
PSYCHOLOGICAL DEPTH OF CHILD CHARACTERS IN CONTEMPORARY ENGLISH DRAMA.

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Annotation

This article explores the psychological depth of child characters in contemporary English drama, tracing their evolution from the mid-20th century to the present. Initially characterized by the rebellious tones of the "Angry Young Men" in the 1950s, child characters in British drama have progressively become central figures reflecting societal issues and the psychological impacts of trauma. The study highlights significant works by playwrights such as John Osborne, Edward Bond, Sarah Daniels, and Claire Dowie, examining how these characters serve not only as narrative catalysts but also as mirrors to societal ills and vehicles for exploring deep psychological themes. The article discusses how psychoanalytic theory and societal changes influence the depiction of these young characters, portraying them as complex individuals shaped by their environments. By focusing on plays that address themes of abuse, oppression, and identity, the article illustrates the changing societal attitudes towards children and adolescents, emphasizing the role of theatre as a medium for social reflection and change.

Keywords

English Drama, Child Characters, Psychological Depth, Psychoanalytic Theory, Societal Reflection, Contemporary Theatre, Narrative Evolution, Child Trauma

ПСИХОЛОГИЧЕСКАЯ ГЛУБИНА ДЕТСКИХ ПЕРСОНАЖЕЙ В СОВРЕМЕННОЙ АНГЛИЙСКОЙ ДРАМЕ.

Annotation

This article delves into the psychological intricacies of child characters in contemporary English drama, tracing their development from the mid-20th century to the present day. Initially marked by the rebellious ethos of the "Angry Young Men" in the 1950s, child characters in British drama have increasingly emerged as central figures, reflecting societal concerns and the psychological aftermath of trauma. The study examines noteworthy works by playwrights like John Osborne, Edward Bond, Sarah Daniels, and Claire Dowie, exploring how these characters not only drive the narrative but also serve as mirrors reflecting societal issues and conduits for exploring profound psychological themes. The article investigates how psychoanalytic theory and shifts in society influence the portrayal of these young characters, presenting them as multifaceted individuals shaped by their surroundings. By focusing on plays that tackle themes of abuse, oppression, and identity, the article illustrates the evolving societal perceptions of children and adolescents, underlining the role of theater as a platform for societal introspection and transformation.

Keywords

English Drama, Child Characters, Psychological Complexity, Psychoanalytic Theory, Societal Reflection, Contemporary Theater, Narrative Development, Child Trauma

ZAMONAVIY INGLIZ DRAMASIDA BOLALAR QAHRAMONLARINING PSIXOLOGIK CHUQURLIGI.

Annotatsiya

Ushbu maqola zamonaviy ingliz dramasiidagi bolalar qahramonlarining 20-asr o'rtalaridan hozirgi kungacha rivojlanishini kuzatib, psixologik nozikliklarini o'rganadi. Dastlab 1950-yillarda "G'azablangan yigitlar" ning isyonkor odob-axloqi bilan ajralib turadigan Britaniya dramaturgiyasida bolalar qahramonlari tobora ko'proq ijtimoiy tashvishlar va travmadan keyingi psixologik oqibatlarni aks ettiruvchi markaziy shaxslar sifatida paydo bo'ldi. Tadqiqot Jon Osborn, Edvard Bond, Sara Deniels va Kler Doui kabi dramaturglarning e'tiborga molik asarlarini o'rganib, bu personajlar nafaqat hikoyani boshqaribgina qolmay, balki chuqur psixologik mavzularni o'rganish uchun ijtimoiy muammolarni aks ettiruvchi ko'zgu bo'lib xizmat qilishini o'rganadi. Maqolada psixoanalitik nazariya va jamiyatdagi siljishlar ushbu yosh personajlarning tasviriga qanday ta'sir qilishini o'rganib, ularni atrof-muhit tomonidan shakllantirilgan ko'p qirrali shaxslar sifatida taqdim etadi. Maqola zo'ravonlik, zulm va o'zlikni anglash mavzulariga bag'ishlangan spektakllarga e'tibor qaratgan holda, bolalar va o'smirlar haqidagi

rivojlanayotgan jamiyat tushunchalarini ko'rsatib, teatrning jamiyatni introspektsiya va o'zgarish platformasi sifatidagi rolini ta'kidlaydi.

Tayanch iboralar

Ingliz dramasi, bolalar qahramonlari, psixologik murakkablik, psixoanalitik nazariya, ijtimoiy aks ettirish, zamonaviy teatr, hikoya rivojlanishi, bolalar travmasi

Introduction. The exploration of child characters in contemporary English drama offers a profound window into the evolving landscape of societal attitudes and psychological complexities. From the mid-20th century onwards, British drama has undergone significant transformations, each period reflecting a distinct approach to character development and thematic focus. This shift was notably initiated during the 1950s with the rise of the "Angry Young Men," a group of playwrights who introduced a new wave of radical literary experiments. Spearheaded by John Osborne's "Look Back in Anger" (1956), this movement marked a pivotal moment in theatrical history, emphasizing the deep-seated frustrations and societal dissent prevalent among English youth.

As British theatre progressed into the latter half of the century, the focus expanded to include even younger demographics, exploring the nuanced realities of children and adolescents through the lens of social and political discourse. This period saw the emergence of plays that delved into the darker, often overlooked aspects of childhood, portraying young characters not just as passive recipients of adult narratives but as central figures experiencing and responding to the pressures of their environments.

The works of playwrights like Edward Bond and later Sarah Daniels in the 1980s highlight this shift towards a more critical examination of the impact of societal structures on youth. Bond's "Saved" (1965) employs a stark portrayal of violence and deprivation to comment on the broader societal malaise, while Daniels' plays such as "Masterpieces" (1983) and "Beside Herself" (1990) confront issues of gender oppression and psychological trauma, reflecting the ongoing struggles faced by young individuals.

By the turn of the millennium, the portrayal of child characters in English drama had become a vehicle for discussing broader themes of cruelty, oppression, and psychological trauma. These narratives often draw on psychoanalytic theory to provide insight into the characters' inner lives, illustrating how past traumas shape individual psyches and social interactions. As noted by contemporary scholars, there exists a "close connection between the development of 'naturalistic' or 'realistic' theatre and the development of psychoanalysis" [Dingwall-Jones 2014: 75],

suggesting that the evolution of drama mirrors advances in understanding human psychology.

This trend continues into the 21st century, with child characters often depicted as complex figures whose experiences highlight critical societal issues. These portrayals not only offer a reflection on the state of contemporary society but also challenge the audience to reconsider the role of youth in the narrative fabric of modern drama. As such, the psychological depth of child characters in contemporary English drama serves as a poignant commentary on the changing dynamics of human relationships and societal norms, providing a compelling narrative tool for exploring the intricate interplay between individual identity and collective cultural forces.

Materials and Methods

Selection of Dramatic Works

This study analyzes a curated collection of British plays spanning from the mid-20th century to the early 21st century, focusing on those that prominently feature child characters and explore themes relevant to youth and societal interactions. The selection includes seminal works by key playwrights such as John Osborne, Edward Bond, Sarah Daniels, and Claire Dowie, among others. Each play was chosen for its historical significance, thematic relevance, and its contribution to the evolution of character portrayal in British drama, particularly concerning psychological depth and societal critique.

Analytical Framework

The analytical approach of this study is rooted in both literary analysis and psychoanalytic theory. By integrating these methodologies, the research aims to uncover deeper psychological and social meanings embedded in the dramatic texts. The primary focus is on how child characters are represented and the broader implications these representations have on understanding societal attitudes towards youth and trauma.

Literary Analysis: This involves a close reading of the plays to examine narrative structure, character development, dialogue, and thematic elements. Special attention is given to how playwrights construct child characters and the roles these characters play within the narrative arcs.

Psychoanalytic Theory: Drawing from classic and contemporary psychoanalytic theories, this study explores the psychological motivations and behaviors of child characters, analyzing how their personal traumas and interactions reflect broader societal issues.

Data Collection

The primary data for this study consists of text extracts from the selected plays. These extracts are used to illustrate specific points of analysis regarding the portrayal of child characters and their psychological depth. Secondary sources include scholarly articles, books, and critiques that discuss the selected plays and their historical and cultural contexts, providing a comprehensive background that enriches the primary analysis.

Method of Analysis

The method of analysis involves a combination of qualitative content analysis and thematic analysis. This dual approach allows for a detailed examination of both the content and context of the plays:

Content Analysis: This focuses on the direct examination of speech, behavior, and interactions of child characters within the plays, identifying patterns and themes in how these elements are depicted.

Thematic Analysis: This involves identifying, analyzing, and reporting themes that emerge from the data, particularly those related to psychological and societal issues affecting child characters. Themes are compared and contrasted across different plays and eras to track the evolution of narrative strategies and thematic focuses.

Ethical Considerations

While this research primarily involves the analysis of published works and does not engage with human subjects directly, ethical considerations include the respectful and sensitive discussion of topics such as child abuse, trauma, and mental health issues, as depicted in the plays.

By employing these materials and methods, this study aims to contribute to the understanding of the psychological depth of child characters in contemporary English drama, offering insights into how these portrayals reflect and influence societal views on youth and development.

Results and discussion. In the mid-20th century, a seismic shift occurred in British drama with the emergence of the "Angry Young Men," a moniker coined by the press to describe a group of playwrights led by John Osborne. Their radical literary experiments introduced a new wave in the theatrical and literary landscapes of England, prominently during the 1950s. This group, initially brought into the limelight by Osborne's seminal work, "Look Back in Anger" (1956), encapsulated the sentiments of English youth of the era, characterized by a profound rejection of social norms.

These playwrights brought to the stage an array of young characters, representing a wide spectrum of ages, subcultures, intellectual backgrounds, and

social classes. The youth issue, highlighted by the "Angry Young Men," became a staple in British theatre for decades to follow, laying a fertile ground for subsequent generations of writers. These later authors continued to explore the themes of youth, extending their focus to even younger demographics such as children and adolescents. This evolution marked a significant chapter in the development of children and youth themes within the British drama of the 20th century.

The thematic exploration of children in British 20th century drama profoundly evolved with Edward Bond, a prominent figure of the "second wave" that followed the era of the "Angry Young Men." Bond's pivotal play from the 1960s, "Saved" (1965), delves into the destitution and marginal status of the youth and their offspring, burdened with the "weight of suffering for all humanity" [Solovieva 1982: 5]. In this work, Bond employs shocking methods as a discourse on pressing societal issues [Dotsenko 2005: 301], firmly establishing a linkage between the representation of children, political concerns, and the traditions of Theatre of Cruelty.

Bond's dramaturgy is characterized by an aesthetic of cruelty, which transcends the philosophical definition where cruelty connotes severity, uncompromising decisiveness, and absolute irreversible determinism, as per Antonin Artaud [Artaud 2000: 192–193]. Instead, Bond interprets cruelty and aggression in a literal sense, viewing them as inherent features of societal structure. In his essay "On Violence," he articulates that "cruelty is not an instinct to be perpetually suppressed as threatening civilized social relations; we are cruel because we are incapable of civilized relations" [Bond 1988: 12].

In "Saved," the protagonists are a gang of young delinquents living on society's fringes. Throughout the play, these characters exhibit an incapacity for civilized interactions, both within their own cohort and with other generations. Their inhumane treatment of a child and denial of his capacity to feel pain mirror the societal neglect of marginalized groups by the more prosperous layers of British society, symbolizing the adult world's indifference to the world of children. The infamous scene where a baby is beaten in "Saved" has been interpreted in various ways—from an ultra-realistic depiction of working-class life to an allegory [Dotsenko 2005: 301]. This scene epitomizes how children's issues are an extreme manifestation of broader societal problems.

The 1970s and 1980s marked a period of relative creative quietude in British drama, but the late 1980s witnessed a renewed surge in interest towards childhood and the portrayal of children. During this era, the child often emerged as a victim, with childhood depicted as a traumatic and painful phase of life. This perspective

was closely linked to the increased public awareness of societal issues previously discussed in hushed tones, especially those concerning domestic violence and sexual crimes against women and children. Elaine Aston notes that from the 1970s, "issues of child sexual abuse, alongside domestic violence, were brought into public view by women's groups fighting to raise awareness and knowledge" [Aston 2000: 38]. In the 1980s, the UK saw a proliferation of social projects aimed at preventing child abuse.

Literature, as a reflection of societal consciousness, artistically grapples with these social realities. The Thatcher era, with its educational reforms and youth protest movements, represented a significant phase in the transformation of the child archetype in English literature. The crisis of the 1980s English society is often analyzed through child characters [Shanina 2014: 76], who are prominently featured in various genres, from quirky teenage protagonists to suffering children, reflecting the issues of the youth [Fedotova 2003: 3].

Similar trends are observed in drama, where authors of the 1980s frequently explored the psychology of cruelty directed at children. Although the range of child character typologies expanded significantly in prose from the 1960s through the 1980s, as seen in the works of E. Pfeifer "Demon or Doll: Images of Children in Contemporary Writing and Culture," A.G. Nenilina "Stephen King and the Problem of Childhood in Anglo-American Literary Tradition," and L.V. Fedotova "The Image of the Teenager in English, American, and Russian Literature (Second Half of the 20th Century)," drama often limited children's roles. This limitation is tied to the dramatic text structure, which is typically retrospective and focuses on adult characters' recollections and self-analysis, often tracing the source of conflict to painful childhood experiences.

The theme of lost childhood is most poignantly articulated in the plays of the 1980s by Sarah Daniels, who not only opposed male dominance in the family but also fought against pornography and prostitution as the most apparent spheres of oppression against women. Daniels' protest against trafficking of teenagers, and violence towards girls and women, is vividly encapsulated in the play "Masterpieces" (1983) and the drama "The Devil's Gateway" (1983). In her subsequent work "Beside Herself" (1990), Daniels examines the interrelation between sexual violence a girl endured within her family and her mental distress in adulthood, "not only does Daniels bring to the forefront the story of a woman grappling with an incestuous past and her journey towards recovery, she introduces an added narrative of a girl raped by her stepfather and her mother's subsequent alienation, <...> another frank narrative about child mistreatment. <...>

These stories combine to form three distinct perspectives – historical, social, and personal" [Bakker 1996: 143]. In the final decade of the 20th century, Daniels continued to address the theme of child maltreatment in "The Madness of Esme and Shaz" (1994). The playwright views child abuse as one of the manifestations of oppression by the dominant group, which traditionally includes women and children.

Another poignant example of playwrights' endeavors to instill a confessional voice within a child character can be seen in Claire Dowie's monodrama "Adult Child / Dead Child" (1987). In this piece, the adult protagonist, who has suffered under the excessive expectations of his parents, struggled with his own childlike tendencies, and matured into psychological instability, recounts the journey of his own growth.

Authors of social dramas about children from the 1960s to the 1980s invariably conclude that an adult character's rejection of another child character or of their own child-self represents variations on the theme of longing for a damaged own childhood, as "according to classic psychoanalytic theory <...> depression, like mourning, conceals aggressiveness towards the lost object" [Kristeva 2010: 17]. By invoking images of children or mentioning them, playwrights explore the causes and effects of systemic social cruelty, revealing how an adult character's deviant behavior and mental illnesses are dependent on the traumatic experiences endured in childhood, thus highlighting "the close connection between the development of 'naturalistic' or 'realistic' theatre <...> and the development of psychoanalysis" [Dingwall-Jones 2014: 75]. This becomes a distinctive feature in the depiction and theatricalization of the sensational behavior of young characters, child characters, and adolescent characters in British drama at the turn of the millennium and in 21st-century drama.

Conclusions. The evolution of child characters in contemporary English drama reflects the socio-political contexts of their times, transitioning from peripheral symbols to central, psychologically complex figures. From the 1950s' "Angry Young Men" to the stark realities in Edward Bond's works, these characters mirror societal ills and deepen narrative themes. Plays by Sarah Daniels and Claire Dowie particularly highlight this shift, focusing on the psychological impacts of childhood trauma and societal neglect.

This trend aligns with psychoanalytic influences on literature, showing a growing interest in the intricacies of human psychology. Dramas now often tackle themes of abuse and oppression through child characters, pushing audiences to consider the effects of societal structures on individual development.

In summary, child characters in modern English drama offer critical insights into the human condition, reflecting shifts in societal attitudes towards youth and emphasizing the role of theatre in social commentary and change. This study highlights the importance of these portrayals in understanding both drama and its broader societal implications.