

دمج السرد القصصي بالأداء المسرحي: دراسة لوجهات النظر المضطربة  
والمتناقضة بمسرحية والاس شون: *إعنة دان وليمون*.

ملخص

ميز والاس شون Wallace Shawn نفسه ككاتب مسرحي مشهور في العقود القليلة الماضية بتاريخ ثرى من الكتابة والتمثيل، وقد أثارت مسرحيته العمة دان وليمون (١٩٨٥) كثيرا من القلق و الاستفزاز بلهجتها المثيرة وجوها المزعج، حيث تناولتها أقلام النقاد وجمهور المشاهدين - على نطاق واسع - بالسخط و عدم الاقتناع، فلم يكن استقبالها أو تفسير ما جاء بها من أحداث مرضيا أو مشجعا بسبب القضايا التي تعالجها بمنتهى الصراحة. وعلى الرغم من أن المسرحية قد نالت مساحة كبيرة في البحث والدراسات النقدية، فإن معظم هذه الدراسات لم تتطرق بالفحص الدقيق لبنيتها الدرامية التي تقوم أساسا على دمج السرد القصصي بالأداء المسرحي. ولذلك، تركز هذه الدراسة على منظورات السرد في محاولة لتقديم تفسير أكثر منطقية ومبررة للاضطراب و التناقض في وجهات النظر السائدة في المسرحية. كما تبين مهارة الكاتب وخبراته الدرامية الملحوظة لاسيما في هيكله الحبكة الدرامية المبنية على سرد ذكريات الماضي من خلال الأداء المسرحي لما يجول لخطيا بذاكرة البطلة ليمون. ومن هذا العرض تتضح السمات المهمة للمسرحية من حيث استفزازها لجمهور المشاهدين و ذلك بعرضها شخصيات مضطربة فتظهر البطلة الدرامية و هي الراوية الرئيسية كما هو الحال مع معظم الشخصيات الأخرى حيث يظهرون، من خيال البطلة ليمون للمشاركة في صنع المشاهد على خشبة المسرح، مضطربى العقول ومتناقضى الرؤى.

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**Notes**

<sup>1</sup> The terms: 'memoirs,' and 'interior monologues' have been frequently used in the criticism of stream of consciousness novels. Perhaps it was Robert Humphrey who first devoted himself leisurely to explain their definitions and use in a narrative. Of these definitions, Humphrey quotes Edouard Dujardin who defines the interior monologue as "the speech of a character in a scene, having for its object to introduce us directly into the interior life of that character, without author intervention through explanations or commentaries; . . . it differs from traditional monologue in that: in its matter, it is an expression of the most intimate thought that lies nearest the unconscious; in its form, it is produced in direct phrases reduced to the minimum of syntax. For more details about the term and its applications, see Robert Humphrey, *Stream of Consciousness in the Modern Novel* (University of California Press, Ltd., 1954), 23-30.

<sup>2</sup> The Russian Doll is one of the most famous national souvenirs that any visitor will not miss to take. It is made of wood and carved and colored in the shape of a bride. It is hollow from the inside so that a smaller one with the same shape and colors can be stored and the same is to be repeated several times. So, when you get a Matrioshka (its Russian name) expect to open and get out several smaller and smaller ones from its inside.

<sup>3</sup> Treblinka, established in 1941 as a forced labor camp for those accused of crimes by the occupation authorities was located 50 miles northeast of Warsaw, Poland. Within a year of opening what would be referred to as Treblinka I, a second camp was built that would become a critical link in the Third Reich's plan to exterminate the Jewish people. Treblinka II, constructed using German firms, Polish prisoners and Jews, would serve as an elimination center for the Jews of central Europe. Only a mile away from the original camp, this new section would become one of the main extermination centers of the Nazi regime. For more details, see: <<http://www.jewishgen.org/ForgottenCamps/Camps/TreblinkaEng.html>>(Accessed 18 April 2011).

<sup>4</sup> Wallace Shawn, "*Aunt Dan and Lemon*," in *The Broadview Anthology of Drama: Plays From the Western Theatre*, ed. Jennifer Wise and Craig S. Walker (Ontario and New York: Broadview Press, 2005), 563. All subsequent references are to this edition and indicated in parentheses.

<sup>5</sup> Anorexia "is one type of eating disorder. More importantly, it is also a psychological disorder. Anorexia is a condition that goes beyond out-of-control dieting . . . . This cycle becomes an obsession and, in this way, is similar to any type of addiction." for more details see MedicineNet.com: <[http://www.medicinenet.com/anorexia\\_nervosa/article.htm](http://www.medicinenet.com/anorexia_nervosa/article.htm)> (Accessed 18 April 2011).

<sup>6</sup> OCD is defined by Steven Phillipson as "an anxiety disorder, first and foremost. . . . The essential features of OCD are recurrent obsessions (thoughts) that create an awareness of alarm or threat" <http://www.ocdonline.com/defineocd.php>

In conclusion, Shawn's *Aunt Dan and Lemon*, in spite of the various critical reaction and the controversy it has left for two decades and a half now, still remains as a baffling dramatic experiment worthy of more elaborate scrutiny. In the play, the dramatist relies much on his dramaturgical skill and experience, particularly in structuring a dramatic plot based mainly on welding past reminiscences and flashbacks recalled through the mind of the protagonist and put into stage performance. Likewise, the play is memorable for its provocation and presentation of eccentric characters with whimsical traits. Its major protagonist/narrator and most of the other characters who participate in the making of the episodes share similar disordered brains and visions. They are mostly controlled directly or indirectly by Aunt Dan and her wicked pack of friends. In the same vein, the sense of perturbation can be felt in the profaneness and brutality of Mindy who destroys several men's lives, regardless of the fact that she only mentions one person, Raimondo. Her freaks, lesbianism, and lust for money are not justified by her best friend, Aunt Dan. Besides, Lemon begins and ends the action with the same observation emphasizing the antithesis in the behavior of her parents, her friends, Dan's friends, and the overall human drive for murdering innocent people for nothing but making a certain way of life.

day if the bomb hadn't been dropped? What about the machine guns and the grenades that were neatly stored in that little barn? What about the attack that would have been made on the village next door . . . . I'm just asking you, Susie, here is Kissinger. He is the man who must make the decisions. What do you want this man to do? (582)

In a similar line of thought, Shawn draws parallels between two abnormal and inhuman ideologies adopted and developed by Lemon and Aunt Dan. He chooses to end the play with another long ardent speech in which Lemon reasserts her opening view that "the mere fact of killing human beings in order to create a certain way of life is not something that exactly distinguishes the Nazis from everybody else" (593).

Obviously, Lemon's abnormality and "pro-Nazi sentiments stem from Dan's Henryolatory" (Simon, "Real Lemon" 129). Apparently, both Aunt Dan and Lemon are not so interested or pleased with "what people call compassion" (595), as it was the case with Lemon's mother, simply because Lemon learned from Dan one significant lesson: "It's easy to say we should all be loving and sweet, but meanwhile we're enjoying a certain way of life — and we're actually living — due to the existence of certain other people who are willing to take the job of killing on their own backs" (596).



but for Kissinger, I thought, I would make an exception. He served humanity. I would serve him. (578)

Antithetical with this view is the view of Lemon's mother who might be the only rational character in the play. Like many Americans, Lemon's mother may not be pleased with Kissinger's policies in the Vietnamese war, but does not wish to make up her conclusions without knowledge:

AUNT DAN. Susie, do you think he likes to bomb a village full of poor peasants?

MOTHER. (*after a brief pause*) Well, I really don't know, Dan, I don't know him.

AUNT DAN. Susie! My God! What a horrible thing to say!

MOTHER. Well, after all, there are people who for one reason or another just can't control their lust for blood, or they just give in totally to that side of their nature. (578)

Obsessed by fake visions and blurred thinking, Dan is propelled to defend and justify whatever Kissinger does including the use of violence. She tries to force Lemon's mother into false conceptions and justifications for mass murder and destructive violence:

Your heart just responds to what it finds in front of it, the present moment — the innocent people killed by the bomb. But what about the thing that would have happened the next

a man whose attitude to life was almost prayerful, a man, perhaps, who was living in fear of an all-knowing God. The boastful exuberance of the public Kissinger was nowhere to be seen in this private moment. (577)

The situation and Dan's many stories about her strong (i.e. though unrequited because it is only from her hallucinating mind) love for Kissinger has insinuated many thoughts in Lemon's perturbed mind. She imagines Aunt Dan with Kissinger having breakfast and sleeping together: "He would stretch himself out on the big couch with a sleepy sort of smile on his face, and he and Aunt Dan would gossip like teenagers" (578). Lemon does not end with this, but she herself develops a similar strong affection for Kissinger: "I was quiet prepared to serve Kissinger as his slave" (578), and gradually this affectionate drive grows stronger and more illusory. Lemon herself began to dream of having sex with Kissinger in an attempt to reward him for serving humanity:

I imagined he would like that sort of thing. Well, he could have his pleasure with me. I'd decided long ago, if the occasion ever arose. Few formalities would need to be observed — he didn't have time, and I knew that very well. An exchange of looks, then right to bed — that would be fine with me. It was how I planned to live as a general rule,

imagination blur — how can a person remember a story told by someone who was told it? (124)

Even though the question George poses here sounds logical, it can be noted that children do, in reality, remember everything they are told, but what is eccentric and more impelling here is the sort of story and the motives that led Dan to narrate to Lemon.

Another obsessive story that shows Dan's antithetical visions and abnormality is her eccentric and illusory love for Henry Kissinger. Whatever said or perceived of Kissinger was not important to Dan. She was only absorbed in her own view of the man. As Simon notes "Dan is an ardent Kissinger fetishist, and explains in interminable, incomparably boring monologues why we need servants and such to do our dirty work, and how Kissinger is just a grave, brave man doing what is distasteful to others but needs doing" (Simon, "Real Lemon" 129). She tells Lemon of an illusory occasion when she happened to have lunch at a Washington club where she saw Kissinger. As she assumed in her story, both were earlier than their lunch partners. As Dan narrates,

Kissinger was utterly immobile. Each time I looked over, his position was exactly the same as it had been before. And to me that downward-looking angle of his entire head, so characteristic of Kissinger, expressed his habitual humility of

This scene is extremely savage and amoral in two ways: first, it must be very dangerous and obscene for an eleven-year-old child's perception; second, it shows that both women, Dan and Mindy must be senseless, psychologically perturbed and disastrous because they immediately jump into sexual ecstasies and physical lust amidst a story of horrible murder that must have affected them both. Likewise, they have sex in the presence of a man already sleeping in the same room beside them:

And then, to the music of Jasper snoring on the couch, I started to kiss her beautiful neck. I was incredibly in love. She kissed me back. I felt as if starts were flying through my head. She was gorgeous, perfect. We spent the rest of the night on the couch, and then we went out and had a great breakfast, and we spent a wonderful week together. (591)

Commenting on the circulation of this story Lemon remembers about Mindy killing Raimondo, George notes:

One of Lemon's persistent memories . . . is of Mindy, an English woman, with a man named Raimondo in a night club, flirting. The scene, when finally fully enacted, ends in a murder. However this is not the usual remembered event of drama: Lemon never knew Mindy, only heard about her from a family friend, Dan. And so the ideas of memory and

perspective allowing Dan to pop up into Lemons memory to complete the story: "She had to put the guy in this plastic sack, kick him down her back stairs, haul him outside, and sort of roll him into the trunk of a car that was parked in an alley. Apparently he'd been working with the police for some time against her friend, Freddie "(590). However, what happened to her friend, Freddie is not known, but her intention to avenge Freddie may be another possible reason behind the savage murder.

Unabashed and brazen as she is, Aunt Dan goes on to complete her story of Mindy. She explicitly describes how flagrant and heartless was Mindy's move in getting rid of Raimondo's corpse. Impertinently, amidst this chilling and drastic atmosphere, both abnormal women blatantly indulge together in physical attraction and lesbianism:

Well, my teeth were chattering as I listened to the work of this naked goddess, whose lipstick was the dreamiest, loveliest shade of rose. Then she fell silent for a long time, and we just looked at each other. And then she sort of winked at me, I think you would call it, and I wanted to touch that lipstick with my fingers, so I did. And she sort of grabbed my hand and gave it a big kiss, and my hand was all red. And then we just sat there for another long time. (590-1)

with them" (579). Mindy's divulgence of the aversion in her life, though pathetic, proves that she was also perturbed and devoid of true pleasure or joy. Besides, Dan's relationship with Mindy was too close to make her understand Mindy better than anyone else, as she narrates to Lemon, "Mindy was a terribly clever girl, and she managed to get an awful lot of money from poor Jasper. She really did get ten thousand for taking off her shirt "(586). Reluctant with Mindy's story, John Simon describes the woman as "a money-hungry call girl, taking home Raimondo, a Hispanic cop in playboy disguise, having oral and missionary sex, then elaborately tying him up and vengefully strangling and disposing of him in a plastic bag" (Simon, "Shawn 'Nuf" Par.3).

Other than money and sex, there are no clear motives behind Mindy's savage murdering of Raimondo. The only possible justification is that Mindy's mental disorder and blurred visions would actually thrill her into hallucination, uncontrolled brutality and sadistic behavior. The scene in which Mindy kills Raimondo is marvelous about its design reflecting Shawn's innovation in merging dramatic performance with storytelling. At the same time Mindy is strangling Raimondo, he begins to talk, struggle, and finally gag (i.e. this scene is pictorially described in details by the stage directions). Shawn shifts to use a different narrative

Mindy appears three times on the stage; when Lemon recalls the memories assumed to be hers at an early time in the play, then a very brief appearance towards the middle of the play, and the third appearance occurs immediately before Lemon's final long soliloquy. The first appearance seems to be designed to introduce Mindy and reveal the reckless life she enjoys with her friends. Although Mindy's friends are only introduced by names and physical descriptions, they unveil the sort of life Mindy was living:

*Raimondo, a Hispanic man in his forties, and Mindy, an English woman in her twenties, are seated at a table. Music in the Background. . . . They both laugh. Now, with Mindy, we see June, an English woman in her twenties, Jasper, an American man in his forties, and Andy, an American man in his thirties, seated in the midst of a conversation. (566)*

Mindy is casually mentioned by Andy who asks Lemon if she remembers Mindy and the other friends, and then he tells Lemon about his sexual relationship with Mindy and how he gave her money because she earnestly needed it. Nevertheless, it is only in her second and very brief appearance that Mindy tells Lemon (i.e. and the audience of course) something about her life: "I was living a sort of dog's life at that time, quite frankly — making love on ugly bedspreads with strange men and then taking these awful showers

ANDY. (*to Lemon*) Do you remember Mindy? Do you remember June? Do you remember the night that Mindy introduced us to *Jasper*?

LEMON. There was nothing Aunt Dan didn't tell me about them. (574)

As Andy appears next to Lemon, the audience may be confused and mistake him for another character from the present, while in reality, he appears only as an image from a reverie in Lemon's conscious mind. Irrespective of their abomination, Andy, Mindy, June and Jasper still fascinate Lemon as good acquaintances with profound experience. It is only because of Lemon's perturbed and antithetical visions that she talks about them with a sort of dignity and glory that none of them really deserves. Dan's exclusive pack of friends, including Geoffrey and Alexander; the men of distinctive education and positions, are all devoid of ethics and their moral vacuity leads them to succumb hideously to their lustful desires. While doing so, they reflect various degrees of abnormality and eccentric behavior.

In addition to her repugnant political views on the Nazis and genocide, Aunt Dan provokes the audience by her frequent and significant stories of Mindy and the enthusiastic defense of Henry Kissinger. Mindy was Dan's real friend while Kissinger was a friend and lover in her wishful illusory world. As the scene progresses,



Nazis in veneration and esteem. Even though such views may be condemned by many, Robert King notes: "The complex reality behind the defense of Nazis in Wallace Shawn's *Aunt Dan and Lemon*, however repugnant, is most credible to a mature audience than the readily accepted matters of fact, the logos, of the information about a growing AIDS crisis in Larry Kramer's *Normal Heart*" (3). However, the most unexpected antithetical development in the play can be deduced from Lemon's passive reaction during the final moments in Dan's life. In spite of their strong relationship, George notes that when "she went to see Aunt Dan when Dan was mortally ill. Even though Aunt Dan tells of the wonderful nurse who takes care of her (in a wit-like epiphany about kindness being all there is), Lemon is unchanged"(124-5).

Shawn's method of welding storytelling with the dramatic performance works at its best when he permeates different time levels bringing people and episodes from Aunt Dan's memory (i.e. pre-past of Lemon's present), to Lemon's childhood days, which are in both cases recalled and narrated to the audience at the present:

LEMON. But her friends were the best. The people she'd known when she was young and wild and living in London. Amazing people. I felt I knew those people myself.

*Andy appears next to Lemon.*

reflects her disregard of moral values and other people's emotions. Aunt Dan's story with Alexander gives another proof of her abnormality, impudence, dishonesty, and indiscretion. She describes how she and Alexander managed to deceive other people when they got to speak to each other on the phone:

AUNT DAN. Well, the telephone thing we worked out was great. Alexander could call me right from his office at the laboratory, no matter who was there, or even from a cozy Sunday afternoon by the fire with his wife, and he'd just say something like, "I need to speak with Dr Cunningham, please," and that would mean we would meet at Conrad's, a place we used to go to, and then he'd say, "Oh hi, Nat," and that would mean we would meet at nine. Or of course, if I called him and his wife answered, I'd just say something like, "I'm awfully sorry, Mrs Wojwodski, it's Dr Vetzler's office again," and then he'd get on, and I'd say whatever I had to say, and he'd say something jaunty like, "Oh hi, Bob! No, that's alright, I don't mind a bit!" (574)

These dishonest lessons, in addition to other political views, have had a strong impact on young Lemon as long as her childhood was entirely overwhelmed by Dan's stories and experiences. They both adopt eccentric political viewpoints. For example, they both hold the

Dan's perturbed and antithetical nature is manifest in several ways. First, she asserts that "Geoffrey was the most fantastic liar" (572), who cheated his wife, yet she continued to believe him, made love with him, and got the price in form of expensive gorgeous food, imported wine, and possibly (though she did not mention) money. In this consideration, she does not differ from Mindy whose prostitution was explicitly condemned by all. The only difference is that Dan makes love secretly with one person or two (i.e. indeed one cannot be sure of the number of men she loved or made love with for she mentions another Oxford professor, Alexander, who was also married and cheated his wife with Dan), while Mindy was so crazy about sex that she used to drag several men at a time, as Andy confesses in his story to Lemon: "because she used to spend half her day in bed just playing with herself, and she was going out with about six other men as well as me at the time" (575). Second, Dan is antithetical in her political stance supporting violence and destruction while simultaneously assuming high code of ethics, a passion for kind-heartedness and rationalism: "I never – no matter how angry I may be – I never, ever shout at a waiter. And as a matter of fact, I never shout at a porter or a clerk in a bank or anybody else who is in a weaker position in society than me"(573). Third, Dan is used to behaving in a reckless immoral manner that

such stories is the destruction of Lemon's soul and mind.

The scene/story in which Aunt Dan describes the way she and Geoffrey spent the time stolen from the latter's wife illustrates an ethical breakdown; a matter that arouses suspicion that Geoffrey might have forged college scores for Dan to be distinguished among her colleagues. At the time of Dan's narration to Lemon, the former was a university professor but did not tell Lemon anything about her scores or achievements in her academic study at those earlier times when they had frequently met. She only described the stolen times of lustful pleasure:

Well, for the first two days we didn't move from bed — I mean, we occasionally reached across to the table and grabbed a pear or an apple or something — and then on the third day we called a taxi, and we went all the way into London to this extraordinary shop. . . . and while the taxi waited we simply filled basket after basket with all this incredible food . . . ham from Virginia and asparagus from Brussels and pate from France and olives and caviar and boxes of marrons glaces, and then we just piled it all into the taxi, along with bottles and bottles of wine and champagne, and back we went to my tiny basement and spent the rest of the week just living like pigs. (572)

mind lying to his wife at all, because she'd trapped him into the marriage . . . and she just lived off his money . . . she just lay in bed all day long in a pink housecoat, talking on the telephone and reading magazines and ordering the servants around like slaves"(572). The reasons Dan gives in order to justify his lies to his wife are indeed, meaningless and full of silly contradictions, because if his wife really trapped him into marriage for money, she would never care about his absence, "But he knew she'd go mad if he left for the week" (572). Like Dan, Geoffrey must have been abnormal, because he was sure that his wife loved him. Dan pursues the story:

so he went to her looking totally tragic, and he said, "Sadie, I've got to go to Paris for a conference for at least three days, and I'm so upset I just hate to leave you, but some professors over there are attacking my theories, and if I don't defend myself my entire reputation will be just destroyed." So she cried and wailed — she was just like a baby — and he promised to bring her lots of presents. (572)

Obviously, Dan and the group of people she mentions in her stories are all deceptive and wicked; Geoffrey fobs his naïve wife; Mindy deceives her lovers and kills one of them; Jasper and Andy are both corrupted and lost in sex and alcoholism. The final outcome of all

young woman by an older one) unmediated by an analysis of the ideology of fascism" (28).

In her early meeting at Lemon's private place during night time, Dan starts recounting her adult stories. To dominate the little girl emotionally and intellectually, she chooses to start with her amorous relationship with a cheating husband, Geoffrey, "the most famous professor in the whole university" (572). The actual events of Dan's story about her relationship with Geoffrey began when she was "a starving second-year student who was living on a diet of brown bread and fruit and occasionally cheese" (572). Dan was overwhelmed by such a financially established professor who met her regularly to feed and seduce her; an awfully immoral act which she ironically repeats now with Lemon. Dan's story is shameful and shocking since it was based on deceit and a series of lies. She narrates to Lemon: "Geoffrey was the most fantastic liar — I mean, he was so astonishingly handsome, with those gorgeous eyes and those thick, black eyebrows — he just had to look at a woman, with those eyes of his, and she immediately believed every word that he said" (572). Geoffrey, a corrupted professor who would contradict and violate all the ethics of university education, had the creative power not to instruct or teach moral values and virtues, but to initiate tactics of deception and lying. Dan narrates: "And he didn't

loathsome, and contemptuous: "Dan's tales of wild and promiscuous friends – especially the amoral Mindy . . . and of Dan's own sexual adventures with married men as well as with the unpredictable Mindy herself. Dan's skewed moral code permits lying to women and sleeping with their husbands" (Bryer and Hartig 45).

The stories Aunt Dan narrates to Lemon have been widely criticized for their inconsiderate attitude and inconvenience for the mentality of such a young child as Lemon. For example, Aunt Dan thinks that she amuses young Lemon with her stories about sex and murder and morally corrupt friends whose "existence [is] unrestrained by conscience or compassion; they become vivid characters in the mind of the girl . . . . Not only is nothing too terrible for Aunt Dan to tell Lemon, there is simply no moral context" (Zinman Par.3). Concerning the strong impact of Dan's corrupted stories on Lemon, Jones notes that the play focuses "on the influence wrought by those with whom we are intimate when we are young," and adds that "One could think of this play as a cautionary tale, reminding you to be careful about who gets to say what to your children" (Par.4). While Dan had indeed played a major role in Lemon's mental deterioration, Vivian Patraka notes that the play's argument "stems from the novelty of female fascists (including an intellectual seduction with sexual undertones of a

instinctively away from the restrictions and plausible mannerism imposed by communal systematic regulations and rules. Lemon's past isolated setting was a little house across the garden from the main family house. When she recognized that no body used that house, narrates: "And so, somehow, over the years, little by little, I found that I was moving all of my things from my own room in the main house across the garden to this little house, till finally I asked to have my bed moved as well, and so the little house became mine" (571). Every time Dan visited the family, she turned over to visit Lemon and spend a considerably long time with her. Lemon remembers well all that happened between them "particularly the talks we had the summer I was eleven years old, which was the last time my parents and Aunt Dan were friends, and Aunt Dan stayed with us for the whole summer" (571).

Shawn's design of Lemon's private setting background reflects the little girl's abnormality and desire to be alone at an early age; a matter that would lead to an early recognition of Lemon's eccentricity and abnormal behavior. What emphasizes this hypothesis is her readiness to listen to Dan's stories which included obscenity and profaneness and prove that Dan also was psychologically perturbed and antithetical in most of what she does with or narrates to Dan. What she unfolds to Lemon is shameful,



Leonora to Lemon, and how she was very close to the family. Lemon functions as a commentator on the scene which then changes to dramatic performance of a flashback in which Lemon recalls Aunt Dan with the family on the dinner table. According to George, "the key to family dynamics is Aunt Dan, a visitor to a troubled marriage in which there was an observing only child, Lemon" (124). Whether certain or uncertain of the time of occurrence, Lemon recalls everything that pops randomly into her mind in form of flashbacks: "when I was five or six or seven or eight, I remember that Aunt Dan and my parents would spend long, long evenings talking in the garden, and I would sit in the grass and listen"(570). Lemon is now recalling the family dinners, the games, and above all the stories which Dan told her when they were together on Lemon's bed away from the parents. Dan's stories have indeed had the most formative impact on Lemon's character and must have also accrued her psychic disorder and anxiety.

Sustaining the narrative line, Lemon tells the audience how she had long established an isolated remote setting for her past events. This lonely background helped Lemon be entirely devoted to Aunt Dan's stories. What Lemon creates stands in a way as a substitute for the remote-setting-convention usually designed to give more freedom for characters to act impulsively, spontaneously, and

And one afternoon as I walked along I saw another girl who was walking also, and as I was looking at her, she looked over at me. And then a few days later, I saw her again and we found ourselves staring at each other. Finally it happened again a few days later, and the other girl decided to introduce herself. She marched up with a sort of mischievous grin, extended her hand, and announced in a forthright American accent, "My name's Danielle." And you know Dan in those days used to wear these Victorian blouses and sort of nineteenth-century men's caps — I'd never met anyone like her in my life." (569)

Amidst the leisurely narrative, Shawn welds the performance by gradually submerging the narrator allowing other characters to appear and participate by using different storytelling perspectives. By exchanging storytelling perspectives from Lemon to her mother and vice versa, Shawn tends to reflect as many dimensions of Dan's character as possible. At first, Dan gave Lemon's mother a real pleasant company: "So she came along, and we drank a lot of tea and got very excited, and we drank some sherry that I'd put away somewhere, and we were screaming with laughter into the middle of the night" (569). Shawn soon shifts to Lemon who unveils how effective Dan was in their life, how she changed her name from

As the action progresses, storytelling develops simultaneously so that the whole dramatic performance overlaps with a complex and multiple variety of narrative levels and perspectives. Aunt Dan is first introduced by Lemon recalling her mother recalling the story of her first encounter with Dan many years ago. Tracking Shawn's implementation of the process of storytelling in the play, George notes:

Sometimes the storytelling itself is literalized, Dan at Lemon's bedside, spinning tales. But often enough the scenes just spring to life — Mindy conning Jasper, Mindy seducing and killing Raimondo — and then we are back to versions of telling. Lemon telling about Dan telling, and then Dan telling about her passionate affair with Mindy, an affair sparked by the story of the killing of Raimondo. A real story, we assume, and as real to Lemon, third-hand, as anything else has ever been. (124)

At first, Lemon's mother was greatly fascinated by Dan's stylish manner, outgoing nature, and liberal attitude. According to her story, Lemon's mother had a very strict and conservative daily routine which included walks in winter afternoons. In a direct narrative perspective, Lemon's mother recalls:

was rotten, and of course he stank. He stank to hell. When we sat at the table, as if everything was normal, everything was fine, there was an overpowering stench that was coming from my father. (568-9)

Again, the filthy image of her father is obviously antithetical with the mother's cleanness and orderly life style which mother assumes to have preserved from her early girlhood days before she married Lemon's father. Lemon recalls: "every morning, I got up at dawn. I'd brush my teeth, I'd make myself a big pot of coffee and bring it over to desk, and then sit down, and I'd start reading. Around noon or so I'd finally stand up . . . and then I'd run out the door" (569). Definitely, her parents' contrariness developed in Lemon symptoms of disquietude, uneasiness, vulnerability, anxiety, and perturbation. She seems to have been deprived of the proper environment of security and mutual love, the natural requirements for a child to cherish secure and normal behavior. This is definitely the main reason why Lemon resorts to the first person to appear in her life, Aunt Dan, whose interest and concern substitute the emotional feelings and parental care which Lemon has missed. Eventually, Aunt Dan has had the most important impact on Lemon's life and thought.

have developed since she was very young. It could be also possible that her sickness and abnormality would accumulate and develop into a severer case in due course of time. Succinctly, Lemon is self-conscious of her blurred visions and admits her physical weakness and suggests that it may be also psychological.

Physically, Lemon suffers from a lifetime severe loss of appetite; a case that may be diagnosed as a kind of chronic anorexia.<sup>5</sup> Eventually, she would grow more psychologically agitated as she grows up in age. Likewise, Lemon's condition can be also classified as a case of psychic disorder diagnosed as Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD).<sup>6</sup> Lemon's distracted mind and emotions most often impose such antithetical memories, scenes, views, and images even of the antitheticalism of her father and mother. She regards her mother as a saint, but holds a very disgusting and hateful image of her father:

My mother was a saint — she loved him very dearly. But my father was a kind of caged animal, he'd been deprived of everything that would keep him healthy. His life was unsanitary in every way. His entire environment — his cage — was unclean. He was never given a thorough washing. So no wonder — his fur was falling out, he was growing thinner and thinner every day. His teeth were rotten, his shit

MOTHER. What's wrong, my love?

LEMON. Mummy, it's raw.

MOTHER. That lamb? — Raw? — But it's *overcooked*,  
darling — I was trying — please — I wanted —

LEMON. I'm sorry, Mummy.

MOTHER. But you have to eat — if you don't eat — please  
— (*to Father*) I can't stand this — (568)

In this scene par excellence, Shawn's skillful merging of storytelling with performance is magnificent as he withdraws Lemon from the performance of the family gathering for dinner (i.e. storytelling of episodes) to face the audience and unravel other sides of her story (i.e. present narrative and performance): "May I be excused? (*She leaves the table, but stands near by, where her parents can't see her. To the audience*) Father was sure that my problem was caused by the very anxiety which my mother expressed when I didn't eat" (568). Lemon is conscious of her abnormality; a fact that is obviously stated several times. On this specific occasion, Lemon recalls her father's comment on the mother's attitude: "You've got to get under control! Because if you don't, we're going to have a really sick girl around here! And I mean *really sick!* . . . We're dealing here with a sick child, a helpless child, she can't help feeling sick" (568). Obviously, Lemon's perturbation and antithetical perception

Lemon's Father is so vulnerable that he gets embarrassed by the way his old friends look down at the type of work he does. He only mentions that his job demands talents but it seems that Lemon's father must have had an inferiority complex and this appears from his lack of confidence: "I wish you would sit in my office for just one week and do my job and then see whether you need your brains to do it or not . . . Maybe I'm stupid "(567). Although, he spends a considerably long time talking about his business world, but he does not mention how successful or satisfied he is. However, the impression he and Lemon create is unremittingly passive.

The scene shifts again from the long narrative speech by Father to one of the family gatherings where Lemon, Father, and Mother are having dinner. The scene is very significant in the sense that it shows how Lemon's eccentric life has been influenced by the unhealthy environment in which she was brought up. When Lemon first remembers the scene, she is aware that this was not a favorable scene for her: "Some people have warm memories of their family table. I can't say I do! There was a problem about that family table for me"(568). When the narrative line shifts from her mind and memory to be acted on stage, Lemon reflects a reluctant attitude towards the food:

intention and mysterious atmosphere.

Abruptly, Lemon cuts the scene short and resumes storytelling giving more emphasis on her family background so that the audience can learn enough about her childhood. Importantly, what she tells about her family and upbringing is reflexive of her conscious paradoxes and confused visions. She does not state clearly how she really felt towards her father; whether she admired, liked, or disliked him: "I have to tell you something about my father. I can't avoid it . . . . But poor Father always felt that his old friends . . . had no understanding of the work he did. He would always tell us they didn't have a clue" (566). Again, Shawn transposes the audience to storytelling/performance, but this time he grants Lemon's Father and Mother a similar chance to long speeches in which, according to King,

their personality flaws become apparent — the father's overbearing anger and the mother's insubstantiality. There are also snippets of remembered scenes in which one sees their endearing characteristics, their playfulness and intellectuality and zeal for life, only then to hear that one by one these qualities have slipped away. At barely ten years of age, Lemon awakened to a steady dislike of her father and contemptuous pity for her mother. (127)



Lemon into visual performance. Henceforth, Lemon acts as a commentator on the performance allegedly conceived of as part of a wider stage inside her head. While still opening her mind to the audience, Shawn allows Lemon, the storyteller, to move quickly from the beginning of the story/performance of Mindy, Raimondo, Jasper, and Andy back to her family again as usual with storytelling amid which she fades out as a dramatic character/storyteller to give space for the dramatic performance, and vice versa:

MINDY. No Jasper.

JASPER. What do you mean? Are you totally nuts?

MINDY. Give me all of it!

JASPER. Get lost!

ANDY. Everybody, please! Let's try to approach our problems sensibly, alright?

*These figures fade, as Lemon speaks. (566)*

Although Shawn uses "nuts" to refer to whimsically eccentric people, yet he follows with the comic riposte of Mindy and Jasper as if he tends to evoke a metadramatic scene from William Shakespeare's *Macbeth* (I, iii, Ln.4-6) where the First Witch narrates to her fellows: "A sailor's wife had chestnuts in her lap . . . 'Give me' quoth I. 'Aroint thee, witch!' "Shakespeare *Macbeth*, I, iii, Ln.4-6 39). By correspondence, both scenes suggest wicked

the audience: *"A long silence. Very faintly in the darkness three seated figures begin to be visible . . . . The seated figures stand and form another picture. Mother and Father have their arms around each other. Aunt Dan is slightly apart"* (565). Shawn's stage directions, here, do not only prepare for the shift from storytelling to performance, but they also present an artistic tableau to give an expression of the nature of the family relationship with Aunt Dan. However, the action of the scene does not move spontaneously to indulge the figures described into action, but Lemon seems to have controlled her memory, for she selectively recalls another different story which Aunt Dan had told her in her childhood. Although all such stories were reported by Aunt Dan, she now believes that: "there are things that happened to other people, but they're mine now. They're my memories" (566).

Lemon's first memoir introduces a host of people whom she had never seen or met, but she recalls them in the same way she heard about them from Aunt Dan. Perturbed as she is, Lemon retrieves these memoirs without much trouble as they seem to fall suddenly upon her mind; detached, unarranged, and spontaneous exactly as it happens in most stream of consciousness narratives. What is distinctive and characteristic about Shawn's dramatic and artistic talent is the way he alters the attention from mere listening to

here living in the past, and I don't really have much of a past to live in. And so of course, I should say that I'm not a brilliant person, and I've never claimed to be one" (565). At this moment of revelation, Lemon discloses vital truths about herself and her acquaintances: "actually most of the people I've known as an adult haven't been that brilliant either which happens to suit me fine, because I don't have energy to deal with anybody brilliant today" (565). Lemon's contradicting nature appears in that she immediately contrasts whatever she maintains in an amazing way. While she complains that throughout her life she has been ill and that everything which exists in her memory is transmitted by other people, she indicates: "So I may not have done very much in my life. And yet I really feel I've had a *great* life, because of what I've learned from the people I knew" (565).

Shawn's dramatic experimentation with this storytelling technique works at its utmost when he moves from Lemon's leisurely speech to a brief pause for Lemon's image to fade away so that he can launch the narrative line occurring in her memory into a scene of dramatic performance. The dramatist employs his dramatic experience and narrative skill in merging and welding storytelling and dramatic performance into one consolidated texture. Shawn's stage directions are indispensably pivotal here, as Shawn prepares

Lemon's conscious storytelling unfolds a number of subsidiary stories deriving from the main narrative source, Aunt Dan. Most of these stories probably bear the same antithetical effect; a sense that can be felt from her remark that she is "a very sick girl" (563). Therefore, whatever she tells might not necessarily be true or rational. She would be giving an expression to what she might perceive and support. In addition to this, her stories provide the audience with "an unusual enough experience in the theatre that, whenever the play is performed, there are some people who mistake Lemon's position for Shawn's own, a misunderstanding that the playwright says he has always found painful" (Walker 562). For many reasons, Lemon must be singularized not only by physical deterioration, but rather by her brain-sickliness, mental disruption and abnormality, and it seems that Shawn must have created this character to show some of the hidden paradoxes of human nature. Her infirmity is established right at the start in her first long speech where she gives a full and conscious account of herself: "And so many of my experiences have had to do with being sick, like visiting different doctors, falling down on my face in public buildings, throwing up in hallways in strange place, and things like that" (565). Even though her past was not of much value, she admits her confinement and isolation from the present: "in a way I'm sitting

phrase read so often in these books"(564). Lemon herself repeats the phrase 'a shower and disinfection' several times not only to reflect something that she has read but the repetition has its cynicism and over exaggeration having an unspoken and implicit view that reflects a kind of sarcasm and dissatisfaction with the way the Nazis were only telling lies which reflect their deceptive and brutal practices.

The antithetical treatment of the first episode Lemon narrates about the Nazis is indeed provoking, as Walker remarks, "Naturally, we are used to the villains of drama presenting such arguments, but hearing them from characters we have been encouraged to befriend is a new and disturbing experience for most audience" (*The Broadview* 562). Besides, Lemon's conscious paradoxes can be deduced from her detached and fragmented lines of narrative; a narrative aspect which Walker describes: "The apparent randomness of the stories she recounts is, of course, illusory" (561). If such is the case, then the whole narrative structure may be subject of criticism and suspicion, at least the credibility of its content may be doubtful on the basis of the complex time levels: first, the time of the occurrence of these fragmented episodes; second, the time Aunt Dan tells Lemon about them; and third, the time of Lemon's own narration.

sweetness and innocence. Regarding Lemon's paradoxical visions, Kathleen George notes:

She says she reads a lot of mysteries . . . . She lives with memories, mostly of a single summer during which Aunt Dan visited. Things which happened to other people are her memories. She thinks she's fine and that her life, although odd, has been good. Thus, she is an unreliable narrator, for most audience members will find her life alarming. She appears to be engaged in a long drawn-out suicide. After everything Lemon divulges, while we try to figure her out, she ends up with the question of whether human beings are capable of feeling compassion. (124)

Lemon is regarded as an 'unreliable narrator' because she appears very much antithetical in most of the notions she holds. For example, she admits a kind of interest in the Nazis with whom she develops an alleged alliance at the beginning and end of the play, but she contradicts herself declaring: "Today, of course, the Nazis are considered dunces"(564). Likewise, Lemon's constant description of the scene: "And when the children and women were undressing in the sheds, the guards addressed them quite politely, and what the guards said was that they were going to be taken outside for a shower and disinfection — which happens to be a

would definitely impose a kind of regression and a rather pessimist view. Therefore, if Lemon is regarded as mentally disrupted, it will probably convey solutions for the arguments Walker denotes: "Shawn's insistence on confronting us with difficult arguments is perhaps of even more urgent importance to us today than it was when these works first appeared in 1985" (*The Broadview Anthology* 562).

A more profound consideration of the beginning of Lemon's story would indicate that she is not at ease with this world. She reflects a consciously blurred and dull vision of life. By her choice to start the narrative story using the first-person method, she wants to add credibility and authenticity to her viewpoint of things and episodes. In spite of this, her story does neither seem convincing nor trustworthy because of her troubled mind at the time of narration, and a suspicious credibility of the time of the episodes she recalls from the very past when she could neither recognize nor properly judge: "my most intense memories really go back to my childhood"(565). Lemon's delirium would also justify the abrupt shift in the narrative perspective from her own life to reminiscences of the Nazis and the 'Road to Heaven;' something that she admires even though antithetical with her early statement of innocence and wishful thinking that the whole world would be like children's

what I would probably have guessed already"(565). Accumulatively, Lemon's eccentric aversion and boycotting of daily papers (i.e. an act that stands symbolically for passivity and separation from the community) together with her observations of those readers and their experience of excitement, expectations, and final shock or frustration prove her perturbation and antithetical visions. Besides, her detailed descriptions indicate that she must have indeed practiced all such feelings herself. However, it may be true that most daily papers, all over the world, may celebrate, excite, irritate, and achieve several other feelings and reactions on their readers and finally conclude with nothing important.

Depending mainly on the first-person, third person, and omniscient narrative perspectives, Lemon's story commences with her own upbringing and life style. In a device to sustain her narrative, she consciously responds to what may occur in the minds of her audience about the many glasses of vegetable juices and drinks. This outset clearly resolves the first ambiguity concerning her poor health and problem with regular food at regular times: "Maybe it's a psychological problem" (263). This may also denote Lemon's conscious illness and reveals that Lemon must be regarded as an abnormal woman with appalling perception and ghastly observation. Her physical (and most probably mental) indisposition



camps"(87-8). Likewise, Lemon's narrative method flows swiftly due to the fact that her "tone is polite and therefore has an air of apparent reasonableness. But the case she makes for believing the rebarbative — that the gap between a decent person and a monster is practically invisible — is meant to test the audience's forensic powers" (Hitchings Par.4).

Lemon's disruption is manifest in her eccentric attitudes and antithetical views including her impulsive impressions of newspapers. Although she has, for a long time, been confined to a limited apartment, she has cut herself entirely from the outer world by simply hating to read newspapers. So, she has lived within a very limited microcosm entirely isolated from the macrocosmic reality. What she knows, hears, or believes are the words and stories of Aunt Dan which encapsulate her with hollowness and vacuum. She hates reading the daily papers and despises their readers: "I hate reading the daily papers, and actually people who read them in a way seem like idiots to me" (564-5). She hates newspapers readers because they can be easily dragged into a belief that things would change and improve, but, she is certain that "a year later they're shocked to learn that that new thing or that new person that was going to make everything wonderful all of a sudden was in fact just nothing or he was just a crook like everyone else, which is exactly

interprets what had been long considered human brutality as an honorable and great action. In an attempt to give possible justification for this intricate and provoking narrative perspective of Lemon's political vision, Bryer and Hartig write:

Framing the play are two monologues, the first a graphic description of the killing of the Jews by the Nazis, the last a rationalization of that killing . . . . She compares Nazi action to the way our society deals with criminals because they threaten our hopes for a desirable future." She compares Nazi action to her own response . . . . Lemon has learnt Aunt Dan's lessons well, and Lemon's sickliness is the outward symbol of her intellectual corruption. Her "education" is Shawn's lesson for the audience in the process of rationalizing human brutality. (45)

Lemon's perturbed viewpoints are primarily initiated by the lack of normal parental care and guidance, and further developed into a severe chronic condition by the corrupted moral and political lessons of Aunt Dan. According to Don B. Wilmeth, "Dan corrupts Lemon's concept of public and private morality with her reminiscences of Mindy . . . . Dan's verbal tirades corrupt Lemon and lead to her secondhand embrace of Henry Kissinger, the policies of violence that rot our society, and to a defense of Nazi death

long speeches — of fifteen and twenty minutes respectively — frame a series of flashback scenes from the childhood of Lemon, when she came under the influence of a charismatic friend of her parents" (126-7). Regarding their relative significance in the structure of the play, these flowing leisurely speeches together with some other narrative aspects have won the attention of George who notes that *Aunt Dan and Lemon*, "shares with *Conversations with My Father* a series of extremely long (five-minute) monologues, set pieces, that any character has the privilege to deliver. The speechifying is unrealistic, without interruption . . . . Shawn's monologues are not even interrupted by paragraph breaths"(125). George's assumption may be accurate in that the long narrative paragraphs continue without a pause, but Shawn has not entirely overlooked dramatic pauses at several other occasions.

In her long speeches, Lemon recounts leisurely within and outside the known limits of space and time. As she narrates, Lemon discloses her mental disorder and physical unfitness. She begins her own story, but shifts abruptly to the Nazis and their practices in a way that justifies human brutality. Therefore, Lemon's antithetical vision becomes too sophisticated to be understood or explained. Primarily, what Lemon views may be antithetical with the mainstream thought in that she glorifies the Nazis processes and

sweetness and innocence do no longer exist in or associate with the world or behavior of adults (i.e. at that time or even now): "If everyone were just like you, perhaps the world would be nice again, perhaps we all would be happy again" (563). This opening would probably strike a keynote for the description of Lemon's personality. She must be sick at heart with the bloody and savage practices of adults; something that is clearly paradoxical with what she unveils later in her stories. With this paradoxical character and eccentric perception, Shawn imposes complex dialectic and baffles the audience.

However, by promising to tell the audience everything about her life, Lemon puts her narrative forth and temporarily intermits the performance. Promptly, she inaugurates her leisurely narrative to capture the audience's full attention whether they like or dislike what she tells. Shawn seems to have designed Lemon's speeches in such a lengthy texture to give her enough leisure to narrate and pause for occasional intervals to put parts of her memoirs into dramatic performance. Her first long speech is dense with impressionistic views and impulsive attitudes which baffle the audience and make her character much more confusing than what she really appears. Regarding Lemon's leisurely speeches at the beginning and end of the play, Davies King notes that: "Theses

before the action starts in *Six Characters*, Pirandello, in his stage directions, describes: "There are no acts or scenes in the play. The performance will be interrupted twice, once when the Director and the characters withdraw for a conference . . . and a second time when a stage hand lowers the curtain by mistake" (569). Again, Shawn can be compared to Pirandello in his design of a play that does not show any commitment to the conventional structures of acts and scenes. His *Aunt Dan and Lemon* follows the Pirandellian style in its composition of detached scenes which first take place in Lemon's memory and then pursued in performance.

In his design of the opening scene of *Aunt Dan and Lemon*, Shawn allows Lemon, the protagonist, to appear much of a storyteller rather than a dramatic character. She opens the action using dramatic language, but in a manner resembling the well-known once-upon-a-time narrative method. Lemon, introduces herself as a generous and kind woman extending an invitation to the audience of whom she consciously selects 'little children.' In a very casual manner, Lemon starts the action: "Hello, dear audience, dear good people . . . . Hello little children. How sweet you are, how innocent . . . . Dear people, come inside into my little flat, and I'll tell you everything about my life."<sup>4</sup> Significantly, her opening welcome of 'little children' bears an implicit denotation that

the entire time of narration takes place sometime in the 1980s, when the protagonist is in her twenties. Conspicuously, Shawn's storytelling method in *Aunt Dan and Lemon* is marked by irrelevance and randomness exactly in the same manner of structuring a stream of consciousness narrative.

In its dramatic aspects, Shawn's play shares a number of similarities with the dramatic work of Luigi Pirandello. Like Pirandello, Shawn designs the play on a disrupted narrative convention. For example, in his *Six Characters in Search of an Author*, the Italian dramatist "did not finish a story. The characters he created insist on playing out their lives, and invade the rehearsal of another play" (Stevens 18). Shawn's attempt to dramatize and put into performance a series of detached narrative events from the past seems to follow Pirandello's example particularly when the latter "infuses a 'normal' dramatic situation with the plurivocal potentials of rehearsal circumstance to weave jarring crosscurrents into the dramatic fabric, and to problematize the drama's own relation to its theatrical incarnation" (Baker-White 70). Since Pirandello was unquestionably one of the most influential dramatists, his structural design of *Six Characters* must have by any means influenced Shawn's design of *Aunt Dan and Lemon* in that the opening action and the stage directions indicate similar connotations. For example,

thriller. But the action also branches boldly into political philosophy"(Par.4). Besides, the method of structuring Lemon's stories in the form of memories and flashbacks primarily recalled by direct narration (i.e. Shawn mostly uses either first-person or omniscient narrator) to be further implemented in performance, is one of the distinctive aspects of the play. It is noteworthy, too, that Shawn's narrative skill in this play lies in his suave shifts from direct narration to stage performance and vice versa. Considering its distinctive storytelling aspect, Harries writes: "The play's force does not lie only on the surface of its long speeches, but in the structure that ties speech, memory, and action together. There is no obvious key to this structure. Except of course in the memories, fears, desires, and resistance that tie us to state violence" (Par.14).

To register Lemon's memoirs and recollections and give them proper and expression, Shawn uses precarious time and space levels which seem very distinctive and peculiarly detached. For example, the earliest episode in the narrative process began around the year 1941-2, with the pictorial description of the Nazis and their extermination centers and death camps in Treblinka<sup>3</sup> I and II. Shawn suddenly shifts his kaleidoscope to pick several other unrelated episodes which took place in London sometime before 1960 when Lemon (i.e. the only narrator/character) was born, while

memoirs in Shawn's storytelling enterprise still need to be further investigated for further interpretation. However, studying the play from a storytelling perspective and following the salient narrative perspectives will emphasize and unveil the implicit antithetical visions in the explicit thesis of the play. It will also tend to trace dramatist's method of incarnating memoirs and interior monologues,<sup>1</sup> and the frequent shifts from storytelling to stage performance and vice versa.

Commenting on the use of storytelling in the dramatic structure of modern and postmodern plays, Kahn and Breed categorize *Aunt Dan and Lemon* with the plays which "deemphasize or submerge the narrative story in an attempt to capture another kind of experience, the exploration of issues in Shawn's *Aunt Dan and Lemon*" (38). By their assumption that the play 'deemphasizes,' or 'submerges' the narrative story, Kahn and Breed must mean that Shawn's play lacks a unified plot or a story line with beginning, middle, and an end. Nevertheless, they seem to have disregarded or ignored the existence of a number of detached stories which Lemon recalls as memoirs and reminiscences falling upon her mind at the moment of performance (i.e. narration). Regarding its endless line of narration, Marmion asserts: "The play itself is a Russian doll<sup>2</sup> of stories inside stories, turning almost imperceptibly into a psychological detective



sides of the political spectrum uneasy" (Par. 2-3). Among the very limited positive views is Gurr's in which he still asserts the controversial aspect of the play considering it as "not just a great play, it's advancing what theatre can do. Completely unsettling, long horrible, it's a play that works on you like hypnotism"(99).

Concisely, most of Shawn's critics have neither entirely praised nor condemned the play on the basis of the issues it discussed. However, it is this controversial and provoking aspect which distinguishes the play and forms its dominant critical background. Probably, the play can be also distinguished by its dramatic structure in which the dramatist attempts a relatively unfamiliar design of plot based mainly on storytelling and direct address with dramatic overlaps for the performance of specific scenes occurring in the mind and memory of the storyteller.

The entire dramatic action of the play is therefore intermittent and sporadic. Its episodes move forward and backward in time and space disregarding the normal and familiar theatrical conventions and onstage limitations. Since the design of its plot (i.e. action and/or storytelling) is based on a number of recollections springing out of the fatigued memory of the protagonist, the narrative lines are clearly detached and consequently appear most likely similar to what happens in a stream of consciousness novel. These detached

"Some wicked fairy must have presided over the birth of Wallace Shawn's *Aunt Dan and Lemon* (at the public Theatre). She must have decreed, 'Thou shalt have neither language nor structure, neither shapeliness nor significance, neither wit nor good sense. 'Be bereft!'" ("Real Lemon" 129).

Of similar disillusioned vision, is Hitchings's notion that: "the title of Wallace Shawn's 1985 play makes it sound like a children's story. But although *Lemon* . . . is waifish and even winsome, there's nothing cute or reassuring about this talky, fragmented essay in moral gymnastics" (Par.1). Irrespective of the reactions it imposes on the audience, Brantley notes that "*Lemon* has a story she wants to tell you. She thinks it's a wonderful story. You will probably disagree with that, but there's no way you're not going to listen" (Par.1). The play's provocative aspect is in itself indicative of its storyteller's perturbation and conscious contradictions. Regarding the shocking atmosphere of the play, Parrish comes to the conclusion that "The ensemble is an excellent pack of beasts, from Ron Kuzava as *Lemon*'s frothing American father to Caitlin Emmons's amoral call girl, stalking the stage for prey. It's rarely such fun to hate everyone onstage" (Par.2). Similarly baffled by its possible connotations, Jones considers *Aunt Dan and Lemon* as a "tricky and perennially controversial little play . . . [it] makes all

walked out or sat in glaring silence" (Wong Par.3). Similarly, in *Aunt Dan and Lemon*, Dean writes, "Shawn observes how easily morality can become totally inverted and how even one act of violence or hostility perpetrated in an atmosphere of self-justification can radically alter an individual's outlook"(172). In a disparaging manner, Billington considers the play as: "certainly an eerie experience, and is excellently directed. But, on a third viewing, Shawn's play, for all its darkly mesmerising power, depends on a number of shaky assumptions" (Par.1).

Not only because of its content that *Aunt Dan and Lemon* has been provoking, but its challenging mixture of storytelling and dramaturgy has also added a rather sophisticated aspect to its dramatic form. Shawn's dramatic structuring of the detached memoirs and flashbacks, on one hand, marks a departure from the regular norms of drama, and "critics have suggested that with *Aunt Dan and Lemon* (1985) Shawn began to give up on traditional dramatic structure altogether, largely dispensing with dialogue and plot and depending instead on direct address" (Cody 1229). Primarily, the play has been provoking by its inclusion of critical issues and striking political references. Its conclusion was not much appealing to many of Shawn's critics. Of these critics, Simon, for example, seems reluctant and displeased with the play as he notes:

His controversial play, *Aunt Dan and Lemon* (1985) has been regarded as "the darkest of black comedies; its monologues (both engaging and disturbing) bring a sense of society's broken moral compass"(Priever Par.1). On the basis of its provocative tone and disquieting atmosphere, this play has been widely recognized by reviewers who were mostly dissatisfied by the play as indicated in their mixed critical reception. Most reviews and interpretations of Shawn's play have not been altogether supportive or encouraging due to the fact that the issues it explicitly handled or propagated were particularly traumatic to theatergoers and reviewers. Insofar, even though the play has won a considerable space in critical research and scholarship, not much scrutiny has been devoted to its dramatic structure which is based mainly on merging storytelling with performance. Presumably, this article tends to lay emphasis and follow the narrative perspectives in an attempt to render a more justifiable and logical explanation of the antithetical viewpoints in its mainstream narrative visions.

Asserting the play's significance, Bigsby notes that *Aunt Dan and Lemon* may be regarded as Shawn's "real achievement, and in some sense the heart of his personal and theatrical commitments"(405). The play has been also regarded as "an ultraprovocative work . . . . Viewers have hissed, booed, screamed,

When I interviewed him recently, he told me, "People sometimes literally define me, and even embrace me, for something, in a certain way, that I don't think of as being the main thing I do. They say, 'Hey! You're the guy who was in *The Princess Bride*!'" And quite frequently I might be walking down the street thinking, "Who the hell am I?" (158)

Obviously, Shawn's true personality is antithetical and perplexing and he admits this personality split considering himself as two persons:

Indeed, Shawn has gone so far as to describe his own life as if he were two separate people: 'Person A,' the actor in movies, is a cheerful character the public thinks of as 'cute'; Person B, the somewhat less famous writer, is heavily preoccupied with exposing the injustices and hypocrisy of the world. He claims to feel this dichotomy strongly enough that, when asked why he doesn't write movies for himself to star in, he explains that 'it is because the only one of the two who can write is Person B, and he doesn't want Person A in his movies!' (Walker 559)

These antithetical self-perspectives must have unequivocally shaped the majority of Shawn's dramatic characters.

By a rich history of writing and acting, Wallace Shawn (1943 –) has distinguished himself among the reputable dramatists of the past few decades. He "has been best known as a film actor since 1979 when he made his first onscreen appearances in two of the most popular movies of that year, Woody Allan's *Manhattan* and Bob Fosse's *All that Jazz*" (Walker 559). Since then, Shawn has achieved an artistic accomplishment "as a character actor in forty-one movies, co-written one cult film, 'My Dinner with Andre,' and starred as the eponymous hero in another, 'Vanya on 42<sup>nd</sup> Street'" (Lahr 158). Likewise, Shawn has been also active as a playwright. His early plays "*Our Late Night* (1974) and *Marie and Bruce* (1980)," according to Krasner, "fascinated and puzzled audiences," because Shawn's dramatic work, Krasner adds, "is strange, nonconforming to dramatic genres or familiar aesthetic contracts between audience and stage" (437). Meanwhile, Marranca sees that Shawn's other plays such as "*The Fever* (1990) and *The Designated Mourner* (1996) get behind the façade of the extravagant 1990s to offer a devastating portrait of an affluent and complacent society isolated from the world's tragedies"(281). In the weird design of his characters, it seems that Shawn most probably reflects his interest and fascination by his own baffling personality. As Lahr contends:

**Merging Storytelling with Performance: A Study  
of the Perturbed and Antithetical Viewpoints  
in Wallace Shawn's *Aunt Dan and Lemon***

Dr. Ahmed S. M. Mohammed

**Abstract**

Wallace Shawn has distinguished himself as a reputable dramatist by a rich history of writing and acting. On the basis of its provocative tone and disquieting atmosphere, his *Aunt Dan and Lemon* (1985) has been widely condemned by reviewers who were dissatisfied by the play. Most reviews and interpretations of this play have not been altogether supportive or encouraging probably because the issues it explicitly handled did not appeal to theatergoers and reviewers. In spite of the fact that the play has won a considerable space in recent scholarship and research, not much scrutiny has been devoted to its dramatic structure which is mainly based on merging storytelling with dramatic performance. Therefore, this article tends to study the narrative perspectives in order to render a more justifiable and logical explanation of the antithetical viewpoints in its mainstream narrative visions. It will also disentangle the confusion arising from welding its dramatic performance together with past reminiscences and flashbacks recalled through the mind of the protagonist. Besides, it will look for possible reasons behind the presentation of such eccentric characters and their whimsical traits.

**Keywords:** Dramatic Structure; Storytelling; Performance; Perturbation; Antitheticalism; Narrative viewpoints; Paradoxical;





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