Modernist drama to serve as a medium between the life on the surface, which it depicts on stage, and the collective subconscious of the entire nation, by being grounded in the national myth. The two modes of storytelling that drama displays, namely the written text and its execution on the stage, are sometimes taken by drama's critics as an encumbering element; though, when combined, the two elements constitute a mode of representation on the level of prose or poetry, as evidenced by the correlation of the three forms of literature on the levels of theme, character portrayal, symbolic representations, contemporary imagery, accordance with the national myth, etc. Moreover, if we take the stage dimension of a play into consideration, it could be argued that drama succeeds to represent life even more succinctly than other literary forms, as a play represents literature come to life. In the words of Susan Harris Smith:

> It [drama] demands a different kind of reading than poetry or prose, a reading that unifies language and image. But the critics stubbornly persist in separating the components of drama as if those components were discrete

> units rather than tightly integrated parts of a whole. Just as a study of dramatic literature must not erase the human agency necessary to its performance, so must not performance studies ignore the central authority of the text. (198)

Although limited in the number of examples, the comparisons and analyses in this paper indicate some of the flaws in logic displayed by the previous classifications of American drama as sub-literary, by providing counterarguments to the claims of American drama's supposed lack of ideas, arguments about its disconnectedness from the continuity of the drama of the western-European circle, its alleged analytical immaturity, etc. Furthermore, since the selected Modernist plays can be examined using the same analytical tools and methods, these examples are indicative of a pattern in all American Modernist drama, especially considering how the plays display a wide variety of styles, cultural references, and imagery used to point out the same essential issues. This pattern points to the conclusion that all Modernist drama could be analyzed using the same methodology and that, should we introduce new plays as examples, the same trends and tendencies would make themselves apparent in them, as long as these belong to the same literary and cultural movement, in this case Modernism. More importantly, keeping in mind that these methods of analysis are aimed towards proving the existence of a strong bond between the American Modernist drama and novel - which the analyzed examples demonstrate – the displayed coherencies between the two literary forms accentuate the need for the reevaluation of the position of American Modernist drama in the nation's literary canon. Additionally, if we take into account that the innovations American Modernist drama introduced to the scene represent the turning point in the way American drama in general was perceived both domestically and outside the USA and which, from today's perspective, constitute the foundation of an intrinsically American dramatic tradition, the vindication of American Modernist drama could represent a path for all American drama towards being recognized as a constituent of the nation's literary canon, culturally, historically, and artistically important as prose and poetry.

Lastly, the analytical methods of comparing the themes of American Modernist plays and novels, as well as providing the insight into some of the psychological processes that the characters go through, and exploring the inner workings of the national myth, merely constitute one of the possible models of analysis of American drama, as there are numerous studies on the subject from a myriad of perspectives and points of authority. The ultimate goal of this paper, therefore, is to corroborate the conclusions of the already

established critical and theoretical works on American drama, with a special emphasis on the drama from the Modernist period, so as to contribute to the efforts of trying to justify its position, and to open the way for further analysis with fresh insight. Considering how long American drama has been denied its rightful status, there is cause to be pessimistic as to when it would finally be accepted beyond a doubt, but finding new methods and perspectives, such as those from this paper, is a step in that direction, as it leaves less ground for American drama's critics to stand on. Just like the "fog people" who succeeded to define their era more eloquently by stammering than a cohort of scholars ever could, the way American Modernist drama implies, but never explicitly depicts, the overwhelming complexity of the world behind the proverbial scenes, speaks volumes about its reflection of the human condition, and that – as the first Homo sapiens teaches us – is as timeless as his mark on a cave wall.

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