



Volume 8, Issue 8, Aug 2021, p. 68-81

Article Information

✍ Article Type: Research Article

✍ This article was checked by iThenticate.

Article History:
Received
9/08/2021
Received in revised
form
17/08/2021
Available online
28/08/2021

**PSYCHOSOCIAL ALIENATION IN A BRIEF HISTORY OF WOMEN
BY ALAN AYCKBOURN**

May Mohammed Baqer¹

Sahar Salam Abdullah²

Abstract

Psychosocial Alienation is a modern concept that arises from the capitalist and materialistic conceptions of individuals. The ever-growing competitive nature of domestic societies crystallised the concept in its modern form. The intensity of the rapid changes in the urbanised societies prevents the individuals from exploring their inner selves. Thus, a new generation is created with an alienation crisis which is reflected inward towards the self and outwards toward society. Alan Ayckbourn (1939), A British playwright, presents Alienated characters inspired by his life on and off stage. He explores their Alienation and their path toward recovery and self-realization. *A Brief History of Women* (2017) Ayckbourn explores the depth of the individual psyche from inside out in a refreshing way.

Keywords: Psychosocial Alienation, the self, feminism, isolation.

1. Introduction

Social Alienation is a worldwide pandemic. It is the psychological disease of the postmodern society. The cities, in particular, face this phenomenon more often than the outskirts of countries because of the overpopulation. More people in one place means less space for individual creativity. Thus, nothing is important, and values are decreasing in priority. Another factor that may be a significant influence is the variety of distraction in the postmodern world; the more distraction there is, the less grounded the individual is. The sense of authenticity is shattered in search of the approval of society strangers. So, the individuals, in reality, embrace these made-up personas, which is nothing like the real them, hoping to fit in the social texture.

¹ Asst. Prof. Dr. University of Baghdad, Iraq, College of Education (Ibn Rushd) for Humanitarian Sciences/ Department of English/ may.mohammed@ircoedu.uobaghdad.edu.iq.

² University of Baghdad, Iraq, Sahar.sallam1207a@ircoedu.uobaghdad.edu.iq.

2. Significance Of The Study

A Brief History of Women falls under two perspectives. First, through the psychoanalytic view, the characters fight an internal battle to find their true self and gain concessions of their position in the world. It explores the hidden roots of Alienation, roots such as the traumatic childhood, the influence of the war on the psyche, the complexity of existing in the postmodern world. Second, the social aspects of Alienation following the fallouts of dysfunctional familial ties, institution and class distinction corruption.

3. Literature Review

Although Alan Ayckbourn has been acclaimed as the most performed playwright after Shakespeare, shockingly enough, there are not many theses and dissertations that have been written on his 84 full length plays. However, many books have discussed his works, and his life was published to recognise his impact on the British and the global stage.

As for theses that are written over Ayckbourn plays, they include the following; *Alan Ayckbourn's Theatricality and Use of Comedy in Woman in Mind (1985), A Small Family Business (1987) and Henceforward (1987): Marriage, Family, Public-Private and Absence of Standards*. In this thesis, comedy is a vital technique through which Ayckbourn shows family destruction, failed marriage and the fallout of such heavy topics on children and other family members. It also deals with the private life vs the public life of characters. The male figures in the mentioned above play are presented to the audience as failures. They failed in their lives, with their marriage and children, and failed in their public and professional lives. Furthermore, all of that is presented in a comedic style, which shows how well a craftsman Ayckbourn truly is.

Ayckbourn excels at using ironic situations to add his commentary on the state of marriage in the modern world, alongside his emphasis on communication's significance in modern families. As the final remarks of this thesis, Ebru Bayol concludes that "Ayckbourn ultimately wants to convey a pessimistic vision of crumbling families which are made up of ineffectual and destructive individuals" (35).

Another thesis discussing Ayckbourn's works is *Playing with Time: The Relationship between Theatrical Timeframe, Dramatic Narration and Character Development in The Plays of Alan Ayckbourn* (2006) by Elizabeth Vokes. The thesis deals with the following plays *Intimate Exchanges* (1982), *The Norman Conquests* (1973), *Absent Friends* (1974), *Time of My Life* (1992) and *Communicating Doors* (1994). It is about what Vokes alludes to as "time plays" and "event plays." The study is time as depicted on stage by Ayckbourn and in the frame of the play's storyline as performed on stage. The thesis then goes into great details about how Ayckbourn utilizes the future as a backdrop in several of his writings. Alan Ayckbourn, according to Vokes "uses the future setting as a great platform for satirical commentary on social and political themes" (4).

On a psychoanalytical note, Ebru Yayla Hiniz's thesis entitled *Illusion and Reality in Sir Alan Ayckbourn's "Woman in Mind" (1985), "Just Between Ourselves" (1976), "Private Fears in Public Places" (2004) and "If I Were You" (2006)*, it explores the psychological diminution of the female character's psyche after going through traumatic events in their lives. It mainly examines the psychoanalytic concepts of illusion and reality in Alan Ayckbourn's four selected plays. The main argument of the thesis is that the female characters are suffering from reality, so they all choose an alternative reality as a way of escapism. It deals with miscommunication between couples, and in three of those four selected plays, the main characters find they are a way back to reality by working out their problems with their husbands.

In this thesis, the portrayal of psychosocial alienated characters is discussed in Ayckbourn's selected work. It elaborates the developments that Ayckbourn provides in each play, covering a wide range of possibilities and variables. This thesis covers three plays *Arrivals and Departures* (2013), *Hero's Welcome* (2015), *A Brief History of Women* (2017). Furthermore, this

thesis alludes to the multidimensional aspects of Ayckbourn's work, by looking through social, psychological, political, and economic lenses.

4. Methodology

Alienation theorists generally studied the socio-historical and structural conditions that contribute to alienation, neglecting or overlooking the concept's individualistic aspect. Some theorists, including James Rinehart (1950 – 2015), a Professor of International Relations at Troy University, believes that Alienation is related to an institutional and structural organisation, separating it from personal aspects. Rinehart persists on this conception by stating, "Alienation is objective or structural in the sense that it is built into human relationships at the workplace and exists independently of how individuals perceive and evaluate their jobs." (14). Other theorists like Amitai Etzioni (1929), an American sociologist, neglected the personal aspects entirely by stating that "the concept of alienation does not assume that the alienated are aware of their condition ... The roots of alienation are not in ... intrapsychic processes but in the societal and political structures" (618).

However, it is until the middle of the 1900s that Melvin Seeman comes up with an alienation Approach that merges the Social with the psychological aspect of the concept. Seeman's work is considered new and challenging because it reintegrates the ordinary meaning of the Alienation concept and links it back to Rousseau's conception, both socially and psychologically. His work "directly challenges this structuralism, 'objective' approach to alienation" (TenHouten 5).

5. Discussion

In *A Brief History of Women*, Alan Ayckbourn presents a wide range of characters that vary in gender, class, and social status. However, they have shared the same issue of social Alienation that shaped their life in one way or another. The main character Spates stands as a literary version of Ayckbourn himself. The relationship between Spates and the house resembles that between Ayckbourn and the Theatre. Both starts working as early as a teenager. Ayckbourn found himself in Theatre. "Although it would be wrong to read too much into it, there are seeming parallels between Kirkbridge Manor and the Stephen Joseph Theatre in *The Round*, the home of the company before the Stephen Joseph Theatre" (Murgatroyd). The Theatre where Ayckbourn started to work as a playwright for the first time has gone through a similar journey as the house in the play. As it was initially a school, and after its closure, it was converted into apartment buildings.

Similarly, Spates finds himself in the house and escape his Alienation. In this play, Ayckbourn explores different types of Alienation, diving into heavy topics, such as Britain's social class system and feminism. He presents a road map that Spates followed to achieve self-realization and how gender-biased society can be if a female character applied the same map.

Britain's social class system has witnessed a rapid change in the past two decades due to the tremendous impact of industrialization in creating a mass consciousness for the public. It has been and will always be a political tool in the hands of governments to use against society in times of need. "A Brief History of Women" Sheds light on that historical conflict and how it is used on a smaller scale to alienate individuals from society (Stone 311). Billington comments on this matter by saying:

Ayckbourn's great gift is that he shows rather than tells. He does not harangue his audience about the evils of capitalism. He simply offers us a comic fable about a

recognisably ordinary family whose materialistic hunger has allowed them to slither into crime. He also uses humour as the bait with which to hook his audience. (Billington 1990, p. 193)

Ayckbourn's main character in *A Brief History of Women* stands for the modern man, always standing at the edge of life searching for his place. Spates' search for himself starts from the first scene, discovering his location in the world. As the upper class treats poorly servants, they are abused verbally and emotionally. The key to escaping Alienation is to find a way out of the box that his true self is strained in. The play's opening scene exposes the mental state of Spates, as it is his first encounter with decision-making. The audience can see the change in Spates' mentality as he realizes his differences from his surroundings. Nevertheless, the reasons for that difference are hard to identify at first, but with the help and guidance of lady Caroline, he can understand a fraction of his problem and thus gets one step closer to the answer.

Spates as a member of the working class, has reached a realization that is "the expectancy or probability held by the individual that his behaviour cannot determine the occurrence of the outcomes, or reinforcements, he seeks" (Seeman 784). Spates is not the master of his life. He cannot decide anything for himself. He lacks the power over his own life. Thus, he reaches the realization of his alienated position in society; Kalekin-Fishman states, "A person suffers from alienation in the form of 'powerlessness' when she/he is conscious of the gap between what she/he would like to do and what she/he feels capable of doing". Therefore, it is a significant event in Spates' life, his identification of this gap and his solution to bridge it and find his way back from Alienation into self-realization.

The play exposes the upper-class mannerism towards the lower class. As Helen Shaw expresses, "The play contains a brief speech so charged with the truth of a lifetime's experience ...touching enough to draw tears" (Times). The play starts on social classes and a matter that is still relevant to this day. The experience that it shares has a realistic view to it. This view carries the sentiment of generations subjected to alienation simply to their social ranking in society. Shaw points out the constant struggle between the classes rooted in Britain's old and modern history (Billington 134).

Lady Caroline and lady Catharine stand for the upper-class women alienated from certain parts of high society because they are females. They appear to be toying with Spates' feelings. They would joke around his appearance and motions as he moved around the room, serving them. They keep on pointing out every physical reaction he projects at their senseless remarks, "Oh, I do believe the boy is blushing" or saying, "I will soon be left dancing with the servants" (*A Brief History of Women*, Ch1). As if servants are not human beings but merely creature less than the upper class. Anthony Burgess, an English novelist and a literary critic states in his Book "A Mouthful of Air" the following; "We are always ready to look down on people: it is an abiding pleasure, a poultice for our sore sense of inferiority" (23). Thus, Lady Caroline and Lady Katherine are reflecting their sense of Inferiority to Spates unconsciously.

Spates seems unmoved by those hateful statements because he is aware of their positions as well. He identifies with their insecurities because he suffers from similar issues. Nevertheless, Spates decision by the end of part one of the play says the opposite. As he leaves his job as a servant, seeking a more socially acceptable career would break the social class alienation chain.

Spates realization for his social Alienation occurs at the mansion, but he does not want to escape the mansion. He wants to prove himself to himself and those surrounding him without leaving his physical location. This gesture that seems unexplainable indicates his sense of pride

and challenge. Spates wants to regain a social position where he will be the master of the situation and not the other way around. This plan that seems improbable to this character occurs by the end of the play in part four, where he finally becomes the house manager. Therefore, establishing his role as a Slumdog who climb the social ladder breaking the social class's tedious chain.

Spates' sense of inferiority was heightened the night of the party. He was subjected to a situation that shocked him and made him question his place in the world. When the two ladies discovered that he is from a farming family, they stated shamelessly, "We plough the fields and scatter" (*A Brief History of Women*, Ch1). This statement is taken from children harvesting hymn written by Matthias Claudius, a German poet, published in 1782. The original poem conveys the insignificance of men without God. However, when it is mentioned in this context, it changes the meaning.

The new context indicates the meaninglessness of farmers in the modern world. It is considered to be an out dated occupation considering the time frame. The statement created a sort of wound in the fragile self of Spates. Eckhart Tolle, a spiritual teacher, describes inferiority's issue in his book "A New Earth" He states: "In essence, you are neither inferior nor superior to anyone. True self-esteem and true humility arise out of that realization. In the eyes of the ego, self-esteem and humility are contradictory. In truth, they are the same" (109). Spates is on his way to achieving that equation of balance that leads to self-realization,

Spates stands out from his soundings, and he is unable to fit in the society. The social background and the different location on the social ladder determine the level of Alienation for the individual. As Neal & Colla's remark:

The lack of similarity in social backgrounds makes everyday communications difficult. Many of the more subtle forms of communication are not clearly understood, and empathy for each other becomes difficult...Clashing perceptions, values, and behaviour patterns frequently produce such high levels of stress that the relationship is terminated (41).

The lack of common ground between Spates and those around him makes it hard to communicate since both parties do not value the same set of ideals. This lack of communication leads to clashing perspectives that push one out of the relationship. Spates suddenly becomes insecure about his past and his future altogether. However, at the same time, it gives him the necessary motivation to take action and change his life.

Carl Jung, a Swiss psychiatrist and psychoanalyst, comments on the lack of communication and its implications on individuals related to Alienation. He confirms: "Loneliness does not come from having no people about one, but from being unable to communicate the things that seem important to oneself, or from holding certain views which others find inadmissible". Therefore, Spates is pushed aside by everyone around him because of their different views (Stewart 54). Spates' realization of his parallelized situation enabled him to escape his Alienation. He is aware of his alienated self; thus, he mapped out the exit and saved himself, eventually owning up to himself.

The un-fulfilment of the self was one reason why Spates go back to college; searching for fulfilment and meaning as meaningless is the leading aspect of Alienation. Remembering his past occupation as a farmer lingered in the back of his mind. It served as a constant reminder that

he is still at the bottom of the social chain. Therefore, he tries to better his education to enhance his social position and prove that even a farmer can be an educated man with a respectful career. Spates is the blueprint for the modern psych-social heroic figure. He was able to identify his issue and solve it, and he refused to stay prisoner to the circumstances. Instead, he built his way out into self-fulfilment.

In the first scene, spates shows small but significant signs of awakening and breaking out of the shell of Alienation. In a fight scene where Lord Kirkbridge has a heated argument with his wife, Lady Caroline, he raises his hand, intending to hit her. At that exact moment, Spates interferes and stops him from completing that action, saying: "I cannot allow this, I really can't." (*A Brief History of Women*, Ch1). This action shows that the change process has already started with Spates' inner self. He identified with the pain of Lady Caroline and stood up for her and himself declaring no more abuse of power in this house. Spates stands up against all the impressionistic systems and forces that alienate low-status individuals, making his voice heard by those at higher locations.

In the first part of the play, spates keeps repeating this sentence to his employees "I am only temporary" (*A Brief History of Women*, Ch1). This statement carries a double meaning. The first meaning refers to his job status as a part-time servant. The other purpose that relates to his psycho-social level, in reality, is his view of himself. Spates sees himself as a non-essential character in society and life in general. This declaration is linked back to the statements of Lady Caroline and lady Catherine. He may seem unbothered on the surface, but it affected him deeply. The idea of being worthless and meaningless are core principles for Alienation, according to Seeman.

The second part of the play starts twenty years after the first one. Spates is now well in his late thirties with his life on track. He has finished studying college; thus, he appears to have gained a small amount of power over his mind. Spates' Alienation's development is more of social nature in this stage. As he has escaped the lower part of the social ladder, he is a teacher in a high-ranked school where he is guiding others towards success. However, on n the psychological level, he is still lost and alienated from his true self. There are improvements, but they are slight and uncoordinated.

The scene starts with the school's Headmaster, Mr Wynford, of the school speaking to the pupils about the cold weather, and he describes the atmosphere using the exciting term "It is Like teaching in Mortuary" (*A Brief History of Women*, Ch2). The Mortuary is a place for dead bodies to be stored before reaching the final stage, burial. It is considered a lonely and depressing place. So, to see those words being used for the description of a place that is supposed to encourage people to find themselves is highly ironic and accurate. However, there is a trim level of accuracy to the situation. The accuracy comes from the notion that all workers at the Kirkbridge Preparatory School are isolated as dead bodies waiting to be buried away by life. Nevertheless, the contrast that Ayckbourn shares are the bonfire celebration at the end of this part.

The bonfire is a source of warmth and sharp contrast with the idea of a mortuary. This juxtaposition of two contrasting images can be projected to the characters vs. Spates. He is the fire that wants to escape the coldness and darkness of the isolated world he lives in, but he is the only one aware of that difference. Others seem to be at peace with their lifeless corpse-style life.

Eva Miller is one of the female characters that appear briefly in part two of the play, she is forty- years old, and she teaches French in school. She is Swiss. Still, everyone treats her as a German—calling her racist slurs and laughing at her behind her back, mistaking her name for Muller instead of Miller. Social- political false acclamations alienate her that other teachers assume. Eva keeps on correcting them, but she gives up on the pressure of her peers after a while. They believe that she will enjoy the fireworks and the bonfire more than others due to Germany's past using fire to extinguish their enemies. Another fellow female isolates the exciting part for this character as a female. "Oh, for Goodness' sake! you stupid, disgusting racist women. I am not sitting here looking at your abysmal unpleasant face any longer" (*A Brief History of Women*, Ch2).

Witnessing this incident, Spates steps in and defends Eva saying, "She showed me her passport. She is genuinely a Swiss national" (*A Brief History of Women*, Ch2). However, others choose to ignore this evidence and stay on the dark side behind their irrational speculations. Phoebe continues her relentless attack on Eva, stating that "she is a German as a liver sausage!" (*A Brief History of Women*, Ch2).

For the second time in the play, Spates faces criticism for having grown up at a farm. Des, a thirty-year-old sports teacher, despises the idea that Spates avoids joining the army due to working as a farmer. He states with envy, "Cushy Life then? Milking cows" (*A Brief History of Women*, Ch2). Spates replied with a self-aware answer to this harsh statement, saying that he would instead work with cows than kill people. This is important because Spates started to appreciate his past as a farmer with a modest background. Unlike part one, when he was ashamed of stating his origins. This small yet tangible change in his character marks self-development and regaining self-value. Self-value is linked directly with Alienation, alienated individuals have a low value, and Spates is starting to overcome this obstacle.

The small achievement that Spates accomplished was short-lived as the bonfire celebrations took place, and Ursula threw herself toward the Fireworks before its launching. This incident left everyone staring at Spates for answers, which he does not have. Thus, the Headmaster's solution was to expel Spates from his position as a teacher, "I lay this entirely at your door, Spates! You are entirely to blame! Entirely!" (*A Brief History of Women*, Ch2). The exciting part is that Waynford was blaming Spates for the fuss he created with Ursula, for she runs towards the rocket and not the part where she died. The value of human life is decreased in exchange for people's comfort. Since most of the students who goes to the school comes from wealthy families. Thus, Spates is forced to sacrifice his job for the comfort of the rich people, which makes him despise himself: "He exudes an open-eyed combination of tentative hope and wariness that makes him the perfect Ayckbourn hero-by-default" (Brantley, 2018).

The only one left to mourn Ursula's sudden death is Spates. He knows the value of life more than anyone else in the play. Thus, he expresses true sadness for her and himself. He realizes that the school is not welcoming his presence anymore and needs a change of scenery to protect his mental deterioration. Spates ends the scene with "Goodbye. Goodbye. Again" (*A Brief History of Women*, Ch2).

The third part of the play starts with yet another shift of the Manor into an art centre and Theatre, where children plays are annually chosen and rehearsed regularly. The change of the house in this part is symbolic of the characters true identity and self. The theatre presence on stage create inception of everyday life, where ordinary people are shifting masks as if they are participating in a play. Iwuchukwu, a Nigerian Literary professor, discusses the act of staging behaviourism by disclose:

A ritualistic test of each individual's ability to conform to the system. The house of a theatre makes the perfect setting for such a test. The theatre setting, of course, suggests performance, but the house of a theatre also suggests an audience; people are not only performing but also, as members of society, watching the performances around them (Iwuchukwu 41).

From now moving forward for this part, the audience is witnessing a multitude of plays accruing simultaneously. Some actions take place over a stage inside the play. The characters are performers, and they perform the role of ordinary people. Characters create a persona in and out of the stage. They use theatricalization in order to be approved by social standards and not considered as an outsider.

Ayckbourn's worldview is summarized in this scene, as the people are divided into two tropes, on and off stage. People in the background can fit in the social norm using fake persons like actors on a stage with nothing authentic. While the individuals outside of the stage are the ones who are faithful to themselves but the society condemns them as outcasts. Therefore, they exist on the Theatre's outskirts. They use "performance as a social behaviour", as mentioned by D.S. Madison and J. Hamera in *The SAGE Handbook of Performance Studies*. They furthermore elaborate on that matter by stating, "In performance as behaviour, social life is described through an organizing metaphor of dramatic action or what the social critic Kenneth Burke describes as (situated modes of action)" (15).

They suggest that the lives of those individuals are unnatural and manufactured to suit the social fabric around them. Their whole life is a Theatre. Even after leaving the stage, they cannot stop performing the role that society wants to watch.

Spates is now in his late fifties and works as an administrative director of the centre. In this section of the play, a play occurs within a play. The art facility plans a yearly children's play. For this year, the play is "Jake and the Beanstalk." The choice of the play is very symbolic of the story of Spates. Jack stands for Spates and the options he had to make to achieve success in his life. Those choices are questionable, such as Jack selling the Cow for Magic Beanstalk. Those actions are similar to Spates, standing up for the less fortunate and choosing unusual methods for living. Thus, it can be seen as Brantley describes it in his article "Review: 'A Brief History of Women'", he states: "feels as broad and overstated as the children's Christmas pantomime" (Brantley, 2018).

In this part, Spates meets a woman that mirrors his insecurities, but she accepts his imperfections and tries to better him as an active part of society. Gel is married to Rory, who is unfaithful to her. In part three, Spates and Gel walk on the rehearsals when they see Rory being unfaithful with another young actress named Jenny. Gel seems to understand Spates' unique personality as she states, "one way or another, you have had a full life, haven't you? A house full of ghosts, then? No wonder you look slightly haunted. Like a character out of Edgar Allan Poe. Beware!" (*A Brief History of Women*, Ch3). The Poe reference was spot on as Poe's characters are primarily hunted with mysterious past in their way to find themselves among all the social difficulties they face. After that statement, Gel makes a highly unusual request, and out of place, she asks Spates to dance with her. Dancing requires complete control of the body and preconceived planning of movement. Each movement should be studied and not taken arbitrarily. This is significant for Spates because it indicates the last change of his personality and his leap towards a healthier lifestyle. This new life leads him to control himself and his surroundings.

In part four and the final part of the play, Spates is the general manager of the Manor hotel. He is in his late seventies with a respectful job and an entire family. The transitions that Spates has gone through are completed here. His life has come to a full circle. These changes of Spates can be traced back and linked with the weather in this play. It has a great significance as in the first three parts, the weather is described as gloomy, and the season is Autumn and winter. These two seasons are always associated with depression and self-loathing. At the same time, the final part of the play is described as in summary. Summer is the opposite of winter and carries the opposite sentiment as well. It stands for a fresh start, hope, and achieving the impossible. The garden is mentioned for the first time in the final part. It is linked with growth, flourishing, and peace.

Spates end up meeting Lady Caroline in the final part of the play, who made everything possible. She was the one who pushed Spates towards success and towards finding himself amidst the crowds. Thus, it is the only debacle that she witnesses Spates' success as she immensely influences it. Lady Caroline is now in her late nineties, but she still carries the same outgoing spirit that the age has yet to beat. The type of loneliness is called existential loneliness, the one that the individual experience due to being his true self and nature. Baites feel silenced, mocked, and unimportant as a valuable part of society and human beings. This feeling of being easily replaced is dreadful due to its accuracy in nature. Individuals reparse their authentic nature in fear of being rejected from society. Thus, individuals' mock others whom society labels as successful figures.

A secret world that was created from the existential loneliness that Spates suffered from. Jung says, "companionship thrives only when each individual remembers his individuality and does not identify himself with others" (138). The need for a meaningful connection with other individuals is something that people desire and fear at the same time. However, that connection requires work from individuals to be achieved, but since humans are fearful of rejection in nature, those connections are never made in the first place. Harmony is achieved through openness with others without the lingering fear of being expelled or unaccepted by others.

Spates poses a question more to himself than to anyone else "it was a good journey, I trust?" (*A Brief History of Women*, Ch4). This question summarizes his lifelong personal journey of growth and development. Furthermore, it links him with the house. As this question is directed, Spates talks to the house like that of between two old friends.

Ayckbourn describes "A Brief History of Women" as a play about a house, thus emphasizing the importance of the house to the story of the play and elaborating even more by stating that the house is the main character. Since the house is an inanimate figure, it needs outside stimulation to advance and move forward. Thus, Ayckbourn links Spates directly to the house, making him an integral part of the house and the story. This link between the House and Spates is a multileveled relationship. In reality, they both exist globally, each carrying their weight and casting an individual shadow on the world. However, on a spiritual and psychological level, the two share one entity in the universe. Thus, the deceiving title might be a bit misleading as "It might better be called "A Brief History of a House" (Brantley, 2018), because it follows the estates' changes and shifts better than any other character.

At the beginning of the play, it is unclear that the two, the house and Spates, are linked in any way or shape. However, later as the play advances, the house carries a magnitude power that seems to pull over Spates. He always gravitates back to the same place, no matter the occasion or the job occupation. This play features the first inanimate character, "The House." It is considered by the playwright as the play's central character as the many stages of the house represent the development of its character. "The play is as much the story of the house and the

various ignominies it endures over the decades as it is of the protagonist, and Alan was very keen that the house played a perpetual presence in the play" (Murgatroyd, 2020).

Stephen Farah, a Researcher and Lecturer, states, "The home symbolically is an extended psychic body, a manifestation of my soul in the world. And since it holds me". Spates identifies himself as an indispensable part of the house by stating, "I am practically part of the woodwork." (*A Brief History of Women*, Ch4). Sharing this idea makes it clear that Spates identifies his role in the house and society. In part three, where Spates was starting to realize how does the house has affected him one way or another, he states:

My whole life seems to have revolved around this place, one way or another. I used to come up here in the early days when it was the big house when it belonged to the Kirkbridge. You know, lord and lady Kirkbridge, to help out occasionally. On the big occasions, they used to bring in the local help for their big do's. Grand Balls and so on (*A Brief History of Women*, Ch3).

The house changes, and so does Spates, and this indicates that the two are standing for one entity. They are two faces of the same coin. In this sense, the house is the figural representative of Spates mental state. It keeps on shifting, looking for stability and a sense of belonging to the outside world. It changes whenever Spates change, and it peaks in success when he finally finds himself. "Watching it change from elegance to raffish-ness and back again, putting on different identities (a fireplace becomes a heater, chairs get increasingly comfortable), is somehow very poignant. You feel somehow that years from now it will still be uptown, waiting patiently long after its human comedy has gone" (Shaw, 2018).

Spates' self-control can be read through his position on the house. In part one, when spates were merely a simple servant working as a part-timer for the wealthy family. His position as a simple worker is perfectly mirroring his control over his psyche. He is alienated from his true self. Watching life pass by him while he is unable to control or participate in any part of it. In the second part of the play, Spates has a somewhat firmer grip over his life and psyche. Thus, he appears to be in a better position as a teacher.

David Gordon, a drama critic, wrote an article "Alan Ayckbourn's Latest Play Is a Brief History of His Dramatic Style", in which he discusses how his career path symbolizes his path towards total control over himself and finding a way out of the isolation. Furthermore, in the final two parts, Spates has gained complete control over the house by becoming a Manager. This mirrors him taking complete control of his psyche and finding a way out of isolation towards social engagement and coexisting in the real world—the play described as "pushing the boundaries of our theatrical imaginations" (Gordon, 2018).

Therefore, Spates is the animated version of the house, and he is finally rooted with a family. He has accepted his past as a farmer and built a future based on that achievement. Concurrently, the house has an accumulative past that leads to the final position of the house as a hotel. Lady Catharine notices that change in Spates' Character as she tells him "want to look at the house. I need to look at the house...they never forget, you know, they never forget you... it's talking to us, can you hear? Can you hear it? Listen...yes, now I can hear it. I can hear it now" (*A Brief History of Women*, Ch3).

A Brief History of Women is a play with many female characters. However, it does not follow anyone in particular. It mentions and lists several females but in a casual manner, showing a bird-view vision of multiple ladies who lived in separate lives but shared the same issue,

Alienation. However, the play revolved around Spates' main character and his journey from Alienation to self-realization. The play did not overview the critical subject that is the Alienation of women over different periods. Anthony Wilden, a professor in the Communications Department at Simon Fraser University, in his essay titled "System and Structure", defines gender roles:

In our culture, men are primarily viewed as digital. That is to say, they are expected to exemplify the so-called masculine traits: logic, rationality, intellect; manipulative, objective, and instrumental knowledge; being in relation-to-objects-in-the-world; and so on. Women, on the other hand, are primarily viewed as analogue. They are expected to exemplify the so-called feminine traits: emotion, irrationality, feeling, subjective knowledge, person-oriented knowledge, life-in-relation-to-men, and, above all, *being-in-relation to-relation* (Wilden, 2002, p. 296).

There is a parallel comparison that runs through the entirety of the play. This comparison is between Spates and female characters. Both are alienated, but the state of their Alienation differs. Spates was aware of his Alienation both psychologically and socially. He was able to identify the reasons for his state of loneliness and overrule it eventually, with better education, self-confidence, and improved social skills. However, female characters seem to run around in unbreakable circles of Alienation, unable to escape their statues socially and hence psychologically. No matter their education, confidence, or social status, they remain entrapped by the state of Alienation. Spates was able to escape his Alienation once he elevated his status in society. He achieved that through education and job replacement. But once the same equation is applied for women, the outcome does not change women are still alienated no matter of the status nor the job occupation

A Brief History of Women is a play that "depicts humanity's tenacious fragility" and does not focus on a specific gender. It is inclusive in combining the two suffrages of the lower-class individuals and women. This parallel links the audience back to the title, presenting the fragmented lives of several women throughout one play. They have nothing in common other than the fact that they are alienated, women. They live in different atmospheres and timelines, but they share the alienation sentiment.

Starting with Lady Caroline's relationship with her husband, he abuses her physically, emotionally, and verbally. She speaks of how she was forced to marry in order to escape people's gaze "I convinced myself, at the time, I was in love with him... I sometimes think he does not give a jot what happens to either one of us, and he says women always cope they can always manage to scrape by, find some luckless man to sponge off" (*A Brief History of Women*, Ch1).

Another incident in the same scene was when Lord Kirkbridge talked to Fergus about Cynthia, his daughter in law. He described her in the most awful and patriarchal way:

You need not worry she will come with a dowry... she is a little bit frisky. Headstrong. She may need a bit of breaking in. a firmer hand—a touch of the crop. But nothing, I am sure, a war hero like yourself cannot handle, once you have got the bridle on her... (*A Brief History of Women*, Ch1).

In the second part of the play, many female characters are introduced. Such as Ursula, who has recently lost her husband and thus tries to be reengaged in life again, tries to rekindle her love for social interaction. However, due to her bazaar nature and excessive emotional

baggage, she finds herself excluded once more from the world. Allan G. Johnson, an American writer, states in his book titled "The Gender Knot: Unravelling Our Patriarchal Legacy" the following:

A society is patriarchal to the degree that it promotes male privilege by being male-dominated, male-identified, and male-centred. It is also organized around an obsession with control and involves one of its key aspects the oppression of women... If men occupy superior positions, it is a short leap to the idea that men must be superior... [and that] whatever men do will tend to be seen as having greater value (166).

In particular, the school's Headmaster keeps on questioning Spates' relationship with Ursula deeming it "unhealthy" among many adverse claims. In a specific conversation, the Headmaster attacks the modern women calling them too fragile for the real world as he states:

Miss Brock's inner feelings reside rather closer to the surface of her sleeve than most people's. Quite a woman of emotions. Quite modern, wouldn't you say?... Woman today, eh? Very different from when I was young, I can tell you. In my day, you practically had to prise them open with no emotional crowbar, you know what I mean? Just to find out what they were thinking. Kept it all well hidden under the surface. Like an iceberg (*A Brief History of Women*, Ch2).

The second part takes place during the 1945 post-war world war, where the feminist movement was strong. Ayckbourn uses Wyn, the Headmaster, to invoice the backlash that the movement faced at that time. Thus, the play is "exploring English class, and gender divides over different periods ". It is a period and modern piece that transmit the sentiment of feminism and those who stood against it (Gordon, 2018).

Spates is the man who stands as a representative for the modern man who encourages women to gain back their voices and to step out of the oppression of Alienation, "In each capacity, this unexceptional, gentle and rather a passive man is beholden to the kindness of women, who prove to be the fairer sex in more ways than one, and ultimately the stronger as well." Spates fined his reflection on these women, as he is an alienated figure, he understands the feeling of being misunderstood by society. Thus, he tries to help them stand up for themselves, hoping it will affect his (Brantley, 2018).

Another Female character that has lost her path is Gill. She is married but has a problematic relationship with her husband, whom he cheats on with another younger actress. She states her insecurities in a private heart-to-heart conversation with spates. In the plays directed by her husband, she has always given an insignificant role. She describes her previous roles by saying:

I am very happy playing the cow. Nice short part, lots of laughs from the kids, and no one ever sees your face. Fine by me... Sometimes it is a horse. And one year, in Aladdin we did try a camel. But that was not a huge success. Terrible trouble with the hump, I recall. And one year, in Dick Whittington, I did go solo and played the cat, which I really quite enjoyed. Once I got over my nerves (*A Brief History of Women*, Ch2).

Gill was permanently assigned the minor roles on and off stage, and she was not the main character of her own life. However, she did action by the end of part three of the play. That action included, for the more significant part, Spates. She decided to live a life that she was worthy of. By marrying Spates, she was able to escape that hauntingly disappointing life and start a new one.

The fourth and final chapter of the play witness a returning character, Lady Catharine. She is in her late nineties when her grandchildren bring her back to the minor and a grand hotel managed by Spates. She is overwhelmed with memories of sadness and fear when she is informed that the study is the room, they are standing in. This room previously belonged to her late husband, Lord Kirkbridge. She started to scream rather frantically, "Never allowed in here. He never allowed us in here" (*A Brief History of Women*, Ch4). Her grandchildren seemed to discredit her acclaim by stating that they are irrational and highly unbelievable.

Spates is the only one who acknowledges that fear and precede to calm her worries by stating, "well, you are certainly allowed in here now, Mrs Seabourne. From now on, this is your room. And you are welcome to come into it whenever you like. Alright?" (Ch4). Spates wants to give her a sense of victory over the patriarchy represented by her late husband. She has achieved something unreachable in the past. No matter how small, it is a success

Conclusion

Psychosocial Alienation is the illness of the modern man. It's inevitable since it accompanies development, and the world is in a state of constant development. Therefore, escaping alienation is not the solution, coping with the concept is a far more reasonable answer. This thesis examined three of Ayckbourn's plays and analyses the element of Seeman's psychosocial Alienation, it generally mirrors the results of alienation research conducted by Seeman, Geyer, Neal & Collas, Kalekin-Fishman, and others. Alan Ayckbourn develops his vision of modern man throughout his plays; however, post 2000s, Ayckbourn has taken a psychosocial approach in outlining his characters. They become more driven by social and psychological difficulties seeking to assert their position in the world. As the world is infinitely growing, existential crisis becomes a constant characteristic of Ayckbourn's characters. *A Brief History of Women* (2017), follows the journey of self-discovery, from Alienation to total self-realization. It is a story of triumph of the human psych over the social super structure. Ayckbourn presents a character that is able to survive in the modern world, providing a blueprint for the modern man towards success and self-fulfillment.

References

- Seeman, Melvin. (1975) Alienation Studies. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 1.
- Brantley, Ben. *Review: 'A Brief History of Women,' an Alan Ayckbourn Comedy of Tragedies. The New York Times*, 3 May 2021, www.nytimes.com/2018/05/02/theater/a-brief-history-of-women-review-alan-ayckbourn.html.
- Wilden, Anthony.(2002). "System and Structure: Essays in Communication and Exchange". Routledge: London.
- Gordon, David. *Alan Ayckbourn's Latest Play Is a Brief History of His Dramatic Style. Theater Mania*, 20 May 2021, www.theatermania.com/off-broadway/reviews/a-brief-history-of-women_85046.html.
- Shaw, Helen. "Alan Ayckbourn's A Brief History Of Women Triumphs In New York." *Yorkshire Times*, 1 June 2021, yorkshiretimes.co.uk/article/Alan-Ayckbourns-A-Brief-History-Of-Women-Triumphs-In-New-York.

- Murgatroyd, Simon. "Alan Ayckbourn: Long Biography". Alan Ayckbourn Official Website, *Haydonning Ltd.* Accessed on 29th of October 2020. <http://biography.alanayckbourn.net/styled/>
- Stone, M. H. (2015). Mass Murder, Mental Illness, and Men. *Violence and Gender*, 2(1), 51–86. <https://doi.org/10.1089/vio.2015.0006>
- Vokes, Elizabeth. *Playing with Time: The Relationship between Theatrical Timeframe, Dramatic Narration and Character Development in The Plays of Alan Ayckbourn*. M.A. Thesis. University of the Western Cape. 2006.
- Billington, Michael. (1990). *Alan Ayckbourn*. British Library Cataloguing.
- Clarke, Angela et al. "Exploring mentalization, trust, communication quality, and alienation in adolescents." *PloS one* vol. 15,6 e0234662. 15 Jun. 2020, doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0234662.
- Colin, Wilson. (2001). *The outsider*. London: Phoenix.