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Unaffectionate Fathers in American Literature: A Comparative Study of the Characters of Ephraim Cabot and Dr. Adler

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Abstract

In the study of American literature, the social reality is reflected; the influence of capitalism is seen with its full might. Individualism and capitalism claimed to be movable factors that influence the direction of human attitude as they are pursuing materialistic goals for self-fulfilment. The severity that is found in the construction of the families is portrayed in the literary works. Saul Bellow's *Seize the Day* and O'Neill's *Desire Under the Elms* have depicted father characters obsessed with their material possession and always obsessed with the fear of losing capital in the long run. These depictions of fathers' figures are the opposite of the image of fathers that we have in our minds. Here, the fathers are not afraid of their sons for being tyrannical, imbalanced and ill-mannered individuals but are reluctant to treat them even as successors. They are in fear of being claimed financial support or the property by their sons. They consider their sons' rivals and chased them away because they failed to fulfil the fathers' roles as expected. This paper analyses and examines the reason behind the behavioural changes and the forces that shape the characters' natural conduct.

Keywords: Materialistic, Filial, Capitalistic, Social, Attitude

Introduction

Human relationship, as we know, is the most vital thing that contributes to building up civilization; the exceptions on earth made by them are believed to be the result of this bonding. Human history is full of the chronicle of this affection; it is motivation and love on which they are sustained and succeeded in nature and other species. Motherly love and fatherly responsibility make millions of successful men who contribute to the world at different times. The need for family and familial affection is undoubtedly an agent to make the world of human flourishing. American literature exposes one significant social problem as a reflection of contemporary society; the disintegration family. The American family consist of the individuals from multicultural background resulting from a cross-cultural

conjuality. Generally, the family members do not belong to the same social and cultural inheritance, which hinders the 'we feeling'. Thus the family members experience little attachment among them.

Furthermore, the high pursuance of material goal among the family members creates a sublime distance. Everyday social interactions, bonding with neighbours, empathy is not visible; fathers do not love; instead, they attempt to deprive their sons physically and spiritually. The sons are thought only snatchers of their property; they are in fear of losing the property to their sons! Love, guidance, good advice and empathy these words are not in the fathers' vocabulary. The excellent textual pieces of evidence are found, which reflects the social reality of modern America, where the economic nature of a region shapes the personality of the individuals. This study compares and contrasts two father figures selected from two different genres and settings in modern America. The character of Ephraim Cabot, the main character in Eugene O'Neill's *Desire Under the Elms* (1925) and Dr. Adler, the father figure in Saul Bellow's *Seize the Day* (1925). Both of the authors depict a typical father character of American materialistic society. There are so many resemblances in both characters are portrayed that it may be misunderstood that they come from the same author. The representation of the father characters shows a parallel mindset which is, perhaps, generated in the same social setting.

In the play *Desire Under the Elms* 1925, Ephraim Cabot is a 17th century New Englander, puritan, stubborn, materialistic and unaffectionately self-righteous father. He is the epitome of cruel paternity. Cabot owns a huge farm and unconsciously always in fear of losing his self-made fortune to his sons—his own flesh and blood. To others, it seems natural that his sons will inherit the farm after his death, but Cabot, as if he would never be dead, did not believe in the concept of inheritance and determines to keep his lots. After marrying a 35 years old, healthy and attractive young woman, Abbie Putnam, his action of marrying another woman indicates that his refusal to give away his farms to the sons. This incident causes further breaches and fissures between the father and his sons. Being frustrated, the two elder brothers decided to leave for California in reaction to their uncertainty of inheriting the ancestral farm and for the shake of financial security in the future. The brotherly relation is portrayed by scorn, envy and materialistic intrigue rather than loving affectionate relation. Among the three sons, Eben is the youngest, resourceful and vengeful, defiant individual who shows his disgusts toward his father's maltreatment to his siblings, including his dead mother. Eben is convinced that excessive labor work along with long working hours on the farm was the cause of her untimely death. The blame points to Ephraim, the self-righteous father who creates misery for his loving mother. By going advance into the play, the audience learns that there was no familial love or bonding between the mother and Ephraim. The mother is the owner of the farm but being treated as a mere despicable slave. After the death of 'Maw', the ownership of the farm is transferred to Ephraim. Thus Eben starts suspecting him of leading his mother to death by forcing her to excessive labour, considered a sort of human trafficking.

Eben is always searching for an opportunity to take avenge on his biological father, and after the arrival of Abbie, it has become easier. But the thing is not happening according to his plan. Rather it is sensuous Abbie who is awfully attracted to the youth of Eben to seduce him. Abbie's plan was to get a child who would be the owner of the ancestral farm, and she was conceived by Eben, but ironically she gets a crush on Eben. Abbie's son

was born, Ephraim, misunderstood it as his own and threw a party on it. Eben was in disgust to Abbie as he is feeling cheated by her; Abbie is in fear of losing Eben. Thus, things have become complicated. Abbie commits infanticide, Eben calls Sheriff, and Ephraim is in great awe and shock. Sooner, Eben has realized the real love of Abbie and makes a false confession of being guilty. Finally, the Sheriff arrests both of them, and Ephraim is in alienation all over again. The plot of the play is a reflection of pre-modern American materialistic society as well as a disintegration family. (Abedin & Muhammad, 2019)

Bellow expresses the condition of Wilhelm from the beginning to the present. The narration draws the reader into the flow of the story. Wilhelm's father, Dr Adler, is a successful physician, whereas Wilhelm is the contrary of his father, who faces unfortunate luck in all jobs that he touches. His father disowned him for fear of losing his wealth; his property marks the symbol of success in modern society. Dr Adler's philosophy views everyone either as a beggar or a mugger to him. So material wealth disintegrates him from the warmth of any relationship possible. The story of that particular day also conveys another wrong decision Wilhelm made where he supposes to be cheated. He bought trading lard with his last \$700; against the will of his father. His failure starts 20 years ago while he arrived in Hollywood wanted to be a hero. He married a woman who considers Wilhelm an automatic teller machine. The decision of marrying Margaret was a big mistake. When Wilhelm realizes that he was fooled by Dr Tamkin, his father, Dr Adler, assumes his son seeking his help for money after being cheated by someone. Wilhelm went out seeking his fatherly sympathy and mental asylum, but it was refused (Abedin & Muhammad, 2019).

Problem Statement

In American literature, unaffectionate characters are found frequently, which is evident in the portrayal of characters. As a reflection of contemporary society, the writers are not intended to avoid the social reality. America, as a pioneer in capitalism, the economic nature of a country moderates the behaviour of the individuals. As a replication of real man in society, the characters of American literature are found influenced by capitalist and materialistic drifts. Success only means material gain, the thirst for money and property is very much usual than the affection to family members. The characters Dr Adler and Ephraim Cabot are American white males who are believed to be a dominating portion of the politics and economy of the country. Both of them are property owners, successful in the American context, tyrannical and unaffectionate to their family members. They are the sign of American capitalism where every person is useless unless he is rich in material perspective. These two father characters are very much reluctant to their sons that they are unwilling to have the presence of their sons. The sons are not 'successful' to them. Dr Adler is not helping his son financially and even not accepting him in a cordial manner. On the other hand, Ephraim is found in a hostile relationship with his sons. This study may try to understand the dynamics of the individuals' attitude influenced by the American social perspective, which is reflected in the mentioned literary works.

This paper involves the reflection of American society in its literature—the reasons for finding unaffectionate fathers here. The work of O'Neill and Bellow may provide textual evidence of the reason. American fathers, Dr Adler and Ephraim Cabot, resemble

in their approaches. The characters reflect the influence of society which create a materialistic mindset, drives them to treat their family members in such a manner.

Bowen's theory of life forces will be included in this study.

Research Questions

There are two research questions of the study:

- What is the resemblance between the personalities of 'American fathers have in the selected works according to Bowen's concept of life forces?
- To what extent the filial relationship is influenced by the materialistic attitude of the family members is depicted in the selected works?
- In what context both characters are also dissimilar from each other?

Purpose of the Study

This study focuses on the essence of the filial relationship portrayed in these two texts, which may unveil the dynamic father figure similarities. The social factors will be found out which is liable to shape a similar personality. The relation between capitalism and materialistic drift will be found out accordingly. As a whole, the paper would like to study the relation between the economic nature of the country and the effect it on human behaviour. The study may try to prove; as a reflection of society, American literature has reflected the contemporary social context and explain the drift of them with textual evidence in an inventive manner.

Research Methods

The method of the research is firstly the close reading of the novel and the drama. The textual analysis will be utilized to analyze the characters' psyche, plot, setting, theme, and the symbol of material wealth. The portrayal of the materialistic society and the characters will be examined thematically to provide answers for the research questions identified earlier. Bowen's theory of life forces is enrolled to examine the actions of the father characters in the context of capitalistic society.

Findings

1. The resemblance of American fathers

Our study has found Dr Adler and Ephraim Cabot have similar traits in their personality and treatment to the family members; they resemble unaffectionate and stubborn attitude to their family, rude in words and actions, consider material gain as a success only, humane value and bonding are less important to them. However, the selected literary works are different in genre but similar in the regional ground, modern America, which may contain the same ground to shape the character. The characters are depicted in the context of modern capitalist America that shapes the materialistic characters as the American dream makes them pursue employment for every person and to be the owner of the property: "The American Dream is the ideal that the government should protect each person's opportunity to pursue their own idea of happiness" (Amadeo, 2013). They value the property the man owns, and social treatment would be justified in this matter. The fathers are the symbol of this materialistic attitude, and their treatment of the families are

no longer different from that of society. At first, Dr Adler and Ephraim Cabot may be examined, and the similarity is to be analyzed.

Dr Adler is seen only advising his son Tommy when he is in need of money badly to establish himself. Though his father helped him once, he is reluctant to help him more. Still, Tommy is in search of mental attachment and cordial consolation; his father is unwilling to provide the mental support:

You have some purpose of your own, said the doctor. In acting so unreasonable. What do you want from me? What do you expect? What do I expect? Said, Wilhelm. He felt as though he, were unable to recover something. Like a ball in the surf, washed beyond reach, his self-control was going out. 'I expect help! Wilhelm's hair, the color of whitened honey rose dense and tall with the expansion of his face, and he said. When I suffer - you aren't even sorry. That's because you have no affection for me, and you don't want any part of me. (Bellow)

As it seems Adler is well aware of the emotional need and urge of his son, still he is avoiding him because he may have to spend some money on his son. This fear let him keep a safe distance from his sons. His father advises him to take some pills to remove this anxiety:

No, Dad, it's not the pills, it's that I'm not used to New York anymore. For a native, that's very peculiar, isn't it? It was never so noisy at night as now, and every little thing is a strain. Like the alternate parking. You have to run out at eight to move your car. And where can you put it if you forget for a minute, they tow you away. Then some fool puts advertising leaflets under your windshield wiper and you have heart failure a block away because you think you've got a ticket when you do get stung with a ticket, you can't argue. You haven't got a chance in court and the city wants the revenue. (Bellow)

Tommy is found craving for love and empathy while his father is failed to provide it. He is missing country life, and the city is too burdensome on him; it happens not because the city people are entirely hostile to him, it is because his father is not empathetic to him: "Dad, I can't take city life anymore, and I miss the country. There is too much push here for me. It works me up too much. I take things too hard. I wonder why you never retired to a quieter place." (Bellow)

As an American Father, Dr Adler believes in self-reliance in the case of carrier pursuance. But in his attitude, there is a lack of humane feelings, which is very much expected in a filial relationship. Dr Adler must have some expectations for his son Tommy, but that unfulfilling Desire ashamed him a lot to society: "Tommy says: 'But what of the truth? Ah, the truth was that there were problems, and of these problems, his father wanted no part. His father was ashamed of him. The truth, Wilhelm thought was very awkward'." (Bellow)

Unlike Dr Adler, Ephraim Cabot is a character of O'Neill's Play, but both of them are exposing the same characteristics as a father figure. The social context of America is claimed to be liable to shape their personality. Ephraim is always in fear of losing his property which is quite unnatural to established custom & legacy of property, but his indomitable greed for the property diminishes the personality of a caring father that he

couldn't realize. His fails to realize the legacy of ancestral property that this son will be the natural benefactor of his property. For financial insecurity and an unfavourable father, two of his sons left him heading to California at the time of the gold rush.

CABOT~(edging away) Lust fur gold~fur the sinful, easy gold o' Californi-a! It's made ye mad!

SIMEON~(tauntingly) Wouldn't ye like us to send ye back some sinful gold, ye old sinner? (O'Neill, 1925, 1.4).

The third son is not leaving him to get the revenge of his mother suspecting his father is accountable for it.

PETER~(after a pause-judicially) She was the good event' him.

EBEN~(fiercely) An' fur thanks he killed her! (O'Neill, 1925, 1.2).

Eben, as a son, of course, supposed to seek mental asylum from his father; however, he is altered into a hater of Ephraim because of his father's arrogance, greed and stubbornness. Here Eben is expressing his disgust to his father:

EBEN~(very pale) I meant-I hain'this'n-I hain't like him~he hain't me! (O'Neill, 1925, 1.2)

The sons of Ephraim think they are trapped in this house, which is surrounded by a stone wall; ironically, it is made by them. They are feeling caged in these stone walls:

PETER~(with sardonic bitterness) Here-it's stones atop o' the ground~stones atop o' stones~makin' stone walls~year atop o' year~him 'n' yew 'n' me 'n' then Eben~makin' stone walls fur him to fence us in!" (O'Neill, 1925, 1.1)

Eben's mother was the second wife of Ephraim, who was exploited by him. He put her in excessive labour without pity. There is no evidence of affectionate relation or even a normal conjugal love between him and Eben's mother. Eben has been suspecting Ephraim to be a killer of his mother as he forced him to unbearable labour:

EBEN~Didn't he slave Maw t' death?

PETER~He's slaved himself t' death. He's slaved Sim' n' me 'n' yew t' death~on'y none o' us hain't died~yit. (O'Neill, 1925, 1.2)

A lustful and possessive side of Ephraim's is revealed when he marries Abbie, a comparatively young woman to him. Ephraim's sons are adult, and they are about to be the owner of the farm. At this moment, the third marriage of Ephraim was unwelcomed by his sons. They are suspecting the lady would be the owner of the farm now:

PETER~(after a pause) Everythin'll go t' her now (O'Neill, 1925, 1.3).

The new wife of Ephraim is not even fond of him. She has married Ephraim only for the property. It seems his personality is no longer attracted his new wife:

ABBIE~(with a cool laugh of confidence) Yewr'n? We'll see 'bout that! (then strongly) Waal~what if I did need a hum? What else'd I marry an old man like him fur? (O'Neill, 1925, 1.4)

Still having a young wife in bed, Ephraim is going to the barn to pass the night with cows as he thinks cows are better than people, which indicates even his family members. This American father is not with his sons, not with his newly married wife, not belongs to a family emotionally. This estrangement alienates him from his family:

CABOT-(*queerly*) Down whar it's restful-whar it's warm-down t' the barn. (*bitterly*) I kin talk t' the cows. They know. They know the farm an' me. They'll give me peace" (O'Neill, 1925, 2.2).

Abbie is so disgustful to Ephraim that she is involved in incest with her stepson Eben and later, a baby is born. Abbie killed this infant, and she is questioned by Ephraim. Now she is answering:

ABBIE: ... What right hev yet' question me 'bout him? He wa'n'tyewr son! Think I'd have a son by yew? I'd die fust! I hate the sight o' ye an' allusdid! It's yew I should've murdered, if I'd had good sense! I hate ye! I love Eben. I did from the fust. An' he was Eben's son-mine an' Eben's-not your'n!" (O'Neill, 1925, 3.4)

Ephraim Cabot is well confident of his stubbornness, his perfection, his loyalty to God. He justifies everything by his puritan values. He has not perceived the stubbornness and faulty personality while his wife is exposed as an adulterer. He is blaming only Eben and Abbie:

CABOT-(*stares at them, his face hard. A long pause~vindictively*) Ye make a slick pair o' murderin' turtle doves! Ye'd ought t' be both hung on the same limb an' left thar t' swing in the breeze an' rot-a warnin' t' old fools like me t' b'ar their lonesomeness alone-an' fur young fools like ye t' hobble their lust" (O'Neill, 1925, 3.4).

Ephraim is abandoned by his two sons earlier. Later on, his misbehave, stubbornness, greed, unaffectionate treatment of family lead him to a forever lonesomeness. But he is in his pseudo perfection of puritanism and justifies his estrangement comparing with God's loneliness:

CABOT-Waal-what d'ye want? God's lonesome, hain't He? God's hard an' lonesome!" (O'Neill, 1925, 3.4).

2. The reasons for generating adversities

American fathers are found similar in various perspective, which is revealed in the previous discussion. The authors from different backgrounds and genres but in the same social context revealed that the individual's personality is shaped by the social setup of capitalistic America. These fathers are to be alienated from the family members for the unmatched values, the difference in expectations and life events: "

Familial estrangement between parents and adult children is attributed to a number of biological, psychological, social, and structural factors affecting the family, including attachment disorders, incompatible values and beliefs, unfulfilled expectations, critical life events and transitions, parental alienation, and ineffective communication patterns" (Agllias, 2017).

Now it may be discussed that in what context of society Adler like fathers, is generated. A capitalist society where everything is to be sold or to be bought. Materialistic attitude leads human to deviate from humane values, and man is not here for each other. The novelist has exemplified sharing a glass of water is an unpracticed charity here:

That sick Mr. Perls at breakfast had said that there was no easy way to tell the sane from the mad, and he was right about that in any big city and especially in New York- the end of the world, with its complexity and machinery, bricks and tubes, wire and stones, holes and heights, and was everybody crazy here? What sort of people did you see? Every other man spoke a language entirely his own, which he had figured out by private thinking, He had his own idea and peculiar ways. If you wanted to talk about a glass of water, you had to start back with God creating the heavens and earth, the apple; Abraham, Moses, and Jesus, ... after reviewing this and getting it all straight again you could proceed to talk about a glass of water. (p. 89-90)

Urbanization is claimed to be a reason for shaping human attitude. In the novel of Saul Bellow, the portrayal of New York City is the evidence of it which is shown earlier. Even both of them depict the disintegration of modern man's life:

The role of urbanization and world wars cannot be ignored in this regard because they make life complicated and hard to cope with. Consequently, the writers flouted the traditional literary strategies of narrative and characterization to flaunt the disintegration of modern man's life. Concerning the impact of urbanization, the following excerpt can visualize the pessimistic viewpoints (Hooti&Omriani p.260).

America, a land of immigrants who come here to pursue material success and this thing are very much common to all citizens, unlike the other regions of the world. This region only values the things or relation which is considered useful: "Americans value those things they consider "useful". Business and natural sciences are seen as more valuable than the humanities and social science" (Farley, 1992). The fathers shamelessly exhibit lust for materialism that deviates them from the loving and cordial personality to self-centric, stubborn and egotistic one; they don't know the actual meaning of life. Here is a comment on O'Neill's *Desire Under the Elms* 1925: "The playwright must dig at the roots of sickness today as he feels it...the death of the old God, the failure of science, and materialism to give any satisfying new one for the surviving primitive religious instinct to find meaning for life.17 (Carpenter, 2008).

Conclusion

In American literature, still belonging to different genres, those are reflecting a social reality through the characters. Dr Adler and Ephraim Cabot are portrayed in a modern American context; one is from the novel, another is from the text of the play; one is in the urban context, and the other one is from rural still both of them resemble in a character who is suffering from estrangement. Their attitude, action, works are stubborn and sometimes tyrannical to their family members. They are confident of their personal perfection and similar in misjudging their families. Still suffering, they are not empathetic to others even failed to generate sympathy for others. Dr Adler is ashamed of his son Wilhelm, and Cabot hates his sons for not being like him. They are greedy and possessive, who are afraid of losing their property to the sons of them. They want to possess and

consume the property even after death. Both of them are the cause of ruining their families. The words are on Cabot but still applicable to Adler: "Rather than placing the emphasis in Man's lot in the universe. O'Neill introduces in *Desire Under the Elms* a picture of a rural family dismantled by greedy desires of possession." (Bogard, 1988).

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