

التخيلات الهستيرية: الهستيريا، الضياع والمكانة الاجتماعية في البوتقة لأرثر ميلر وعربة اسمها الرغبة
لتنسي وليامز

**Hysterical Fantasies: Hysteria, loss, and Social Status in The Crucible by Arthur
Miller and A Streetcar Named Desire by Tennessee Williams**

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المستخلص :

لقد اشتمل التقليد الدرامي الأمريكي الحديث على انخراط مع مجموعة متنوعة من الموضوعات لتحديد وتوضيح الحقائق الغربية التي يعيشها المجتمع الأمريكي، والتي يغذيها الحلم الأمريكي وتداعياته. يظهر كل من آرثر ميلر وتينيسي وليامز كنماذج لهذه المشاركة الحازمة حيث يوضح عملهما مشهداً رثائياً للمؤسسات المتعفنة وحطام الطموح. بالاعتماد على تجارب الناس في فترة الكساد الكبير في عشرينيات وثلاثينيات القرن الماضي، يكشف عملهم عن الثغرات الهائلة التي كانت موجودة داخل نظام حاولت المؤسسات وصفه بالكمال. نشأ الكتاب المسرحيون خلال هذه الأوقات، وكانوا مدركين تماماً لعيوب الوضع الراهن، وبالتالي فإن مسرحياتهم تقوض الانقسامات التي أنشأتها المؤسسات الاجتماعية والسياسية والأخلاقية لإجراء فحص عميق للديناميكيات الشخصية أو المجتمعية خارجها. بينما تسعى *البوتقة* إلى فحص الهستيريا الاجتماعية التي تنشأ من تفكك المنطق الذي يسمح للناس بالاعتقاد بأن جيرانهم متورطون في جرائم سخيفة وغير معقولة مثل التواصل مع الشيطان وذبح الأطفال وما إلى ذلك من خلال فحص هذه الإجراءات الهستيرية، تلفت المسرحية الانتباه إلى التفاوتات بين الجنسين في

السلطة والعنف الأبوي الذي يسعى إلى محو الذات الأنثوية. وبالمثل، فإن *عربة اسمها الرغبة* تستعير القضايا المتنوعة التي تواجه المجتمع الأمريكي، وخاصة هياكل القوة غير المتكافئة بين الجنسين والتاريخ العائلي الصادم. وبالتالي، فإن المسرحيات مرتبطة بفحص أهمية الوضع الاجتماعي وتحيزاته في صياغة عمليات التفكير المعياري التي تشكل حجر الأساس للمجتمعات الرأسمالية المتدهورة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: التخيلات الهستيرية، الوضع الاجتماعي، البوتقة، *عربة اسمها الرغبة*.

Abstract :

*The modern American dramatic tradition has encompassed an engagement with a wide variety of themes to define and illustrate the peculiar lived realities of American society, fuelled by the American dream and its aftermath. Arthur Miller and Tennessee Williams, both emerge as exemplars of this incisive engagement as their work articulates an elegiac kaleidoscope of decaying institutions and the debris of ambition. Drawing from the experiences of people in the Great Depression of the 1920s and 1930s, their work reveals the gross loopholes that existed within a system that institutions tried to call perfect. Growing up during these times, the playwrights were acutely aware of the imperfections of the status quo, and so their plays subvert the dichotomies established by social, political, and moral institutions to undertake a deep examination of personal or community dynamics beyond them. While **The Crucible** seeks to examine the social hysteria that emerges from a dismantling of logic that permits people to believe that their neighbours are engaged in absurd and unbelievable crimes like communing with the devil, slaughtering babies, etc. Through an examination of these hysterical routines, the play draws attention to the gendered disparities in power and patriarchal violence that seek to erase female subjectivities. Similarly, **A Streetcar Named Desire** allegorizes the varied issues confronting American society, especially the asymmetrical gender power structures and traumatic familial histories. The plays, therefore, are conjoined in examining the importance and biases of social positioning in forging normative thought processes that form the bedrock of decaying capitalist societies.*

Key Words: *Hysterical Fantasies, Social Status, The Crucible, A Streetcar Named Desire.*

Introduction:

Since Aristotelian times, the ethics and virtues that one should ideally live by have been very prominent. These codes of conduct, however, go even beyond that. People have had a tendency to band together based on similar practices and interests since the

dawn of civilization. The formation of society stimulated the process of creating these codes by which one should live .

Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics talks about the action-consequence dynamics that establish the importance of ethics as a formal discourse (Aristotle, 1906). With the evolution of societies, these established moral codes have become more solidified. However, even in Athens, the oldest democracy in the world, women, children, and slaves were not allowed to participate in the decision-making of the state, including the right to vote. Thus, 'democracy' remained a jargon of the rich and upper class as they had the power of choice .

Thus, at the root of every society lies the manifesto of the codes of conduct that regulate the actions of its people. These give birth to stringent beliefs about what one should abide by. The ones who transgress are alienated. Based on the magnitude of their transgression, they are killed or jailed. But even the ones who follow all the rules are affected by the norms .

The First and Second World Wars transformed societies and inter-country dynamics. Seeing mass deaths and economic breakdowns in such close proximity, many structures were shattered and some became even more stringent. People from various socioeconomic backgrounds reacted differently to the war. As a result, the effects on their lives differed, as did how they shaped their moralities. (Murthy, 2006, p. 27)

However, morality cannot be looked at without class. In his essay, Class, Moral, and Recognition, Andrew Sayer talks about the normativity underlining which moralities are laid down. (Sayer, 2005, p. 951) This normative thought process is further shaped by class because only a certain section of this class structure participates in the morality formulation process. Therefore, these moral rules are customized to their experiences .

These societies have created binaries in the name of morality that sees characteristics as good or bad, right or wrong. These push people to their limits by requiring them to meet any single criterion. As a result, if they are on the "right" side, they will be an embodiment of morality, whereas if they are on the "wrong" side, they will be attributed with all of the negative characteristics. This dichotomy was also reflected in the literature of older times, especially in religious texts. Eventually, some sort of skepticism came into play, especially with Shakespearean texts where people and establishments are looked at from a suspicious lens .

However, post-war literature tore apart the charade of morals hiding behind moralities and political systems. It moved away from producing literature for the upper layers of the class structure and started catering to the people, especially American literature .

Both Arthur Miller and Tennessee Williams were writing plays from the experiences of the people. The Great Depression of the 1920s and 1930s further revealed the gross loopholes that existed within a system that institutions tried to call perfect. Growing up during these times, the playwrights were aware of the imperfections of the status quo. Therefore, their plays broke away from the dichotomies established by social, political, and moral institutions and attempted to look at personal or community dynamics beyond it .

*Thus, the goal of this study is to shed light on the flaws that evolved as a result of the dichotomies produced by the social, political, and moral institutions of that period, as shown in Arthur Miller's *The Crucible* and Tennessee Williams' *A Streetcar Named Desire*.*

Spectacle, hysteria, and subversion

*Theatre has always been a tool for critiquing establishments to raise speculations over a well-conceited facade. Perhaps it was with this spirit that Arthur Miller wrote *The Crucible*. Drawing an analogy, Miller used the literary device with such panache in his play that had it not been for the narration (which is missing in some versions), nobody would know that he related a century-old Salem witch trial to the Congress questioning members suspected of practicing Communism. Miller was even called to be questioned by Congress after that .*

*Thus, the trial serves as an instrument to bring forth the essential goodness of John Proctor, and it helps him to emerge purer and intenser than ever before. The play records a struggle between the Puritan theocracy and the power of human conscience- it records the strife of an individual for the assertion of greater individual freedom. John Proctor refuses to be what society demands of him (from the very beginning of the play, he challenges the authority that operates through terror) and acts according to his own will, though in doing so he risks his own life. As Miller himself said that in writing *The Crucible* he wished to "show that the sin of public terror is that it divests man of conscience, of himself." (Arthur Miller. *Collected Plays*. p. 41)*

When the play's first performance began, a strong wind was blowing from the right with all its might. It developed a portion of its audience by instilling fear and partisanship in them. However, Miller makes that obvious in the preface to Collected Plays that the "real and inner theme" of The Crucible is

"the handing over of conscience to another, be it woman, the state, or a terror, and the realization that with conscience goes the person, the soul immortal, and the "name." (Arthur Miller. Collected Plays. P. 47)

In other plays by Miller, Joe Keller, and Willy Loman are both considered victims for what they accepted and imposed on them by their respective societies and shaped themselves accordingly, but the protagonist of The Crucible is extraordinarily different from them in this respect, John Proctor refuses to be classified by his society and does what his conscience dictates. The play shows us a different hero who does not bend to the pressures of society .

The notion of "self in society" and the individual achievement in the play serves as an instrument to bring forth the essential goodness of John Proctor, for self-realization that emphasis in Miller's play The Crucible. However, there is a quiet difference here. The play records a dispute between Puritan theocracy and the authority of individual conscience-it records the struggle of an individual for the assertion of greater individual freedom. Although Society plays an excessive part in Miller's vivid and most powerful play The Crucible, unlike Joe Keller and Willy Loman who is burdened by the inquiries posed by society on them, we have in this play a different character, John Proctor, who rejects to be what society demands of him, and what it tries to force on him. He, therefore, challenges the authority that operates through terror and, acts according to his own will. John Proctor dies at the end of the play and his society kills him, but his death is a romantic one, classified as a kind of victory, and an assertion of the individual. In the crucible and with John Proctor, Miller goes for something deeper than the one-dimensional good person. John Proctor is accepted as a product of his society to consider himself a sinner for having slept with Abigail Williams, His guilt, considering the sexual sin as an indication of absolute depravity, his unwillingness to forgive himself, and his need to be punished, are what drive the later action in the play. As a result, he bears a burden of guilt before being charged with associating with the Devil. Miller believes that there are people dedicated to evil. Evil is not a mistake, but a fact in and of itself.

When he is finally faced with the choice of death or confession, his guilt as an adulterer becomes confused with his innocence as a witch; one sin against society comes to look like another. The stage is set for yet another victim-hero; for a John Proctor who

is willing to be what men say he is, but at the last minute, chooses to be his own man. (Gerald Wilson, Arthur Miller's Shifting Image of Man. in Critical Essays. P. 135)

For years, the appraisal of The Crucible was marred by major distortions as a result of the shortcoming of many critics to give a judgment about the play apart from the current matter to which it had been ostensibly addressed. The play was either criticized as a frigid, anti-McCarthyite treatise or applauded for its author's boldness of beliefs, which coalesced into an eloquent articulation of contemporary protest in the play. Without a doubt, The Crucible was inspired by the special conditions of the McCarthy period.

The other perspective of the play is that it reinforces the stereotypes of femme Fatales and unforgiving wives to serve the men's desires. John does this to upbraid the victim of his lust for seducing him, describing her as a "whore" rather than calling himself an "adulterer". Society itself criminalizes sexual desire, viewing women's bodies as the source of disgrace and sin. Feminine power is described as dangerous to a puritan society that "transforms risky sexuality into witchcraft." (Alter 123) The women, who are accused of witchcraft at the beginning of the play, remain on the fringes of a society where class strata and property ownership are becoming increasingly visible .

The Crucible reveals a disgraceful period in American history in which fanaticism destroyed reason and witch-hunts transformed man into a formidable beast. When The Crucible premiered on January 22, 1953, the term "witch-hunt" was roughly equivalent in the public's mentality to the congressional investigations that were then conducted in the context of so-called devastating actions .

The Crucible was not only viewed as a political tract or a denunciation of the McCarthy era. In writing The Crucible, Miller focuses more on social problems than psychological ones. Miller wants to discuss a wider social issue: human liberation from the centuries-old tradition of witch-hunting today. Miller himself dismisses the suggestion that The Crucible is a simple propaganda play. The structure of the play reflects that understanding, and it centers on John, Elizabeth, and Abigail. Somewhat annoyed over the speculation of what The Crucible was 'about', Wendy Schissel writes that "extremes of female sexuality – sultriness and frigidity, respectively – test a man's body, endanger his spirit, and threaten his 'natural' dominance or needs, is the real and inner theme of the play," which was the handing over of one's conscience to another. (Schissel 461)

The Crucible is an appropriate depiction of ethics in Miller's play. In one sense, The Crucible displays a noteworthy resemblance to the struggle of the sense of personal dignity against the misleading images imposed by society. The Crucible was Miller's first endeavor into a historical record with a large cast of characters. It depicts the doom of all communities trapped in the tidal waves of rational political hysteria. The witch-hunts that took place in Salem in 1692 were stifling, as they rewound in Miller's mind the trials of the Salem witch-hunt, which had remained unfathomable darkness to him, but now they were unfolding in the present time, providing the writer a perfect foil to speak his mind. Moreover, they were on the minds of people for several years. Hawthorne and his contemporaries saw it, primarily, as an illustration of man's inhumanity to man and a theme of sin and personal guilt. They do not have our reasons for looking at it in the broader social context that leads Marion Starkey to speak of it .

The ideological intensities which rent its age no less than they ours and to remind us that, only twenty witches were executed, a microscopic number compared to the millions who have died in the species of witch hunts peculiar to our rational, scientific times. (Marion L. Starkey, The Devil in Massachusetts. P. 11)

In the Crucible, after the rumour of witchcraft being practiced in the village goes viral, a witch-hunt starts where people are convicted even without proper evidence. This goes on to disrupt the lives of the innocent as people refuse to stand by lies forged by personal vendettas and hysteria .

The belief in witchcraft, irrespective of their perspective, costs the lives of those who are far from the core of this belief. Through witchcraft, Abigail tries to win over the married person she loves, by trying to kill his wife. Even when Reverend Parris catches her and the other girls dancing naked in the forest, she continues to lie to protect herself. She goes on to make blatant accusations as a result of which many innocent people in the village get killed. Her 'love' or rather obsession/hysteria, instigates a form of hysteria in her, so much so that she does not care for anything else or anybody else's lies. It deprived her of rationality. However, when her position in society is analyzed, one can understand how her actions are a result of her childhood, wrecked by war and her insensitive uncle, who was forced to raise her because she had nobody else. However, despite that, her social status is higher than other people who are house helpers. This is probably because of her race .

Social position and race have always had a very close relationship, and white help gets some benefits over the help of colour. That is why perhaps she, despite being the culprit in the given situation in the Crucible, gets away with it. She is aware of her social status and uses it to protect herself. This is noticed from the very beginning when

Abigail excuses herself from her uncle's accusations of why she was fired from her last job .

"They want slaves, not such as I. Let them send to Barbados for that, I will not black my face for any of them!" (Miller, The Crucibles, 1953, p. 232)

The Crucible takes place in Puritan society; the lord is the governor, and 'he' has representatives, on Earth who take care of his subjects for him. Thus, people strictly follow the codes of conduct laid out by these representatives, and any transgressions can lead to trouble. In puritan society, the distinction between the good and the bad is the same. That is why there is a clear difference made by society between the children of God and the friends of Satan. The idea of a good-evil dichotomy is thus born. What Miller does is bring out these arbitrary distinctions and how much polarization and loss of life they can create in real space .

This polarization was also experienced in the States when Arthur Miller was writing. Anybody who was suspected of communism was made to go through a lot, even without proper evidence. It was the hysteria born out of prolonged bitter relations with the Soviet Union that made ordinary people practicing different ideologies victims. Using a puritan state as a backdrop for his play helped him enhance the loopholes in the so-called democracy of the United States that held on to hysterical fantasies of an ideal state and one alternative .

Hysterias are driven by personal or political motivations that force people out of rationality. In Salem, it worked as a result of forced institutionalism. These invisible hands that magnify the force that influences people and drives them into hysteria are sketched to understand the mechanism of society .

The personal motivation that backs hysteria is best understood in The Crucible, where people attach a reason - a bigger force to their ordinary misery because humans have this tendency to find reason in everything. The woman who delivers dead babies is convinced that the midwife is a witch and that is the reason her babies do not see the light of the world. People often estrange themselves from science and believe in superstitions for the same reason .

"They were murdered, Mister Parris! And mark this proof! –mark it! Last night my Ruth was ever so close to their little spirits, I know it, sir. For how else is she struck dumb now except some power of darkness would stop her mouth! It is a marvelous sign, Mister Parris!"(Miller, The Crucibles, 1953, p. 10)

However, before the trials, she had tried approaching Tituba so that she could help bring back her babies .

Reverend Parris, I have laid seven babies unbaptized in the earth.

Believe me, Sir, you never saw more hearty babies born.

And yet, each would wither in my arms the very night of their birth.

And now, this year, my Ruth, my only-I see her turning strange.

A secret child she has become this year and shrivels like a sucking

The mouth was pullin' on her life, too. And so I thought to

send her to your Tituba. (Miller, The Crucibles, 1953, p. 235)

On one hand, where The Crucible bases itself around political establishments and the hysteria it induces, A Streetcar Named Desire goes one step ahead and calls out the politics that has seeped into the personal. A flawed yet loving sibling relationship and the presence of a hyper-masculine figure create an ambiance that brings out the socio-political dynamics and the power play between gender and class that exists in mainstream society .

Normative desire and the political subject in A Streetcar Named Desire

A Streetcar Named Desire is one of the major and most distinguished plays by Tennessee Williams. His fame and critical acclaim rest mainly on A Streetcar Named Desire. The popularity of this play is so immense that the dramatic, thematic, and lyrical components of the play are deeply embedded in the "American cultural consciousness" (Londre 1997: 45). The play had not only catapulted Tennessee Williams to great literary heights, but it had also "become a milestone in contemporary American dramatic literature" (Donahue 1964: 37). Directed by Elia Kazan and considered Tennessee Williams' finest play, A Streetcar Named Desire opened on Broadway at the Barrymore Theatre in New York on December 3, 1947. The play was an immediate success, and it ran on Broadway for a groundbreaking record of 855 performances. It also became the first play ever to receive the Pulitzer Prize, the Donaldson Award, and the New York Drama Critics' Circle Award all at once.

A Streetcar Named Desire can be analyzed from different social, cultural, and psychological perspectives as the play is a realistic reflection of the rapidly changing American society in the post-Depression and post-World War II era of the 1940s. The play also focuses on the psychological realism of its characters “who are physically wounded or otherwise marginalized by mainstream society: characters seeking lost purity, or escape from the ravages of time, or refuge from the harshness of an uncomprehending world, or simple human contact” (Londre 1997: 46-47). In A Streetcar Named Desire, conflicting issues between the weak and the strong, between the sensitive and the brutal, are succinctly expressed, along with the psychological aspects of unexpressed human desires and repressed emotions that get embedded in the unconscious mind and affect one’s vision and attitude towards society.

As a socio-historical play, A Streetcar Named Desire captures the contrast and conflict between two opposing cultures in American society, that of the North and the South. The American Civil War (1861–1865) had already destroyed much of what remained of the South, while the North's increasing advancement and modernism gradually ripped off all of its Southern gentility and aristocratic traditions. What remained of the South was just a nostalgic remembrance of the old past, to which most of Tennessee Williams’ female characters, such as Amanda Wing Field, Blanche DuBois, and Alma Winemiller, hopelessly cling. These Southern gentlewomen live in a distorted present, unable to discard their Southern heritage nor able to embrace the new social order. It is their dichotomous nature that makes them outsiders in their contradictory world of decadent aristocracy and crude reality. Blanche DuBois and her younger sister Stella play the faded belles of Southern aristocracy in A Streetcar Named Desire. The play is about these two sisters who have gone their separate ways and met each other after a long time, only to separate again forever. Of the two sisters, Stella left her ancestral home, moved to New Orleans, and was married to the man she loved. While Blanche remained behind to bear witness to the eventual death, decay, and disintegration that engulfed their plantation and the Belle Reeve mansion. Moreover, when everything is lost, Blanche arrives at Stella’s door completely broken, seeking refuge and protection, hiding her promiscuous past that has led to her current helpless condition. Stella’s husband, Stanley Kowalski, a brutish man of rough behavior who saw the refined Blanche as a threat to his domestic world, did not welcome Blanche’s entrance into her sister’s life. Their quarrel and power struggle constitute the main action of the play.

The play opens with an epigraph from Hart Crane’s poem “The Broken Tower” (1932), which runs as:

And so it was I entered the broken world To trace the visionary company of love, its voice An instant in the wind (I know not to whither hurled) But not for long to hold each desperate choice. (ASND 2009).

The lines symbolize much of the play's thematic content as well as express Tennessee Williams' "poignant feelings and his constant contentions between good and evil, body and soul, God and Satan" (Sugarwala 2004: 53). The lines are very much applicable to the life of Blanche, who steps from one "broken world" to another in a constant search for hope, love, protection, permanence, and security.

It is in the deconstruction of the extremely personal that we find the political. This comes out very well in Tennessee Williams' A streetcar Named Desire. The play is set up in the bedroom of Stella and her husband Stanley, and therefore, sets the tone for an intimate perspective of their life. As the play evolves and the grey shades of the character come out into the open for everyone to see, the multiple layers of the play also get enriched. The role that hysteria plays in this play is powerful, to say the least. On stage, it is Blanche who goes mad and has to be taken to the asylum, but the audience/reader is left with a question: is she the only one in the play who is hysterical?

Here again, the approach to hysteria through a lens of normativity brings out the loopholes in the system, revealing the politics of hysteria. Indian poet K. Satchidanandan (1946) had written in his poem, "The mad are not mad like us." (Satchidanandan, 2009)

This supports the argument that hysteria is what society doesn't understand. In old times, witchcraft was considered hysteria. Later on, orgasm in women was called hysteria as well. In this play, Blanche is declared mad. Although she has had a tonal shift in insanity, her hysteria comes from uncertainty, loss, and the fall of her social position. She has lost everything- her house, her husband, and even her job. But she has complete agency over her desires and body. She does whatever she wants to, and perhaps that is seen as hysteria- a woman doing whatever she pleases .

However, the beauty of the text lies in the unspoken - in the subtext. Although Blanche is the one who is suffering from a more "evident" form of madness, there is hysteria in everyone. Stanley's hyper-masculinity, Stella's incessant need to go back to Stanley even after multiple cases of abuse, and even their neighbour Eunice and her husband's breakup followed by makeup are all episodes of hysteria existing under the name of normativity. Only Blanche's hysteria gets institutional recognition because a man hitting his wife is the norm, but a woman accusing a man of rape isn't. A woman having the agency to speak up isn't. A woman making choices over her own body isn't. A Streetcar Named Desire plays with this idea of hysteria and its close relationship with normativity .

Blanche is a woman who has fallen from her social position and is alone in this fall. That is why she is more prone to shaming than her sibling Stella because she has gone through the same but with a man around. Blanche's class-shaming Stanley cannot go unnoticed at the beginning of the play .

"Suppose! You can't have forgotten that much of Out bringing up, Stella, that you just suppose that any part of a gentleman's in his nature. Not one particle, no! Oh, if he was just ordinary! Just plain-but good and wholesome, but-no. There is something downright bestial about him! You're hating me saying this, aren't you?" (Williams T. , 2004, p. 188)

Although she is jobless and homeless, she still criticizes Stanley and Stella's two-room house. This abhorrence towards the lower class that Blanche gives away, not directly, but in pauses and connotations, does not sit well with Stanley, who sees it for what it is, unlike Stella, who wants to believe the best in everybody and almost lives in a house of cards made of false beliefs. Something that is bound to fall .

"Wonderful, honey. I do not like a bed that gives much. But there's no door between the two rooms, and Stanley-will it is decent?" (Williams T. , 2004, p. 15)

Blanche tries to be cheerful and good, but her disapproval over her sister's choice of marrying someone from the 'working class' often gives her away .

Now, then, let me look at you. But don't you look at me ,

Stella, no, no, no, not till later, not till I've bathed and rested I

And turn that over-light off! Tum that off! I won't be looked at

in this merciless glare! [Stella laughs and complies]

Come back here now! Oh, my baby! Stella!

Stella for Star! [She embraces her again] I thought you

would never come back to this horrible place !

What am I saying? I didn't mean to say that. I meant

to be nice about it and say -Oh, what a convenient

location and such-Ha-a-hal Precious lamb! You haven't

said a word to me. (Williams T. , 2004, p. 11)

The constant power play between Stanley and Blanche is the power play between gender and class. Towards the end, when Stanley rapes her (made evident through connotations), the hyper-masculine force overpowers the class bias. It is not out of lust but from a position of power attainment that Stanley rapes Blanche .

Stanley's animalistic behaviour is made evident throughout the play. Even in his relationship with his wife, the animalistic tendencies exist - so much so that it even draws Stella along with it. Stella, who is otherwise a person who seeks the best in people, is very warm and welcoming, cannot resist her husband, despite his bad behaviour. It is important to mention Stella and Eunice's hysteria here as well. The fights between them and their respective husbands are hysterical, to say the least. But in the end, they forgive their husbands no matter what they do. Even though she is pregnant, Stanley beats Stella when she defends Blanche. However, they make up when Stanley cries and apologizes .

"Yes, you are, Blanche. I know how it must have seemed to you and I'm awful sorry it had to happen, \but it wasn't anything as serious as you seem to take it. In the• first place, when men are drinking and playing poker anything can happen. It's always a powder-keg. He didn't know what he was doing. He was as good as a lamb when I came back and he's very, very ashamed of himself." (Williams T. , 2004, p. 72)

A similar toxic pattern is also seen in Eunice and her husband, who fight like dogs but make up in the next moment. These disclose the hysterical moments apart from the tagged hysteric - Blanche. This goes on to establish the political roots of hysteria - a personal phenomenon of political effect .

Loss in The Crucible and A Streetcar Named Desire

In both, The Crucible and A Streetcar Named Desire, loss plays a huge role. The sentiments of a post-war world are carried in the subtext of both the plays, where the loss, although personal, is caused by a public effect. Where people are not just individuals but collective identities of their socio-political positioning .

In The Crucible, the presence of the puritan state directly in the scenario makes it easier to understand the mechanism of the state and how it affects personal loss. In this play, the attitude of the state towards its belief in protecting its constitution is understood. The state that is represented by biased people does its best to protect its power position. This is well understood when John Proctor tells Reverend Parris the

truth about Abigail's curse on his wife. But the Reverend refuses to believe him and instead shifts the blame on him. This is simply because if everyone came to know that Abigail and Parris' daughter Betty was involved in witchcraft, it would bring the Reverend shame and challenge his power as a representative of God. "I pray you, leap not to witchcraft. I know that you, you least of all, Thomas, would ever wish so disastrous a charge laid upon me. We cannot leap to witchcraft. They will howl me out of Salem for such corruption in my house," Parris says. (Miller, The Crucibles, 1953, p. 234)

This abandonment from the trusted state triggers Proctor, who cannot believe that his truth has no value in a so-called perfect system. Eventually, he sees how wrecked the system is as he goes on to look at the establishment with skepticism.

"A fire, a fire is burning! I hear the boot of Lucifer; I see his filthy face. And it is my face and yours, Dan forth. For them that quail now when you know in all your black hearts that this is fraud. God damns our kind especially, and we will burn, we will burn together!" (Miller, Arthur Miller's The Crucible, 1998, p. 96)

Thus, the loss in The Crucible is created out of hysteria for power, ignorance, and fear of Satan. These social hands that are creating changes in personal lives are more evident in The Crucible. In A Streetcar Named Desire, these institutional forces are made invisible. They exist only in subtext. The fallen agency of Blanche, Stella's hysterical 'love' for her husband, and Stanley's hyper-masculine embodiment. Stanley, a working-class man, is constantly threatened by Blanche, whom he believes has more class power than him .

"Look at these feathers and furs that she come here to preen herself in! What's this here? A solid-gold dress, I believe! And this one! What are these here? Fox-pieces! [He blows on them] Genuine fox fur-pieces, a half a mile long! Where • are your fox-pieces, Stella? Bushy snow-white ones, no less! Where are your white fox-pieces?" (Williams T. , 2004, p. 34)

He thinks Blanche is going to rob Stella of her inheritance. He constantly fills Stella's mind with gibberish about her sister. That is why he is always trying to assert his power over her .

Although Stella stands her ground and supports her sister for most of the play, in the end, her normalized hysteria in the garb of her love for her husband stops her from standing by her sister. Blanche, a victim of collective shaming, becomes deranged in thought. She has lost more than she gained. Her drinking problem is a symbol of how things are wrong with her, although she pretends all is fine. This is made clear in the play when she says,

“Just water, baby. to chase it. Now don't get worried, your sister hasn't turned into a drunkard, she's just all shaken up and hot and tired and dirty! You sit down, now, and explain this place to me! What are you doing in a place like this?” (Williams T. , 2004, p. 12)

Her promiscuous character is used as an excuse to snatch away her agency. Although it is Stanley who directly challenges her agency, all the other characters, including the invisible forces of society, are also contributing to it .

In A Streetcar Named Desire, Tennessee Williams used class politics versus gender politics to enhance the effects of institutional reinforcement. Everybody is driven by desire and in the process of doing so, it drives them into hysteria. This then contributes to their respective losses. Lee Bonn puts it well, as he writes in the 19th century,

It will be remarked that among the special characteristics of crowds, there are several – such as impulsiveness , irritability, incapacity to reason, the absence of judgments and of the critical spirit, the exaggeration of the sentiments , and others besides – which are almost always observed in beings belonging to inferior forms of evolution – women , savages, and children for example. (Bon, 2012, p. ii)

This summarizes the emotional arch in both the plays in question here. Mass hysteria driven by a particular incident or emotional trigger evokes a collective conscience that drives people to do things without reason .

Conclusion

As a result, a critical examination of the texts - The Crucible and A Streetcar Named Desire- shows how various establishments work - sometimes even together (like in a Puritan state, political and religious institutions work together) to control people's minds. When that becomes uncontrolled, people get driven into hysterical fantasies and commit to actions that are estranged from reason. In forcing minds to function in rigid

dichotomies, it tries to manipulate the mass conscience, resulting in personal loss. Moreover, the norms are always set by the upper class. Therefore, the importance of social positioning in forming the normative thought process is undeniable - further established by a critical study of the two texts .

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