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"It is my life": A Psychoanalytical and an Existentialist Study of People of Suicidal Tendencies in Modern and Contemporary American Suicide Drama

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Abstract

This study presents a psychoanalytical and an existentialist investigation into people of suicidal tendencies in modern and contemporary American drama in the elated hope to probe deeper into the minds of such characters and reveal the causes behind developing such suicidal ideation, attempted suicides and completed suicides. Before committing or attempting to commit suicide characters of suicidal tendencies must have experienced many ordeals in their lives that have made them want to commit suicide. They feel or must have felt overloaded by the miserable conditions they find themselves entrapped in. Their suicidality is the culmination of long years of pent up frustration, hopelessness, powerlessness and helpless endurance. For them resorting to suicide seems inescapable to relieve them of the pain of daily living.

Keywords: Suicide; Suicidality; Causes; Psychoanalysis; Tendencies; American; Drama

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The notion of suicide or the deliberate taking of one's own life is a hot and controversial issue tackled in all literary genres. Many world dramatists, poets and fiction writers have portrayed characters with suicidal tendencies who have contemplated or did in fact commit suicide as a result of the unbearable stress, despair and grief they suffer from. Unable to psychologically cope with the ordeals they pass through, many characters in literature find in suicide an escape from the harsh conditions they find themselves entrapped in. To depict the hopelessness and meaninglessness of life many modern American dramatists have populated their plays with characters whose depression and seemingly detachment and estrangement from society have driven them to contemplate suicide or even terminate their lives. The study investigates the phenomenon of suicide in modern and contemporary American drama in the light of some major psychoanalytic perspectives, including Freudian views and those of his disciples and contemporary psychiatry. In addition, the study explores suicidality from existential and ethical perspectives integrating perceptions of suicide in comparative theology.

Suicide is a personal act condemned by all heavenly religions: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Suicide is prohibited in Judaism since it is perceived as a grave sin punishable by hell. The prohibition of suicide in Judaism is implicitly stated in a verse in Noah, where, after the flood, God addresses Noah**,** "Surely I will require your lifeblood (*The Holy Bible*, 1995)" interpreted as: I will require your blood if you yourselves shed it. In the Jewish tradition suicides are not even entitled to Jewish burials and mourning rites because, as Rabbi Jacobs pointed out, their act entails a denial of human life as a divine gift(Jacobs, Rabbi). In Islam committing suicide is a deadly sin and a person who commits suicide is condemned to hell. In Surah Al-Nisaa' Allah says, "Do not kill yourselves for verily Allah hath been Most Merciful to you(The Holy Quran, 4:29)." Prophet Mohammad, peace be upon him, also warned Muslims against committing suicide on the basis that it is punishable by hell: "He who commits suicide by throttling shall keep on throttling himself in the Hell Fire forever and he who commits suicide by stabbing himself shall keep on stabbing himself in the Hell-Fire (Sahih Bukhari, 446)." There is even an ongoing dispute among Muslim scholars whether the funeral prayer of a person who com-

mitted suicide should be performed or not. In Christianity the suicide is denied a respectful Christian funeral. Jesus considered suicide a cowardly sinful act, a rejection of life as a divine gift. Jesus says, "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own, you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body." (The Holy Bible, 1995)

Such Christian perception of suicide is well documented in all literary genres of English literature. Shakespeare's drama is replete with characters who have resorted to suicide to put an end to their misery in life. In the final scene of Romeo and Juliet the two romantically enchanted young lovers Romeo and Juliet both commit suicide. In *Julius Caesar* Brutus and Cassius both terminate their lives. In *Othello* the moor Othello stabs himself to death with a dagger after killing his mistress in a crime of passion and honor. *Antony and Cleopatra* ends with massive suicides, including the suicide of both Antony and Cleopatra. Shakespeare seems to hold contradictory views towards suicide. In *King Lear* suicide is depicted as a satanic act caused by demonic forces controlling the individual who commits such a hideous act. Commenting on the blinded Gloucester's frustrated attempt at suicide from Dover Cliff, his son Edgar asserts that the suicidal instinct is facilitated by "some fiend(*King Lear,* 4.6.72)." In *Hamlet,* while the two grave diggers are digging a grave for Ophelia they negotiate whether the young woman deserves the rituals of a Christian burial or not since they doubted that she deliberately drowned herself in the brook. In Medieval and Renaissance Europe, the corpses of those convicted with suicide were, in compliance with the canon law, denied a Christian burial in sanctified ground. Before the body of a suicide was thrown in a hole dug in a highway or crossroads, his or her heart was pierced through with a stake (MacDonald, Murphy, 1990). These rituals involving a disgraceful burial and the desecration of the corpse of the self-murderer denoted that suicides were considered sinners and felons thus marking them exemplary to others. Barry Nass states that "Suicides were thereby made the object of opprobrium, in death debased and ostracized from the community whose beliefs about the sanctity of life they had profoundly transgressed" (Nass, 2000) .

However, in some Shakespearean plays suicide is depicted as an honorable and admirable act. In *Antony and Cleopatra* suicide is presented in a favorable light echoing the Roman honor associated with the act. Cleopatra says,

> Then, what's brave, what's noble
> Let's do it after the high Roman fashion
> And make death proud to take us (Shakespeare, scene 15, lines 101-103).

Rowland Wymer (1986) states that, "suicide was reacquiring the dignity and honor of its Roman past, but had not lost its medieval connotations of shame and despair (Rowland Wymer, 1986)." Kirkland (1999) perceives suicide as "a release from suffering, a refuge against anticipated misfortune (Kirkland, 1999)." Hamlet's "To be or not to be" soliloquy, quoted underneath, clearly reflects the ultimate purpose of depressed people contemplating suicide as a form of escape from the miseries of life:

> For who would bear the whips and scorns of time,
> The oppressor's wrong, the proud man's contumely.
> When he himself might his quietus make
> With a bare bodkin? (William Shakespeare, p. 78-9, 83-4)

Both Juliet in *Romeo and Juliet* and Othello in *Othello* express the same purpose of committing suicide as a release from the agonies of life. Juliet says, "If all else fail, myself have power to die" (William Shakespeare, p.255), and Othello *says*, "If there be cords, or knives. Poison, or fire, or suffocating streams, I'll not endure it(William Shakespeare, p.436-438)." Despite this contradiction in Shakespeare's perception of suicide as both a token of honor and condemnation, Kirkland remarks that "the attitude toward suicide in Shakespeare's plays, pagan and Christian, is generally one of acceptance (Kirkland, 1999, p.662)."

Several studies have shown that religiosity can reduce suicide rates. Believers in God who are afflicted with bodily or psychological diseases do not resort to suicide as a final solution to their calamities because they fear God's punishment, whereas those who have weak faith find comfort in such a hideous act. Neeleman and Lewis (1999) have found out that religiosity protects individuals who suffer from severe depression, chronic diseases or economic calamities and that the protective effect of religion may be greater in less religious countries (Neeleman, and Lewis, 1999). Durkheim (1952) argues that religion protects against suicide, but asserts that similar protection should be provided by other types of social support, and especially by the family and political society (Durkheim, 1952, p.171). Durkheim generally saw the main protections against suicide coming from living in tighter and more integrated religions, families and societies (Durkheim, 1952, p.171). Individuals living in disintegrated families teeming with familial problems like divorce, separation, abandonment are likely to develop suicidal tendencies. Families in many modern societies have disintegrated as a result of the accelerating influence of globalization, technology, and individualism, and America is not exempted from this global trend. James Wilson (1999) commenting on the causes of the moral decline in the American society states, "The American people believe that this nation is on the wrong track, not because it is constitutionally ill-founded or economically backward, but because its family life is deteriorating." (Preface to Richard Gill, 1999)

Suicide is a dreadful act that reflects the irrational facet of the human psyche; an act condemned by almost

all cultures, and an act that violates the basic rules of citizenship and shatters the foundations of human existence. The psychiatrist Weisman (1967) compared suicide to a natural apocalypse that demolishes the structure of the world and its natural order (Weisman, 1967). Though suicidality is a worldwide phenomenon in world literature, it is a prevalent action within the context of American literature in particular in modern drama. Many renowned American dramatists have created characters of suicidal tendencies such as Eugene O'Neill, Arthur Miller, Tennessee Williams, Sam Shepard, and Marsha Norman. Even some American literary suicides, who have depicted characters that resort to self-killing, have committed suicide themselves. Ernest Hemingway committed suicide with a gunshot in 1961, and two years later in 1963 the poetess Sylvia Plath committed suicide by self-asphyxiation in a stove (Jeffrey Berman, 1999).

Marsha Norman's '*night, Mother* (1983) is the representative American suicide drama that shows how a woman deliberately commits suicide to put an end to her apathy and sufferance in life. The play opens with Jessie, an epileptic woman, unfeelingly informing her mother, Thelma that she plans to take her own life. At first, Thelma considers Jessie's talk about committing suicide trivial, and does not believe that she means what she said, but later realizes that her daughter is serious in carrying out the act. Throughout the play Thelma tries in vain, using various tactics, to dissuade her daughter from making such a suicide ideation a reality. Thelma, acting out of her love for her daughter, has not informed Jessie about her epilepsy until she has become a fully grown up woman. Like Linda of Miller's *Death of a Salesman*, Thelma resorts to the wrong policy to dissuade her daughter from inflicting self-death on herself. As Robert Brustein pointed out, Jessie is full of recrimination, particularly about Thelma's lying to her about her epilepsy, and in deciding to commit suicide, Jessie inadvertently has set forth on a mission to punish her mother (Brustein, 1996). But, Jessie has already decided to take her own life and she even does not hide her intention to carry out such a hideous act from her mother. For Jessie it is her own life and she can do whatever she wants with it. Addressing her powerless mother, Jessie metaphorically likens her plan of terminating her own life at any moment she wants to disembarking from a bus, "because even if I ride fifty more years and get off then, it's the same place when I step down to it. Whenever I feel like it, I can get off. As soon as I've had enough, it's my stop (Norman, 1983)." Deliberately, Jessie inflicts pain on her helpless mother and forces her to live a nightmarish experience. Hanson states, "Jessie's announcement to her mother is cruel in that she puts Thelma into an untenable, yet unavoidable, situation (Hanson, 2006)." Inattentive to her mother's feelings, Jessie cruelly cries out, "My life is all I really have that belongs to me, and I'm going to say what happens to it (Norman, 1983, p.30)."

Deception and untruthfulness permeate through the daily conversation between Jessie and her mother Thelma. As Bigsby (1999) observes, "For somewhere beneath the apparent banalities of conversations which seem no more than ways of passing the time, of filling the silence, are emotional truths which bruise the language and expose hidden tensions and anxieties (Bigsby, 1999)." What makes the experience touching and nerve raking even to the audience is the fact that the play consists of only one act and the setting is fixed in time and place. The action unfolds in one place without any change of scenery and the time is chronologically real and matches that of the real time for the audience. Norman has employed such a dramatic technique to stress the social detachment of the two characters. From an existential perspective the real time technique also keeps the audience emotionally involved in the onstage action and thus share the nightmarish experience the mother has to live while helplessly trying to dissuade her daughter not to commit suicide.

The stage directions in '*night, Mother* clearly show that the clock on the wall, which is visible on the stage, displays the actual time known to the audience. In making the duration of the play similar to that of the onstage action and in emphasizing the concurrence between the time of the dramatic world and the real world, the dramatist has sought to dissolve all boundaries between both worlds, the imaginary and the real. The audience sporadically keeps watching the clock ticking to see how much time is left for Thelma to dissuade her daughter from committing suicide. Thelma mistakenly believes that she is to blame for fostering Jessie's planned suicide. Conscience-stricken, she says to Jessie, "It has to be me that's the matter here. You wouldn't be doing this if it wasn't (Norman, 1983, p.30)." She even confesses to her that hiding her epilepsy from her for so long and marrying her off to the wrong man may be a tragic mistake that she committed and that must have made her think of suicide. Thelma says to Jessie, "I didn't tell you things or I married you off to the wrong man (Norman, 1983, p.62)." Thelma keeps making guesses as to what has developed a suicidal tendency in her daughter. This time she thinks that in trying to mold her in her image as all mothers do might have developed in her such a hideous tendency to kill herself "or I took you in and let your life get away from you or all of it put together (Norman, 1983, p.62)." Thelma seems confused and can not think of the accurate cause for developing such an obsession of suicide in her daughter, and now she feels incapable of helping her overcome such an obsession. She says to Jessie, "I don't know what I did, but I did it, I know. This is all my fault, Jessie, but I don't know what to do about it now (Norman, 62)!" Jessie coldly replies that her mother has nothing to do with her suicide ideation: "It doesn't have anything to do with you (Norman, 63)!" Having heard the gunshot that indicates that

Jessie has killed herself, Thelma bursts into tears and cries out, "Jessie, Jessie, child...Forgive me. I thought you were mine (Norman, 77)." Thelma seems to have finally realized that Jessie has never been molded into her image and that Jessie's life has always been hers. However, like any other woman, Thelma feels that she has failed to pluck out the idea of suicide from her epileptic daughter's mind. In fact, no matter how much she has tried to prevent Jessie from carrying out her plan to commit suicide, Jessie is determined to go ahead with her plan. Like any mother Thelma feels that she might have used the wrong tactic in saving her daughter's life. Hanson states, "Thelma is destined to fail and destined to bear the blame for that failure (Norman, 63)." However, any mother placed in Thelma's pitiable situation would feel confused and unable to choose the right way to save her daughter's life. Browder points out,

> Whatever this particular mother did would have been wrong, just as whatever any mother does is wrong. As long as she is made to feel ultimately responsible for her daughter's well-being, a mother is thrust into unyielding, conflicting expectations (Browder, 1989).

The confined setting of *'night, Mother* is a constant reminder of the inescapability of both women from the claustrophobic situation they are entrapped in. While Jessie is ensnared in her own thoughts of suicide, Thelma seems imprisoned in Jessie's mind trying to find a way out of her obsession with suicide in an attempt to save her. The physical confinement of the two women in a relatively small house built way out on a country road mirrors their isolation from the outside world. This feeling of entrapment both physical and emotional seems to make escape from the dilemma of suicide for both women impossible. Jessie's suicide impulses that drive her to carry out the act function as the destructive other that resides in our psyches. Olga Mikhailova states,

> The problem is that the "Other" is always with us and inside us with the full destructive power of its gaze. Sometimes the latter will push the individual towards the most drastic of actions–self-inflicted death (Mikhailova, 2005).

In some American plays suicide is caused by a chronic disease genetically inherited from a parent .In such plays the patient is forced to take his or her own life to put an end to their sickness. Several physiological theories of psychiatric disorders emphasize the role of the parents in passing on the genes for the disorder to their sons and daughters. Norman's *'night, Mother* portrays the mental and emotional state of a suicidal, epileptic woman who resorts to suicide for two apparent reasons: suffering from a chronic disease, in this case epilepsy, and living in a disintegrating family. From the conversation between Jessie and her mother Thelma we learn that Jessie's father, referred to only as "Daddy," has already died of acute depression, social detachment and epilepsy. Thus, the father has genetically passed on his chronic disease to his daughter Jessie. Though Daddy is an offstage character, his influence on his daughter Jessie's fatal decision to take her life is undeniable. The dead father's gun, the only remnant of the deceased father in addition to the epilepsy she inherited from him, foreshadows the daughter's wish to terminate her life. Though Jessie keeps cleaning her father's gun in anticipation for her approaching suicide, she lies to her mother by telling her that she intends to use the gun only for protection. In fact, after her Daddy's death, Jessie started to feel lonely and becomes emotionally disturbed. In fact, Jessie not only loved her father more than her mother, but she also acquired several traits of his personality including his acute depression, social detachment, gloomy mood, lethargic attitude towards life and people, and even his suicidal tendencies. Thomas Luddy argues that Jessie suffers from an incurable disease that drives many people to contemplate suicide. Jessie, Luddy states, had a "reluctant awareness that she is already gone, alive now on borrowed time like someone with a terminal illness (Luddy, 1983)." Hanson argues that Jessie's epilepsy is the cause for much of her present unhappiness, depression, and thus her suicide (Kristin Hanson, 36). Indeed, Jessie's frequent epileptic seizures surely made her contemplate committing suicide to put an end to such shameful existence. Her epilepsy has even rendered her helpless, almost, as Agnes remarks, "like a corpse (Marsha Norman)." In fact, Agnes' description of Jessie's emotional and mental state as a corpse mirrors Mama's frequent depiction of her late husband's lifestyle that rendered him a lifeless and corpse-like demeanor even at home. Actually, Daddy not only passed on his negative traits to his daughter Jessie, but also to his grandson Ricky. Jessie passes on the negative expectations her father had for her to her son Ricky that he will live a fiasco all his life and will even turn into a criminal. Jessie even complains that her husband abandoned her without tolerating her epilepsy in the same way her mother did not understand the agony and pain associated with her father's epilepsy. Jessie tells her mother, "He just didn't know how things fall down around me like they do (Marsha Norman, 53)." Thelma even fears that Jessie will pass on her morbid mood and her suicidality to her son Ricky. Therefore, Thelma appeals to Jessie's maternal nature to stop contemplating suicide as this will ultimately make her son devalue life and as a result might develop a suicidal tendency. Heart-broken, Thelma reproaches Jessie, "You'll be telling him killing is O.K. with you, you know. Want him to start killing next? Nothing wrong with it. Mom did it (Marsha Norman, 20)." Jessie even sarcastically tells her mother that her expectation for her son to develop criminal behavior will be fulfilled, but it is "Only a matter of time, Mama (Marsha Norman, 21)."

Norman seems quite knowledgeable of psychiatry as her message in the play seems to show that people of suicidal behavior inevitably pass on such irrationality and self-destructive behavior to their kids. Vicky

Phares (1999) asserts that the father's disturbed mental and emotional state negatively affects his children's behavior. Phares states, "having a father who is depressed is associated with a number of emotional and behavioral problems for children (Phares, 1996, p.46)." Souery et al. (2003) have found out that morbid daily life happenings likely to cause harmful health and behavior outcomes can be buffered in some individuals by protective genes (Souery, Daniel, et al, 2003, p. 191–196). Kohut (1978) argues that the depressed do not fear death as they are already overwhelmed by an acute feeling of "inner deadness (Kohut, 1978, p.5)." In Kohut's opinion, the disintegration anxiety in neurotic and depressed people is much stronger than their fear of death; therefore, such a libidinal anxiety forces such alienated people into destroying their lives. In her final moments of despair Jessie in '*night, Mother* makes it crystal clear to her mother that her suicide is inevitable as she has become fed up with living. She tells her mother, "I'm just not having a very good time and I don't have any reason to think it'll get anything but worse. I'm tired. I'm hurt. I'm sad. I feel used (Norman, 23)." It is clear that Jessie's epilepsy caused her acute depression that in turn resulted in her choice of suicide. Many psychological studies have shown a great link between high rates of suicide and acute depression. Cavanagh et al. (2003) argue that clinical depression is a strong predictor of subsequent suicides, both attempted and complete (Cavanagh, Carson, et al, 2003, p. 395–405). Several studies have shown that abandonment by the husband, divorce, and widowhood leave many women preys to depression and suicidal thoughts. Luoma and Pearson (2002) have also found out that widowhood remains a large risk factor that motivates some widows and neglected women to resort to suicide (Luoma, and Pearson, 2002, p.1518–1522). Durkheim has also found out that a stable marriage has a suicide preventive power for widows and divorcees (Emile Durkheim, 171). Jessie's abandonment by her husband seems also to have influenced her mental health significantly. Being abandoned by her husband along with her chronic epilepsy must have made her prone to depression and thus have developed in her a suicidal tendency.

Most psychoanalysts hold that when dealing with a suicidal person overwhelmed with feelings of self-hatred, self-debasement, and depression, the therapist has to be firm in refusing to accept the client's death wishes. While incarnating the vitality of life force, the therapist must openly reveal to the suicide that his or her self-destructive impulses are disparaging and have negative consequences on their families and society. Thelma fails to play the role of a good psychiatrist and did not even consult one to help her dissuade her daughter Jessie from taking her own life. Thelma did not even bring Jessie any antipsychotic medication that might reduce her anxiety and depression. Jessie is epileptic, abandoned by her husband, unemployed and has developed an inferiority complex. She has become antisocial and her withdrawal from society has made her prone to psychosis and depression. Jessie's inner deadness has reduced her inner worth to a minimal limit and thus she is forced into terminating her life which for her has become meaningless and is not worth living.

The murder-suicide syndrome, a term coined in criminal justice and which denotes inflicting self-death on oneself after committing murder, is applicable to many modern American plays. Wormer and Odiah (1999) have defined the syndrome as "Willingly inflicting harm on others as a way of ensuring their own death. Sometimes turning the gun on others in order to get up the nerve to pull the trigger on themselves (Wormer, & Odiah, 1999)." In Miller's *All My Sons*, though Joe Keller did not kill the twenty-one American Air Force pilots, he did in fact cause their deaths indirectly. Though Joe Keller is not the like of Thomas Hamilton, a disillusioned scoutmaster with an obsessive interest in guns and school children, who committed the mass murder of a whole classroom of children in Dunblane, Scotland, and horrified the whole world with such an atrocious act, Hamilton's last gunshot through his own brain looks very similar to Keller's suicide at the end of the play. Both Keller and Hamilton resorted to the murder-suicide act as a form of penalty and self-punishment for committing a horrible crime.

In *All My Sons* (1947) Arthur Miller weaves the fabric of the play in a way to show how a suicide, even in his death, can function as a catalyst for the onstage action and set the lives of the onstage characters into turmoil and chaos. Joe Keller, a ruthless aircraft engines manufacturer, is charged with selling cracked aircraft cylinder heads to the American Air Force during the war, thus causing the tragic death of twenty-one pilots. His son Larry, a fighter pilot in the American Air Force who was reported missing, most probably dead in a combat aircraft crash off the coast of China, commits suicide because of his father's criminality towards his nation and his fellow countrymen. This military suicide contributes much to the development of the play's plot and its climax. The absent son also controls the play's climax. His fiancée Ann shocks all when she reveals a hand-written letter she received from Larry in which he divulges to her his intention of committing suicide out of the shame of the crime his father committed:

> My dear Ann: Yesterday they flew in a load of papers from the States and I read about Dad and your father being convicted. I can't bear to live any more. How could he have done that? Every day three or four men never come back and he sits there doing business. I can't face anybody. I'm going on a mission in a few minutes. They'll probably report me missing. I want you to know that you mustn't wait for me. I tell you Ann, if I had him there now I could kill him (Miller, 1973).

Joe Keller realized, though too late, that the cracked cylinder heads he dispatched to the American Air Force

during the war did not only cause the tragic deaths of the pilots, including his son, but also distorted his image as an American profiteer in the eyes of his fellow countrymen. Stunned by this news and beleaguered by a tormenting sense of guilt for shamefully disgracing the reputation of his son among his fellow pilots and thus driving him to commit suicide in a plane crash, Joe Keller shoots himself.

In *The Social Reality of Death* Charmaz (1980) explains that Freud's notion of the death instinct exists in conflict with life instincts in a similar way as the social id is in conflict with the socially imbued superego (Charmaz, 1980). The death instincts then become mediated by the ego into aggressive acts outside the self (Wormer, and Odiah, 5). In line with Freud's conceptualization of suicide, Menninger argues that people who harbor suicidal thoughts are depressed and immature individuals fixated at early stages of development (Menninger, 1983). In her poem "Lady Lazarus" the American poetess Sylvia Plath, one of the notable American literary suicides, even considers suicide an art; a personal and private affair that everyone can do in an exceptional way. The persona in the poem says,

> Dying
> Is an art, like everything else,
> I do it exceptionally well (Plath, 1962).

Any discussion of suicide should take into consideration the two contradictory views of suicide: theology and its condemnation of the act and a non-theologically based ethic which is culturally oriented since many cultures consider suicide a rational and noble act. David Hume's essay "Of suicide", published in 1777, is unquestionably applicable to the debate about the morality of suicide in American drama. Hume's essay presents several non-theological arguments in defense of the morality and rationality of suicide. In fact, Hume's existentialist suppressed views of suicide as a permissible act caused a storm of debate among theologians who viewed the act as being strictly impermissible. Hume even considers suicide a courageous rather than a cowardly act. He writes of "a man who, tired of life, and hunted by pain and misery, bravely overcomes all the natural terrors of death, and makes his escape from this cruel scene (Hume, 2004, p.4)." Hume argues that suicide is permissible in many cases, including chronic diseases, individual misfortunes, calamities, and when life becomes a burden or meaningless. Hume writes, "That suicide may often be consistent with interest, and with our duty to ourselves, no one can question who allows, that age, sickness, or misfortune may render life a burthen, and make it worse even than annihilation (Hume, 2004, p.4)." In fact, even today's medical ethicists would not reject such an argument, especially when it comes to assisted suicide as a form of mercy killing and putting an end to the suffering of a patient whose recovery seems impossible. Frey (1999) argues that consequentialism that permits one to take his or her life depends upon how consequences work out, and then one may have a positive duty to take one's life (Frey, 1999, p.339). Hume states "a man, who retires from life, does no harm to society. He only ceases to do good, which, if it be an injury, is of the lowest kind (Hume, 7)." Hume does not consider suicide a violation of the suicide's duty to society, but only to those who love him, including his or her spouse, children and parents.

Freud was very much interested in self-destruction and had discussed the phenomenon of suicide in the context of his theories of the libido and the death instinct. For Freud and contemporary psychoanalysts suicide is considered as a "self-directed aggression (Ellis, 2002, p.133)" or "murder in the 180th degree (Shneidman, 2001, p.92)." In *Mourning and Melancholia* Freud argues that sadism is behind some people's tendency towards self-destruction. Freud says, "It is this sadism alone that solves the riddle of the tendency to suicide (Freud, 1995/1997, p.252)." In *The Ego and the Id* Freud holds that the death instinct embodied in sadism "had entrenched itself in the super-ego and turned against the ego. What is now holding sway in the super-ego is…a pure culture of the death instinct, and in fact it often enough succeeds in driving the ego into death (Bibring, Edward, 1968, p.164)." In *The Economic Problems of Masochism* Freud writes, "the sadism of the super-ego and the masochism of the ego supplement each other and unite to produce the same effects (Freud, 1924/1960, p.43)." Self-inflicted death caused by depression, to quote Bibring (1953/1968), "stems from a tension within the ego itself, from an inner-systemic conflict (Bibring, Edward, 1968, 164)." Faber (1967) argues that people resort to suicide for different reasons though all objectives of suicide are paradoxically "life-oriented as well as death oriented (Faber, Mel, 1967, p.31)."

To Freudian psychoanalysts suicide entails a triumph of the ego over the unbearable suffering that has finally exceeded the maximum limits of endurance. Though psychoanalysts perceive suicide as pathology, they do not restrain from describing it as a natural act for a person overwhelmed with guilt, anxiety, and depression. Freud (1961) states, "[if] the aim of all life is death" what choice do we have but to go along with it? (Freud, 1961, p.32)" Though post-Freudian psychoanalysts discuss suicide in the context of manic-depressive disorder, they still perceive the act as a triumph rather than a defeat (Klein, 1975, p262-289). Winnicott (1971) holds that suicide is caused by extreme despair, but not an extreme pathology. In Winnicott's view self-inflicted death is an accomplishment rather than a retreat from life, a natural phenomenon in desperate people, and their self-destruction is the result of healthy psychic structures (Winnicott, 1971, p.93).

In many American plays some characters resort to suicide because of being haunted by tormenting feelings of guilt for wrongdoing against the family. Eugene

O'Neill's trilogy *Mourning Becomes Electra* is centered on two suicides. Unlike its original Greek legend in which the son and the daughter deliberately murder their mother Clytemnestra, the mother in O'Neill's play resorts to taking her own life. However, like its original counterpart, both Orin and Lavinia are tormented by feelings of guilt for precipitating their mother's suicide. This tormenting guilt forces Orin to commit suicide, and Lavinia to withdraw from the real world. Like Clytemnestra in the Greek legend, Christine tries in vain to justify her betrayal of her husband to her daughter. She even speaks to her as a woman rather than her daughter:

> I'm talking to you as a woman now, not as mother to daughter! That relationship has no meaning between us! You've called me vile and shameless! Well, I want you to know that's what I've felt about myself for over twenty years, giving my body to a man (O'Neill, 1995, 286).

Lavinia cold heartedly rejects her mother's justification and continuously talks to her as a rival rather than her mother. Christine has failed to realize that her sensuality and betrayal have distanced her from her daughter. O'Neill depicts Christine as a sensuous and voluptuous forty-year old woman with an animal grace whose sensuality has decreased her motherly affection. The stage directions read: "Christine Mannon is a tall striking-looking woman of forty but she appears younger. She has a fine, voluptuous figure and she moves with a flowing animal grace (O'Neill, 266)." Kristin Hanson states, "These details place Christine in the realm of the hyper-feminine by emphasizing animal movement over reason and higher thought (Hanson, 47)." However, Christine's tragic flaw as a pathetic heroine seems her sensuality that made her betray her husband with his friend; a betrayal that has distanced her from her husband and disgraced her in the eyes of her children. Lavinia confronts her mother with her inner feelings towards her. She tells her that she has never treated her as her daughter, but rather as an object of disgust. Lavinia frankly outpours her bitterness towards her mother:

> So, I was born of your disgust! I've always guessed that, Mother–ever since I was little–when I used to come to you–with love–but you would always push me away! I've felt it ever since I can remember–your disgust! Oh, I hate you! (O'Neill, 287)

Christine hopelessly tries to justify her estrangement from her daughter when she was a little girl by frankly confessing to her that she unwillingly hated her at first because she has always reminded her of her conjugal rape by her father. On her wedding night the bride Christine was forced to have a sexual intercourse with her new husband Ezra against her will. For Christine, Lavinia was not a daughter, but merely a hideous reminder of her rape on her wedding night. Heartbroken and in the elated hope to garner her daughter's sympathy, Christine makes the confession of her heart: "I tried to love you. I told myself it wasn't human not to love my own child, born of my body. But I never could make myself feel you were born of any body but his [Ezra's] (O'Neill, 287)." Christine has failed to notice that she is to blame for her failure to establish a warm motherly relationship with her daughter from the beginning. She has rejected her daughter at a time when she most needed her affection. Rather than molding her in her own image as a mother, Christine has rejected her daughter and has treated her as an object of derision and an extension of her hatred to her husband. In this line of argument, Miliora asserts, "In the dialogue between Lavinia and Christine, it is apparent that Christine has never loved her daughter and that she failed to serve as a mirroring self object (Miliora, 2000, p.98)." In fact, in the ensuing battle between the mother and her daughter both seem blind minded to the wrongdoing each has done towards the other. While the mother is guilty of neglect, the daughter is guilty of cold-heartedness in tolerating her mother's guilt.

Throughout *Electra* both the mother and her daughter engage in a fierce battle to gain dominance over the men in their lives, in particular Ezra Mannon and Orin. Christine uses every tactic to convince her husband that she has been faithful to him during his absence in war, while Lavinia keeps convincing her father that her mother has betrayed him in his absence with his friend Captain Brant. While Ezra was at war, Lavinia sent him a letter in which she complained to him of her mother's illicit love affair with Captain Brant. However, to defend herself against such accusations, Christine frequently tries to poison her husband's ears with fabrications of facts and tries to convince him that Captain Brant's frequent visit to their house was meant for Lavinia. Christine even coaxes Brant to pretend having a passion for Lavinia to confuse her daughter's increasing suspicions about their affair. However, after a romantic walk in the moonlight that ended with a kiss on the lips, Lavinia realizes that Brant's infatuation is fake and he is deceiving her for her mother's sake. When Ezra informs Christine of the content of the letter he received from his daughter while he was at war, she immediately reports to him that Brant is Lavinia's beau. When Ezra inquires, "Vinnie wrote me you'd had company. I never heard of him. What business had he here?" Christine, mockingly replies, "You had better ask Vinnie! He's her latest beau! She even went walking in the moonlight with him! (O'Neill, 304)" In fabricating this lie, Christine has succeeded both in deflecting her illicit love affair with Brant, and creating an emotional gap between Ezra and Lavinia. However, Lavinia is not an easy prey. She tactically tries to persuade her father that her mother's love affair with Captain Brant is a disgrace to Mannon's family and that she deserves to be punished for her immorality.

To unravel the true identity of her mother as an infidel woman who betrayed both her husband and the honor of the entire Mannon's family, Lavinia even distorts her mother's image in the eye of her brother Orin. Though

Orin is allied with his mother in her battle with his father and sister since he loves her with an incestuous passion, a feeling that Christine seems to return, he feels suspicious of his mother. Lavinia wickedly convinces her brother to take caution in dealing with his mother since she is morally degenerate: "All I want to do is warn you to be on your guard. Don't let her baby you the way she used to and get you under her thumb again. Don't believe the lies she'll tell you! (O'Neill, 329)" Jealous of his mother for betraying him with another lover, Orin murders Captain Brant under Lavinia's direction. Both suicides in *Electra* are caused by a feeling of guilt for wrongdoing against the family. Christine commits suicide because she has felt that she has disgraced her family by her promiscuity and betrayal, while Orin commits suicide for disgracing his mother even further by having an incestuous affair with her and precipitating her suicide. The conflict between the mother and the daughter ends up in their destruction. While Christine takes her own life, Lavinia is doomed to live in guilt for precipitating the death of her mother and brother and destroying her entire family.

The family of a suicide is traumatized, heartbroken and usually embarrassed to talk about the suicide once he or she has gone. Beth Henley's *Crimes of the Heart* (1981) shows how suicide negatively affects the lives of the family members of the person who commits suicide and how such a tendency to kill oneself can be emulated by other members of the same family. The play portrays three daughters whose mother committed suicide when they were children and how the mother's act has radically altered the course of action for each character in the play. Babe, the youngest daughter, has developed both a suicidal tendency and a violent behavior. Meg, the middle daughter, turns into a public slut, and Lenny, the eldest daughter, develops hatred toward men and heterosexuality. Hanson argues that the Magrath mother is to blame for her daughters' failure to live happily as her tragic suicide created these problems in her daughters (205). The play commences with Babe sent to jail for shooting her husband, Zackery. Lenny, the eldest daughter, who lives in their childhood home and cares for their hospitalized aged grandfather, lives the life of a recluse and has preferred to remain an old maid. She has even developed a kind of repulsion of heterosexuality, and therefore disdained from marriage. Babe returns home after being bailed out of jail by her lawyer, Barnette. The mystery surrounding the mother's suicide and the causes of that act remain a mystery throughout the play. Henley does not mention the causes of the mother's suicide directly and the entire image of the suicide incident is unraveled gradually and comically. The audience has to gather the bits of information scattered throughout the play to scrutinize the causes of the mother's suicide. The unraveling of the causes of the mother's suicide starts in Act One when Babe and Meg suddenly bring up the topic of their mother's death. In this dialogue the two sisters divulge the means by which the mother took her life. The audience is allowed to know that the mother hung herself along with her yellow cat:

> Babe. (*After a pause*) Gosh, sometimes I wonder...
> Meg. What?
> Babe. Why she did it. Why mama hung herself.
> Meg. I don't know. She had a bad day. A real bad day. You know how it feels on a real bad day.
> Babe. And that old yellow cat. It was sad about that old cat (Henley, 1982, p.21).

In Act Two, Babe gives the audience a fuller picture of how the absent mother killed herself, "That old yellow cat. You know, I bet if she hadn't of hung that old cat along with her, she wouldn't have gotten all that national coverage. (Henley, 1982, p.44)" Henley comically emulates the murder-suicide syndrome, but instead of murdering a human being, the mother killed her yellow cat before committing suicide. Henley gives hints to the audience that the mother's suicide might have been caused by severe depression after having been abandoned by her husband with three daughters to raise. Thus, one can see that a husband's abandonment of his wife might cause her a lot of misery and in some cases some women might resort to suicide. However, the mother's suicide rather than the father's abandonment is the defining and lasting impact on the three daughter's lives. The mother's suicide is so tormenting to the three daughters though each shows a different reaction to this dilemma. Their hopelessness in life has rendered them prone to psychological diseases, violence, promiscuity and even criminal behavior. Chick complains that the mother's suicide must have made Lenny hesitant or even repulsive to cross the threshold of the Ladies' League. On her thirtieth birthday, Lenny expresses her fatigue in life and that she has become feeble. Although at the age of thirty a woman is still in the peak of her attractivity and sexual vivacity, Lenny feels that she is decrepit and as dumb as a corpse. She says to Meg, "I'm thirty years old today and my face is getting all pinched up and my hair is falling out in the comb. (Henley, 1982, p.44)" Meg and Babe sarcastically keep complaining that Lenny has grown into the image of their grandmother, and that she even keeps wearing her old-fashioned sunhat and gloves: "She's turning into Old Grandmama...Do you know she's taken to wearing Old Grandmama's torn sunhat and her green garden gloves(Henley, 1982, p.22)?" Being the eldest, Lenny tries to take the role of the absent mother in making the Magrath sisters cling together in times of trouble; a role that appears to be unsuitable for a woman who herself is still deeply affected by the mother's suicide. When she learns that Babe has been jailed for shooting her husband, she straight away sends Meg a telegram with the urgency to come to the family home. In doing so, Lenny wants to reunite her sisters when one of them needs help: "Babe's in terrible trouble–Stop! Zackery's been shot–Stop! Come home immediately–Stop!

Stop! Stop! (Henley, 1982, p.14)"

As a result of the mother's suicide, the Magrath sisters have turned into weird women of eccentric behavior. The worst effect of the mother's violent suicide on the three sisters is their powerlessness to successfully engage in a normal heterosexual relationship. Their infertility and impotence to get married or have children is, as Hanson remarks, "a symbolic detail that shows how their lack of a mirroring relationship has made the sisters unable to reproduce themselves as mothers in their own mother's image. (Hanson, 191)". Lenny has become repulsive of all men, and deformed her sense of womanhood. Feeling sorry for Lenny, Meg says to Babe, "She needs some love in her life. (Henley, 22)" Though Lenny once had a sexual relationship with a man she met through a lonely-hearts club in Memphis, when her beau visited her and met Granddaddy, she broke off the relationship, informing him that her decision to break off the relationship is due to her impotence. Unlike Lenny, Meg has turned into a public whore. Chick links Meg's prostitution to her mother's suicide: "She was known all over Copiah County as cheap Christmas trash, and that was the least of it. (Henley, 7)" Chick even implies that had the mother been around, she would have curbed Meg's blatant sexuality. Meg does not even hide her promiscuity and feels proud of it. She says to her sisters, "Look, I know I've had too many men. Believe me, I've had too many men. (Henley, 47)" Thus, the mother's suicide that has made Lenny repulsive to sexuality seems to have made Meg freely and unashamedly sink into it. Sophie Freud (1998), Sigmund Freud's granddaughter, states "surfaces mirror only one aspect of human motives, and that each visible aspect of human behavior carries within it, its very opposite (Freud, 1998, p.459)." To express her rejection of her mother's self-killing, Meg has turned into its opposite desire. She is even bold enough to declare her promiscuity to everyone. Meg sees such boldness as contrary to her mother's weakness and Lenny's withdrawal from the heterosexual economy. The horrible and nerve raking sight of her mother's body hanging from the ceiling must have disturbed Meg's entire physical system and distorted her mental state.

Babe, like her mother, is suicidal and violent. More than once she has attempted to commit suicide. Though she has entered the lady's league, she remains socially detached from her husband. She even betrays him with a fifteen year old lad. Her estrangement from her husband and the many rows they used to have made her develop a kind of disgust of him. Finally, she shoots him while he is trying to drive her adolescent beau out of the property. As her husband Zackery is lying shot, on the rug in their living room, Babe does not even bother to bring him medical help or take him to hospital. Instead, she cold heartedly goes to the kitchen and drinks three glasses of lemonade. She even hysterically called out to Zackery offering him a glass of lemonade. During the ensuing moments, Babe even calmly describes her disengagement from her violent act after shooting her husband:

> And there he was; lying on the rug. He was looking up at me trying to speak words. I said,
> "What?...Lemonade?...You don't want it? Would you like a Coke instead?" Then I got the idea, he was telling me to call on the phone for medical help. So I got on the phone and called up the hospital. I gave my name and address and I told them my husband was shot and he was lying on the rug and there was plenty of blood (Henley, 35).

Towards the end of the play Babe's murderous behavior is turned against herself. She receives a threatening phone call from her injured husband in which he accuses her of being unbalanced and even mentally deranged like her mother. Babe's defensive mechanism fails her this time, she bursts into tears as she is helplessly trying to defend herself and her mother against such disparaging remarks, "I'm not! I'm not...She wasn't crazy either...Don't you call my mother crazy! (Henley, 66)" Immediately after the phone call with her husband, Babe hysterically starts searching for a rope to hang herself. She even asks Lenny, who is busy with a phone call with her beau in Memphis, to help her find a stronger rope. Having found the right rope, Babe goes upstairs to hang herself while Lenny is still flirting with her beau. However, her suicide attempt fails and soon she hurries downstairs carrying a broken piece of rope hanging around her neck. After her fiasco in hanging herself, Babe desperately attempts to asphyxiate herself with the oven, but again fails. As she is trying to light a match for the oven, she desperately calls on her mother for help to end her life. Suddenly, she realizes that her mother committed suicide because of depression and the hardships of life, "Mama...So that's why you done it! (Henley, 68)" Suddenly, Babe's heart is filled with fantastic terrors fearing to take her own life. She even wonders why her mother killed her cat along with herself. Then, she explains her mother's motif in killing the cat shortly before committing suicide. She says to Babe, "It's 'cause she was afraid of dying all alone. (Henley, 69)" Babe's rejection of the idea of suicide and her love of life make her reject her mother's escape from life through committing suicide. She asserts that she is different from her mother, who suffered from loneliness and abandonment by her husband: "I'm not like Mama. I'm not so all alone. (Henley, 70)"

In attempting to take her own life by hanging herself with a rope in the same way her mother actually did previously, Babe, as Hanson points out, becomes able to "fully exorcise the pain of the suicide, an exorcism that permits Babe to allow her mother to become fully absent. (Hanson, 196)" The play ends with the three sisters having Lenny's deferred birthday cake for breakfast, where Lenny tells her sisters that she has just experienced a vision that the three of them will cling together all their life. This jovial ending makes the audience relieved as they become aware that the Magrath sisters are not likely to relive their

mother's shattering experience of suffering, loneliness, abandonment and estrangement. In clinging together and in living in their childhood home, the three sisters have been empowered to free themselves from the oppressive dominance of their sinister, absent mother and have finally set themselves free of the painful memories of her suicide. *Crimes of the Heart* stresses the idea that daughters might emulate their mother's actions in nearly all aspects of life because they were molded into the image of their mothers. The play also holds the view that an individual who commits suicide not only destroys his life, but also the lives of all his family members as well since his or her suicide will haunt their lives forever.

The artist's suicide as a result of fame obsession and his or her failure to gain international recognition is a worldwide phenomenon. Many famous artists and world celebrities took their lives due to their failure to gain or sustain such international fame. In 2007 the Hollywood film maker Theresa Duncan and her lover Jeremy Blake took their lives. The bizarre double suicides of the two infatuated lovers stunned the art world and the media throughout the United States without ever discovering the couple's motive of suicide. One might question why such a creative young artist and a renowned feature film maker like Theresa Duncan with her glamorous personality, intelligence, and glamorous beauty and living a vibrant life would take her life. One might also wonder why Jeremy Blake, a talented young and handsome video artist whose digital paintings have positioned him in a prominent place in the art world, would commit suicide shortly after Theresa's suicide. Though romantic and Shakespearean the couple's suicides might seem, they are still tragic and mysterious. Several speculations were made about the couple's suicides. Theresa had become fed up with working with the narrow-minded Hollywood executives who rejected her innovative vision, and the fame obsession that for her seemed unattainable. David Amsden states that having realized that she was a Hollywood failure, Theresa committed suicide by taking an overdose of sleeping pills with bourbon (Amsden, 2007). The brief suicide note that Theresa left Jeremy, in which she declares her love for him and that she was at peace with her decision of committing suicide, made the infatuated lover detest life and contemplate the idea of following her in death. A week later, Jeremy Blake's body had been found by a fisherman several miles off the coast of New Jersey. However, later it became clear that Theresa was spurned by success, toxic ambition and fame obsession and her failure to make her dreams come true might have driven her to commit suicide. Jeremy Blake could not live without his girlfriend and consequently took his own life a week later by drowning himself in the ocean.

Similarly, in Sam Shepard's *Suicide in Bb* Niles, the frustrated jazz musician, mysteriously takes his own life to languish his artistic talent on account of his failure to gain international recognition among his contemporary musicians. The chalked "outline of a man's body sprawled out in an awkward position of death" (*Suicide in Bb* 193) remains visible on the empty stage as a constant reminder of the mystery surrounding the young artist's suicide. The two detectives, Pablo and Louis, desperately use all tactics to solve the mystery and discover the motive behind the musician's hypothetical suicide. Louis even performs the act of suicide by pretending to be shot by a silent bullet and falls into the chalked outlined shape. Having exhausted all their tactics to discover the cause of the suicide, the two detectives come to the conclusion that all their tactics are of no use since, as Pablo comments, "all we come up with is supposes (Shepard, 1979, p.194). " Louis makes a final guess that the departed musician might have taken his life as a result of acute depression or unrequited love. The two detectives even study the musician's personal life to trace any suicidal tendencies in his family history. However, the play ends without ever discovering the motive of the musician's bizarre suicide. In fact, suicides in modern American drama, especially those who are kept offstage, create a sense of ambiguity in their respective plays. The onstage characters' delineation of the causes of their suicides perplexes the audience since it entails differing unreliable views towards such characters.

Some characters in twentieth-century American drama take their lives after heavily indulging in self-destructive acts such as promiscuity, homosexuality, drug addiction, or excessive alcoholism that bring them to the brink of insanity. The link between suicide and homosexuality has been found to be a strong predictor of subsequent suicides and suicide attempts (Silenzio, et al, 2007, p.2017–2019). A study conduced by Fergusson et al. (1999) has showed a significantly higher occurrence of depression, anxiety disorder, conduct disorder, substance abuse and suicide ideation amongst those who were homosexually active (Fergusson, Horwood, Beautrais, 1999, p.876-80). In Tennessee Williams' *A Streetcar Named Desire* Allan Grey, Blanche's adored and degenerate husband, committed suicide to put an end to his homosexuality. While dancing with her young husband in the Casino, Blanche cruelly exposes him and cruelly informs him that his homosexuality has made him an object of disgust in her eyes. Blanche drives her husband crazy when she reveals to him that she has stealthily seen him naked in bed with an elder homosexual. Having felt ashamed of his homosexuality, an act that he has tirelessly tried to stop, and having been debased by his wife to whom he has sympathetically turned for help, Allan departs the dance hall in a rush, puts the barrel of the gun in his mouth and pulls the trigger, exploding the back of his head. Having realized that she caused the suicide of her husband whom she immensely adored and to escape the agony of such deliberate cruelty, Blanche

unconsciously indulges in self-destructive prostitution with soldiers in the nearby military camp, and excessive alcoholism. Allan's heartbreaking suicide set Blanche's life into turmoil and influenced her entire life. Blanche becomes conscience-stricken for not being able to understand her homosexual husband's half spoken plea to set him free from homosexuality. As a form of perpetual punishment for driving her husband to commit suicide, Blanche is doomed to relive the experience every time she remembers the incident. Whenever she recalls the incident, the polka music to which the couple danced in the casino, is subjectively played in her mind. The music stops playing once the bullet shot that blew off the back of Allan's brain is heard. Blanche realizes, though too late, that she failed to understand her husband's plea to be saved from homosexuality. Blanche remorsefully makes such a tormenting confession to her new beau Mitch:

He came to me for help. I didn't know that. I'd failed him in some mysterious way and wasn't able to give the help he needed but couldn't speak of! He was in the quicksands and clutching at me-but I wasn't holding him out, I was slipping in with him (Williams, 1947, p.95).

After his death, Blanche's life has changed drastically until she has turned into a public slut, a sex entertainment object for young soldiers and strangers in the Flamingo Hotel. Every course of action that she takes in the play is triggered by the tragic suicide of her homosexual husband. She confesses to Mitch, "After the death of Allan- intimacies with strangers was all I seemed able to fill my empty heart with(Williams, 1947, p.119)." Blanche's regular bathing, which she perceives as a cleansing ritual through which she purifies her body of her past nymphomania, is also motivated by her wish to relieve her of the guilt of causing the tragic suicide of her husband. Whenever Blanche gets out of the bathroom, she boasts of becoming a new human being. But, she fails to realize that the guilt of precipitating the death of someone dear and prostitution can not wash away easily by soaking one's body in a hot tub.

Similarly, in Williams' *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* Skipper commits suicide to put an end to his homosexuality. Though Skipper is absent and never appears on the stage, his suicide is so influential to the extent that it has destroyed his best friend's marriage life. After Skipper's suicide, Brick slipped into melancholy as he was tortured by feelings of guilt for precipitating the suicide of his close friend. Having rejected his homosexuality, Skipper cruelly takes his own life. Brick's abstinence from having sex with his wife Maggie reflects his rejection of the deceased Skipper's homosexuality. Bored with Brick's abstinence from having sex with her and having noticed that Skipper's suicide has indeed destroyed her family life, Maggie rebukes her husband, "Skipper is dead! I'm alive! Maggie the cat is alive! (Williams, 1983, p.28)" To flee the tormenting guilt of precipitating the heartbreaking suicide of his homosexual friend, Brick, like Blanche of *Streetcar,* resorts to its opposite desire. Having realized that he drove his best friend to commit suicide after rejecting to share his homosexuality, Brick Pollitt slips into self-destructive nymphomania. Reminiscent of Blanche of *Streetcar* Brick is haunted by the guilt of precipitating the suicide of his homosexual lover. Londré (1996) has observed that both Brick Pollitt of *Cat* and Blanche of *Streetcar* share the same dilemma of causing the death of a homosexual lover (Londré, 1997). Both are haunted by feelings of guilt and self-debasement for failing to understand their devotee's half-spoken pleas to be saved from homosexuality and unintentionally causing their suicide. Both are haunted by tormenting noises in their heads that only subside upon hearing a gunshot. While Brick keeps gulping liquor from the bottle until he hears the click of a trigger in his head, Blanche is gripped by the distressing polka music that was playing in the casino where she danced with Allan until she hears the gunshot that exploded the back of his head.

In some American plays suicides remain offstage and never set foot on the stage, but still they seem to influence the course of action the onstage characters take. These suicides, who are denied any onstage presence, seem to exist in a sublime, idealistic and nostalgic realm. Because they are deeply hurt by their tragic death, the onstage characters cherish the memories of such suicides, speak highly of them and even adore them like revered idols. The death of such adorable people causes pain and confusion in the lives of their beloved whom they left behind. Their absence even destroys their lives and many develop an escape mechanism such as alcoholism, prostitution and drugs to forget them. Having gone through a shattering experience with these suicides, their beloved develop an idolatrous love for them. Due to their tormenting absence the onstage characters are doomed to suffer, either of excruciating guilt or agonizing lovesickness. Blanche Dubois of Williams's *Streetcar* turns into a public whore, becomes lunatic and is finally hospitalized in a mental asylum. Brick of *Cat* turns into a drunkard. In O'Neill's *Electra* Orin commits suicide and Lavinia withdraws from the real world, and Babe of Beth Henley's *Crimes of the Heart* develops acute suicide ideation.

Veneration and adoration of suicides can be sensed in a number of American plays where such people are spoken of as being heroic, and pure. In Williams's *Cat* Brick Pollitt depicts his friendship with his former friend Skipper as pure, genuine and rare. He even launches a severe verbal attack against his wife Maggie and Big Daddy for describing his friendship with Skipper as immoral. Blanche Dubois of *Streetcar* keeps bragging that she is still married to a gentle and tender poet like Allan Grey, the idolatry love of her youth. Blanche venerates Allan as an earthly

deity worthy of reverence and this justifies the way she angrily rebuked Stanley for throwing her love letters from Allan on the floor. Some suicides are even portrayed as paragons from the past prior to the commencement of the narrative's main action like Allan Grey of Williams's *Streetcar*.

Some characters in modern and contemporary American drama are destroyed while trying to fulfill their dreams, achieve glories for themselves and their families and search for their true identities as humans. Unable to fulfill their unattainable dreams, they resort to suicide to put an end to their pointless pursuit. This applies well to Willy Loman of Miller's *Death of Salesman*. Karen Horney (1950) considers a suicide as a neurotic victim who is always "at war with himself (Horney, 1950)." Self-hate inspired by the death instinct, argues Horney, is either the sadism of the super-ego or the hostility directed towards the introjected object. The neurotic keeps oscillating between the idealized self that he aspires to be and the actual self that he despises. Willy Loman of Miller's *Salesman* is torn apart between his actual self that yearns to fulfill his ambitions, and his idealized self that makes him despise his actual self for being a failure salesman. Horney asserts, "The rage of the proud self for being humiliated and held down at every step by the actual self (Horney, 1950, p.114)." increases the victim's death drive, which takes the form of suicide, "the most extreme and the final expression of self-destructiveness (Horney, 1950, p.148)." Willy is fanatic about the notion of material prosperity. His blind faith in the American dream and his inability to fulfill that dream for himself and his two sons drive him to the brink of insanity and result in his suicide in a car crash. Though he knows for sure that he is not suitable for the business profession any more and that his sales figures have diminished, he exaggerates his sales figures to his wife and sons, claiming that he is still a successful salesman. His firm belief in the American dream has made him blind to the fact that he has become an old, second rate salesman whose sales figures are gradually decreasing and is now working on commission without a salary and is even about to be dismissed from his job for poor business performance. To preserve the last remnants of his humanness, Willy starts to contemplate death as a form of release of the pain he has to endure while trying to pursue his dreams. According to Kohut (1984), suicide is viewed as an attempt to recover the last remnants of humanness, the last try to be "true to our innermost design (Kohut, 1984)." To raise his sales figures Willy lies, and indulges in an illicit love affair with a prostitute to put him "right through to the buyers (Miller, 1949)." His death is even triggered by deception. He commits suicide in a car crash to bankroll his son Biff with money from the insurance company. But, he was ignorant of the fact that if the insurance company finds out that the car crash is fabricated, it will absolutely not reimburse the insurance claim. Consequently Biff will not obtain the money from the insurance company and Willy's suicide will be as futile as his American dream. Fromm (1955) states that the alienated person "commits suicide just as a businessman declares his bankruptcy when losses exceed gains, and when there is no more hope of recuperating the losses (Erich Fromm, 1955)." Durkheim (1952) argues that economic crises increase suicides because they are disturbances of the social order (Emile Durkheim). This applies well to Willy Loman, who resorts to suicide to bankroll Biff in the elated hope to win his respect and to preserve his identity as an ideal salesman. His wife Linda, acting out of her colossal love and unlimited support for her husband, becomes entrapped in his lies, deceits, and exaggerations. She keeps assuring her husband that though he has become old, he is still a well-liked and successful salesman. Although Linda has found out that her husband is a man of suicidal tendencies as she found the rubber pipe with which he once intended to kill himself in the kitchen, she does not even face him with this fact to safeguard his dignity. Instead of saving his life by making him face up to reality and relinquish his phony dreams of success and material prosperity, Linda unintentionally, as Roudané (1997) remarks, contributes to Willy Loman's truth-illusion matrix though she knows that he has been trying to kill himself (Roudané, 1997).

Suicidality in American drama operates on two levels: within the text of the play, as a form of escape, and within the narrative structure prior to the commencement of the play, where the suicide acts as a catalyst for action and a focal invisible center around which the narrative's meanings rotate. Suicides of the first level include Christine and her son Orin of Eugene O'Neill's *Mourning Becomes Electra,* Jessie of Marsha Norman's '*night, Mother,* Joe Keller and Willy Loman of Arthur Miller's *All My Sons* and *Death of a Salesman* respectively. Suicides of the second level include Allan Grey in Williams' *A Streetcar Named Desire*; the mother in Beth Henley's *Crimes of the Heart,* Niles, the frustrated jazz musician, in Sam Shepard's *Suicide in Bb*, Skipper of Tennessee Williams' *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, and Larry of Miller's *All My Sons.* By investigating how dramatic texts are structured by self-inflicted and self-willed death, this study strived to show how characters who commit suicide affect the onstage characters, advance the plot, motivate the conflicts, and define the eventual conclusion of their respective plays. In some plays that center around suicidality the suicides cause the basic tension in the drama since their suicide influences all their family members and acquaintances. The influence of suicides on the course of action onstage characters take is authoritative, mystifying and omnipresent.

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