

**THE REPUBLIC OF TURKEY
ANKARA UNIVERSITY
GRADUATE SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
DEPARTMENT OF WESTERN LANGUAGES AND LITERATURES
ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE**

**THE REPRESENTATION OF THE FAMILY IN ANTHONY NELSON'S
YEAR OF THE FAMILY, MARK RAVENHILL'S *HANDBAG* AND LINDA
MCLEAN'S *STRANGERS, BABIES***

M.A. Thesis

Pınar BOZ

Ankara-2019

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I hereby declare that all information in this document has been obtained and presented in accordance with academic rules and ethical conduct. I also declare that, as required by these rules and conduct, I have fully cited and referenced all material and results that are not original to this work. (.../.../2019)

Pınar BOZ



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INTRODUCTION

From the twentieth century onwards, the family institution has undergone dramatic alterations due to shifting working patterns, demographic changes and social movements (Garret 113). As part of a wider political programme, a series of legislative reforms have been made in Britain to re-adjust the 'moral' regulation in accordance with the changing society. (Weeks 341). The amendments in regulations, in return, have also altered the family institution and eventually the society substantially. In addition, the developments in reproductive technology since the 1990s have opened up new opportunities for both heterosexual and same-sex families, and reshaped the concept of the 'family'. Thus, owing to the changes in legislation, technology, attitudes and expectations, today's family institution displays great diversity, varying from traditional nuclear families to single parent households, blended families, cohabiting families, civil partnerships and same-sex families (Jenkins et al. 5).

The representation of the family in dramatic writing requires a detailed analysis since playwrights not only dramatise the psycho-social dynamics of individuals within the family unit, but also explore the drastic influence of rapidly changing social landscape on the individual and the family. While some playwrights focus on the family life merely within the framework of domestic relationships, others also treat the family in a wider context by dramatising the relationship between the state and the family institution to comment on social policies, social control, surveillance and welfare intervention.

This thesis adopts a critical approach to the prevalent family ideology elevated by British governments to realise their economic fantasies and to maintain social control, and explores political, social and economic factors behind its implementation.

The aim of this thesis is to study the family institution in British society and its representation in British drama through the analysis of Anthony Neilson's *Year of the Family* (1994), Mark Ravenhill's *Handbag* (1998) and Linda McLean's *strangers, babies* (2007) through an interdisciplinary lense.

The scope of this study is limited to the plays written and performed in the period from 1990 to mid 2007 -corresponding to John Major's and Tony Blair's governments- as it marks a global political interest in the family institution. In this period, alterations in the family structure became more evident than ever, leading to profound socio-economic and socio-politic outcomes in Britain. Therefore, it is essential to look into the history of the changing family institution and governments' family-related policies in Britain.

In this respect, Chapter I "The Family and the State in Britain from 1900 to 2007" will explicate the concept of the family and will examine British family institution since the 1900s. In this chapter, an interdisciplinary approach is taken to study and comment on the family institution and family dynamics. After the concept of the family is explored, British family institution will be scrutinised in terms of changing family structures, governments' policies and family-related issues that are of historical significance. However, as this thesis aims to explore the representation of the family in plays staged in British theatres from 1990 to 2007, the relevant historical period will be treated in a more detailed way. In order to better understand the political atmosphere in the nineties and the first decade of the twenty-first century, Thatcher's period will also be discussed since her policies continued to exert influence over British policies even after the millennium.

Chapter II "The Family Institution and Contemporary British Drama" will explicate on British theatrical atmosphere in the last decade of the twentieth century and at the beginning of the twenty-first century by presenting the contemporary debates and discussions on theatrical concepts and practises to better analyse the plays of this period. This chapter will also survey the plays -composed between 1990 and mid 2007- that dramatise the family institution. Thus, the representations of the family in contemporary British theatre will be reviewed within British theatrical context.

Chapter III "The First International Year of the Family: Anthony Neilson's *Year of the Family*" will focus on Anthony Neilson's place in British theatre and will present a brief survey of his plays to better understand his treatment of the family in his dramatic works. Then, this chapter will explore the family institution in Anthony Neilson's *Year of the Family* within the framework of politics, economy and sociology. The play will be analysed in relation to the first International Year of the Family, which was celebrated in 1994 (UN General Assembly 1994). British Conservative government's pro-family campaigns such as "back to basics" will be discussed in relation to the economic concerns of the government. This chapter will also elaborate on the reasons why the recent changes in the family structures are considered by the government as a problem requiring an urgent solution. Thereby, in this chapter the family life and family relationships will be reconsidered in terms of social control as well. Furthermore, this chapter will also address the detrimental effects of Ideology of Marriage and Family on the individuals living outside the traditional family unit. In *Year of the Family*, the main focus will be the discrimination of those characters that do not conform to the 'popular' family ideology. Lastly, Neilson's treatment of family dynamics will be examined in the context of family conflicts and dysfunctional family relationships.

Chapter IV "Alternative Families, Similar Miseries: Mark Ravenhill's *Handbag*" will briefly explore Mark Ravenhill's theatre career by concentrating on the changing dramatic concerns of the playwright and will survey his plays to explore his family portrayals. Then, this chapter will analyse the representation of changing family life and family relationships in Mark Ravenhill's *Handbag*. Thatcher's ideologies, which continued its influence on British politics well into the 2000s, will also be taken up since it is widely acknowledged that the then-current problems in the society had their roots in Thatcher's policies (Sierz, *Rewriting the Nation* 101). Thus, Ravenhill's *Handbag* -bringing together the bleak pictures of Victorian and contemporary times- will be examined in terms of Thatcher's ideology which manifests as the selective use of Victorian ideals for contemporary politics.

As *Handbag* dramatises the contemporary world with a prequel to Oscar Wilde's *Importance of Being Earnest* through its unconventional dramatic style, the portrayal of the family institution of these two different eras will be scrutinized by focusing on the changing family structures and parental practises, the concept of motherhood and maternal instinct, and parent-child relationships. On the other hand, in the analysis of the contemporary narrative of the play, queer theory will be used in order to comment on the relationship dynamics of the seemingly alternative family which is comprised of a gay and a lesbian couple. In order to explain queer theory, this chapter will explicate on the discourse on sexuality, the emergence of the homosexual as a type in the nineteenth century, and the terms such as "heteronormativity" and "homonormativity". Then, the dysfunctional family relationships of this ostensibly unconventional family will be evaluated in the light of the given terminology.

In this chapter, consumerism and commoditisation will also be explored since family relationships in the play are defined by them. In this chapter, commoditisation

will be tackled in relation to the reproductive technologies as well since the baby in the contemporary narrative is conceived through in vitro fertilization. The way these medical developments result in the commoditization of human attributes and eventually the baby in the play will be discussed in detail.

Chapter V "State Intervention in the Family: Linda McLean's *strangers, babies*" will discuss her place within the post-devolutionary Scottish theatre and will provide a brief survey of her plays to examine concisely the representations of the family in her dramatic works. Then, this chapter will analyze *strangers, babies* around the themes of dysfunctional family relationships, juvenile crimes, tutelary complex and welfare intervention. In the play, the crime May committed when she was a child will be examined in relation to the parental abuse and neglect, and juvenile delinquency. Linda McLean's treatment of dysfunctional relationships touches upon the effect of parental abuse on the emergence and development of delinquent behaviour in children. Therefore, the tragic consequences of parental abuse and neglect on children's development will be further elaborated in order to better understand the problem of juvenile delinquency. Juvenile delinquency will be handled at a sociological level as well since child crimes epitomise alarming social problems and create a huge concern for the public and governments alike (Hill and Tisdal 177). Moreover, in the analysis of the play, the James Bulger case will also be addressed since the delinquency hinted in the play displays apparent similarities to the Bulger incident. Thereby, the family's function as a social control mechanism will be addressed as the family is expected to bring up 'normal' individuals.

In *strangers, babies*, the family institution will be handled in relation to British governments' social welfare services and state intervention. Thus, in this chapter the surveillance of the family will be explored in detail. The play revolves around child

abuse and protection programmes through May, a mother who was once a serious juvenile delinquent probably involved in a child murder. In order to better understand the play, why the private realm of the family turns into a matter of public concern under certain circumstances and consequently erupts into the government's surveillance agencies will be delineated. Therefore, it will also be essential to give information about how government services take action in child abuse and neglect cases, together with a brief critical overview of British social welfare work in the field of child protection.



CHAPTER I:

THE FAMILY AND THE STATE IN BRITAIN FROM 1900 TO 2007

1.1. The Family as a Concept

The family is generally defined as "a group of people related by blood or by law, living together, or associating with one another to a common purpose, that purpose being the provision of food, shelter, and the rearing of children" (Wilson 2). However, this definition of the family falls short of describing and portraying it adequately since in terms of association, the family is contingent, has unstable boundaries and displays distinctive structures (Shapiro 2). Therefore, Diana Gittins argues that "[f]amilies are not clear-cut, but are highly complex and often confusingly fluid social groupings" (4). Contrary to general belief, the family is not a natural constructed unit, but rather an ideological one (Barrett and McIntosh 35). Anna Arroba indicates that the family

has been seen as the 'natural', hierarchically-ordered human organisation, as if people naturally and automatically join together under the protection of their father, and the nurturance of their mother. This notion hides the coercive ways in which many families are structured, and the laws, religion, and education that have made people exist within family organisations. (8-9)

Thus, it is necessary to approach the family institution from an interdisciplinary perspective since the significant influence of politics, economy, society, culture and gender relations on the family cannot be disregarded in any study of the family institution.

Barrett and McIntosh contends that "the family is not timeless and culture-free" (33). Therefore, as families change through time and cultures, so do the concepts that define this institution. For instance,

the revolution in social thought with respect to family issues in the West that had its origins in the upheaval of the 1960s has continued to exert influence on contemporary discussions on families by breaking down unified concepts of 'the family'. (Trask 23)

Today, many people live in single parent families, blended families, civil partnerships and same-sex families, which clearly show that the strictly defined concepts regarding the family institution are in crisis (Arroba 12). Therefore, the concept of the family is being redefined so that it can also embrace non-traditional family structures (Loukas et al. 36). It should also be stated that in any discussions of the family, it is necessary "to question the assumption that there is, has been, one single phenomenon we can call the family" and to "think of families rather than the family" (Gittins 2). Moreover, it should be noted that family relationships are also shaped by normative conceptions concerning the family institution (Morgan 210). Thus, as there appears a relationship between the ideal representation and material life of the family, it is essential to consider both aspects in order to better understand families (Gittins 3).

Barrett and McIntosh state that "[w]hat happens outside families is much affected by the existence of the family as a privileged institution" (76-77). That is, the discourses concerning the notion of the family not only shape families but also the overall society and thus, influence every other parts of social life outside the domestic sphere.

The family institution should be viewed within the context of the politics, economy and belief systems since it is "a nodal point in a web of social practices and regulations which operate both within and around it" (Gittins 2, Knowles 33). Therefore, it is a must to explore the family institution by putting it in a wider social context and to find out the relation between this smallest unit we call the family and society. Catherine Bernard indicates that in addition to fulfilling its members' needs, the family institution is also expected to create well-integrated and responsible individuals who can contribute to the society (6). As the family institution serves a function for the betterment of societies, governments turn to families for solutions to tackle social issues. However, it is a 'chicken and egg' situation since one cannot be sure if the family problems lead to social catastrophes or vice versa. This is why Thatcher's governments considered the family institution both as the cause of, and solution to social problems (Gittins 1). Caroline Knowles notes that

[b]ecause of its central social significance the family is constantly scrutinized for signs of decay and decline. In this sense it operates as a barometer of a more general social malaise. An entire spectrum of social failure and pathology (prostitution, crime, drug abuse, teen pregnancies, and so on) is laid at the family's door, making it one of the most highly socially invested arrangements of our time. (21)

Then, the family is considered as a foundation upon which the society rests. Michel Foucault, on the other hand, describes the family as the "parent-children cell" and "the privileged locus of emergence for the disciplinary question of the normal and the abnormal" (Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 215-216) Thus, the surveillance of the family institution reveals that the family is "the product of disciplinary society" (Knowles 33). Governments aim to keep the family in its proper functioning and

support it to perform its social duties efficiently by taking notice of its own identity (Rose, *Powers of Freedom* 128).

Richard J. Gelles and Murray A. Straus state that as the family organization is made up of individuals of different ages and sexes, it is "the locus of the 'generation gap' and the site of 'the battle of sexes'" (35). Although starting a family might appear as attractive, "the little enclosed group can also be a trap, a prison whose walls and bars are constructed of the ideas of domestic privacy and autonomy" (Barret and McIntosh 56). Gelles and Straus contend that

[w]ith the exception of the police and military, the family is perhaps the most violent social group, and the home is the most violent setting, in our society. A person is more likely to be hit or killed in his or her home by another family member than anywhere else or by anyone else (15).

Unfortunately, it is this family privacy which makes the domestic victims helpless and desperate. Whether the state intervention in domestic sphere should occur or not in case of a domestic crisis depends on the social norms concerning violence. Societies differ in their views on when it is or is not acceptable to use violence, and what kind of violent behaviours can or cannot be displayed (Gelles and Straus 34). Regarding this issue, Knowles states that the family becomes public concern once the surveillance agencies find out that its norms and practices are seriously violated (34). That is, between the domestic and public sphere there is a blurred line upon which the private becomes public and the personal becomes political.

Voluminous literature on domestic problems reveals that this subject has been tackled by multidisciplinary approaches. Psychologists, sociologists, feminists and scholars all investigate what impairs the proper functioning of this unit and leads to the disturbances and even catastrophes. Their studies show that there are different reasons

underlying a dysfunctional family unit such as socio-economic difficulties, gender and power relations, and mental disturbances, just to name a few.

Oxford English Dictionary defines "dysfunctional" as "of or relating to dysfunction; that disrupts or impairs proper, normal, or satisfactory function; not operating normally" and as

[e]xhibiting or characterized by dysfunction; (of social interactions, family relationships, etc.) disruptively aberrant or abnormal, esp. when harmful to the emotional wellbeing of those involved; (of a person, group or family, etc.) incapable of forming or conducting normal social relations; maladjusted. ("Dysfunctional")

Maria Kopsztejn argues that while a family is functional as long as it carries out its social functioning appropriately, it becomes dysfunctional once it does not fulfil its members' needs and does not serve its function for the betterment of the society (25).

Basem Abbas Al Ubaidi indicates that though healthy families infrequently might show some characteristics of the dysfunctional family, they start to re-function after the crisis passes. On the contrary, in dysfunctional families the problems are consistent and occur in the long-term (1).

Natalie Sufler Bilynsky and Elizabeth Rudow Vernaglia argue that a functional family keeps the balance collaboratively. It is an open system as its members are both emotionally involved with each other and motivated to bring forth their own identity. On the contrary, a dysfunctional family is a closed system as its members are emotionally withdrawn and detached (306).

Concerning the dysfunction that arises in the family relationships, Kopsztein claims that the dysfunction

can be expressed as low cohesion, low adaptability, low communication skills and it is always expressed via: pathogenic functioning of roles, the existence of too rigid or too fuzzy boundaries, general difficulties related to the functioning of the system. It is coupled with learning-related stress and low coping with situational or developmental crises. (26)

It can be argued that alcoholism and drug addiction, verbal, physical and psychological abuse, juvenile delinquency, crime and imprisonment, unemployment and poverty, homelessness, prolonged mental or physical illness, separation, and divorce have an effect on the emergence of the dysfunction in family relationships (ibid.).

Consequently, with or without problems, family life and dynamics vary greatly. Therefore, as the family institution is culture-specific and differs through time and space, it is essential to indicate that the scope of this study is limited to the families in Britain especially from 1990 to mid 2007. However, in order to better understand the evolution of British family, the historical background will delineate British family institution by starting from 1900s.

1.2. The Family Institution in Britain from 1900 to 2007

The family institution is closely interrelated with the notions of sexuality and gender. The change in attitudes towards sexuality in the early twenty-first century was

the result of a long, still unfinished, revolution in erotic and intimate life that saw a radical change in laws, attitudes and personal behaviour. It was not a straightforward or automatic process. On the contrary, it was in many ways messy, contradictory and haphazard, with distinctive phases and unexpected turns. (Weeks 321)

In the twentieth century, one of the most prominent changes in British family structure resulted from the accelerating female employment. Women's participation in the work force led to change in gender identities and reshaped the division of labour within the domestic sphere. The twentieth century witnessed an increase in the feminisation of labour force, and through changes in legislation, women have secured their rights in the workplace since then. In the first half of the twentieth century, the government policies were shaped around the general public opinion that women should serve as a reserve labour force required in times of necessity. Therefore, women had to overcome great difficulties in order to claim their rights in the work place and achieve the same rights as men.

When women were called upon to enter into the workforce during the First World War, they were considered as a reserve labour source. Though it was during the Second World War that women workers achieved equal pay and were provided with state-run nurseries, women were once again expected to leave their jobs and childcare facilities after the war (Weeks 331-332; Garret 120). In the post-war period, the debates regarding the role of woman never ceased since women were expected to be primarily responsible for their motherhood and wifely duties. There was a growing concern around "latchkey children", and working mothers were held responsible for juvenile delinquency (Weeks 331-332). In spite of all these drawbacks, women's income played a significant role in the consumer economy's expansion in the 1950s and 1960s and contributed to the upkeep of the financial stability during the 1970s (Weeks 331).

The family institution was also heavily influenced by a series of prominent social movements and momentous legislative reforms in the twentieth century. Especially "[b]etween the 1960s and the millennium, Britain went through a historic transition in sexual beliefs and behaviours, transition that transformed the possibilities

of erotic and intimate life for millions of people" (Weeks 321). During these decades, sexual revolution was also coupled with social movements such as civil rights movements, the liberal student revolts of 1968, resurgence of feminism and sexual liberation movements (Hekma and Giami 2; Weeks 359). In these distinctive but closely interrelated movements "sexual oppression came to be seen as an indispensable aspect of all social oppression" (Weeks 359). As a result, youngsters and students, women, lesbians and gays, and every kind of marginal individuals revolted in order to oppose all kinds of authoritative social, religious and educational institutions such as the family, the church and the university (Hekma and Giami 10).

Thus, as a result of the rapidly changing social landscape, legislative reforms became necessary as "an attempt to come to grips with the problems posed by a legal framework that was no longer fit-for-purpose in the light of changing social realities" (Weeks 324-325). Thus, these legislations, on the one hand, came out as a response to changing society, but, on the other hand, reshaped the society especially in the long run. However, with regards to these so called permissive legislations, it should be noted that "[t]here was no official endorsement of hedonism. There was in fact a strong element of negative utilitarianism in the legislation, more concerned with removing difficulties and minimising suffering than in positively enhancing happiness" (339). In this period, the permissive legislations that have an effect on the family institutions are Sexual Offences Act of 1967, The Abortion Act of 1967 and Divorce Reform Act of 1969. Sexual Offences Act of 1967 decriminalised male homosexual acts in private between two adults. The Abortion Act of 1967 made abortions legal on certain grounds, thus enabling women to have a say in their reproduction (ibid.). With the 1969 Divorce Reform Act, the irretrievable breakdown of marriage became the only ground for divorce. Thus, through this act, under certain conditions, the parties to the marriage

could get a legal separation without proving to the court any kind of misconduct in their marriage (Divorce Reform Act 1969, ch. 55). When the history of divorce in Britain is examined, with the 1857 Matrimonial Causes Act, though divorce had become accessible to common public, it had created a double standard because this act proclaimed that although a husband could divorce a wife for her adultery, a husband's adultery was not a sufficient ground for a wife to obtain divorce if it was not accompanied by desertion, sodomy, bigamy, incest. The 1923 Matrimonial Causes Act, on the other hand, had "made adultery by either husband or wife the sole ground for divorce. A wife no longer had to prove additional faults against the husband" ("Changes in divorce: the 20th century"). The 1969 Divorce Reform Act, on the other hand, enabled the citizens to get no fault divorce.

Thus, in the twentieth century, with the passing of the 1969 Divorce Reform Act, divorce rates increased considerably, leading to new family formations such as single parent families, blended families and stepfamilies through remarriages. It should also be clarified that women's financial autonomy affected the divorce rates as well. Nevertheless, the influence of permissive legislations cannot be disregarded as these legislations "widened individual choices, reduced individual frustration and suffering, and loosened the bonds of matrimony" (McGregor 55).

In the meantime, the late 1960s and the early 1970s also witnessed a significant change in birth control with availability of the oral contraceptive pill in mid-1960s (Botting and Dannel 32). The pill not only enabled women to have control over their fertility, but also reformed and redefined the relationship between sexuality and reproduction:

[Contraceptive revolution] finally broke the link between heterosexual intercourse and reproduction, and what followed from this was truly transformative: the separation of marriage and conception; the separation of heterosexuality and marriage; and ultimately the separation of heterosexuality and parenting. (Weeks 335)

Thus, during these decades, female sexuality changed immensely as a result of the more equal standards in marriages through the Divorce Reform Act 1969 and the introduction of pill which enabled self-determination (Hekma and Giami 10).

On the other hand, the inequality between men and women still persisted in social, economic and political aspects such as underrepresentation of women in the parliament, restricted opportunities in paid labour, pay inequality and women's limited access to university education. In spite of the legislative reforms of 1960s, social and cultural attitudes towards women and their role in the society did not make much progress in the short run. Thus, women felt the need to fight for their rights in order to secure their positions in the professional life through strikes and organizations. Ford Women's Strike in Dagenham (1968) drew attention to the injustice in the workplace and pay inequality, British Women Liberation Movement (1970) became influential in the prospective gender equality legislations, Night Cleaner's Campaign (1970-73) fought against gender and class based exploitation of women, The Grunwick Strike (1976-78) aimed to achieve a unionised workforce with its mostly women of colour participants, and Organisation of Women of Asian and African Descent (1979) articulated the need for Black Women's Movement that would address issues specifically related to oppression of Black women (Binard 2-5).

After all these above mentioned feminist struggles, the government had to take action for women workers from 1970s onwards. Equal Pay Act of 1970, which came to

force in 1975, prohibited gender-based discrimination with regards to pay and conditions (Equal Pay Act 1970, ch. 41). In 1973, the marriage bar, which required women to resign upon marriage, was removed (Jenkins et al. 15). Employment Protection Act of 1975 made provisions for maternity leave and pay (Binard 7). Through Sex Discrimination Act of 1975, any kind of discrimination between men and women in the workplace were made unlawful (Sex Discrimination Act 1975, ch. 65). Equal Opportunities Commission was founded to attend to people's grievances in case of discrimination. The Domestic Violence and Matrimonial Proceedings Act of 1976 made it possible for married women to get court orders against their husbands. The Housing Act (Homeless Persons) of 1978 enabled battered wives to benefit from accommodation (Binard 7).

Thus, shifting working patterns, changing gender roles and relations, social movements, and legislative reforms had started to result in alterations in the family structures in the late 1970s. In the following subchapters, the historical period corresponding to the date of the plays - this thesis focuses on- will be explored in a more detailed way. The family institution, governments' policies concerning the family and historically significant family-related issues will be discussed by starting from Thatcher's governments as the political climate even in 2000s was greatly shaped by Thatcher's policies. Thereby, in these subchapters, it will be argued that British governments' family related policies are implemented to achieve their economic ends and to maintain social control in the society.

1.2.1. “The Milk Snatcher”: Margaret Thatcher

Thatcher was elected Prime Minister in 1979 and stayed in power until she was forced to resign on 20 November 1990 (Marr, sec. 4). She was succeeded by John

Major, and thus the Conservative Party remained in power until New Labour Party leader Tony Blair won the general election in 1997. However, it is widely acknowledged that Thatcher's influence continued even after New Labour Party's victory (D'monté 79). Her ideology and politics continued to shape British political atmosphere as "New Labour ministers were Thatcher's Grandchildren" (Sierz, *Rewriting the Nation* 101).

At the time, "[e]xtreme right-wing Conservatives, of whom there were several in the Cabinet, enthusiastically envisaged the complete disappearance of the Welfare State and its replacement by the 'Night-watchman State'" (Marwick 358). During the three consecutive terms in office, Thatcher's policies revolved around monetarism, privatisation of state owned industries and free market economy (263). Thus, she limited public spending and tried "to remoralize society, creating a nation whose Victorian values were expressed through secure marriages, self-reliance and savings, restraint, good neighbourliness, hard work" (Marr, sec. 4).

The aforementioned permissive legislations had started to result in changes in social attitudes and behaviour, and thus illegitimacy, divorce and single parenthood had become morally less oppressive. However, in Thatcher's period, these issues turned into major social problems requiring an urgent solution as the economic and social deterioration was thought to be primarily resulted from the changing family structures and behaviours (Mulkay 6; Rodger 4-5). In the meantime, permissiveness had started to be used as a pejorative term denoting the breakdown of morality and degeneration of the traditional family unit (Garret 129).

In the 1980s, the policies related to the family institution resulted from the need to reorganise and regulate public spending. Due to the welfare maintenance, alternative

family structures started to pose serious problems in the state budget, and Conservatives thought that "less state welfare requires more family, and possibly community, responsibility for social care, and that this goal will dictate that more conventional sex codes and lifestyles should be adopted by those who might make claims upon the state" (Rodger 124).

Moreover, Conservatives held the post-war welfare state responsible for the collapse of the traditional family unit, thinking that the welfare state weakened the role of the family institution in the modern society while seemingly trying to help it (Rodger 5). Thus, it was the

moral decline associated, in the first instance, with 'our' over-reliance on the state and the loss of those virtues of self-help and thrift. It was this that undermined our entrepreneurial spirit and our sense of national pride and it was here that discourses on the family played a central role in the Thatcherite project. (Winter and Connolly 31)

The general spirit of the Thatcher's government was manifested in "Margaret Thatcher, The Milk Snatcher", the sobriquet she got "when, attempting to cut costs, she abolished free milk for some school children" (Feiler 18). Apart from the cuts in services, the family credit had complex and long forms which were quite deterrent for the applicants (Marwick 299). Moreover, during her governments, welfare provisions turned into a "poverty trap" that "almost seemed designed to cage people in the worst-paid jobs" (ibid.). For apologists, the poverty trap would distress beneficiary temporarily until s/he found a job with better opportunities that would fulfil his/her all needs and make the benefits unnecessary. That is, while the government was promoting economic independence, it was actually perpetuating privation and poverty (ibid.).

In the meantime, child abuse cases were frequently on the agenda, and public got severely concerned and agitated about children during the 1980s. Child maltreatment had come into focus in 1960s when "battered babies" syndrome was introduced to the literature with the use of new radiology techniques (Hill and Tisdall 198). In the 1980s, child abuse scandals broke once more, following the inquiries into the deaths of Jasmine Beckford, Tyra Henry and Kimberley Carlile, all of whom had suffered the severe physical abuse and neglect by their parents, stepparents or carers. The fact that their death had occurred despite social workers' involvement with the family resulted in the loss of public confidence in welfarist child care system. The involved social workers were seriously criticised by the public on the grounds that they either lacked professional competency or did not implement their full authority (Parton 48; Winter and Conolly 33). Thus, in 1985 a campaign, "The Children in Danger", was started by the National Children's Home "to counter what it saw as the effects of 'rising poverty, increased drug misuse, deteriorating housing, escalating family break-down, a continuing high level of physical and sexual abuse, and cuts in services for children'" (Marwick 310). In 1986, ChildLine was established to give counselling service to children and young people (Parton 47).

Soon after, in 1987 over a hundred children in Cleveland were diagnosed as victims of sexual abuse by the paediatricians. At first, the number of abused children created a great concern in the public but then it came out that medical examinations were quite controversial, and in many cases the diagnosis was flawed. The intervention of surveillance agencies was considered improper as the involved doctors and social workers who had removed the children from their homes in the middle of the night without attending to parents' rights were thought to be overzealous in their attempt to diagnose the abuse (Hill and Tisdal 207). As they did not recognise the parents' rights,

"[a] shift in emphasis, away from the incompetence of social workers towards the unaccountability of their actions, was made in 1988 with the publication of the report of the inquiry into the events in Cleveland" (Winter and Conolly 33). The debates on Cleveland Case led to the Children Act of 1989, which constituted child abuse as socio-legal problem and protected the rights of the family members in a legal frame during the process of decision making in the course of state intervention (Parton 48-49).

Apart from terrifying child abuse scandals, Aids crisis occupied the agenda during the 1980s. Though it was 1982 when one of the first people, Terrence Higgins, died of Aids, British government did not take an immediate action since it required the acknowledgement of various sexual practices from homosexual relationships to extra and premarital sex, which the conservative government would not willing to address. However, when it became apparent that the heterosexuals were at risk as well, the government started a full scale campaign in 1987 (Garret 129).

As, in the early days of the crisis, Aids was wrongly considered to be a disease confined only to gays, homophobia became prevalent in the society and undermined the homosexual's way of existence. After the 1967 Sexual Offences Act, first in Soho in London and then in the other liberal areas of Manchester and Edinburgh, gay and lesbian subcultures had begun to take shape with the proliferation of gay entertainment venues (Garret 129-130; Marr, sec. 4). However, after the Aids outbreak, homosexuals were once again stigmatised as Aids was considered by many but especially conservative traditionalists as "the medical and moral consequence of promiscuous and unnatural sexual behaviour. as you sow, so shall you reap - almost literally" (Marr sec. 4). Thus, from the conservatives' perspective, Aids crisis served as a warning to the society with respect to the tragic outcomes of new liberal movements.

Thatcher's government enacted a homophobic legislation in Section 28 of the 1988 Local Government Act. It proclaims that

(1) A local authority shall not—

(a) intentionally promote homosexuality or publish material with the intention of promoting homosexuality;

(b) promote the teaching in any maintained school of the acceptability of homosexuality as a pretended family relationship.

(2) Nothing in subsection (1) above shall be taken to prohibit the doing of anything for the purpose of treating or preventing the spread of disease.

(*Local Government Act 1988*, ch. 9)

Elizabeth Morrish draws attention to the topics of the family and disease in the legislation that recurrently appear in discussions around homosexual relationships (Morrish). The homophobic stance of the government is clearly seen in the attitude which considers gays only in relation to the transmission of disease. This legislation also reveals the family structure that the government legally approves and recognises since "[t]he presupposition laid out in section 28, is that the category of 'family' is a rigid and impermeable one -it is unambiguously heterosexual, while the attributive adjective 'pretended' declares the gay family to be invalid" (ibid.).

Conservative government's family ideology is clearly seen once more within the section of the 1989 Children Act on fostering and adoption:

It would be wrong arbitrarily to exclude any particular groups for consideration. But the chosen way of life of some adults may mean that they would not be able to provide a suitable environment for the care and nurture of a child. No-one has a 'right' to be a foster parent. 'Equal rights' and 'gay rights' have no place in fostering services. [qtd in Morrish].

The legislation above shows that in the conservative discourse of the government, the "'family' has become a code word for the exclusion of homosexuality" (ibid.).

Consequently, during the 1980s the family attracted the attention of policy makers and was severely exposed to several social control mechanisms from health professionals to welfare workers. Though conservative traditionalists frequently uttered their concerns about the negative influence of liberal movements on the family institution whenever they have the chance, others thought that Margaret Thatcher's politics were responsible for the breakup of the family unit as extreme individualism and crass consumerism weakened the moral values that maintain the bonds of matrimony (Garret 135).

1.2.2. “Back to Basics”: John Major’s Government

After Thatcher was forced to resign on November 22, 1990, her Chancellor, John Major became the Prime Minister. Britain's socio-politic and socio-economic outlook in 1990s presented a bleak picture with a seriously "divided, and increasingly atomised society - a society, in short, at odds with itself" (Marwick 372). The gap between the rich and poor was increasingly wide, and at the beginning of the decade one-sixth of the British lived in poverty. Ten per cent of couples with children and half of the single mothers did not have any income, benefiting from social security provisions, and one in three children lived in poor conditions, leading to increase in child poverty through the late 1990s (Sierz, Introduction 3).

During the 1990s, the government's discourses on the family institution and family relationships largely focus on lone parent family as lone parenthood does not comply with the model of active and autonomous family unit in the government's policy (Rodger 121).

Whilst 86 per cent of two-parent families derive their main source of income from earnings, 67 per cent of one-parent families rely on the social security system for their main source of income. Only about 4 per cent received regular income from maintenance payments before the introduction of the Child Support Act. (Rodger 119)

Thus, during the 1990s single mothers were catching the attention of Conservatives who aimed to restrict the government's spending by protesting that "an overgenerous state benefit system was encouraging young, single mothers to 'marry the state' and embark on a 'benefit career'" (Garret 126). Moreover, the fact that the rate of teenage pregnancy in Britain was higher than any other European country created a huge concern for the government. It was claimed that teenage girls got pregnant to make use of the council housing and state subsidies. However, what scared the family-friendly conservational government the most was the assumption that the current situation of the single motherhood resulted from the young women's own choice to live without men rather than male abandonment. Therefore, the government thought of devising a system which would penalise the single mothers in case of the birth of the second or third child. However, protestations arose from the pressure groups such as Association of Single Parents, announcing that many lone parents benefited from the state subsidies not because they were unwilling to work but because it was difficult to find a job that would cover all the expenses of the child in their care. Moreover, these opposition groups also asserted that rather than choice, it was divorce or separation that led to the single parenthood in two-thirds of the cases, and seventy-five per cent of the single parents were leading their life under the official poverty level. Thereby, these criticisms resulted in the abandonment of the plans of the government to cut benefit for lone parents. However, on April 1993 Child Support Agency (CSA) was found, which stirred up even more trouble concerning the child maintenance (Garret 126).

Supported by the government, the CSA was established in order to adjust child maintenance and track down absent fathers as it was calculated that only less than thirty per cent fathers were supporting their child/children. However, soon after, the agency was seriously criticized on many grounds related to the procedure adopted by the CSA: Firstly, payment rates were adjusted at an astronomical level; secondly, single mothers were forced by the agency to name the father of their children even when they had reasonable grounds to avoid their former sexual partner. Lastly, it was claimed that instead of pursuing the absent fathers, which was harder and more expensive in the ongoing process, the CSA was raising the payments of the fathers who were already supporting their children through court order. Protests erupted after the agency's high financial demands led to the breakup of many fathers' second marriages and, more tragically, the suicide of two fathers due to economic distress. As a result, a House of Commons Select Committee was appointed to re-evaluate the process of the CSA. Before long, White Paper, *Improving Child Support*, introduced limits on the payments that would be demanded from the absent fathers and granted recognition to court decisions and the financial requirements of the fathers' second families (Garret 126-127; Marwick 365).

In 1993, in order to promote the autonomous traditional nuclear family unit, the Conservative government started a moral campaign, known as "back to basics" (Rodger 8). Actually, "back to basics" focused on variety of topics such as "public service, industry, sound money, free trade, traditional teaching, respect for the family and law, and a campaign to defeat crime" (Marr, sec. 5). However, the campaign failed as a result of the financial and sexual scandals involving Conservative political figures, and, since then, "back to basics" became identified with sexual hypocrisy (Garret 124).

At a national level, in Britain "the conflation of the individual and the family [was] absolutely necessary to sustain the conservative economic fantasy" (Barret and McIntosh 48). However, during the 1990s, the political, social and economic concerns for the family institution attracted global attention. The year, 1994 was proclaimed 'International Year of the Family' by the United Nations, and in a three day International Conference on Families, the President of the United Nations stated that "present-day socio-political realities have heightened the importance and responsibilities of families and have made their role even more vital" (*UN General Assembly 1994*, 2). The International Year of the Family aimed at "encouraging both governments and individuals to re-evaluate the place of family relationships and obligations in society in a rapidly changing world" and focused on family related issues such as illegitimacy, child abuse and neglect, divorce and reordered families (Rodger 1-2).

With the Cleveland Case, concerns for children's safety had started to grow, and the allegations of satanic abuse in Nottingham, Rochdale and, especially, Orkneys stirred up apprehensions once more. In 1991, on the island of South Ronaldsay, nine children suspected of having been sexually abused by their parents during the alleged satanic rituals was removed from their home early in the morning and taken to placements in the Scottish mainland by the social services. Social workers' treatment evoked the Cleveland events during which the surveillance agencies had disregarded the wishes of children and the rights of parents, and taken action without enough evidence (Hill and Tisdall 207). Though there was an increasing moral panic about child abuse in the society, the inappropriate social work intervention was criticised by the public once again after the Cleveland inquiry (Winter and Connolly 34).

In the 1990s, drug-taking among children increased substantially as well. In 1995, it was predicted "that one eleven-year-old in five would have taken drugs, compared with fewer than one in ten in 1989; and that almost half of all sixteen-year-olds" (Marwick 404). When Leah Betts died after taking an Ecstasy tablet on November 16, 1995, the society became more concerned about the safety of children and young people once again. According to the European Commission report in 1998, in Britain drug-taking was more prevalent among teenagers and adults than any other EU country (Sierz, Introduction 6).

Moreover, in the 1990s the increase in child delinquency and a high profile murder committed by children necessitated the re-evaluation of children's home environment more than ever. In 1993, two-year-old toddler, James Bulger was abducted from a shopping centre and tortured to death by two eleven-year-old boys, Robert Thompson and Jon Venables (Garret 127). The tragic incident provoked a public outcry and stirred up trouble in the society as

[t]he issue of child crime seems to encapsulate many fraught issues for society. Children who commit crimes bring into question the society's ideas of childhood and of adolescence, gender roles, the proper socialisation of young people, people's sense of safety of community. They seem to symbolise anxieties about the state of our society. (Hill and Tisdall 177)

Therefore, Bulger Case led to many speculations regarding the motive and intention behind the murderous actions of these two young boys. The tabloid newspapers drew attention to the negative influence of 'video nasties' on children and drew parallels between the murder and Child's Play 3, a horror movie which the children allegedly had watched prior to the murder. More importantly, the murder incident gave rise to the heated debates about the relationship between the parental behaviour and delinquency in

children. The study carried out after the Bulger Case by the Commission on Children remarked that it was poverty and parental abuse rather than the violence on TV or cinema that constituted a common ground for the delinquency cases (Garret 126-127; Sierz, Introduction 5; Franklin and Petley 139).

The rise in juvenile crimes was a particular concern to Conservatives as it had severe economic repercussions as well:

The Audit Commission (1996) estimated that public services spend around £1 billion dealing with young offenders between 10 and 17 years old. Sixty-six per cent of this money is spent by police, and 22 per cent by social services. With most offences by young people being property related, manufacturers and retailers are estimated to lose over £1 billion a year due to crime. The estimated cost of the crime generally exceeds a staggering £16 billion for public services and victims each year. (Hill and Tisdall 179)

Around this time, voluminous literature appeared on juvenile crimes and delinquency to better understand the underlying causes of offences committed by children and young people, and it was found that "[t]he causes of delinquent behaviour and child abuse/neglect are the same, so little distinction is made between children who offend and children in need of care and protection"(Hill and Tisdall 183).

Meanwhile, Section 28 of the 1988 Local Government Act led to the resurgence of gay activism such as Stonewall, Act Up and Outrage (Garret 130-131). In September 1991, actor Sir Ian McKellen visited Downing Street to discuss laws about homosexuals with the Prime Minister. During the decade, lowering the homosexual age of consent and prohibiting the discrimination based on sexual orientation were brought to agenda (Marwick 379-380). The attempt to lower the age of consent from twenty-one to sixteen to equalise it with that of heterosexual age of consent "was part of a broader gay

equality package drafted by the Stonewall group, and inspired by the European Union's social charter commitment to ending all forms of discrimination" (Garret 132). In February 1994, British Parliament reached an uneasy compromise to lower the age of consent for gay men to eighteen (Morrish).

There were significant scientific breakthroughs in reproductive technologies in the 1990s. In 1992, in Brussels, André Van Steirteghem invented the process of sperm injection, which was "significant moment in the development of in vitro fertilisation (IVF), enabling women to become pregnant by the implantation of fertilised eggs" (Sierz, Introduction 21). With the help of this technique, men who had minimal sperm production gained an opportunity to have a child, and women who had ovulation problems would be able to get pregnant through IVF using donated eggs. Reproductive technologies would also enable the formation of alternative family structures.

1.2.3. "Education, education, education": Tony Blair

On May 1, 1997, Tony Blair became the prime minister and remained in power from 1997 to 2007. After winning three consecutive terms in office, he was followed by his Chancellor, Gordon Brown. The landslide victory of Labour party was related to the reforms initiated by Neil Kinnock in the 1980s and thereafter continued by Tony Blair, under whose leadership the party was rebranded as New Labour Party. In 1995, Blair had amended the Clause Four of the party constitution, thereby bringing an end to the mass nationalisation (Sierz, Introduction 25; Marwick 339-340). Thus, Blair's New Labour party came to stand for "a move to the centre of British politics, with a generally progressive attitude to personal morality, a mixture of neoliberalism for industry and higher public spending, and a decidedly traditional alignment in foreign affairs" (Rebellato, Introduction: Living in the 2000s 28). Therefore, although New Labour

came to power, "the essence of Thatcherite Toryism - the privatisation of services, the deregulation of markets and the making-of-life-easy for big business - was the dominant political ethos" (Sierz, *Rewriting the Nation* 101).

The family institution was considered by New Labour as a means for economic and social betterment, and New Labour shaped its family policy around "the education, care and well-being of children, financial support for families with children, services for families, parental employment, work/family reconciliation, and family functioning" (Daly 434). However, in spite of its universalist discourse for family welfare policies, New Labour maintained a selectivist approach to welfare provisions, targeting certain types of families. Working Families Tax Credit (replacing Family Credit in 1999), Working Tax Credit (replacing WFTC in 2003) and Child Tax Credit (2003) were all targeted and means-tested (435).

Blair emphasized "education, education, education" which "was the starting point for the wider social reforms, introduced as the first White Paper, in July 1997, *Excellence in Schools*" (David 120). In 1997, Early Excellence Centres were founded by Department of Health for children under five years who were suspected to be at risk or need the support of social services. Sure Start Programme provided services and provision in poor localities, and targeted mostly single mothers and families in need, who had children under three years old. The Children's Centre programme reframed Sure Start with the goal of providing universal provision in 3500 centres by 2010. However, as stated above, welfare policies were generally selective and targeted the particular groups in the society such as needy families and lone parents. Thus, with regards to childcare, while private sector prevails in wealthier areas, public provisions and services were available in deprived areas (Daly 438).

Maintaining liberal regimes of welfare, New Labour's policies in relation to families and children drew the line between deserving and the undeserving poor while providing services (Daly 438). Therefore, New Labour government introduced activation policies in keeping with the "modern welfare premised on the notion of promoting opportunity and personal responsibility" (Walker and Wiseman 7). Families were required to assume certain responsibilities in order to make use of the welfare services. Thus, from 2002 onwards, one of the most prominent core targets of Sure Start service was promoting the employability of parents (Meadows and Garbers 3). Lone parents were thought to have increased the unemployment rates, causing poverty at the national level and playing a huge part in the intergenerational transmission of disadvantage (Walker and Wiseman 17-18). Therefore, New Labour introduced New Deal for Lone Parent, which was "a voluntary, employment-orientated advice service covering job search, training, childcare and benefits that is targeted on lone parents whose youngest child is at least five years three months old" (Walker and Wiseman 18). However, with the introduction of compulsory elements, from 2008 onwards parents were required to seek employment once their child reaches the age of twelve years (and seven years from 2010) (Daly 436).

In accordance with the liberal regimes of welfare, New Labour politicians were preoccupied with "how the behaviour of family members, especially parents, could be mobilized to improve social order and in the process (re)fashion the family as an agent of social integration and economic responsibility" (441). For New Labour government, as the family played a prominent role for social order, the state control over the family institution was considered requisite. The court started to give Parenting Orders, which was initiated by Crime and Disorder Act of 1998, to the parents or carers in case their children exhibited delinquent behaviours. Once given this Parenting Order, the parent

was required to attend counselling and, when considered necessary, to meet other requirements such as ensuring that the child did not truant (Watson 8). Also, New Labour government initiated changes in home-school agreements through the School Standards and Framework Act of 1998. These transformations include "home-school contracts and the reform of homework and out-of-home clubs" (David 120). Although the official rhetoric centred around the public provisions for families and improvements in educational services, the schemes served more as a social control mechanism as not only the children's but also the parent's activities were surveilled in this manner (121).

In the 21st Century, there appeared great changes in the rights for LGBT individuals (van Eeden-Moorefield et al. 1374). In 2000, the ban on homosexuals serving in the military is lifted, and in the same year Section 28 of the 1988 Local Government Act, which prohibited the local authorities to promote homosexuality, was repealed in Scotland and then in the rest of the UK in 2003. In 2001, the age of consent for homosexuals was lowered from 18 to 16, thus equalising the age of consent for homosexuals and heterosexuals (Rebellato, Introduction: Living in the 2000s 9).

In the first decade of 2000s, changes in legislation led to different family structures as well. The Adoption and Children Act of 2002 came into force in December 2005, enabling unmarried heterosexual and same-sex couples to adopt children (Ball 6). The Civil Partnership Act of 2004 came into force in 5 December, allow"[ing] same-sex couples to register their relationship for the first time" (Ross et al. 172). Thus, with the introduction of this act, new types of families started to emerge in Britain. Moreover, the Equality Act (Sexual Orientation) Regulation of 2007 prohibited sexual orientation discrimination in the provision of goods and services (Rebellato, Introduction: Living in the 2000s 9).

These developments prepared the grounds for the future regulations as well. Human Fertilization and Embryology Bill (2008) would "allow for the first time for the same sex female partners each to be recognised as the legal parent of a child from the moment of birth" (McCandless and Sheldon 186). Thus, through this legislation, same-sex couples would become equally eligible with heterosexual couples for fertility treatment. Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act would be passed on 17 July 2013, allowing same-sex marriage in England and Wales from 2014 onwards (Brown 976, 979). In Scotland, The Marriage and Civil Partnership (Scotland) Act 2014 would be passed by the Parliament on 4 February 2014 and would receive Royal Assent on 12 March 2014 (*The Marriage and Civil Partnership (Scotland) Act 2014*).

Consequently, when alterations in the family structures in Britain from 1900 onwards are taken into account, it becomes once more apparent that the family institution changes over time. However, as families deviate from the traditional family structure, new family structures pose a variety of problems for the governments not only

because of the increasing cost of divorce and welfare maintenance for fatherless children, certainly, but also because welfare strategies geared to alleviating child poverty (partly related to the increase in one-parent households) and developing community care require ordered patterns of family life in order to stimulate greater financial responsibility on the part of families and facilitate case management. (Rodger 121)

The family institution has always occupied a substantial place in the welfare strategy of governments both in Europe and in the United Kingdom. Between 1979 and mid 2007, British governments readjusted the relationship between the state and the domestic sphere through a number of discourses and focused on the importance of the family institution for an orderly society. During this period, the family was "shaped by legal regulation, moral exhortation, fiscal manipulation and expert intervention in the name of

both public good and private well-being" (Rose, *Powers of Freedom* 6). Therefore, between 1979 and mid 2007 the family institution started to be at the heart of socio-political agendas of British governments. In this period, British governments tried to control and regulate the family institution as the family was considered to be in need of immediate attention.



CHAPTER II:

THE FAMILY INSTITUTION AND CONTEMPORARY BRITISH DRAMA

2.1. Contemporary British Theatre

In the last decade of the twentieth century, a new theatrical sensibility, in-Yer-Face theatre (also known as Neo-Jacobeanism, New Brutalism, Theatre of Urban Ennui) caused "a revolution in new writing for the British Theatre" (Sierz, "Still In-Yer-Face?" 17). Apart from the in-ye-face theatre, new theatrical trends continued to appear as well, causing the Arts Council in 2007 to reconsider and review its 2000 *Theatre Policy* document and revise "its references to 'new writing' using instead the term 'new work' in recognition of changing trends" (Radosavljevic 86). Therefore, in the twenty-first century, heated academic debates generally centred on the history and concept of "new writing" and "new work" in Britain.

Drawing attention to the theatrical discussions, Andrew Haydon argues that "[p]art of the problem was this definition of – capital N, capital W – New Writing essentially constituted a genre all of its own. In doing so, it marginalized other new plays, not to mention new work, which did not conform to its specifications" (72). Although in British theatre history, "'[n]ew' came to stand for a significant, meaningful text that had 'relevance'" (Chambers 132), during the 1990s, new writing became almost synonymous with In-Yer-Face theatre due to the theatre critics' selective treatment of the period. Fin Kennedy in his article for *Exeunt*, titled "Starting of Something Else" contends that

the strain of the 'new writing' brand that we mean when we use the term today ... has its strongest roots in the 1990s, and in particular the 'in-ye-face' movement – of which more in a moment...in our collective memory, we have elevated one distinct strand of playwriting within a decade's output, which has come to disproportionately influence the paradigm of what we now think 'new writing' should be. (Kennedy)

Thus, today's concept of new writing is heavily influenced and shaped by the textual and theatrical practices of in-ye-face sensibility.

Led by young playwrights such as Sarah Kane, Anthony Neilson, Mark Ravenhill, Martin McDonagh, and Philip Ridley, etc., in-ye-face theatre explores the depth of human emotion and evokes the innate vulnerability of being human through the scenes of nudity, sex and violence, and with the use of offensive language and shock tactics (Sierz, "Theatre in the 1990s" 57; Sierz, "Still In-Ye-Face" 19). In-ye-face dramatists "push the boundaries of what is acceptable - often because they want to question current ideas of what is normal, what it means to be human, what is natural, what is real" (Sierz, *In-Ye-Face Theatre* 5). Their legacy have changed and reshaped the political theatre's definitions and trends as these dramatists portray the despair and the plight of the individuals in a society where Thatcherite ideology prevailed with its emphasis on "self-serving individualism rather than caring collectivism" (Saunders, Introduction 8; D'Monte 80).

Foremost, the writers are Thatcher's children, a generation raised under eleven years of hard-line Thatcher rule. There is a shared hatred for the Tories's dismantling of the socialist state during the 1980s. But this anger is also coupled with an increasing sense of disillusionment at new Labour's move to the political center (not unlike that of the New Democrats in this country) during the 1990s ... The youth culture of the 90s often felt that no political alternative existed, just a monolith of the same. (Urban 39)

In their plays, in-yer-face dramatists explore the effect of Thatcher's long lasting legacy on the individual and society (Kritzer 30). Although these playwrights have political concerns, their plays differ from the "older, self-consciously political writing" of the 1980s since "[w]ith the fall of Communism and the weakening of the Left, a theatre that relies on rational discussion and an abiding hope in socialism appears sentimental and out-of-step with the times" (D'Monté and Saunders 20; Urban 39-40). Therefore, during the 1990s, in-yer-face dramatists rearranged their themes and dramatic form by taking account of the changing realities (Sakellaridou 44).

John Bull contends that "[i]f one of the central credos of the amazing outflow of new plays by women in the 1980s was that the personal is political, then the work by writers of the 1990s would push and test the implications of this credo to the limit" ("A Review of In-Yer-Face Theatre" 123). That is, in-yer-face plays explore domestic problems, daily issues and the despair of youth which are both cause and effect of crass consumerism, unemployment, drug and sex trafficking, use of technology for unethical, immoral and illegal intent, and degeneration of fundamental human values (Sakellaridou 47). Thereby, the politics of new writing, having started with the nineties and continued since then, "allow[s] the audience to connect the personal to the political, the particular to the general" (Carney 233).

It should also be noted that apart from in-yer-face sensibility, there were also other burgeoning theatrical practices. During Stephen Daldry's leadership in the Royal Court, in addition the strand Sierz called In-Yer Face, there were a number of

companies we would probably now think of as 'devising' or creating 'new work': People Show, Desperate Optimists, Candoco Dance, The Brittonioni Brothers, DV8, Man Act ... The distinction between these

companies and the Court's regular playwrights just didn't seem to exist.
(Kennedy)

The embryonic stirrings of these different theatrical practices flourished in the post-millennial period, causing the formation of a new theatrical concept, new work. Today, new work embraces the theatrical practices such as verbatim theatre, devised theatre, headphone-based theatre, site-specific/sympathetic theatre, and immersive theatre. In many cases, there appears to be a crossover between these practices as they borrow elements of each other (Haydon 40-65).

During the 2000s, the theatre in Britain underwent "a shift in its topics and representational methods" through productions "that have redefined dramatic representation, breaking new ground through form, content and the ways these interact with one another – not necessarily harmoniously" (Angelaki 1, 3). Translated into English in 2006, Hans-Thies Lehmann's *Postdramatisches Theatre* (Postdramatic Theatre) had already become influential since the original publication (1999) with its ground breaking ideas spreading throughout Europe. Lehmann argues that "[d]ramatic theatre is subordinated to the primacy of the text" and "the step to postdramatic theatre is taken only when the theatrical means beyond language are positioned equally alongside the text and are systematically thinkable without it" (21, 55). Apart from these innovative European theatrical ideologies explored in Lehmann's book, "the historical emphasis on text in British theatre has also dialectically produced a move away from it and towards explicitly non-text-based forms" (Radosavljevic 90). That is, the revolutionary ideas on theatre led to changes in dramatic representation, and British theatre in the 2000s experienced "a period of redefinition from within, facing outwards to the audience, its plights and needs, and seeking new points of contact" (Angelaki 2).

These new dramatic representations continued to hold mirror to the social tensions in their own fashion as well. (Angelaki 2).

On the other hand, new writing was thought to be in crisis due to the fact that Evening Standard Theatre awards in 2001 for the best new play and Soho Theatre's biennial Verity Bargate award in 2002 for the best play by a new writer were not awarded (Lane 28; Sierz, "Beyond Timidity?" 56). However, "this was not so much a case of drama in crisis" as British theatre had started to change its route from new writing towards new work, and in point of fact, "experimentation was being mistaken for a crisis" (Radosavljevic 90).

Throughout the 2000s, debates on new writing and new work continued relentlessly. The post-millennium period witnessed

the interrogation and gradual problematization of a supposed antagonism between 'New Writing' and 'New Work' – the nominal division between newly written plays and almost any form of theatre that had been arrived at by another route – the embrace of 'alternative' or 'upstream' elements and strategies by the 'mainstream', an increased internationalism in 'British' theatre and the emergence of entirely new channels for promotion and criticism on the internet. (Haydon 40)

Thus, in the first decade of the 2000s new mediums and diverse representation techniques changed the theatrical atmosphere in Britain. Taking notice of these changes, in 2007 Arts Council proclaimed that "[w]e will give particular emphasis to experimental practice and interdisciplinary practice, circus and street arts. We will help develop a sustainable environment in which promoters can develop new work and exploit international opportunities and partnerships" (Arts Council). From then on, a different attitude towards playwriting has been adopted as

[t]he processes of creating and producing theatre that involve the writer as a collaborating artist, or a structuring force behind a collage of raw material (among many other possible roles) are filtering into the mainstream, challenging our perception of drama simply being the realization of a writer's singular vision. (David Lane 30)

Thus, this repositioning of the playwright has altered both the creation and the reception of theatrical works.

Comparing British theatre in the 1990s and 2000s, Sierz argues that "[i]f the 1990s were, to use a science metaphor, Newtonian, with every cause having an effect, and one thing happening after another, the 2000s were the quantum decade, with everything happening at the same time and all over the place" (*Rewriting the Nation* 26). Haydon contends that in the post-millennial period, British theatre were living its 'golden age':

While it could be claimed that by the end of the decade there had not been any single revolutionary moment – no *Look Back in Anger* or *Blasted* – a number of changes in the way that theatre was being watched, thought and talked about, were indicative of bigger underlying shifts, facilitating an ever-increasing plurality in the work available. (Haydon 40)

That is, in the 2000s the plurality of voices and different sensibilities contributed to the alteration in the reception of the theatrical works

Consequently, during the 1990s and 2000s, British theatre scene witnessed new theatrical sensibilities and styles. In the last decade of the twentieth century, while in-
-face dramatists made such a significant contribution to theatre that new writing in that period was considered to be living its renaissance, there also appeared diversity of theatrical practices that would flourish in the 2000s and result in the formation of a new concept, new work. Thereby, new works such as devised theatre, verbatim theatre,

headphone-based theatre, site-specific/sympathetic theatre and immersive theatre led to a great shift in the production and reception of theatrical works in the 2000s. The evolution of British theatre heated up theatrical discussions as theatre critics and scholars tried to understand and categorise these works. Therefore, during this period, British theatre hosted theatrical debates that concentrated on the concept and history of new writing and new work.

2.2. Representations of the Family in British Theatre (1990-2007)

Manifesting the postmodern, defined as "incredulity towards metanarratives", plays from the second half of the twentieth century onwards have started to display "the new cultural ethics of postmodernity regarding the production and reception of arts" (Lyotard, xxiv Introduction; Sakellaridou 46). The politics of post-modernism reshaped the representation of the political in dramatic works especially in the 1990s as Sarah Kane's agent, Mel Kenyon indicates:

The strong Right is full of certainties, certainties which are abhorrent. The Left was full of certainties, certainties which proved to be bogus. So to write these big political plays full of certainties and resolution is completely nonsensical in a time of fragmentation. When you want to create a political piece of drama, there's no point in mimicking the form of resolution and certainty in a time of complete uncertainty. (qtd. in Urban 39)

In the 1990s, playwrights responded to the new realities by displaying "a retreat into private concerns, a dismissive cynicism or a renewed criticism of consumer capitalism" (Sierz, "Theatre in the 1990s" 31). Thereby, micro-narratives have started to be used prevalently in the theatrical works since 1990s (Saunders, Introduction 3).

Against this post-modern background, it could be stated that with the shift of attention from grand narratives to micro-narratives, playwrights turned to "the family – the smallest and simultaneously the most potent social unit – the world in microcosm" to comment on the on-going changes and problems in the family institution and the society (Bernard 5).

There have been great alterations in family dynamics and structures from the twentieth century onwards due to the massive feminisation of workforce, reforms in legislation, liberation movements and technological advancements. These changes became more apparent than ever and had significant political, social and economic consequences especially during the 1990s and 2000s. Sierz states that during these decades, "if the traditional family was dead, the new extended families developed in eye-wateringly complex ways, with a plethora of relationships, from single motherhood to multiple varieties of step-parenthood" (Sierz, *Rewriting the Nation* 163). Shapiro argues that

[f]irst, any investigation of the significance of the family in the shaping of political relations must be deeply involved in analyzing the genres within which the family achieves status as a set of representations, and, second, it must be recognized that mediation is not necessarily a deficit. (4-5)

Playwrights have frequently dramatised and commented on changing family structures, domestic problems and other family-related issues in their works. Reid states that "British drama thrives on the family. Whether united or divided, creative or destructive, welcoming or hostile, the family provides fertile ground for the exploration of individuals in dynamic relationship" (*The Theatre of Anthony Neilson* 101). During the 1990s and 2000s, playwrights dramatised families to comment alterations in the family

that both result from and in social changes. Apart from these sea of changes, most playwrights also drew attention to the fact that

dangers exist of rose-tinted 'familism', in which families are seen as inherently good and 'the family' is portrayed uncritically as an institution to be supported and as a solution to social ills. In reality, family relationships can be major contributors to social problems" (Hill and Tisdall 66).

During the 1990s and 2000s, a great number of plays focusing on abusive and dysfunctional family relationships were composed in Britain. Phyllis Nagy's *Butterfly Kiss* (1994) dramatises the events that lead to twenty-five-year-old Lily Rose to commit matricide. Though *Butterfly Kiss* takes place in a prison cell, Lily's memories and imagination change the cell into many different places, and the time shifts back and forth, gradually revealing Lily's dysfunctional family relationships as the play progresses. Apart from abusive family relationships, the play also addresses how the portrayals of the family institution in the family ideology differ from the reality as Lily's attorney Jackson states "what I find interesting is that for all the talk about means and averages, most folks I know don't fit the mould" (Nagy 68). Thus, Jackson draws attention to the incongruity between the notions governing the "average" family unit and the family in reality. *Butterfly Kiss* displays that all the definitions and set of representations of the "average family" are just made up while in reality the family is a complex and dangerous institution in which the individuals might get exposed to any kind of maltreatment and abuse.

Claire Dowie's *Easy Access for Boys* (1998) –composed of video projections alongside the play's action- signals the new theatrical sensibilities that would be prevalent in 2000s The play revolves around Michael, a rent boy who interviews the

people in his life and makes a record of his memories and feelings for his video diaries. Sexually abused by his paedophile father, Ed during his childhood, Michael tries hard to cope with his dark past. The play also dramatises how Michael mistook his father's sexual advances as a demonstration of love as a child and felt depressed for years when his father stopped abusing him. Thus, *Easy Access for Boys* reveals how sexual abuse perplexes children and inflicts deep wounds that are unlikely to heal even when they become adult.

Debby Tucker Green's *born bad* (2003) deals with abusive relationships within a religious black family. Dawta, the only character named in the play, seeks an explanation by confronting her family about a past abuse in the family. Dramatising a day in the life of this family, the play unveils that Dawta's abuse by Dad was arranged by Mum. Using minimal staging, the play begins with a chair in the first scene which increases to five as the family members appear on stage for confrontation.

Once formed, the circle of chairs never opens to permit the characters to exit the situation or to allow the perspectives of the audience to enter their private world. This forces the audience to see the family, and the system it represents, as a discrete unit. No outsider can change the unit or create a way out for an individual within it (Kritzer 120).

Thus, unable to exit the circle, Dawta sacrifices herself and sits between Dad's legs at the end of the play as the chairs are one too few for the family of six. During the confrontations, while Mum attacks saying "you was born bad" (Green 31), Dad, who is doing silent treatment throughout the play, speaks finally to accuse Mum of having chosen the wrong daughter for his sexual motives.

Shelagh Stephenson's *Five Kinds of Silence* (2004), on the other hand, follows the events after two sisters, Janet and Susan are driven to murder their father, Bill

during an epileptic seizure. The interviews with detectives and psychiatrists after the patricide reveal the life-long emotional, physical and sexual abuse inflicted by Bill upon his wife, Mary and his daughters.

During the 1990s and 2000s, British playwrights also explored teenage motherhood in their dramatic works. Rebecca Prichard's all-female play *Essex Girls* (1994) revolves around teenage girls and focuses on the problem of teenage single motherhood. In the first act, *The Party*, three fourteen-year-olds, Kelly, Dianne and Hayley skip lessons and talk about sex, boys, pregnancy and abortion in the toilet of a comprehensive school. In the second act, *The Holiday*, Kelly's seventeen-year-old sister, Kim, who is a single mother staying in a council flat, is visited by her friend, Karen. In the play "[t]he lively verbal banter between the girls in Act One is replaced by a much more subdued tone, punctuated by the cries of the infant on a baby monitor" (Aston 62). On the other hand, these two acts complement each other, suggesting that "ignorance and immature fantasies lead to desperation and impoverished life choices" (Sierz, *In-Yer-Face Theatre* 227).

Taking place in a council flat, Leo Butler's *Redundant* (2001) dramatises a year in the life of a teenage mother, Lucy. With its poorly furnished council estate setting and underclass characters, the play is a good example of dirty realism (Sierz, "Beyond Timidity?" 60). The play displays Lucy's troubled life by focusing on her family and romantic relationships. Unable to make reasonable choices and fulfil her own responsibilities, seventeen-year-old Lucy has a mixed race half-sister, Nikki and a grandmother, Jo, who is apparently the only family member that cares for these sisters. While the dialogues reveal that Lucy had her first child by her English teacher when she was fifteen, she becomes pregnant again to the bewilderment of her grandmother. Through *Redundant*, Leo Butler treats teenage motherhood which has tragic

consequences both for inexperienced teenage mothers and children who are either taken by social welfare officials or not cared sufficiently.

There were also other family plays that explore family conflicts, family secrets, reproductive technologies, families outside marriages, economic problems, marriage breakdown, crime, chronic psychological or physical illnesses and death. Churchill's *Blue Heart* (1997) consists of two one act plays, *Heart's Desire* and *Blue Kettle*. Defying the conventional dramatic methods with its poststructuralist aesthetics, the play is "into the territory which is most often contested in relation to its dramatic or postdramatic status" (Tomlin xiii). In *Heart's Desire*, Brian and Alice are waiting at home with their alcoholic son, Lewis and Brian's sister, Maisie for the arrival of their daughter, Susy, who is returning home for the first time after having spent some years in Australia. As this domestic scene proceeds, "[s]imilarly to a broken record, the play develops to a point when it is compulsively sent back to its beginning" (Angel-Perez 90). In the play each beginning leads to alternative scenarios resulting in different outcomes but throughout the play however different these scenarios are, family conflicts always remain the same. In these alternative scenarios language becomes obsessively repetitive, thus alluding to the dysfunctional relationships in the family.

In *Blue Kettle*, in order to prey on their wealth, Derek deceives four women, Mrs Vane, Mrs Oliver, Mrs Plant, Miss Clarence into believing that he was their son whom they gave up for adoption forty years ago. Meanwhile, his mother -the only character whose name is not given - stays in a geriatric ward, and Derek's girl friend, Enid feels uncomfortable about the situation and asks him "Blue do you kettle it for? You've a perfectly good mother of your own (100)". The dialogues between Derek and the women reveal the past illegitimate affairs of these women who could not find any solution other than adoption. In the play, language is gradually invaded by the words

blue and kettle, and through the end these two words shrink to bl, ket, tle, b, k, leaving the characters speechless in the end. The tongue-tie might suggest the emotional burden and guilty conscience of the characters.

Thus, in *Blue Heart*, Churchill dramatises the theme of the family through constrained writing in order to "propose a playful yet irrevocably tragic sort of theatre, a kind of theatre playfully able to reveal the inhumanity of humanity and the linguistic and ethical disaster of modernity" (Angel-Perez 81). While exploring family relationships, the play deconstructs language in order to show "the total breakdown of any possibility of meaningful communication or fulfilling human relationships" (Tomlin xx). Thereby, in *Blue Heart*, the repetitive structure and language games complement the meaning of the play.

Joe Penhall's *The Bullet* (1998) dramatises Robbie's homecoming from Singapore with her girlfriend, Carla long years after his departure. The play tackles the detrimental effects of redundancy on family relationships in the post-recession period. Robbie's father, Charles has been made redundant lately and turned into an alcoholic due to feeling worthless and useless. His redundancy creates a tense atmosphere in the family, causing bickering and conflicts as Robbie's mother, Billie remarks "I am sorry. It's not much of a homecoming" (Penhall 310). In the play, it is not only Charles who has been made redundant as the dialogues reveal that Carla's father suffered the same fate two years ago, and Robbie is experiencing the same problem now but keeping it from his family. In *The Bullet*, Joe Penhall tackles how socio-economic problems cause distress and impair the family relationships.

Liz Lochhead's *Perfect Days* (1998) explores the family institution within the frame of gender and reproductive technologies by portraying a thirty-nine-year-old

celebrity hairdresser, Barbs Marshall. Worried that her biological clock is ticking, Barbs desperately desires to have a baby and starts searching for someone in order to conceive. As the men she considers as a prospective father cannot meet her demand either due to being in love with someone else or having a vasectomy, she resorts to artificial insemination with the help of her gay friend, Brendon Boyle. Later on, she becomes pregnant but it turns out that Brendon's sperm count is too low to have a child. The mystery behind her conception comes to light only after Barbs gives birth to her daughter as it is revealed that she is conceived through the sperm of Brendon's partner, Cameron who felt jealous of Brendon at the time and substituted his own sperm for that of Brendon. The play also presents different portrayals of motherhood through Sadie, Alice and Collette as well. Sadie, Barb's mother, is a single mother who has always endured economic difficulties. Alice, the sister of Barbs' estranged husband, Davie, was a teenage mother who was forced by her parents to give her son, Grant for adoption twenty-five years ago. Collette, Davie's partner, on the other hand, decides to terminate her pregnancy. Thus, in *Perfect Days*, Liz Lochhead explores motherhood, reproductive technologies and changing family institution.

Zinnie Harris's *Nightingale and Chase* (2001) focuses on a family outside marriage by portraying the relationship between Nightingale, a forty-year-old man and Chase, a twenty-year-old criminal who was condemned for "fraud and shop-lifting and about every other sort of petty crime" (Harris 16). The play depicts the events after Chase is released from the prison through three subsequent monologues by Nightingale and Chase, each revealing the characters' own perception of their relationship. In the play, Chase's homecoming does not go as planned because they are both stressed, and when Chase learns that their son, Scot is staying at Nightingale's sister, Laura's, the tension is aggravated. Beaten by Nightingale during a violent quarrel in their first night

together at home, Chase leaves the house and finds a shelter in a council hostel in the next morning. The play ends with the re-arrest of Chase as she has stolen "[t]rainers, computer games. Soft toys" to make Scott happy (Harris 46). *Nightingale and Chase* deals with domestic violence, and the impact of crime and imprisonment on family relationships.

Richard Bean's *Honeymoon Suite* (2003) dramatises a married couple at three different stages of their life. The play is set in a honeymoon suite at a Bridlington hotel, and on stage three different actors and actresses play Irene and Eddie simultaneously as eighteen-year-old newly-wed couple, forty-three-year-old middle-aged couple, and sixty-seven-year-old long-separated couple. In the same suit room where they celebrated their honeymoon and silver wedding anniversary, Irene meets Eddie after twenty-three years of separation to inform that she seeks divorce in order to marry a pacifist, Mark Woolf. The play explores the couple's marriage as they go through poverty, corruption, differences of opinion, problems with their child, adultery and separation. Through Eddie's admiration with Thatcher policies and Irene's being a New Labour Baroness, the play explores the couple's difference in opinion through a political lens as well.

Mike Bartlett's *My Child* (2007), on the other hand, deals with the effects of divorce on the family relationships. The play dramatises the problematic relationship between the divorced parents and victimization of children as a result of parental conflict. In *My Child*, the characters are named as Man, Woman, Older Woman, Mother and Father, suggesting that the characters are universal rather than specific individuals. In the play, Woman (the mother of Child in the play) starts proceedings against her husband, Man when the Child returns home with a bruised arm after spending the day with his father. Unable to afford a solicitor and unwilling to separate from Child, Man

abducts Child but later on is found and beaten severely by Child's stepfather, Karl. Throughout the play, Child actually seems more as an object of Man and Woman's power struggle than a beloved son. While Man appears to be irresponsible and negligent father, Woman is a vindictive mother who uses Child for her own purposes. In the middle of parental conflicts, Child turns out to be a spoilt child who has no respect left for his father and behaves him cruelly. In *My Child* Bartlett focuses on the parental conflicts after divorce and the adverse effects of the family conflicts on children who are made to take sides in parental arguments.

Tim Crouch's *An Oak Tree* (2005) is a two-hander concerned with the impact of losing a child on the family relationships by focusing on a bereaved father, Andy. As a great example of "new work" with its innovative theatrical representation, the play renders important ideas about theatrical illusion. Dan Rebellato in his *Introduction* to the play states that Tim Crouch "puts the conceptual rather than retinal aspects of theatre front and centre but, in doing so, he reminds us that all theatre is like this" (Rebellato, Introduction, *An Oak Tree* 8). On stage, the main actor plays both Hypnotist and the mother, and a chair and a piano stool respectively represent a baby and an oak tree. In every performance, the second actor playing Father is different and can be male or female. Not having any knowledge about the play, the second actor plays his/her parts by either reading pieces from the script given to him occasionally during the performance or being informed through instructions that are sometimes given directly by the Hypnotist and at other times through headphone.

In *An Oak Tree*, Andy - who is named as Father in the stage directions- and his wife, Dawn try to come to terms with the death of their elder daughter, Claire. The reality becomes so unbearable for the couple that while for Dawn, "Claire was a hair left on a bar of soap, some flowers taped to a lamp post. She was the photograph hung

above the piano" (Scene 4), for Father, Claire is the oak tree by the road. Though Dawn manages to accept Claire's death and move on at the end, Father cannot, and the oak tree comes to symbolise his attempt to keep her alive. The play dramatises the interactions between Father and Hypnotist, who killed Claire accidentally with his car, and displays the desperate attempts of Father to acknowledge his daughter's death with the help of Hypnotist.

Dennis Kelly's *Taking Care of Baby* (2007) is a play about a mother, Donna McAuliffe who was convicted of killing her two infant children owing to the fictional 'Leeman Keatley Syndrome'. In the play, this invented psychological disorder causes a severe anxiety in the mother who becomes excessively preoccupied with the dangers in and around the world. Unable to cope with her apprehensions, she attacks the cause of her suffering, her children. In the play, though at first Donna is put into prison, through the end she is released due to the lack of evidence.

By using the style of docu-drama and verbatim theatre to dramatise a fictional disease, Kelly, in *Taking Care of Baby*, criticises these popular dramatic forms that were prevalent on British stage then. In the play Dr. Millard's lines point out unreliability of verbatim theatre: "This is the truth, I'm saying this is the truth but I'm saying that it all depends on how you slant it" (56). The characters and events surrounding them are just figments of dramatist's imagination as Haydon indicates:

Kelly also makes a wider point about authorship. By having made up not only the 'testimonies' but also the 'facts', Kelly drew attention to the much-debated issue of how much editorializing went on in the creation of verbatim theatre, and also the wider way in which it could be seen to have provided a convenient way for dramatists to author their views on a particular subject under the guise of reportage. (46)

Thus, through this play Dennis Kelly criticises verbatim theatre by using the techniques of this genre and explores the tragic consequences of psychological disorders in the family by parodying the theatrical style.

As family issues were frequently brought to the agenda between 1990 and mid 2007, family plays in this period evince that "[s]ometimes the characters in a drama are themselves illustrative of contemporary preoccupations" (Sierz, *Rewriting the Nation* 54). These plays explored parental abuse and neglect, teenage pregnancy, lone parenthood, family conflicts, economic problems in the household, family disintegration, reproductive technologies, alternative families, criminal family members, family members with chronic mental and physical illness, and death of a family member. That is, in this period, playwrights reflected and commented on changing family structures, problematic family relationships and family issues in their works now and then, verifying the "[t]heatre's role as a public forum (57).

CHAPTER III:
THE FIRST INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF THE FAMILY: ANTHONY
NEILSON'S YEAR OF THE FAMILY (1994)

3.1. Anthony Neilson: A Brief Survey of His Theatre

Anthony Neilson, a Scottish playwright and a theatre director, was born in 1967 to an actress mother, Beth Robens and an actor and theatre director father, Sandy Neilson.¹ He went to Welsh College of Music and Drama in Cardiff and performed in various productions, but was later expelled due to insubordination². When he returned to Edinburgh, he entered a BBC young playwrights' competition, which he won, and his playwriting career began. Thus, his first radio play, *The Colours of the King's Rose* was transmitted in 1988, and his first stage play, *Welfare My Lovely* was premiered at the Traverse Theatre in 1990³. Before moving to London, he wrote *Normal: The Düsseldorf Ripper*, which was performed in Edinburgh Festival in 1991 (Bull, "Anthony Neilson" 343-344; Sierz, *In-Yer-Face Theatre* 65-68). This play "not only kick-started his theatrical career but, with its careful deployment of disturbing images, this portrait of a serial killer has been claimed by many as the real starting point for 'in-yer-face theatre'" (Bull, "Anthony Neilson" 344-345). From then on, other plays have followed, which secured his place in contemporary British theatre.

The main criticism of Neilson's early plays emphasizes the in-yer-face sensibility of his works such as *Penetrator* (1993), *Year of the Family* (1994), *The Night*

¹ Neilson defines himself as "rehearsal-room baby" and indicates that he was greatly influenced by his parents' theatre career (Sierz, *In-Yer-Face Theatre* 65).

² He always had a troubled school life as he acknowledges that "he is 'one of those people that institutions feel they have to break'" (66).

³ In the same year, his second radio play, *A Fluttering of Wings* was broadcast as well.

Before Christmas (1995), *The Censor* (1997) and *Stitching* (2002), etc. However, the absurdist and surreal dramatic elements in his later plays such as *Edward Gant's Amazing Feats of Loneliness* (2002), *The Wonderful World of Dissocia* (2004) and *Realism* (2006) have led to the re-evaluation of his works. When interviewed by Caroline Smith, Neilson also acknowledges that he "moved towards comedy and absurd" after *Stitching* (Neilson, "Anthony Neilson" 77). In his plays such as *Wonderful World of Dissocia* and *Realism*, while characters' figment of imagination appears as surreal on stage, the blurred line between the imagination and reality leads to absurdity and creates comedy. In these works, Neilson also draws the audience into the hidden territory of consciousness and makes the audience experience the characters' imagination unrestricted by reality.

The significance of audience's experience in the reception of Neilson's later works has caused the critics to re-evaluate his works in terms of experiential drama (Bull, "Anthony Neilson" 359; Sierz, *Rewriting the Nation* 197). Stating that "experiential theatre" is more appropriate term than "in-yer face theatre" for his theatre, Neilson explains what he aims through his dramatic works:

I will presume that you know about the "In-yer-face" school of theatre, of which I was allegedly a proponent. I suppose it's better to be known for something than for nothing but I've never liked the term because it implies an attempt to repel an audience, which was never my aim. In fact, the use of morally contentious elements was always intended to do very opposite ... [E]ngaging a receptive audience with such issues is a useful way of scrambling the intellectual responses that inhibit/protect us from full involvement with what we are watching. Engage the morality of an audience and they are driven into themselves. They become, in some small way, participants rather than voyeurs. That's why I prefer the term

“experiential” theatre. If I make anything, let it be there. (Neilson, Foreword)

Relocated (2008), which is a play about child killers, is a great example of experiential theatre. In its production, a smell of disinfected is used to give the feeling that the place is cleaned up after the murder (Sierz, *Rewriting the Nation* 6). While in *Wonderful World of Dissocia* and *Realism*, Neilson uses experiential techniques to make the audience experience the vivid imagination of the characters, in *Relocated* his use of experiential techniques serves to reinforce reality. In Neilson's theatre, "(e)xperiences such as this suggest that the audience is a vital element in the creation of meaning. It's even tempting to say that the meaning of a play lies in the experience of the audience" (Ibid.).

The recent criticism on Neilson and his dramatic works, on the other hand, emphasises the influence of his ‘Scottishness’ on his creative process. Now, it is acknowledged by many theatre critics that "repositioning Neilson as a more identifiably Scottish artist can allow for new inflections in the interpretation of his work" (Reid, "Deformities of the Frame" 491). Trish Reid states that although Neilson's place in Scottish theatre has been overlooked by many critics, his position as an artistic associate in National Theatre Scotland (NTS) requires the re-evaluation of his works in terms of his Scottishness ("Anthony Neilson" 138). Adrienne Scullion asserts that in the post-devolution era there appeared a shared thematic concern in the Scottish plays that "indeed ubiquitously deploys a catalogue of relevant metaphors of mutable edges and liminal terrains, the space between, as well as the ‘here’ and the ‘there’" (74). Thus, Scullion states that in the post-devolution Scottish theatre,

plays are concerned with interior landscapes: mind-maps appear as structuring devices, while narratives enact psychological journeys back to

what is barely memorable, out to the edge and beyond, into the unconscious and back ... [They] all explore the boundaries and limits of identity through metaphors of psychoanalysis and memory ... In *Blackbird* and *The Wonderful World of Dissocia*, for example, the exploration of identity is painful, violent and clinical, yet understood to be necessary and inescapable ... (74-75)

Therefore, reconsidering Neilson within the frame of "more inclusive and populist Scottish tradition" might contribute to the new understandings of his work (Reid, "Deformities of the Frame" 493)

Though Neilson's works are not overtly political compared to the state of the nation plays of the earlier generation, it should also be noted that he certainly is not an apolitical playwright (Bull, "Anthony Neilson" 360). While in *Normal* "Neilson has his murderer echo Margaret Thatcher's words, 'There is no such thing as society'", *Realism* (2006) has an imagined rant that concludes 'We've got a society- a post-Thatcherite society - that is so fractured and dysfunctional'"(Bull, "Anthony Neilson" 348; Sierz, *Rewriting the Nation* 108).

Neilson's "characters live in a real world, and are confronted by the problems of that world" (Bull, "Anthony Neilson" 360). In his dramatic works, relationships take up a significant place whether it is friendships, romantic relationships or families, and he generally focuses on the problematic ones. Family relationships, with their presence or absence, have a great influence on the characters in Neilson's plays. In *Normal*, which is a play about a serial killer, Peter Kurten, the family appears as the root of all the evil Peter Kurten is later capable of. When his lawyer, Wehner says "Tell me about your family" to Kurten, Kurten reveals the gruesome realities behind his family (Neilson, *Normal* 8). In his family, abuse was multi-fold with the presence of a violent father who

practised the old saying "Spare the rod / Spoil the child" (9) and attempted to rape one of his daughters:

Wehner Did you also attempted to rape her?

Kurten Rape?

Living in one room, Dr Wehner, there is little space for Inhibition.

Most of my sisters made advances towards me and only on that one occasion did I reciprocate.

...

Kurten (*pause*) You see, Dr Wehner

When my father wanted to take my mother he took her

In that room

In full view of us all.

That was my family.

... (9-10)

They all lived in one room, saw their mother and father having intercourse, were beaten by their father, and experienced consensual incestuous relationships. In the play, abusive family relationships have shaped Kurten's problematic understanding of love as he says "Brutality belongs to love" (12). Through a serial killer, the play dramatises that dysfunctional family relationships lead to terrible outcomes. Two years later, in *Penetrator*, the family institution is questioned once again through Max, who says "Families are built on fucking. Fucking and secrets" (Neilson, *Penetrator* 74). Neilson continues to explore family relationships in *Stitching*, which revolves around a grieving couple who tries to come to terms with the loss of their child through sexual role plays. Through its non-linear plot structure, the play dramatises how Stu and Abby have ended up losing their child due to their never-ending arguments.

Abby ... We were too busy fighting to hear him die.

Stu Children fall. How many times did you fall as a child?

Pause.

We were unlucky (Neilson, *Stitching* 10)

Through the end of the play, obsessed with the thought of fixing her relationship, Abby appears on stage, having stitched up her vagina and singing "We will fix it, we will mend it" (47). Even in a surreal and absurd play such as *Realism*, the family is ever-present inside the head of the protagonist, Stuart. The play dramatises a journey into the mind of Stuart, who is an ordinary man spending time alone at home on a Saturday. In this absurdist play, his mother appears inside the washing machine, giving advice to him about daily chores:

*He opens the door of the washing machine and starts bundling the clothes in; but, from inside the machine, he hears his **Mother's** voice:*

Mother (muffled) Have you checked the pockets?

Stuart What?

Mother (muffled) Have you looked in the pockets?

He removes some of the washing. (Neilson, *Realism* 123).

All these above-mentioned plays display that family relationships, especially the problematic ones, occupy a significant place in Anthony Neilson's theatre.

3.2. *Year of the Family*

Year of the Family premiered at the Finborough Theatre on March 28, 1994 "to mark the first International Year of the Family (Neilson, *Year of the Family* 122; Reid, *The Theatre of Anthony Neilson* 100). Written as an explicit criticism on the International Year of the Family, which is an international observance initiated by the United Nations in 1994, the play dramatises how individuals suffer when problems arise in their family relationships owing to the unrealistic "happily ever after" portrayals of

families in the popular Ideology of Marriage and Family. Therefore, the representation of the family institution in Anthony Neilson's *Year of The Family* will be analyzed in relation to the UN International Year of the Family, Conservative government's 'back to basics' campaign, the popular Ideology of Marriage and Family and dysfunctional family relationships.

Changing family relationships and alterations in the family structure attracted both public and government attention on a global scale during the 1990s. On October, 18, 1994, the United Nations opened a three-day International Conference on Families as a "tribute to families throughout the world and a testimony to the importance and high priority that the global community attaches to families and to family issues in the process of sustainable development" (UN General Assembly 1994, 1). In this conference, the United Nations Secretary General stated that

[f]ive years ago, the General Assembly decided that 1994 was to be the International Year of the Family. At the time, there was no consensus. Some did not see the point of an International Year of the Family. Opinions were divided as to what the Year was about. Some people argued that support for the family discriminates against those who prefer to live outside family units ... The International Year of the Family has stimulated a worldwide debate. Many political notions have been clarified. Out of the process of debate and reflection have come new insights. Instead of confusion and hesitation, there is now consensus about the role of the family in human society. Today, a new realism prevails. It is accepted that the family is a fundamental institution of human society. Indeed, it is established that society is a structure made up of families and individuals related to society, in the first instance, through families. (3-4)

These statements show that the United Nations decided to give particular importance to the family institution during the 1990s. The reasons behind this decision should be addressed in the frame of the national economy and politics.

John J. Rodger in his book *Family Life and Social Control* views the family "as an object of policy interest and welfare intervention, rather than 'the family' as a social institution" (1). He claims that the driving force behind the family policies of the governments is mainly economic concerns rather than moral values:

The presentation of changes in family life and family structure, particularly the rise in the numbers of living patterns alternative to the nuclear family model, as not only a 'moral' question confronting modern societies, but fundamentally a problem of the distribution of responsibilities between the state and the private sphere of family relationships, is at the heart of this issue. The welfare state whose beneficence everyone took for granted in the 1960s and 1970s is now subject to severe criticism for being costly, and also destructive of the institution of marriage and a sense of family duty within our culture. (4-5)

In Britain, from 1979 onwards, Conservative Policy had centred upon reducing the public spending and "Thatcherite ideology was a driving force, as also was the all-encompassing Government determination not to spend money if it could possibly be avoided" (Marwick 358). In Major's period, alternative family forms were considered as a drain on state resources as "[a]bout £219 million was paid out in one-parent benefit to around about 700.000 lone parents in 1991" (Rodger 119). Thus, the government started "to draw attention to, and possibly to scapegoat, unconventional patterns of family life, transforming them into a major social problem" (116). In 1993, John Major initiated a moral campaign known as "back to basics" which is "now more generally referred to as 'pro family' and against the notion of 'welfare dependency'" (120). Thus, in one way or

another, public expenditure issues caused the governments to control and regulate individuals' sexual lives and family relationships. While doing so, the state "obscure[d] the real interest in cutting back state responsibilities in social policy by clothing the rhetoric in the principles of 'morality' and 'family values'" (124).

Rose argues that "[t]he function of this familial ideology was to mask the realities of family life, and to preserve a social institution that provided vital economic functions for capitalism" (*Governing the Soul* 126). Therefore, any investigation on the family institution requires the evaluation of its social and economic role in the society.

Apart from the economic forces behind the implementation of the family policy by the governments, the popularity of the family institution in the society cannot be disregarded. Meg Luxton indicates that "[t]he powerful emotional commitment to families and the strong cultural imperatives that stress the importance of families are significant reasons why families matter" (Luxton 5). Bella M. De Paulo and Wendy L. Morris claim that "the Ideology of Marriage and Family, like many other ideologies, persists because it offers a simple and satisfying worldview" ("Singles in Society" 58). Therefore, it is not surprising that "[t]he imagery of idealised family life permeates the fabric of social existence and provides a highly significant, dominant and unifying, complex of social meaning" (Barrett and McIntosh 29). However, in such a social environment the individuals who live outside the family institution are discriminated.

Every other aspect of social life is planned on the assumption that people live in families. Those who do not are isolated and deprived. Couples who do not have children are frowned upon, people who live by themselves are thought to be abnormal. The popular image of the family – the married couple living with their young children – is constantly projected as the image of normality and of happiness (Barrett and McIntosh 77).

That is, the individuals who do not conform to the Ideology of Marriage and Family are stigmatised in the society⁴. DePaulo and Morris use the term singlism for this "antisingles sentiment" and the stigmatizing of single adults ("Singles in Society" 60; "The Unrecognised Stereotyping" 251).

Barret and McIntosh claim that "[i]t is the over-valuation of family life that devalues these other lives" (78). About singlism, DePaulo and Morris write that

[a]lthough singlism is a nonviolent, softer form of bigotry than what is often faced by other stigmatized groups such as African Americans or gay men and lesbians, the impact of singlism is far ranging. Unlike more familiar isms such as racism, sexism, or heterosexism, singlism is not often recognized, and when it is pointed out, it is often regarded as legitimate. ("The Unrecognised Stereotyping" 251)

The stigmatisation of people living outside the family structures corroborates and strengthens the family institution as well since it serves to maintain cultural beliefs about marriage by derogating those whose lives challenge those beliefs ("The Unrecognised Stereotyping" 253).

The social exclusion of people without family bonds is also evident in political rhetoric which usually addresses people within the frame of family rhetoric. Barret and McIntosh exemplify how singles are left out by depicting a disarmament poster:

Take the case of the recent disarmament poster that announces: 'The average British family spent £16 a week last year on arms'. Predictably it is illustrated by an image of a typical family whose supermarket trolley contains a miniature missile nestling among the groceries. Why are we addressed in this way rather than as individual tax-payers with no control

⁴ Kenneth L. Dion defines stigma "as having a spoiled identity, being perceived negatively by others, and being an object of discrimination owing to inferior outcomes such as less pay "(104)

over the proportion of our taxes allocated to defence? Because 'the family' is a so much more resonant image. The poster tries to construct an association between domesticity, family values and pacifism. We are to be shocked at this militaristic invasion of the sanctity of hearth and home. And indeed we are. But to couch the message in the discourse of familialism is to mask the fact that single people will also die in a nuclear war and that it is as citizens and not as families that we should be protesting about arms spending. (33)

This example of anti-war poster clearly illustrates how the general public is addressed as if they all belonged to a family unit and lays bare the social exclusion of familyless individuals.

Anthony Neilson's *Year of the Family* raises a concern over the popularity of the family ideology by dramatising the characters' desperate attempts in creating a family unit. The play displays how the family ideology inflicts deep wounds on the characters whose lives do not comply with the traditional family structure by focusing on the complex relationships between Claire, Fliss, Dickie, Sid and Tramp. Fliss and Claire are maternal half-siblings, Dickie and Sid are father and son, and Tramp is a desolate and homeless man as his name suggests.

Year of the Family depicts the events after the dissolution of a blended family and a nuclear family. The reason behind the dissolution of the blended family is revealed through the dialogues between Fliss and Claire: Fliss is the older half-sister from the first marriage of their mother, Janis. After Fliss's father, Henry Gaines died in a car crash, Janis married Brian, the father of Claire. However, Brian's sexual advances to Fliss eventually led to the break-up of this blended family unit.

Fliss is a delusional young woman who still cannot acknowledge that her father died in a car crash when she was two. After her life-time search, Fliss now believes that

she has found him as she says "[n]o doubt this time, Claire" (Neilson, *Year of the Family* 130). The argument between the two reveals Fliss' obsessions with the family institution: "All I've ever wanted for us to be family" (Neilson, *Year of the Family* 130). Believing that Tramp, a homeless and desolate man suffering from severe memory loss, is her father, Fliss brings him into her house, gives him the clothes she claims belong to her father and teaches him her father's behaviour patterns. When Tramp hears Fliss's delusional ideas, he becomes appalled as indicated in the stage directions: "He sits, his eyes full of horror" (140). Fliss locks Tramp in her flat and starts brainwashing Tramp in order to reconstruct his identity "brick by brick" (148). At first, Tramp protests this new identity:

Fliss ...

Daddy!

He turns on her.

Tramp No!

Fliss Yes!

Tramp I'm not.

Fliss You are!

He shakes his head.

Then who are you?

Tramp I don't know

Fliss You're Henry Gaines... (159)

Through these endeavours, she tries to make Tramp acknowledge that he is her father, Henry Gaines. By reading out Janis's old love letters to the deceased Henry Gaines, Fliss tries to arouse Tramp's interest for Janis so that he can feel a sense of belonging. When Tramp establishes a bond with these love letters, Fliss offers to take them out from the locked drawer and let him read them only if he acknowledges the "truth":

Fliss You are Henry Gaines. Just keep saying it to yourself. You know who you are, you are Henry Gaines. Say it. ...

Say 'I know who I am.'

Tramp I know ... who I am

Fliss I'm Henry Gaines.

Tramp (pause) I'm...Henry Gaines.

Fliss (pause) Who are you?

Tramp I'm Henry Gaines. (160)

Thus, Tramp –giving in- starts to take part in the Fliss's fantasy world. She manages to confer a new identity on Tramp as Henry Gaines, father to Fliss, husband to Janis and a former History professor. From then on, Fliss teaches him how 'he' used to behave – right manners and postures- as a History professor. Fliss dictates to Tramp how he should sit, laugh and rub his chin to Tramp's surprise:

Tramp How do you know these things about me?

Fliss Which things?

Tramp How I laugh, how I rub my chin. You don't remember them, do you?

Fliss Maybe I do, I don't know whether I do or whether I just remember Janis telling me. But they are true, I do know that. (175)

These details about her father's behaviour patterns appear to be the figments of Fliss's imagination. Through Tramp, she attempts to create a father figure that is compatible with her idealised father image. Thereby, in the play Fliss's pathetic endeavours to form a family relationship with Tramp is clearly seen. In a society where the family institution is given great importance, she cannot come to terms with her father's death and becomes delusional.

Claire, on the other hand, tries to compensate her own father's absence by having an affair with a man, Dickie, who is old enough to be her father. She also has a relationship with Sid, Dickie's son though she does not know that they are father and son. Sid, on the other hand, knows everything because he formed a relationship with Claire in order to take revenge on Dickie, who left his wife for Claire. The dialogue

between Sid and Claire reveals Claire as a young woman who is actually in need of fatherly love:

Sid Who is it that you love?

Claire I love you both in different ways.

Sid Bollocks.

... (143-144)

Finding Claire's answer unsatisfying and ludicrous, Sid hits the right notes when he reminds Claire of what Dickie did to his ex-wife:

Sid Or maybe in ten years' time, when that peachy skin isn't snapping back like it once did and your thighs are getting that waterbed look about them and your womb's dropped and your hour-glass figure is more like a German beer tankard - hey! Along comes another little baby-doll looking for daddy, and sooner than you can say mid-life crisis you've been dumped on your sweet, spreading arse. Why not? He did it to his wife, why wouldn't he do it to you? (144)

The "little baby-doll looking for a daddy" in this instance is Claire, who is hopelessly trying to get fatherly love and attention from a man sexually attracted to her.

The other family dynamic in the play is that of Dickie and Sid, a father and son from a disintegrated nuclear family. Dickie works in the social security department in Newman House where he met Claire for the first time. Experiencing a mid-life crisis, he left his wife for the much younger Claire. However, though Dickie left his wife, he still lives with the memories of his ex-wife and does not avoid talking about her to his new young girl friend: "I've never been much on fashion. Lara always did that" (134). As the play progresses, he even shares happy family moments with Claire:

Dickie ... And Lara used to make this fish pie - God it was awful. Me and my son used to scrape it out the window when she wasn't looking. But we used to laugh so much, it always gave the game away. (169)

Owing to his mid-life crisis, he changes his dressing style to attract Claire's attention as the stage direction indicates:

Claire *sits blindfolded, waiting.*

Dickie *appears behind her wearing the most god-awful casual jacket and panama hat. (134)*

His mid-life crisis becomes apparent once more while he is talking to Claire: "[a]ll the young lads are wearing them" (134) and "[y]ou're only as young as you feel" (134).

In the relationship between the two, Dickie's love for Claire appears one sided as she tries to restrain from any physical contact with Dickie throughout the play.

Dickie (Pause) You are very beautiful, Claire.

Pause. She looks away.

Don't you believe me?

Claire (pause) I believe you think I am

She says nothing. He goes to kiss her and she gives him only her cheek. He kisses her neck desperately. She remains detached ... (137)

Claire's avoiding intimacy with Dickie shows that she is not attracted to him but attempts to fill the gap left by her father through this relationship.

In the play, the father-son relationship between Dickie and Sid is impaired as Sid holds Dickie responsible for the dissolution of their family. Dickie tries to explain how he feels about the end of his marriage to his angry son:

Dickie All right, Sid. You're not a little boy. But I remember when you were. I remember the first time I saw you in her arms. And I looked at you and I looked at her and I saw my whole life stretch ahead of me and I felt a

love - so intense - that it felt like my heart would just - burst. And I thought, yes: a family. Here is my son and here is the woman I will spend the rest of my days with. I felt like I was just standing in just exactly my space in the world at just exactly the right time. (Pause) The truth is, I can't tell you how I came to this place from there. What happens in a marriage is a mystery, up there with black holes and god and the *Marie Celeste*. There's nothing can be said, nothing can be done - no judgement we can make on ourselves or on anyone else ... (*Year of the Family* 157)

While Dickie tries to say that people and relationships might change as time passes, these explanations do not ease Sid's anger towards him. Trish Reid states that "[f]amilies are supposed to be protected spaces, safe havens against the outside world, and it is the loss of this place of safety that drives Sid to despair" (Reid, *Theatre of Anthony Neilson* 103). Thus, Sid plans to take revenge on his father by separating Claire from Dickie: "You have lost your wife. You have lost children. And whatever you have left you'll lose that too" (Neilson, *Year of the Family* 158). Due to the prevalence of the family ideology in the society, Sid has difficulty in coping with the disintegration of his family and reacts to the end of his parent's marriage quite irrationally.

The family ideology reinforces "the assumption that only family and children provide us with purpose and place, bestow upon us honour, respect, love and comfort" (Klepfisz 97). However, in reality for some people, "family home is not a comfortable haven or heart, but a place of danger and unhappiness" (Hill and Tisdall 197). That is, though the family ideology presents the family institution as a safe place, this institution might turn into a place of abuse or severe neglect. As stated earlier, in *Year of the Family*, the dialogues reveal that Fliss was sexually abused by Claire's father, Brian. Traumatized by this sexual abuse, Fliss cannot help but include sexuality in her relationship with Tramp as well. This newly constructed father-daughter relationship reveals Fliss' perplexed mind as she is after sexual intimacy with a father figure:

Fliss ... Will you hold me?

Pause. She lifts his arms around her. Awkwardly, he holds her. She snuggles contentedly against him. He reaches for the letter. She kisses him, his neck. Something too intimate about it.

Give me a kiss.

Pause. He kisses her forehead, briefly. He smells her hair.

Properly.

She indicates her lips. Pause. He kisses her there, too long and she breaks away smiling. He has gentle hold of the letter between thumb and forefinger. She won't let go. (148)

This is the first but not the last time Fliss' sexual desires towards Tramp become apparent in the play:

Fliss Daddy, my knee's sore again. I think I've done something to it.

Again she puts her knee up in front of him. He kisses it in a perfunctory manner, reaching for the letters.

It's not just my knee now. It's spread.

*She raises her skirt further. Her thigh. Only now does the **Tramp's** hand lower. He looks at her (168-169)*

In this scene not only does she display immature behaviours and act childishly, but also indulges in a highly sexual game with Tramp. Thus, this pseudo father-daughter relationship reveals that since she was sexually abused by her step father at a young age, Fliss mistakes sexual desires with paternal love.

As Fliss and Claire are half-sisters from a disintegrated blended family, the analysis of their relationship to each other should be carried out in the frame of blended families. Luxton states that

[s]eparation and divorce and subsequent new relationships produce 'blended families' in which the adult partners may parent step-children who

live with another parent part-time, while children have multiple parents and siblings who do not all have the same parents. (10)

In the play, Fliss and Claire are maternal half-siblings, and their fathers are the deceased Henry Gaines and Brian, respectively. Claudia Wood Straw and Brian Kent Straw investigate the negative influence of the half-siblings on the parents' biological children in the subsequent marriage. They claim that "half-siblings brought into the household from previous relationships affect the well-being of children born into subsequent marriage who live with both of their biological parents" ("Evidence" 177). Their study differs from the previous studies since the prior studies considered all children living with their biological parents alike without distinguishing if they have half-sibling or not. They argue that if there is a half-sibling, the biological child living with both parents experiences some of the same difficulties as the step children. Moreover, they also examine the stepchildren, reaching the conclusion that the well-being of the stepchildren without a half sibling is the same as the children living with their biological parents in a nuclear family. Thus, it is understood that the existence of a half-sibling has a negative influence on both step-children and biological children. They contend that both stepchildren and biological children have more behaviour problems if there is a half-sibling (180, 198).

In the play the negative relationship between Fliss and Claire is seen for the first time when Claire and her middle-aged boyfriend, Dickie talk about Fliss:

Dickie She seemed nice.

Claire You mean you fancy her.

Dickie No I mean she seems nice

Dickie You've got no idea whether she's nice or not.

Dickie I just said she seemed...

Claire She's not any nicer than anyone else. She seems a lot of things, but it's all put on ... the posh voice, the little girl lost look. And she's a bloody Tory.

He smiles. She looks at him.

What's funny

Dickie Well - *(Pause)* I just detect a hint of sibling rivalry.

Claire *Rivalry?* Why would I want to ... rival her? I am not joking when I say she's mad. She's a fucking nutter. *(Neilson, Year of the Family 136)*

Realizing that Claire does not speak well of her half-sister, Fliss, Dickie cannot help remarking that he has spotted a jealousy.

As the play progresses, when Claire comes to Fliss' apartment and sees Tramp to her shock, she reveals the truth about Fliss and her real father Henry Gaines:

Fliss Don't listen to her, she just wants to spoil this for me! She doesn't want me to have anything!

Claire What do you mean?! What did I have? Nothing! You took everything from me! Everything I ever have she takes away from me!

Fliss You see, Daddy?! That's why she's saying all this.

Claire Don't you see what a fake she is? That fake face, that fake voice ...
!

Fliss It's her voice that's fake, not mine! *(Pause)* Wanted to sound more "working class"!

Claire She's always had everything - money, success, skinny little legs!

Fliss You were the pretty one! Always good at school, always got nice boyfriends. I didn't have anything - I didn't even have a daddy and now I find you and so she wants to take you away!

Claire Like you did to me?! *(182)*

In this scene, when both Fliss and Claire reveal their emotions, it again becomes clear they are jealous of each other. This dialogue also shows how they hold each other

responsible for the disintegration of their blended family. Regarding blended families, Claudia Wood Straw and Brian Kent Straw state that

[t]he added tension, decreased stability, and greater complexity of relationships in a blended family may take away from the quality and quantity of time and material investments in both step and biological children in the family. Thus, we predict that this more stressful environment will negatively affect both biological and stepchildren in blended families. ("Evidence"185)

These difficult dynamics in blended families become more problematic in the case of Fliss and Claire owing to the dysfunctional relationships between the family members.

Therefore, feeling something terribly went wrong in this blended family, Sid asks:

Sid ... Are we getting warmer? Or are we tiptoeing into the land of dysfunctional? Is there summat nasty int' woodshet? And are we talking genetic deformity, inherited disease or could it be ...? The Holy Grail? The Iron Cross? Not ... child abuse?

Pause

Yes, old Brian, old counsellor Brian - I can see him now in his cloak and horns, standing on his pentangle - and there's wee Claire on the altar in her birthday suit. Is that it? Or was it worse than that? Was it worse than that? Was it Fliss on the altar, whilst Claire peeled the potatoes, was that it? Daddy spending all his time with another man's daughter, spending all the time he should be spending on you? (173)

In this dialogue, Sid gives dysfunctional family examples and makes references to the child abuse cases in British history. Imagining Brian as leading a ritual, Sid alludes to the events in Nottingham, Rochdale and Orkneys, which were related to the allegations of child abuse in satanist rituals (Winter and Connolly 34).

The father-son relationship between Dickie and Sid also portrays a family that is quite different from the family representations of the family ideology as Sid is hateful

and vindictive towards Dickie. Disappointed by his parents' break-up, Sid draws a bleak picture of the family institution:

Sid We can have a couple of kids, a dog, a house, and burn them too. Back to fucking basics. Why do you think they call it a nuclear family? Because they're burning alive. Because they burn and everything burns with them, till there is nothing for miles. What will the neighbours say? Fuck all, because they're burning too, all of them, behind their net curtains, the blue rinses burning, the Union Jack burning, burning in the schools, burning in the jumble sales. Burn the right brick and the whole house burns and then the street and then the cities, crumbling black fucking tinder box music box music hall burning churches burning pigs children burning like their fathers burnt and their father before them and their fathers before them the whole thing burning down. (145)

After having witnessed his own family's disintegration, Sid loses his hope in the family institution. Therefore, when Claire wants to stay in Sid's bedsit for a night after she breaks up with Dick, Sid rejects her request by saying:

Sid No you're not just talking about tonight, you're talking about tonight and tomorrow night and every night until you forget for a moment that it's pain you want, that it's pain you need and you hop to the next man and then you remember that happiness is beyond you, that happiness and love are beyond the likes of you and me. (*Pause*) I mean, what's your story, Claire? What's your family tree? What's your fuck up? (172)

Sid believes that since they have become addicted to pain because of their family of origin, they will be unable to form a healthy relationship. Though Sid falls in love with Claire, their relationship is as destructive as it is passionate. After a heated argument between the two, Sid has a car accident that leaves him paralyzed. Only after this accident, Claire and Dickie become aware of this morbid love triangle.

As it is stated earlier, apart from dramatising abusive and dysfunctional family relationships, *Year of the Family* criticises the popular family ideology which might inflict deep psychological wounds in the individuals who have problematic family relationships by portraying the characters' pathetic attempts to adhere to traditional family structure. Through the end of the play, having interiorised their father-daughter roles, Fliss and Tramp make preparations on Christmas day. From the dialogue between the two, it is understood that Claire and Sid -now paralyzed- will join them on this special day. While waiting for them, Fliss says "I hope they get here before the Queen's speech" (Neilson, *Year of the Family* 189), which shows her adherence to traditions and conventions. In "Anti-Social Family", Barrett and McIntosh argues the popularity of royalty is closely connected with the family institution:

It is not the institution of monarchy that is popular, it is the royal family. The monarchy was severely threatened when Edward VIII abdicated in the face of the opposition to his taking a divorcee as a queen, and it has taken decades of indefatigable royal family life to secure the present popularity of the institution ... Idealized, yet flawed, perfection with personal foibles, these characters represent a way of managing the contradiction between family life as we are told it should be and family life as all too often experienced. (32)

It was during the nineteenth century that Royal Family came to epitomise the ideal British family (Storry and Childs 116). Since then, the family ideology has bound the public and monarchy alike, permeated all classes of society and created a common point. In British society, the family ideology is so influential that "[e]ven today, the Queen is sometimes referred to as 'the mother of the Commonwealth', just as England, the imperial centre, was once viewed as 'the mother country'" (116).

When Claire and Sid join them, they exchange presents, have Christmas dinner together and play charades. In the last scene, Dickie appears in women's suit as the stage direction indicates "*Dickie, dragged up to nines*" (Neilson, *Year of the Family* 193), and the reason behind the five glasses on the table is understood. Dickie, who is introduced to Tramp by these half-sisters as Janis Gaines, is Claire's and Fliss' surprise gift for Tramp, who has always dreamt of meeting Janis after reading her love letters:

Claire *is setting up the camera. The Tramp's face twists to one of incomprehension. Janis/Dickie takes his/her place next to the Tramp. Claire comes back to the table. Fliss raises her glass.*

Fliss To Christmas. To Britain. To the Family.

Claire To the family

Pause, and the Tramp too raises his glass, and the camera flash goes off, freezing them there. Claire, Dickie, Sid drooling onto his chest. The Tramp stunned. (193)

It becomes apparent that in this holy evening, Fliss and Claire have planned to create a pseudo-family by compensating the lack of their mother and father with surrogate members. Tramp and Dickie are respectively the father and the mother of this family. Reid states that Neilson

carries his attack on the idea of the traditional family into parody. The final scene of *Year of the Family* is a grotesque imitation of the kinds of familial resolutions we associate with traditional comedy. The longed for reunion between the fake dad and the fake mum lays bare both the conventions of comedy, and the conservative assumptions that underwrite the idea of an International Year of the Family. (*The Theatre of Anthony Neilson* 102)

Fliss and Claire feel incomplete in a society where the family ideology thrives, and the last scene shows their pathetic efforts to construct a family. In the play, "Fliss" is the

nickname of "Felicity", which means happiness and joy. However, only in the presence of the pseudo-family, Fliss is able to be happy as the stage directions indicate at the end of the play "*And Fliss, happy. / End.*" (Neilson, *Year of the Family* 193).

Consequently, *Year of the Family* dramatises that in a society with strong family values, individuals in problematic family relationships feel bereft and forlorn. The play shows that due to the prevalent and popular family ideology, individuals do not find the happiness in themselves but tie it to the family institution. Thereby, the play explores that by elevating the family ideology, the UN International Year of the Family might negatively influence those who have problematic family relationships. The play criticises the United Nations' declaration of strong family values on the grounds that the individuals' psychological and social well-being are being threatened by these family values.

CHAPTER IV:
ALTERNATIVE FAMILIES BUT SIMILAR MISERIES: MARK
RAVENHILL'S *HANDBAG* (1998)

4.1. Mark Ravenhill: A Brief Survey of His Theatre

Born in 1966 in West Sussex, Mark Ravenhill studied Drama and English at Bristol University between the years 1984-87⁵. After his university education, he moved to London, where he started working as an administrative assistant and then as a workshop director at Soho Poly. Later on, he worked at Finborough Theatre, and in 1997 became the literary director of Paines Plough, a new writing company, and was appointed in 2002 as an artistic associate in National Theatre (Svich, "Mark Ravenhill" 403; Sierz, *In-Yer-Face Theatre* 122-123).

As a playwright, Ravenhill's ten-minute play *Fist* (1995) marked a turning point in his career.⁶ Ravenhill's dramatic works in the 1990s such as *Shopping and Fucking* (1996) *Faust is Dead* (1997), *Sleeping Around* (1998), *Handbag* (1998), *Some Explicit Polaroids* (1999) placed him among young generation of playwrights who were later called in-ye-face dramatists (Svich, "Mark Ravenhill" 403; Sierz, *In-Yer-Face Theatre* 122-123). In these works, Ravenhill "consistently probed the way commerce and consumer culture drive Western social relationships" (Hadley 261). In other words, he dramatised "the state of our communal bonds, ripped and tattered by transcontinental economic forces" (Rebellato, Introduction x *Mark Ravenhill Plays I*).

⁵ In the final year of his study, he wrote *Blood Brood*, which was staged at the Edinburg Festival.

⁶ Since seeing this play, Mac Stafford-Clark, who was the director and founder of Out of Joint company asked him if he had a full length play. Thereupon, Ravenhill started writing *Shopping and Fucking* (1996), which was followed by his other plays.

While in his early works such as *Shopping and Fucking*, *Some Explicit Polaroids* and *Handbag*, Ravenhill explores the commoditization of sexuality, in his works such as *Mother Clap's Molly House* (2000), *Citizenship* (2005) and *A life in Three Acts* (2009), which was co-written and co-performed with British drag artist Bette Bourne, Ravenhill mostly explores gay and queer sexuality (Svich, "Mark Ravenhill" 404). After having explored gay and queer characters in these plays, Ravenhill decides to stop writing on gay themes for a while:

It feels as though every aspect of the gay experience has been narrated, performed and picked over in the past 30 years ... Right now, I'm eager to explore the strange, twilight world of the heterosexual - to expose its anguishes and mysteries and unconscious comedies. Maybe one day there will be something to pull me back to the gay experience, the sense of something new to be said about the gay world. But, for the moment at least, my lavender quill is at rest. (Ravenhill, "My pink fountain")

Ravenhill's *The Experiment* (2009) and *Ten plagues* (2010) verify this statement as these plays explore themes other than gay experience (Svich, "Mark Ravenhill" 404).

On the other hand, in his twenty-first century works such as *Product* (2005), *The Cut* (2006), *Pool (No Water)* (2006) and *Shoot/Get Treasure/Repeat* (2008), *The Cane* (2018), Ravenhill becomes "more concerned with the effects of globalisation on local and immediate lives, figures of authority and how they wield power to corrupt their citizenry, and the role of art and how it speaks to culture, if at all" (Svich, "Mark Ravenhill" 419).

In his theatre career, inspired by "Douglas Coupland's *Generation X*, Bret Easton Ellis's *Less Than Zero*, Tama Janowitz's *Slaves of New York* and Jay McInerney's *Bright Lights, Big City*", Ravenhill has created "an ironic and cynical tone in dramatic writing,

befitting the sensibility of its generation" (Sierz, *In-Yer-Face Theatre* 124; Svich, "Mark Ravenhill" 406). Apart from the "'blank fictions' of American culture", he has also been influenced by Martin Crimp's plays whose effect on stage, he thinks, is similar to the above mentioned fictions. The other influences that have shaped his works are the dialogues in David Mamet's works, "theatrical possibility" in Caryl Churchill's works, and Anthony Neilson's "sense of stagecraft" (Sierz, *In-Yer-Face Theatre* 151, 124). Also, Ravenhill explains his fascination with theatre of Edward Bond, stating that Bond "stripped away all of the conventional rhetoric of British theatre" and was able to dramatise in 1967 a "world of listless, rootless youth, casual acts of sex and random acts of violence in south London parks" which Ravenhill was quite familiar with during the 1990s (Ravenhill, "Mark Ravenhill").

Caridad Svich contends that "[s]o much coolly focused rage at the declining values of a country and world gone wrong makes Ravenhill an impassioned moralist and humanist" ("Commerce and Morality" 92-93). Ravenhill's own statements is quite relevant in this context in order to better understand what he aims through his theatrical works:

Certainly I've always written against moral relativism. I want audiences to make moral choices: to decide moment by moment – intellectually and emotionally – whether what the characters are doing and the choices they are making are right or wrong. I find this dramatic. It makes good theatre. (Ravenhill, "A Tear in the Fabric" 313)

Ravenhill wants the audience to meditate upon and question what they see on stage in order to distinguish the right from the wrong since he believes that theatre has the power to bring forth a change (313). Ravenhill's moral concerns "links him to a tradition of writing that is much more classical in its nature" (Svich, "Mark Ravenhill" 419). In his

works, Ravenhill comments on and criticises the relationships in today's world which are heavily determined by the market forces and consumerism by drawing upon "ancient Greek drama, the plays of Oscar Wilde, Brecht and contemporary pop culture" (ibid.).

Arguing that Ravenhill's works are generally received as a commentary on capitalism, globalism, and consumerism and consumer culture, Graham Saunders draws attention to the fact that the sexual politics in his works has been overlooked by many theatre critics. He considers Ravenhill's theatre as innovative in terms of his treatment of gay relationships (Saunders, "Mark Ravenhill" 164). His works radically differ from "the militant coming-out dramas of the 1970s and of the AIDS plays of the 1980s, to present a more rounded view of life and sex" (Sierz, "Theatre in the 1990s" 62). In an interview with Enric Monforte, Ravenhill stated that

I have certainly never wanted to be involved in any kind of theatre that's directed towards a specific gay/lesbian audience ... [G]ay characters and contemporary gay men's lives could be useful to write about, because they're the ultimate definition of a hedonistic, materialistic society. They are metaphors for a wider society, but I'm not interested in writing plays that affirm that gay people exist and that their narratives exist. That's everywhere; we have reached saturation point. (Ravenhill, "Mark Ravenhill" 92)

It is this attitude that distinguishes Ravenhill from the earlier generation of playwrights who explore gay sexuality.

In Ravenhill's works, "families are places that one abandons, or structures that need reinventing" (Saunders, "Mark Ravenhill" 184). Ravenhill's theatre is rife with complicated stories of absent, abusive, exploitative father figures and abandoned teenagers and children. The search for a father figure is dramatised in *Shopping and*

Fucking through a fourteen-year-old character, Gary, who says "I want a dad. I want to be watched. All the time, someone watching me. Do you understand?" (Mark Ravenhill, *Shopping and Fucking* 33) . In the play, Gary is sexually abused by his step father and left to his own fate by the social workers. He starts looking for a potential surrogate father but it becomes apparent that the father figure in his imagination has been shaped by his abusive step-father: "I am not after love. I want to be owned. I want someone to look after me. And I want him to fuck me. Really fuck me. Not like that, not like him. And, yeah, it will hurt. But a good hurt" (56). Traumatized by his past, he incessantly fantasises about being hurt by this new father figure "who's not gentle" (65). Therefore, in a dangerous game Mark meets blindfolded Gary's fantasies by means of a knife during the intercourse, and these destructive fantasies which are rooted in his abusive family cost his life. Thus, *Shopping and Fucking* criticises abusive family relationships through the abused character, Gary. However, after Gary's death, the play's tone changes and becomes more optimistic as the absence of the traditional family unit leads to a new family structure that is not based on kinship. The members of this new family feed and take care of each other in the last scene, succeeding in what the traditional family has failed to provide. In *Some Explicit Polaroids*, on the other hand, the traditional nuclear family is represented as problematic through Nadia who says "I've never met a paedophile. Well, only my father. But I don't count him (Mark Ravenhill, *Some Explicit Polaroids* 257). In his twenty-first century work, *Mother Clap's Molly House*, Ravenhill dramatises sexual diversity and alternative family structures which he also explores in *Handbag*. In the eighteenth century plot of *Mother Clap's Molly House*, Orme calls Philip and Kedger Mother and Father respectively, saying that "[b]ecause my real father was a beater of children and animals. And my mother was transported long ago for her wickedness. So now we must play at families. I'll be the child"

(Ravenhill, *Mother Clap's Moll House* 33). Thus, thinking that "Lord intended each one of us to have a father and mother and if Nature don't provide 'em, we must do what we can", Orme creates an alternative family in the molly house (Ravenhill, *Mother Clap's Moll House* 34). This molly house is "an urban oasis where activities include sexual pleasure, transvestitism and even a game in which a man 'gives birth' to a baby doll. It is a metaphor for flexible gender identity" (Sierz, *Rewriting the Nation* 210) Sometime later, the childless owner of the molly house, Mrs Tull also starts to define herself as mother: "In't Tull no more. Tull's dead and buried see. From this day on all shall call me Mother. In this molly house"(Ravenhill, *Mother Clap's Moll House* 55). The potential alternative family appears through the end of the play when Tull rents out the profitable molly house and leaves it behind with Princess Seraphina and Martin/Susan to start a new life in the countryside. In *The Cane*, on the other hand, Ravenhill explores a problematic father-daughter relationship which is set against the theme of authority and power. The play portrays an authority figure, Edward a retiring deputy headteacher at a local comprehensive school. In the play, he is protested by a mob of students gathered around his house due to his use of cane as a corporal punishment before it was banned in 1986. While he was trapped inside his house with his wife, Maureen, his daughter, Anna who also teaches at a local academy, arrives, which leads to a heated family confrontation.

4.2. Handbag

One of the elements that have led to important changes in the family structures has been the relaxation of social attitudes towards same-sex relationships. Since the enactment of Section 28, Britain has witnessed the resurgence of gay activism ranging from Stonewall, to Act Up and Outrage!. There have been significant changes in

legislation concerning same-sex relationships in the last three decades (Weeks 364; Garret 131-132). These legislative amendments have led to the formation of new family structures, enabling same-sex couples to register their relationships through civil partnerships and same-sex marriages, adopt children, and conceive through assisted reproductive technologies (Weeks 359). However, although family structures have changed considerably, family problems have remained the same as reflected in Mark Ravenhill's *Handbag*.

Mark Ravenhill's *Handbag*, commissioned by Actors Touring Company, premiered at the Lyric Hammersmith Studio on the 14th of September 1998 (Ravenhill, 2014, 5). In *Handbag*, Ravenhill dramatises the evolution of the family unit from traditional nuclear family to same-sex families, the effects of reproductive technologies on the family institution, changing parental practices, and the influence of consumer capitalism on family dynamics and the prospective commoditization of human attributes such as sperm and ova.

Handbag, comprised of two plots, is both a contemporary story about an alternative family and a prequel to Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest*. In *Handbag*, Ravenhill "uses parallel timescales to compare family and parenting in the 1990s with that of the Victorian period" which overlap and merge together from time to time to create "the marriage of two fin-de siècles" (Saunders, "Mark Ravenhill" 174; Svich, "Commerce and Morality" 86).

The contemporary half of the play takes up the attempts of a lesbian couple, Suzanne and Mauretta, and a gay couple, Tom and David, to form an alternative family structure. A baby is conceived through artificial insemination of Tom's sperms to Mauretta's ovum. However, as the play progresses, the relationship between these four

characters begins to shatter as a result of emotional conflicts and dysfunctional relationships. The Victorian half of the play, on the other hand, is a prequel to Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest* and dramatises how Earnest/Jack Worthing ends up in a handbag at Victoria Station. While dramatising the family and parenting in Victorian and contemporary times, Ravenhill draws an analogy between these two worlds which are different on the surface but similar when examined closely. Thus, he "looks back and forward in time with equal amounts of unease and dread" (Svich, "Commerce and Morality" 86).

In Ravenhill's reworking of Oscar Wilde's text, Constance, Augusta, Moncrieff, Prism, Cardew and Jack are re-imagined by the playwright to add a deeper meaning to the play. Constance is pregnant with Earnest while her sister Augusta is not married yet. After the baby is born, however, Constance has difficulty in establishing a loving bond with her newborn baby despite her efforts to love him. Cardew, on the other hand, appears as the head of the Belgrave Square Society for the Discovery and Betterment of Foundling Boys from the Lower Orders but actually is a paedophile who sexually abuses the boys under his auspice. Through the end, he is driven out of the city after the public finds out about his notorious acts. While in the source text of the play, Prism places the baby in the handbag "[i]n a moment of mental abstraction" (Wilde 65), in Ravenhill's version, her mental abstraction becomes deliberate and part of the plan. Believing that "[t]o he who needs the child, the child shall be given" (Ravenhill, *Handbag* 66), she gives the child to Cardew, who is heading for Worthing to start over his life.

In the contemporary plot of the play, the same-sex couples' endeavours to create a utopic and an ideal family lead to a catastrophe with the tragic death of the baby. This supposedly alternative family faces their first crisis due to David's affair with Phil.

However, the family becomes disintegrated for sure when their baby gets stolen by Phil and Lorraine. When the baby stops breathing because of his congenital health problem, floppy larynx, Phil, not knowing what to do, first burns the baby's skin with his cigarette and then pushes the cigarette into the baby's eyes and ultimately causes its death. Thus, in the play both babies in different centuries have tragic destinies.

With its allusions to a Victorian play, *Importance of Being Earnest* in which the family institution is criticised with a sarcastic tone through its portrayals of the family more as a business transaction, *Handbag* shows that society has not changed for better but for worse since Victorian times, and the play serves as "a mournful expression of lost hopes and ideals, a lament for the passing of the socialist promise of English society, a tragic dirge for the dismantling of English society by Thatcherism" (Carney 235).

Although Margaret Thatcher was forced to resign in 1990, her policies continued to shape British political atmosphere (Sierz, Introduction 24; D'monte, "Thatcher's Children" 79). In *Handbag*, Ravenhill reflects Thatcher's selective use of Victorian ideals through the play's structure which intertwines Victorian and contemporary times. In "Thatcher and the Victorians: A Suitable Case for Comparison", Stephen Evans explores whether Thatcherism "possessed essentially Victorian characteristics" (601). He contends that impressed by the achievements of Victorian period, Thatcher accommodated and adjusted its ideology and policies for the contemporary society. The most salient Victorian ideologies in Thatcherite government were "individualism, enterprise, self-reliance, and limited government" (608).

Thatcher used Victorian values as "a metaphorical space for the expression of moral anxiety" (Samuel 14). It was inevitable that the developments in science and

technology would ultimately lead to the evolution of the society as well, and this fuelled the fears that the social order would be disrupted.

[Victorian discourse] played on fears that the family was in crisis and marriage falling apart. In one aspect, the invocation of Victorian Values was a counterpart to Conservative demands for a 'crack-down' on crime; in another it was perhaps an alarmed response to the coming out of previously stigmatised (and criminalised) sexual minorities. (15)

Thus, Victorian ideals served as a kind of shield to protect the society from the effects of fast changing world which had potential to create a threat for deep-seated traditions and conventions.

However, it should be pointed out that Thatcher was highly selective of Victorian ideology and values, and only made use of those which might serve for her political ends. For this reason, although the nineteenth century also "witnessed the emergence of collectivism and socialism, and state intervention began to replace laissez-faire", Thatcher chose to turn a blind eye to these social developments in Victorian society as they were clearly in contrast with the ideology she tried to create (Evans 615). Therefore, it is obvious that "Thatcher's version of 'good old days' [was] altogether more severe" (Samuel 19).

Evans also states that there were also sharp contrasts between Victorian and Thatcherite ideology:

There was an explicit linkage between earning and spending in the 1980s which would have been alien to the Victorian mind. To make matters worse, not only were we encouraged to spend the money we had: we were also encouraged to spend the money we did not have. Credit-based expenditure increased dramatically in the Thatcher years as ever greater numbers of people carried plastic as well as cash in their pockets ... The

fault-line of this approach became all too clear in the aftermath of 'Black Monday' (19 October 1987). (616-617)

That is, while Victorian times were age of thrift, the seeds of consumer culture were planted during the Thatcher period as she encouraged people to spend and consume.

In *Handbag*, Phil serves an important dramatic function as the timeframe and narrative overlap through this character. The first time Victorian and the contemporary world intermingle is when Phil gets high under the influence of drugs. In this scene, Phil sees Cardew and goes back with him to Victorian times where he meets other Victorian characters. Unable to live up to the expectations of Victorian society - or because the drug's effect wears off- he leaves Victorian world to return back to the contemporary times. The second and the last time when these different eras commingle is when Phil is alone with the baby and gets distressed due to its crying. The Victorian characters in the play come to the contemporary world, and it becomes apparent that not much has changed regarding the babies' worth since then as the mishandled babies of both worlds appear with Cardew, Phil and Lorraine in the last scene.

In this chapter, gay and lesbian relationships in *Handbag* is explored in the frame of the family institution. As Ravenhill's plays display queer sensibility, queer theory should be used to analyse the same-sex relationships in the play. Therefore, concepts such as queer, heteronormativity and homonormativity should be explicated in order to better understand the problems that lead to dysfunctionality in the alternative family of the play.

Foucault explores sexuality by presenting it as a discursive product. He states that until the nineteenth century same-sex sexuality was not thought to constitute a kind of identity but were thought as "a category of forbidden acts" (*History of Sexuality* 43).

He also argues that with Westphal's article in 1870, the homosexual appeared as a personage for the first time and, from then on, while "the sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species" (ibid.). Thereby, the nineteenth century sexual discourse created a "binarised and hierarchised sexual categorisation", and homosexuality was classified "as a deviation from a privileged and naturalised heterosexuality." (Jagose 72). However, Foucault notes that

[f]or two centuries now, the discourse on sex has been multiplied rather than rarefied; and if it has carried with it taboos and prohibitions, it has also, in a more fundamental way, ensured the solidification and implantation of an entire sexual mosaic. (*History of Sexuality* 53)

Thereby, while the discourse on sexuality has enabled social controls into the sexual lives of the individuals, it has also contributed to the emergence of a "reverse discourse" (101).

Heterosexual culture which is also the product of the sexual discourse is manifested "as the elemental form of human association, as the very model of intergender relations, as the indivisible basis of all community, and as the means of reproduction without which society wouldn't exist" (Warner Introduction xxi). Thus, sexual acts are classified within a hierarchical order with "heterosexual, marital, monogamous, reproductive, and non-commercial" on top (Rubins 280). Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner use the term, "heteronormativity" to explain the presentation and elevation of heterosexuality as an indicator of normalcy. They argue that

[h]eteronormativity is more than ideology, or prejudice, or phobia against gays and lesbians; it is produced in almost every aspect of the forms and arrangements of social life: nationality, the state, and the law; commerce; medicine; and education; as well as in the conventions and affects of narrativity, romance, and other protected spaces of culture. (554-555)

Dispersed through all machinations of life, heteronormativity exerts an influence on all people alike regardless of their different sexuality. It gives rise to homonormativity which conforms to "heteronormative assumptions and institutions" and leads to "a demobilized gay constituency and a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption" (Duggan 50). Thereby, gay identity turns into "gay normality" which is characterised by gender conformity, exclusion of trans individuals and queers, ghettoisation, heteronormative and domestic normative family structures with marital bonds (Drucker 7-8).

Queer came out as a reaction to this heteronormative culture and homonormativity, and "embraced a working-class or poor, radical, and anti-capitalist identity in opposition to 'homonormative' middle- and upper-class gays and lesbians who were perceived as seeking acceptance from heterosexuals" (Lewis 30). Therefore, queer is revolutionary in that it aims to create a kind of intimacy that has no "relation to domestic space, to kinship, to the couple form, to property, or to the nation" (Berlant and Warner 558).

With its meanings "'strange,' 'odd,' 'unusual,' 'abnormal,' or 'sick,'" queer was a derogatory term that is used to insult lesbian and gay individuals (Halperin 339). Today, the term "queer" has gained new meanings in the realm of sexuality and is now used to delineate "those gestures or analytical models which dramatise incoherencies in the allegedly stable relations between chromosomal sex, gender and sexual desire" (Jagose 3). By reclaiming the pejorative term "queer", queers call attention to the fact that "language has long been used to categorize and devalue human lives and lifestyles" (Hall 54). Since then, they have displayed their political stance by "reject[ing] a minoritizing logic of toleration or simple political interest-representation in favor of a more thorough resistance to regimes of the normal" (Warner, Introduction xxvi).

Thereby, queers take an "antinormative positioning with regard to sexuality" and embraces sexualities which are deemed as abnormal and unnatural (Jagose 98). By "protesting not just the normal behavior of the social but the *idea* of normal behavior", queers call into question all the methodologies that are based on this idea (Warner, Introduction xxvii).

In academic disciplines, queer theory first came out as a joke by Teresa de Lauretis, who playfully coined the phrase by bringing together the word "queer" and a serious academic term "theory" for the title of a conference at the University of California in February of 1990. Her aim was

to introduce a problematic of multiple differences into what had tended to be a monolithic, homogenizing discourse of (homo)sexual difference, and to offer a possible escape from the hegemony of white, male, middle-class models of analysis. (Halperin 339-340)

Along with lesbian and gay studies, queer theories' "analytical framework also includes such topics as cross-dressing, hermaphroditism, gender ambiguity and gender-corrective surgery" (Jagose 3).

As Ravenhill's *Handbag* dramatises dysfunctional same-sex family relationships, the family institution should be briefly touched upon in relation to 'marginalized' sexualities. Shelley M. Park in *Mothering Queerly, Queering Motherhood* explores the family institution and family relationships first in lesbian and gay, and then in queer studies. She argues that in early lesbian and gay scholarship, the family was regarded as an institution from which they were excluded. Later on, LGBT scholars presented a more positive rendering of the institution through lesbian and gay families. However, as these lesbian and gay families were largely shaped by heteronormative culture, queer came out as a result to protest against the homonormative life styles of these

'supposedly' alternative families. For queers, the family is an institution "through which 'abnormal' sexuality is regulated by state" (18). Its positive portrayals of the family institution, on the other hand, is based on "intragenerational forms of kinship based on friendship" which do not conform to heterosexual norms (ibid.). Shelley M. Park presents the discussions regarding queer families and children, and contends that it is possible to "mother queerly":

In adoptive, lesbian, extended-blended, and polygamous families, narratives of reproductivity frequently are (albeit not always) displaced by narratives of chosen kinship—choices that may include homosocial and even homoerotic relationships between women. In such families, moreover, practices of distributed mothering make it possible to inhabit intergenerational kinship networks while continuing to enjoy adult pursuits and intimacies (including, but not limited to, non-normative sexual pursuits and intimacies) outside of the family. By providing alternative models of kinship featuring female homosociality and resistance to gendered norms of self-sacrificial mothering, polymaternal families allow for (although they do not guarantee) the formation of queer subjectivities in both mothers and children. (20)

That is, in order to mother queerly one should resist heteronormative culture whose narrative is built on reproductivity and monogamous marriage with normative domestic practices. Therefore, she warns that while "some folk who identify as queer may sometimes 'play it straight,' some folk who identify as straight may engage in deviant practices" (21).

In *Handbag*, the struggles of a lesbian and a gay couple to form a 'supposedly' alternative family together are dramatised. The characters' past experiences in their dysfunctional family of origin have a direct influence on their choice of this family structure with two mothers and fathers. Thus, when these two couples decide to have a

baby together through artificial insemination, they envisage a perfect and flawless alternative family.

In this family, Mauretta and Tom are the biological parents and their utterances are of great importance as they reveal the reason why Mauretta and Tom are involved in this family structure and have decided to have a baby.

Mauretta When I was a kid my dad walked out. One day he came home and he packed a bag and he stuck his head round the door and he said: 'I'm going out'. And that was it. He was gone and we never mentioned him again. But people would look at you and they'd say: 'It's not right. A mum and a dad's best for a kid. A kid's gotta have a mum and a dad.' So they should be fucking pleased now. Because you my child will be doubly blessed. There's a positive glut of parents here for you. You've enough mummies and daddies that if one decides to pack a bag and move on you've got plenty to be going on with. And we love you and we want you and we're waiting for you. (Ravenhill, *Handbag* 9)

As it is understood from the above quotation, Mauretta involves in this alternative family structure to secure the parents' presence in her child's life since she believes that in such a family her child will not have the difficulties she once had.

On the other hand, Tom appears to be an idealist individual who believes that they can raise their child by providing a loving atmosphere. Thus, when his sperms are needed for artificial insemination, he is against the idea of using a porn magazine to ejaculate more easily as he believes this would be inappropriate.

Tom ... Sorry. I just want everything to be ... You see so many kids. At the end of school, the parents come and pick them up. And I watch them from the staffroom window, and they grab hold of the kid's hand and it's: 'shut up' – swipe – 'keep your fucking mouth shut'. I mean, how's a child supposed to grow, develop and grow, when there's so much anger and, and

... ugliness? And that's why I want ... We can do so much better than that.
We can create something calm and positive. We can do that. (10)

From the above quotation, it is clear that he is quite concerned with and sensitive towards children and their emotional needs, and believes that together, they can provide an environment necessary for the healthy development of their child.

As the play progresses, however, problems begin to arise, and this 'supposedly' alternative family comes to an end with the tragic death of the baby. Although these couples aim to create an alternative family relationships, they fail utterly in the end as their 'alternative' family turns out to be a kind of family which is heavily influenced by heteronormative culture. These same-sex couples lead homonormative lives, and thus their family becomes embedded in normative domestic structures. That is, their relationship shows "commonality with the norms of heterosexual culture, including marriage, monogamy, procreation, and productivity" (Connell 145). Thus, although these characters are not heterosexual individuals, they, in Shelley M. Park's words, "play it straight" (Park 21).

Thus, in the play, the relationships in this supposedly alternative family begin to shatter when the family members form a sexual or emotional bond with people outside their family. When Tom learns that David had a relationship with another man, Phil, they start quarrelling.

David Yes? So what? So what do you want?

Tom I want some kind of commitment.

David So -up with the Wendy House. Up with the Wendy House and how did Mummy and Daddy do it and their mummy and daddy do it and let's be like them. Yeah and let's move to suburbia and / bleach those nets and twitch, twitch, twitch. (Ravenhill, *Handbag* 40)

While David with his polyamorous intimacies takes an antinormative stance towards romantic relationships and shows his reluctance to a life with normative domestic practices, Tom wants to lead a homonormative life with domestinormative practices, and this creates a conflict in their relationship, resulting in a dysfunctional family.

The similar events occur in the relationship between Maureatta and Suzanne. In the first scenes of the play, while Suzanne is interviewing Lorraine for consumer's choice, Lorraine indicates that her mother passed away recently. In order to comfort her, Suzanne first hugs Lorraine but then this emotional intimacy turns into a sexual one once Suzanne starts to kiss Lorraine. Through the end of the play, when the baby is stolen by Lorraine and Phil, Mauretta has a fit of jealousy and tells Suzanne "No. I don't want you. You go to her. You go to Lorraine. Go and kiss Lorraine" (60) and decides to put an end to this family:

Mauretta ...You're nothing. All of you. I had him. And I want him back. And we're going to live together, him and me and I'm going to watch him grow and I won't even tell him that you exist. And maybe you'll interview him one day, and maybe you'll teach him one day, and maybe you'll try and sleep with him one day and you won't even know who he is. He won't know you. Just me. That's all he needs.

Tom All of us.

Mauretta All of us? All of us doesn't work. Look at you. (59)

Heavily influenced by heterosexual norms, these characters cannot manage to create an alternative family because their family are based on homonormative relationships and shaped by domestinormative practices.

Apart from same-sex relationship, the concept of motherhood and mother-child relationships play a vital role in *Handbag* as well. Shari L. Thurer in *The Myths of*

Motherhood: How culture reinvents the Good Mother argues that motherhood is a cultural phenomenon. She claims that motherhood

is culturally derived. Each society has its own mythology, complete with rituals, beliefs, expectations, norms, and symbols. ... Our particular idea of what constitutes a good mother is only that, an idea, not an eternal verity. The good mother is reinvented as each age or society defines her anew, in its own terms, according to its own mythology. (xv)

Namely, the concept of "motherhood" is not culture-free, and its meaning and practices vary with different periods of time and societies.

Thurer also contends that "[t]he so-called maternal instinct is a political hot potato"(211). She states that the term "maternal instinct" which is derived from Darwinism suggests that women are naturally programmed to be mothers. This idea implies that biologically destined to be a mother, women feel the need to take care of their children. She questions this assumption on many grounds by stating that "women obviously come in variety of shapes, colors, sizes, talents and temperaments. Why shouldn't they vary in degrees of 'motherliness'?" (212). She also argues that the maternal instinct is a social construct by drawing attention to the fact that "more than four thousand years of social pressure exerted on women may explain motherhood's popularity" (ibid.).

In the contemporary story of *Handbag*, the belief in the maternal instinct is seen through Mauretta's utterances as she says "My body's ready now, you know? All those little hormones rushing around screaming ... come on, come on. We're up for it. Start the clock" (Ravenhill, *Handbag* 8).

On the other hand, in the Victorian plot, through Constance, the maternal instinct is portrayed as a myth. After Constance conceives her baby, Earnest, no matter how hard she tries, she cannot feel anything towards it. Presumably influenced by the morals regarding maternal love and affection, Constance tries hard to feel loving emotions to her baby but to no avail as she says "Nothing. I feel nothing" (48).

Throughout the play, she endeavours to create a bond with her baby and forces herself to love it.

Constance This is mine. This came from me. What it feels, I shall feel.
Here. Here. To me. Give me the child.

Phil Yes. Alright.

Constance Oh yes. Come here. Come here. Let me feel something.
She takes the baby.

Constance And now, of course, it should flow through me. Now I should feel overwhelmed by a mother's love.

Phil And what do you feel?

Constance Nothing. (64)

In spite of all her endeavours, she cannot feel maternal love to her disappointment and dismay. Thurer states that "[t]o confess to being in conflict about mothering is tantamount to being a bad person; it violates a taboo; and, worse it feels like a betrayal of one's child" (xiv). Thinking that maternal love is a biological necessity, Constance believes she should feel it. Her desperate efforts to love her baby reveal her guilt-stricken conscience. In the play, she decides to breast-feed her baby thinking that it might help her establish a kind of loving bond between her and the baby.

Constance No. It will come. Hold him long enough and it must come.
Don't want to look down and see - what?- little square bundle of feet and teeth and eyes. That is not it, is it? No. No. No. Should see love. That is

quite the proper thing to see. So why? Feed him. Feed him. That will do it.
Yes. That will do it. (Ravenhill, *Handbag* 64)

In Constance's reactions, it becomes obvious that "[a]part from the fact that women possess the equipment for lactation, mothers seem no more predisposed to, or innately skilled at, child care than are fathers, siblings, or nonparents" (Thurer 212). The portrayal of such a character is of great importance for the concept of motherhood and maternal instinct since through her the authenticity of these concepts is questioned.

Thurer argues that today's concepts regarding the family and familial relationships dates back to Victorian times when the idea of home as a sanctuary became prevalent. The Industrial Revolution divided the workplace and home as mass production replaced the household production and caused an alteration in living arrangements of the family. In order to work in factories, a great number of people migrated from small towns to industrial cities, and this led to a great change in the society. As for the families that left their homelands to be a wage labourer in the city, the family ties became more important, and the family members started to develop closer bonds with each other. Thus, the domestic sphere turned into a shelter "where one might retreat for repose or renewal or inner fortification" (Thurer 184).

In order to understand the Victorian plot of *Handbag*, it is necessary to explore Victorian household arrangements as well. Thurer states that

in wealthy households, men would retreat into a male zone, the smoking room, and women into a female one, the drawing room, so named because it was the place to which women "withdrew" after dinner. The division of rooms according to gender was an artifact of this period and indicates just how patriarchal Victorians could be: women were considered too delicate to tolerate cigar smoke, too scatterbrained to engage in male conversation. (190)

In the Victorian plot of the play, the division of domestic sphere is clearly seen as Moncrieff says:

Moncrieff Thank goodness the modern age has realised the importance of dividing up our lives. Former ages, I believe, quite muddled up the aspects. Now we men can play billiards in the billiards room, smoke in the smoking room and relax in the library. And the ladies ... well the ladies have their own worlds too. (Ravenhill, *Handbag* 24)

In the play, Constance, who is heavily pregnant is told to stay in her room as it is presumably improper to be seen with a huge belly. Feeling isolated, she once protests by saying "[c]onfinement is unbearable. I am so lonely" (22) but is warned by Moncrieff "it is your burden" (ibid.). Moncrieff's statement implies that as a woman Constance should be able to endure pregnancy alone.

As it is stated earlier, the practices of motherhood vary in accordance with the culture and time, and are shaped by "mundane things, like subsistence strategies, population pressures, biology, technology, weather patterns, and speculations about women's nature" (Thurer, xxv). In *Handbag* when Constance tries breast-feeding to trigger maternal love, she is interrupted by Moncrieff:

Enter Moncrieff and Prism.

Moncrieff Oh my love. No. No. Come.

Constance Must do my duty.

Moncrieff Not the duty of an animal.

Constance Must be as one with the child.

Moncrieff Not like this. Come.

Now - hand the child over. Cling to the child and the child will cling to you.

Constance *hands the baby to Prism.*

Moncrieff Now we will go about our business. My billiards, your piano. And from time to time the child will be shown to us and we will be shown to the child. And so the proper degree of affection between parent and child will grow. You understand?

Constance Yes.

Moncrieff Good. (Ravenhill, *Handbag* 64)

From this dialogue, it is understood that bottle-feeding is preferred in Victorian society since breast-feeding is considered to influence the child's development adversely.

Apart from the concept of motherhood, the mother-child dyad is also explored in the play. These relationships are portrayed as problematic both in the contemporary and the Victorian plot of the play.

In the Victorian plot, when Constance asks Augusta about their mother, Augusta says "Oh don't talk to me of her. I detest our mother" (48). She continues her harsh comments regarding their mother by saying that

Augusta Really, this modern mania for acknowledging one's parents after birth seems to me to be quite senseless.

Constance You shouldn't say such things.

Augusta Mothers should have their eyes plucked out. Blindness is a very attractive thing in a woman. (48)

Through this dialogue, Augusta's hatred towards her mother is revealed once more. Though she herself is a woman, her comments on women reflect patriarchal Victorian ideology regarding the inferior status of women.

In the contemporary plot of *Handbag*, a pathologic mother-daughter bond is portrayed through Lorraine. In the play, Lorraine recently lost her mother and has difficulty in coming to terms with it. Lorraine's utterances also reveal conflicting emotions regarding her mother:

Lorraine ... It's not like I ever liked her. Used to lie awake sometimes. Used to lie awake and think: Wish you'd die. Wish you were dead you old witch. But now ... now ... I ... I go down the shops the same time as her. I watch her programmes. I wear her clothes. I put on her clothes and I watch her programmes and I eat pizza like she used to eat pizza. (20)

Thereby, through Augusta and Lorraine, Ravenhill touches upon mother-daughter relationships. However, while portraying daughters' problematic relationship with their mother, the playwright does not reveal the source of Augusta's and Lorraine's hatred for their own mother.

Consumerism is a significant and recurrent theme in Ravenhill's plays, and *Handbag* revolves around the "characters whose whole vocabulary had been defined by the market, who had been brought up in a decade when all that mattered was buying and selling" (Sierz, *In-Yer-Face Theatre* 123). Claire Wallace states that in the theatre of Ravenhill

[t]he language of consumption is used most strikingly to express the relationships around which the play is structured. These might be classified as familial, business and sexual, though notably the categories are often indistinct and overlap in a variety of patterns. (Wallace 271)

In *Handbag*, Ravenhill criticises consumerism and consumer culture that permeate every aspect of life and corrupt the individuals' relationship with themselves and the others. Ravenhill shows that "[i]t is now the gays and lesbians with their stable and solid identities who are the market-oriented capitalist dupes" (Lewis 221). In the play, David's and Suzanne's professions are market-oriented. Working together in the business, they visit the consumers and live with them for a while in order to videotape what products they use in their daily lives:

David To ask people about tea bags...in a completely new way. We actually go and live with the consumers of tea bags. Tea bags and air fresheners and pizzas. The full gamut of modern life. Live with them for a week, take along a video camera and video their choices, their habits and discover all the stuff statistics never tell us. Yeah. Thought you'd be impressed. (Ravenhill, *Handbag* 14-15)

Their profession lays bare the way modern life in a contemporary capitalist society is invaded by consumption.

In *Handbag*, Ravenhill explores the effect of consumer culture on the family life and family relationships as well. In the play, the family is portrayed as an institution where the consumer habits are passed from one generation to another:

Suzanne (*on video*) And that tea. Is that your regular brand of tea?

Lorraine (*on video*) Oh yeah. We always have this one.

Suzanne (*on video*) And why do you think that is Lorraine?

Lorraine (*on video*) I don't know. It's a family thing. (14)

In the above dialogue, how families are involved in the consumer capitalist society is displayed through Lorraine. The products used by the elder family members, the mother in Lorraine's case, influence the product choice of the younger ones.

Handbag shows how consumer culture influences the family relationships of people who have turned into avid consumers in this market-oriented society. Jacques Donzelot states that "[c]oncentrated on itself, more attentive than before to the least details of the children's education, the family became an avid consumer of everything that might help it to 'realize itself'" (Donzelot 224). Donzelot's statement is dramatised through the 'supposedly' alternative family in *Handbag*:

Mauretta We work so that he can have a future. He's got to have an education. He's not going to end up like ...

Lorraine What? What?

Mauretta He' not going to be a two-pound-an-hour person.

Lorraine Fuck you. Fuck you. (Ravenhill, *Handbag* 56)

In the above dialogue, Ravenhill dramatises how "children constitute a kind of guilt-edged investment" (Donzelot 224). While in the past parents used to invest on their children's education so that in the future their children could support them in times of distress, today entitled to pension, parents do not offer them education so that they can depend on their children. However, "[i]n them, parents begin to cherish promises of success, a compensation, or more accurately, the permissible part of the dream that society has consented to leave to them" (ibid.). Thus, today's parents project their dreams on children and get satisfied by means of them. They lavish gifts and money on their children to help them realise their dreams, and the family thus gets involved in the consumer culture. Thurer draws attention to a New York Times article "It's a Boy! It's a Girl! It's time to Shop" and argues that "[u]pscale 1990s' mothers continue to convert their parental anxiety into fevered consumerism" (296).

Never has a baby been so delicious. Capitalizing on this sentiment, hospital administrators boost business by romanticizing their maternity services with gourmet postpartum dinners and private Jacuzzis. Advertisers from the Gap to IBM to Tyson Chicken and Calvin Klein fragrances have turned to photographs of babies to sell their products. Giving birth turns out to improve the popularity ratings of female television newscasters. Children have become fashion accessories in women's magazines. Politicians and British royalty need only demonstrate affection for their offspring to add warmth and likability to their image. Motherhood is utterly sentimentalized. (Thurer xxiii)

Thereby, not only parents but also their children get involved and consumed in this consumption frenzy. Parenthood gives way to consumption in a capitalist society and

becomes more important "as a social signifier than the act of parenting itself" (Svich, "Commerce and Morality" 87).

Igor Kopytoff argues that "[i]n all contemporary industrial societies, whatever their ideologies, commoditization and monetization tend to invade almost every aspect of existence, be it openly or by way of a black market" (87-88). He defines commodity as "an item with use value that has also exchange value" (64). However, later on he argues that commoditization is not restricted to the universe of things by stating that

In contemporary Western thought, we take it more or less for granted that things - physical objects and rights to them- represent the natural universe of commodities. At the opposite pole we place people, who represent the natural universe of individuation and singularization. This conceptual polarity of individualized persons and commoditized things is recent and, culturally speaking, exceptional. (ibid.)

He indicates that although the separation of people from things dates back to classical antiquity and Christianity, throughout the centuries in different societies people have been commoditized through slavery. However, he also argues that the abolition of slavery once again emphasizes the importance of this distinction (84).

Kopytoff contends that it is "the conceptual distinction between the universe of people and the universe of objects" that plays a vital role in the debates regarding abortion and adoption (ibid). This is the reason why there are certain restrictions for abortion as once it has a life, it cannot be aborted. As for adoption, if the adoption involves a payment transaction, it is considered illegal on the grounds that it implicates the commoditization of the child (84-85).

In *Handbag*, the characters' relationships and familial bonds are highly influenced and shaped by commoditisation. The commoditization of human body is dramatised first through Phil:

Under a bridge.

Phil *is fucking David. Phil pulls away.*

David No. Don't stop. Don't stop.

Phil Fifty quid.

David I don't think I ... I think you've had ... Luncheon vouchers?
AMEX?

Phil Gotta be cash. (Ravenhill, *Handbag* 26)

In the above dialogue, the commoditization of sexual services is clearly seen through Phil, who has an intercourse with David for money. Through the end of the play, Phil also confesses that he let a drug dealer rape his five-year-old daughter in exchange for drugs. This aberrant event also shows how he turned her daughter into a commodity with an exchange value.

Handbag also dramatises how a baby becomes commoditised both in Victorian and the contemporary society. Through *Handbag's* Victorian plot, Ravenhill dramatises the antecedent action of the play and rewrites the commoditisation of baby Earnest in Wilde's text in order to explore the commoditization process. Considered as "[t]he most famous farce in which a baby is treated like an inanimate object" (Varty 221), Wilde's play serves for Ravenhill's dramatic purposes. At the end of the source text of the play, Jack Worthing, who is a grown-up man, turns out to be Lady Bracknell's -or Aunt Augusta's- lost nephew, Earnest. In Wilde's play, through the dialogues it is revealed that Miss Prism, the nanny mistakes the baby for the manuscript, and puts the former in a handbag and the latter in a perambulator. Then, she leaves the handbag in the cloakroom room of Victoria Station. Later on, this handbag is given to Cardew "in

mistake for his own" (Wilde 18). From then on, Cardew takes care of this baby he named Jack. Thus, at the end of the play when Jack restores the handbag to Miss Prism, his identity becomes restored to him.

Ravenhill adds a sinister tone in his rendering of Oscar Wilde's text with his portrayals of the Wildean characters by overemphasizing the egoistical and materialist personality of Augusta, changing Cardew from a philanthropist man to a notorious sodomite, portraying Moncrieff as an emotionally distant Victorian father, and introducing Constance as a pathological mother.

In *Handbag's* Victorian plot, Prism cannot concentrate on writing her novel because of the baby and decides to give it to Cardew by saying "[n]either father nor mother care for you. So, why should I?" (Ravenhill, *Handbag* 64). Thus, Ravenhill turns the climactic confusion in the Wilde's text into an aberrant arrangement:

Prism Bags become easily muddled at Victoria station. It is quite possible, in a moment of mental abstraction, I should place my manuscript in the perambulator and the baby in this handbag. What a confusion. And that, similarly abstracted, you should mistake my bag for your own.

Cardew Victoria Station? Which line?

Prism The Brighton line

Cardew Thank you, thank you. (65)

Thus, the baby is put in a bag as if it was an object and given by egoistical nanny to a notorious sodomite who has been forced to leave the city as a result of his paedophile scandals.

In *Handbag's* contemporary plot, Ravenhill treats artificial insemination in order to explore the commoditization of babies in the late capitalist society. He focuses on the

medical developments and recent exchange technology which enable the commoditization of human attributes.

Kopytoff argues that "the realm of human reproduction is one in which the difference between persons and things is particularly difficult to define, defying all attempts at drawing a simple line where there is a natural continuum" (86). He explores the developments in reproductive technologies and the possibility of the commoditisation of human attributes such as sperm and ova. He explains how the transplantation of ova enables the surrogate motherhood and gives way to commoditization and trafficking of it (86-87). Then, he questions why commoditization of the ova is morally more problematic than the commoditization of the sperm:

Is this because the ovum is seen as the basic core of the future human being? Or because women are expected to feel maternal toward the ova as potential babies and should not sell them, whereas men are not expected to have paternal feelings about their sperm? (Kopytoff 87)

The medical developments in human reproduction result in the commoditization of human attributes. The commoditization of human attributes is of great importance for the play because the baby is conceived through artificial insemination.

In the contemporary half of *Handbag*, the baby of the same-sex couples is conceived through artificial insemination instead of sexual intercourse. Akin to asking a neighbour for a cup of sugar to make a cake, Tom's sperms are requested so that the baby can be conceived. Thus, Tom's sperms might be interpreted as the raw material and the baby as the end product. The commoditisation of the baby is made apparent through floppy larynx, a congenital health problem related to breathing.

In *Handbag*, the playwright dramatises first the commoditisation of the sperm and then the baby. The commoditisation process starts with the sperm when Tom ejaculates in the cup. When "**Mauretta** kisses the cup, passes it around the others who each kiss the cup. Loud music through the walls" (Ravenhill, *Handbag* 9), the sperm in the cup turns into an object used in a ritual or a sacred ceremony.

When baby Jack is born, Mauretta, the biological mother does not want to leave her child fearing that someone might steal him from the hospital. Thus, when the nurses come to take the baby to the maternity ward, she does not want to give him over. In this scene, the dialogue between Mauretta and Tom is of great importance:

Mauretta They wanted to take him away.

Tom Yes?

Mauretta Yes. Snatch him away. Stick a little plastic marker on his wrist and shove him in a plastic box.

Tom Well, I suppose they know what they're up to.

Mauretta It doesn't seem natural. When what you want to do is hold on to him. (28)

In this dialogue, Mauretta protests against her baby being labelled and put in a plastic box as if it was an object or a product. Although the baby is not kidnapped in the hospital, it is later stolen from the lesbian couple's house by Lorraine and Phil. In the play, the act of stealing implies the commoditisation of the baby as well.

In *Handbag*, the baby is commoditised continuously. Even the members of the 'supposedly' alternative family take part in this commoditization:

Mauretta My baby. They took *my* baby.

Tom Our baby.

Mauretta My baby.

Tom He loves me. He'll be missing me.

Mauretta And what did you do? At the end of the day what did you actually do?

Tom I ...

Mauretta You wanked into a cup.

Tom It makes me Dad. I'm a father.

Mauretta It makes you nothing. You're like him. You're like her. You're nothing. (59)

In this scene, the baby turns into a doll that cannot be shared by these adult children in an adult game. Ravenhill states that

[n]obody in these plays is fully adult. They are all needy, greedy, wounded, only fleetingly able to connect with the world around them. Consumerism, late capitalism – whatever we call it – has created an environment of the infant ‘me’, where it is difficult to grow into the adult ‘us’. ("A Tear in the Fabric" 312)

By abducting the baby, Lorraine and Phil also get involved in a dangerous and tragic family game. While Lorraine satisfies her emotional needs through the family atmosphere she created with the existence of the baby, Phil compensates for his past wrongdoings through it. Earlier in the play, Phil mentions how he caused the death of his own daughter by letting a drug dealer rape her in exchange for drugs. Through this baby, he finds the chance to rewrite his family narrative:

Phil And finally the dealer comes for the kid and the dad says: 'I'm free of you. I've got no habit and I'm free of you and I never want to see you again.' And the dealer starts to shake, and then he turns red like a furnace and then smoke comes out of his ears and he burns up until there's just a pair of shoes lying there and they're full of ash and that's the end. (Ravenhill, *Handbag* 60)

However, the unfortunate baby continues to be commoditised in the hands of Phil and Lorraine. After bathing the baby, Phil places it in a cardboard box crib for a pseudo-birth scene, a ritual fuelled by his fantasy:

Phil *picks up the baby, goes to put him in a bag.*

Lorraine What you doing?

Phil Just for a moment.

Lorraine He don't like it in there.

Phil For a moment. How long did you have him in there?

Lorraine That was different, that was. I had to do that. To get him out.

Save him.

Phil Only take a minute.

Phil *opens the bag.*

Phil Bye-bye Jack. Bye-bye.

Phil *puts the baby in the bag.*

Phil Come here.

Lorraine *goes over to Phil. They stand over the bag.*

Phil No more past. Begin again. Begin now. Yeah?

Lorraine Yeah.

Phil *reaches down and takes out the baby.*

Phil Hello Eustace. (61)

In this ritual-like adults' game, taking the baby out of the bag stands for its symbolic birth. At the end of this invented ceremony, baby comes out of the bag with a new identity, Eustace, the name of Cardew's lost boy. Throughout the play, the commoditized baby is used repeatedly, and when it stops breathing due to floppy larynx, it becomes useless and thus is put in a bin-bag so that it can be disposed.

In *Handbag*, the babies in Victorian and contemporary plot shared the same unfortunate fate though their commoditisation process are different. When the play ends, on stage there appears the commoditised babies of two different centuries:

Enter Cardew with handbag. Sets it down carefully. Opens it. Brings out a baby.

Cardew My own.

Enter Lorraine with shopping bag. Puts down shopping bag. Goes to cradle. Sees it is empty.

Phil I did a bad thing. I ...

Lorraine *goes to bin-bag, picks it up*

Cardew My own one.

Lorraine *cradles the bin-bag. Cardew cradles the baby. Phil howls.*

End. (66)

Thus, in the play, the babies of these two different eras are commoditised and treated as if they were a "thing".

Consequently, in *Handbag*, Ravenhill dramatises the changes in the family unit, same-sex families, the concept of motherhood and maternal instinct, consumerism and commoditisation, and the developments in reproductive technologies by alluding to Oscar Wilde's *Importance of Being Earnest*. Comparing a Victorian family with a contemporary family, Ravenhill shows how the family is time and culture-specific. However, while reflecting the change in the family structures and parental practices, he also portrays the recurrent problems in the family institution since Victorian times through the commoditization of the baby both in Victorian and the contemporary society. Through the play's unconventional dramatic structure which commingles these 'seemingly' different worlds, Ravenhill implies that though family structures have changed through the time, the family sphere is still problematic.

CHAPTER V:
STATE INTERVENTION IN THE FAMILY: LINDA MCLEAN'S
***STRANGER, BABIES* (2007)**

5.1. Linda McLean: A Brief Survey of Her Theatre

Linda McLean is a multi-award winning Scottish playwright whose plays include *One good Beating* (1999), *Riddance* (1999), *Word for Word* (2003), *Shimmer* (2004), *strangers, babies* (2007), *Any Given Day* (2010), *Uncertainty Flies* (2010), *Sex and God* (2012), *Every Five Minutes* (2014) and *Glory on Earth* (2017)⁷. She was born in Castlemilk, Scotland and educated at Strathclyde University⁸ (McGlone, Foreword). In 2010-2011, she became a Creative Fellow at Edinburgh University's Institute of Advanced Studies in Humanities where *Gathering Uncertainties*, the conversation between her and Professor Susan Manning, was published. Currently, she works as the chairwoman of The Playwrights' Studio Scotland, which is a national writer's organisation and is also on the Artistic Board of magic Theatre Company in San Francisco. She has also collaborated with theatre makers in İstanbul, Mexico City, Teluca and Bogota ("Linda McLean CV").

Though Linda McLean's plays have been performed internationally and translated into many languages, there are not many critical works that explore her dramatic works. Drawing attention to "the lack of extended critical work on McLean's plays" (McKean 86), Morgan McKean indicates that

⁷ She has also written adaptations such as *Olga* (2001) (adaptation of Finnish playwright Laura Rauhonen's same titled play), *The Last Mission* (2003), (adaptation of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*), *The Problem* (2009) (adapt. of Francois Begaudeau's play *Le Problème*), etc.

⁸ Before her career as a playwright, she worked as a teacher in Israel, Yugoslavia, Sweden, Kenya and the United States.

[a]t a workshop in 2013, David Greig suggested that he should not answer questions about playwriting alone, but should have David Harrower and Linda McLean on stage beside him, indicating the stature she holds within the playwriting community (“Q&A”). In a 2002 article, in which Aleks Sierz lists the names of playwrights identified as part of a “massive revival of New Writing in British Theatre,” McLean appears as a footnote, and although her career and reputation have grown considerably in the time since this was written, an accompanying body of critical work has yet to appear. (ibid.)

As her works have generally been explored within the frame of post-devolutionary drama, there appears a need to briefly address her place in post-devolutionary theatre.

In Adrienne Scullion's "Devolution and Drama: Imagining the Possible" McLean is mentioned along with David Greig, David Harrower, Henry Adam, Gregory Burke, Zinnie Harris, Douglas Maxwell and Iain F. MacLeod. In this article on post-devolution Scottish theatre, Scullion remarks that "[w]hereas 1999 represents a watershed in the political history of Scotland, its impact on the theatrical meanings of Scotland seems more evolutionary" (68). Trish Reid explores the thematic concerns of post-devolution Scottish dramatists and contends that the New Scottish parliament in 1999 "enabled and indeed required, reimaginings of Scotland and Scottishness" (Reid, "Post-Devolutionary Drama" 188). Therefore, the massive change in Scottish political climate has influenced the nation's cultural productions as well:

Questions of inclusion and exclusion, boundaries and borders, whether real or imagined, have for a generation of Scottish playwrights working in a post-devolutionary context, affected their terms of engagements with issues of identity and difference ... All plays are, after all, about identity in one aspect or another and the stage has long been a platform for such issues' discussion. (ibid.)

After having reviewed the post-devolution theatrical works, Adrienne Scullion finds that there appears shared metaphors and thematic concerns in contemporary Scottish plays:

Riccardo Galgani's *The Found Man* (Traverse 2005), Glover's *Shetland Saga*, Greig's *Outlying Islands* (Traverse 2002), Harris's *Further than the Furthest Thing* and McLean's *Shimmer* – are set on islands or coastlines, at the edge of the world and on the brink of things, describing encounters in the fissures, peaks and hollows of geological and psychological pressure, movement and erosion; their characters survey landscapes, map places, describe topographies, chart events ... [A]ll explore the boundaries and limits of identity through metaphors of psychoanalysis and memory. (Scullion 74)

While identity is closely connected to memory, "the space [is] literally echoing and creating memory as soundscape through the dialogue" (McKean 85).

While exploring Scottish identity, McLean makes use of Scottish geography, history, culture and language in her dramatic writing. In *Word for Word*, which portrays three generations of women in a family, the conflict arises "from McLean's use of rhythm of language, repetitions and the lack of understanding between Scots speaking women and English speaking cameraman who comes to film them" (Horvat 152). Imbued with Scottish geography, culture and history, *Shimmer* dramatises characters' struggles in Scottish landscape through an interrupted journey to Island of Iona, which is believed to have miraculously therapeutic effect during midsummer. In the play, the cultural myths constitute the important part of the characters' identities and thus, "their personal identities become a strong metaphor for national identity" (147). The "olden days" with their pilgrims, rituals and mud huts are inscribed in the characters' mind and are waiting to be recalled in today's world, proving that collective memory is no less

important than the personal memory in the formation of the self and identity (McLean, *Shimmer* 56). In the play, Petal's reimagining of her own and her family's reality might be considered as a metaphor for reimagining of Scottish nation and history. *Glory on Earth*, on the other hand, is a history play, dramatising a turbulent period in Scottish history with its portrayals of Mary Stuart, Queen of Scots and John Knox.

In her works, Linda Mclean uses the stage as a site for exploring the family institution as well. In *One Good Beating*, Linda Mclean dramatises past traumas due to the dysfunctional family bonds and shows the destructive results of a problematic family relationship. The play takes place in and out of a coal shed rather than a domestic space. Elaine and Stephen, two siblings, locked their father, Robert in a coal shed in order to take revenge on him for his abusive behaviours in the past. The final straw in this troubled relationship is the death of their mother for whom Robert did not prepare a decent funeral. The absence of the mother in the play is quite symbolic and indicative of how family relationships might bring an end to one's individual existence. The fact that her name is not mentioned by any characters in the play suggests in this abusive family she died without an identity. At the end of the play, Elaine and Stephen consider that taking revenge will not change the past, and the father is let out (Mclean, *One Good Beating*).

Made up of two distinct plays, Play One and Play Two, Linda McLean's *Any Given Day* displays how our beloved family members who are in need of care create emotional and psychological stress in our lives. In Play One, Bill and Sadie live in a council-owned flat in the city, and the stage directions indicate that "[t]hey were, for a long time, kept in a home for the 'mentally defective' but were released into the community when their and other similar institutions were closed in the early 1990s" (Mclean, *Any Given Day* 5). Due to their mental state, they both have great difficulty in

their daily routines. Moreover, these two characters are trapped in their estate as a result of the hostile attitudes from the outside world. As they are wary of strangers and afraid of going outside in the dark, they live in constant fear. The couple's only relief is Bill's niece Jackie, who visits them from time to time on Saturdays. The play dramatises the hardships and cruel abuse they experience while they are waiting for her, ranging from a stone thrown at their window to a boy breaking into their house and verbally, physically and sexually abusing Sadie. The Play Two, on the other hand, focuses on the distress of their niece Jackie, a single mother who has to take care of her invalid child. Jackie is a former nurse who has been working at a bar since she quit her job due to emotional stress. Her mentally ill uncle and invalid son create a life with full of responsibilities, leaving Jackie with feeling of inadequacy and guilty conscience. When taken together, these two plays dramatise the distress of not only physically and mentally ill individuals but also their family members.

In *Shimmer*, Linda McLean portrays the loss and bereavement in the family relationships through a repetitive dramatic structure which suggests how characters trapped in their memories have difficulty in moving on in their lives. In the play, Petal, who is terminally ill is taken by her mother, Missy and grandmother, Hen to the island of Iona, which is believed to have miraculously therapeutic qualities on midsummer day. On the way to Iona, their train stops due to flood, and they have to take shelter in B&B in Tarbet. At the hotel, they meet the hotel's owner, Jim and two in-house guests, Sonny and Guy. Each character's common ground is the loss of a family member: Hen's husband and son who are also Missy's father and brother were trampled to death in 1971 Rangers versus Celtic match, Guy's mother died of illness when he was just seven, Sonny's son died after being crashed by a vehicle at the age of thirty-five and Jim's wife and daughter was drowned in a loch. All these characters are trapped in their memories,

and each new encounter reminds the characters of their losses. Sonny likens Guy to his late son, Jim his late wife to Missy, Guy her late mother to Petal, Missy her estranged partner to Sonny. Thus, the play revolves around how these characters are still under the shadow of their lost family members. These characters live with their ghosts and bring them wherever they go with themselves as the lost ones are engraved in their minds.

5.2. *strangers, babies*

Linda McLean's *strangers, babies* was first performed at the Traverse Theatre on February 23, 2007 (McLean, *strangers, babies*). *strangers, babies* revolves around the adult life of a once-delinquent girl, May and the social works' intervention into her family after she gives birth to her child. The play is a tragedy of a woman who struggles to lead a normal life due to her criminal past and deals with how society and its institutions might alienate a troubled woman rather than helping her out. In a correspondence with Sıla Şenlen Güvenç, McLean explains about the title of the play: "*strangers, babies* (in lower case) would normally be in the middle of a sentence or phrase, in the same way that strangers and babies who may be at risk are in the midst of our communities. If they were upper case they would be easier to identify" (McLean). Thus, through the play's title written entirely in lower-case, McLean also shows that the play dramatises the distress of any strangers and babies that might go unnoticed in the society.

strangers, babies reflects the 1980s and 1990s in Britain where family relationships were brought to the agenda as a result of the rise in child abuse cases and related delinquency. In this period, there appeared a great dissatisfaction with the child welfare system, largely due to their intervention. The general public criticized the state intervention either for their incompetence in dealing with certain cases and lacking

substantial knowledge or for acting 'overzealous' and disregarding parent's rights while making decisions. Therefore, the aim of this chapter is to argue that Linda McLean's *strangers, babies* explores parental abuse and neglect as the underlying reason for delinquency in children and reflects the criticism made on child protection services.

strangers, babies dramatises dysfunctional family relationships, juvenile crimes and tutelary complex with its portrayals of juvenile delinquency cases and state intervention scandals in British history. Therefore, the hinted crime May committed as a child in the play will be treated by referring to the James Bulger case. On the other hand, the welfare intervention in May's family after she gives birth to her child will be handled within the frame of politics of child protection.

The five-act play revolves around May, a troubled woman who is struggling to live under the shadow of her dark past. May is seen talking to a different character in each act, and these dialogues help to reveal more and more about May and her troubled life. The fragmented but interrelated acts give a glimpse of her present life and gradually reveal the murder she committed as a child. Thus, May, the central character, functions to bind the five fragmented but interconnected structure of the play because she is the only character who appears in each of the five acts. However, though the five acts are given in fragments, the scenes are interdependent, and the use of linear time in the play creates a sense of continuity in spite of the time lapse. The fragmented structure of the play might both stand for her fragmented family and suggest her inability to get into the flow of life due to her criminal past. Furthermore, as the only woman character, she tries to survive in this male-dominated play with a criminal past. In each act, May talks to a different man, respectively, her husband, father, online lover, her brother and social worker. These five characters shed light on different sides of May and, as the play progresses, reveal her past crime.

By portraying an adult character who was once a juvenile delinquent, *strangers, babies* initially delves into themes of juvenile crimes, dysfunctional family relationships, neglected or unloved children. In order to explore children's crimes and the effect of dysfunctional family on the development of delinquent behaviours in children, the tragic murder of James Bulger in British history should be scrutinized as there appears a parallel between the Bulger case and the fictional murder in the play.

May's past crime is a reminder of a similar event that occurred fourteen years before the play's premier. On February 12, 1993, two-year-old James Bulger was killed by two ten-year-old boys, Robert Thompson and Jon Venables. Taking advantage of his mother's momentary obliviousness in Bootle Shopping Centre, Thompson and Venables took James Bulger to a railway line in order to torture him to death (Lusher). About the tragic event, Adam Lusher writes

[t]hey poured modelling paint into the toddler's eyes, stoned him and clubbed him with half-bricks. They kicked and stamped on him, before battering him with a 22lb iron bar they found lying by the track. Then they left the toddler's dead body on the railway line, to be sliced in two by a train (ibid.).

There were also signs of sexual abuse as well since "James's shoes and stockings, trousers and underpants had been taken off. And the pathologist's report read out in court recorded that the child's foreskin had been manipulated" (Sereny). This horrific murder led to the reconsideration of the concepts of childhood that had been made until then, and the debates about whether children are innocent or innately evil creatures heated up. Bob Franklin and Julian Petley in "Killing the Age of Innocence: Newspaper Reporting of the Death of the James Bulger" write about the newspapers' stance regarding the children:

Journalists squared the circle and resolved the evident mismatch between ideal and reality in one of two ways. The first possibility involved what James and Jenks describe as 'conceptual eviction'; some journalists thus defined Venables and Thompson as anomalous exceptions to childhood, leaving the category of childhood as an age of innocence intact. This strategy was adopted by journalists at the *Daily Mirror*, 25 November, and articulated in the headline which branded Venables and Thompson as 'Freaks of Nature'. Lord Denning was a predictable advocate of this view declaring 'such terrible wickedness in two young lads' to be 'a freak incident' (*Sun*, 25 November 1993). *Today* also presented the two convicted boys as exceptions: 'I believe human nature spurts out freaks' claimed a police officer. 'These two were freaks who just found each other. You should not compare these two boys with other boys— they were evil' (*Today*, 25 November 1993). But the great majority of newspapers, like the *Times* and the *Daily Mail* ... redefined children as a threat and childhood as containing innate evil. (142)

Shock-stricken public and media tried to understand how such an horrendous murder could be committed by two little boys, and before long questions arose as to why it happened. Angela Neustatter and Liz Hunt entitled their article *Young Criminals are "Sad Rather Than Bad"* and gave wide coverage to the psychiatrists' views concerning the relationship between the improper upbringing and troubled children. In this article, Dr Janet Reibstein states "[y]ou cannot say it is simply a matter of original sin. There are things which happen to children which push them to an emotional breaking point" and Dr Michael Little indicates that "[w]e are talking about children so emotionally undernourished that they are caught in their own turmoil and pain and may act that out on another child ...". (Neustatter and Hunt)

In *strangers, babies*, through the end of the play, it becomes apparent that May was once a juvenile delinquent involved in a murder similar to that of James Bulger. In the play, Linda McLean creates suspense as the murder is not openly stated by any one

of the characters but hinted first by her father, Duncan, then by her brother, Denis, and lastly by the child protection social worker, Abel. However, these hints get more and more obvious as the play progresses.

May's relationship with her family of origin, on the other hand, seems to be problematic as the dialogues with her father and brother reveal that her family was abusive and neglectful towards their children. May's abusive alcoholic father, the absence of her mother in the family unit, the disintegrated relationship between May and her brother are indicative of dysfunctional relationship patterns in May's family of origin.

May's relationship with her family of origin is first seen in the second act, "The very smell". In this act, May pays a visit to her father, Duncan, who is staying at a hospice. Although the diagnosis is not mentioned in the play, the setting and the dialogues between the father and daughter reveal that he is a terminally ill patient with a liver condition that makes him seem pale. In this act, from the first encounter on, Duncan exhibits emotionally and verbally abusive behaviours towards May. When May enters the room, he first gets annoyed by her smiling face, and then his hostility towards her gradually accelerates:

Duncan ...

Worst I can do

Lying here

Is embarrass you with a bit of shouting

WHERE IS MY BLODDY PORRIDGE

May I am not embarrassed

Duncan

...

I don't want you sitting there

Smiling

you don't deserve (Mclean, *strangers, babies* 29).

The dialogue between the father and daughter in this scene reveals that Duncan abuses May verbally and emotionally. Until the end of the act, there appears neither a loving relationship nor a strong bond between them. In this scene, Duncan wants May to bring a bottle of whisky, and when May turns down his request, Duncan says:

Duncan Who else?

Who else is going to come?

Your brother?

No he wouldn't dare.

Your ...?

No

Never

Nobody. (26)

The triple dots in Duncan's lines might suggest his avoidance of saying "your mother". Although the cause of the family breakup is unclear, Duncan's current disease and craving for a bottle of whisky points to an alcohol addiction.

Moreover, apart from showing the dysfunction of May's family of origin, in this act Duncan's lines "How did that ever happen? / How could you have?/ Unforgivable" (31) and "Little / Thing / Might turn out so wrong/ so bad" (32) indicate that May did something terribly wrong in the past. The act ends with Duncan high on morphine saying "Daddy forgives you/ that's my girl/ That's my smile/ Poor wee thing." (32).

In *Child Abuse and Neglect in UK Today* it is stated that young people who have been subjected to child maltreatment are more inclined to delinquent acts, and "[t]he more the experiences of abuse, the higher the level of poorer emotional wellbeing and delinquency found" (Radford et al. 119). Therefore, it might be suggested that her

abusive father might have been the underlying cause for her past wrongdoings hinted in the play.

In the third act, "Breasts and etcetera" while May and Roy, a man he met in one of the online chat-rooms, are talking about the lack of passion in their life in a hotel room, May says that she has never felt passion for anything in her life so far but just experienced overwhelming anger when she was young. When they start discussing if anger can be considered a kind of passion, the way she describes her anger shows its intensity and magnitude:

May It filled every part of me
Top to toe
Gut to nerve end
I exploded if I didn't get rid of it
...
Roy Yes
Yes
May You can hurt someone
If you don't find some way of letting that kind of
Anger (41-42)

In National Institute for Health and Care Excellence's (NICE) guideline, *Child Abuse and Neglect* it is stated that child abuse and neglect should be considered if

a child shows repeated, extreme or sustained emotional responses that are out of proportion to a situation and are not expected for the child's age or developmental stage or fully explained by a medical cause, neurodevelopmental disorder (for example, ADHD, autism spectrum disorders) or bipolar disorder and the effects of any known past abuse or neglect have been explored. Examples of these emotional responses include:

- anger or frustration expressed as a temper tantrum in a school-aged child
- frequent rages at minor provocation
- distress expressed as inconsolable crying. (*Child abuse and neglect* 21)

In *strangers, babies*, May's destructive emotions, failure in anger management, tendency to violence all point to dysfunctional relationships in the family. As May's character is revealed more in each scene, it becomes apparent that what is deemed "unforgivable" in the previous act by her father might be related to a violent criminal act fuelled by her anger (Mclean, *strangers, babies* 31).

In the fourth act, "Dark at half past three", Duncan's implications start to make more sense with her brother, Denis's comments on May's pregnancy. In the park at night, May meets Denis for the first time after a long while. When she informs him about her pregnancy, Denis's comments reveal the nature of the crime she committed as a child. Though it is not stated openly by either of them, Denis's statements "You can't / They won't let you/ We can't"(Mclean, *strangers, babies* 59), "We can't do babies"(60), "We can't be trusted" (65) suggest that she has a criminal past. His use of first-person plural personal pronoun, "we", might also suggest that though he might not have involved in the criminal act, he was there and thus now suffers from a guilty conscience. Denis also claims that the authorities will not permit her to have a child because of her criminal past.

As the scene progresses, he starts talking about horrific possibilities about delinquent children and bullied children, and projects his thoughts onto May's future child.

Denis This park

In a city

A city
Urban
City kids
You don't know them
You know that
Can't know them.

...

May It's
Kids
Kids
They don't know what they're doing
We didn't know what we were doing

...

Denis What if your boy doesn't like other children?
What if he's the one to be afraid of (61-62).

May's statement "[w]e didn't know what we were doing" (66) suggests that Denis's explicit portrait about children and childhood results from their own experiences. In this act, bits and pieces from May's statements, and Denis's anxiety and fears suggest that May was a juvenile murderer whose victim is another child.

The act is also important as May's revelation about the dysfunction in her family of origin more than once displays how the child delinquency is closely related with the problems in the family:

May If we'd been watched
If we'd been cared for

...

May: We weren't loved
You and/me
Not in the way other children
We were hurt (62, 66)

May's statements show that she considers the maltreatment of her family as the cause of her criminal act. Nicholas Rose claims that

If parents had problems with their own emotional life, they would build these unconsciously into their attitudes and relations to their children, hence transmitting psychical disturbance across generations without the need to posit any hereditary process ... Love was no longer merely a moral duty or a romantic ideal, it was the element in which were produced normal and abnormal children. Normality was now to be promoted not through coercion after the event - the removal of a pathological child and the disablement of the family - but by inciting the family itself to take on board the business of production of normal subjects. (*Governing the Soul* 160)

In the light of the quotation above, in *strangers, babies*, May's parents failed to realise their essential objective of bringing up 'normal' individuals with their own troubled lives. Emotional and verbal abuse of Duncan, his alcohol problems and parental neglect obviously led to her aberrant delinquency in her childhood.

strangers, babies also deals with how a fully grown up woman, as a result of the crime she committed as a minor, is having difficulties in both leading and shaping her life. From then on, the play touches upon another important theme, tutelary complex. To explore tutelage, terrifying child abuse incidents and notorious state intervention cases in British history from 1970s to 2000s, and the Children Acts of 1989 and 2004 should be scrutinised in the analysis of the play.

Rose states that "[t]he soul of the young citizen has become the object of government through expertise" to emphasise that governments' concerns for children result from the need for an orderly society (*Governing the Soul* 134). Jane Pilcher and Stephen Wagg claims that

children are mainly present in New Right discourse as instruments of wider political concerns about the condition of society—concerns which have included the relationship of the state to the private sphere, parental responsibility, support for ‘the family’, law and order and sexual morality. (Pilcher and Wagg 4)

That is, bridging the gap between the state and the family institution, the child plays a prominent role in the state's policy. The child is on the line where the public and the private is divided, and is ready to become a matter of public concern when something is going wrong in the private realm. Thus, by means of the child protection social workers, the government aims "to preserve a positive image of childhood and family life in a postmodern world of uncertainty by controlling and minimising deviations from family ideals" (Hill and Tisdall 217).

In order to further explain the relationship between the state and the family institution, a brief history of state social work, its change and development should be given. Nigel Parton states that in the immediate post-war period there was an optimism about family and children social work, and the state intervention in the family was considered to be influential in improving the lives of the citizens. On the other hand, from the late 1960s onwards, there was a growing criticism on state interventions as it was thought that these interventions violated the individuals' rights under the guise of welfare. These criticisms led to the foundation of pressure groups such as the National Association for One Parent Families, Justice for Children, the Children's Legal Centre and the Family Rights Group and Parents Against INjustice (PAIN) (46-47).

In the context of welfarism, social work was institutionalized when "the local authority social services departments" were founded in 1971 (46). Though the process of social work and the qualifications of a social worker were not clarified in the law,

child abuse was considered to be a medico-social problem which could be solved through the collaboration of paediatricians and child psychiatrists with social workers. Thus, with the issue of a Department of Health and Social Security circular in April 1974, the process of child abuse management began (46-47).

In the early 1970s with the death of Maria Colwell there appeared some concerns about the child care system and the skills of the social workers (46-48). During the 1980s, the death of Jasmine Beckford, Tyra Henry and Kimberley Carlile led to the public inquiries as these children were killed either by parent or step parents despite the fact that they were under social care (Winter and Connolly 33). Parton states that these deaths "were usually seen as particular instances of the current state of policy, practice knowledge and skills and of the way systems operated and interrelated" (48).

The public trust in the social workers was once more damaged with the Cleveland inquiry in 1988. However, this time social workers were criticised not because they failed to protect. On the contrary, in Cleveland case social workers were considered "overzealous" in their attempts as they proved to be unaccountable in their actions. Moreover, the methods used to diagnose sexual abuse turned out to be controversial and not quite right. After the Cleveland case, the events in Nottingham, Rochdale and, in particular, the Orkneys, all increased the public concerns about the state authorities' improper interventions. (Hill and Tisdal 207; Winter and Connolly 33-35).

As a result of the unaccountable actions of social services in Cleveland, there appeared a need to create a legal framework for the process of decision making regarding the children and their families, and from then on, the conviction that child abuse should be regarded as socio legal problem came out (Parton 49; Hill and Tisdal

206-208). The required changes in the nature and process of social services found their place in the Children Act of 1989. This act proclaims that social workers should recognise the rights of individuals in the family in the process of decision making:

Before making any decision with respect to a child whom they are looking after, or proposing to look after, a local authority shall, so far as is reasonably practicable, ascertain the wishes and feelings of—

- (a) the child;
- (b) his parents;
- (c) any person who is not a parent of his but who has parental responsibility for him; and
- (d) any other person whose wishes and feelings the authority consider to be relevant, regarding the matter to be decided. (*Children Act 1989*, S22,(4) (a) (b) (c) (d))

Furthermore, the individual's right to end the state intervention is also included in the act as following:

Any of the following may apply to the court for an emergency protection order to be discharged—

- (a) the child;
- (b) a parent of his;
- (c) any person who is not a parent of his but who has parental responsibility for him; or
- (d) any person with whom he was living immediately before the making of the order (*Children Act 1989* S.45, (8))

In what circumstances the state should intervene is also stated clearly as "[a] court may only make a care order or supervision order if it is satisfied— (a) that the child concerned is suffering, or is likely to suffer, significant harm" (*Children Act 1989* S.31 (2)(a)).

The inquiry into the death of Victoria Climbié, another child abuse victim, led to the writing and implementation of the Children Act of 2004 (Penna 146). This act amends the Children Act of 1989 and is important in the creation of databases regarding the child in care (*Children Act of 2004* S12). Moreover, the areas of concern regarding the child's welfare is stated as following:

The arrangements are to be made with a view to improving the well-being of children in the authority's area so far as relating to—

- (a) physical and mental health and emotional well-being;
- (b) protection from harm and neglect;
- (c) education, training and recreation;
- (d) the contribution made by them to society;
- (e) social and economic well-being. (*Children Act of 2004* S10 (2))

Knowles states that "[t]he idea of the tutelary complex makes the point that family life is only a partially private domain. The family constantly erupts into public concern when agencies of surveillance detect serious violations of certain norms and practices" (34). However, unless the family don't violate the law, there is a high possibility that the family affair turns out to be a state affair.

In the play, May's lack of caring skills is implied right from the start through the first scene, *Greenstick fracture*. The act is composed of a dialogue between May and her husband, Dan in their flat. Having seen a bird lying motionless in their balcony, May tries to figure out if it is wounded or dead and even becomes obsessive about it. However, though she seems preoccupied with the bird and keeps telling Dan that she wants to help it if it is alive, she does not take action. Instead, she tries to identify the species of the bird, speculates on the injury it might have, has an argument over the birds' tweets with Dan, who thinks the right term should be "calling" rather than "singing" (Mclean, *strangers, babies* 6). Though at first Dan warns May she should help

it immediately if she is determined to save it, later on he gets lost in these discussions as well. Saying that since the very beginning he has not approved of her putting the feeder on the balcony, Dan starts complaining for not being able to use the balcony because of the birds. Afterwards, Dan tries to end the argument by saying:

Dan Okay
 Okay
 Help the bird
 Whatever you have to do to help the bird is fine
 But I'm taking the feeder off the balcony
 ...
May ...
 If I don't help the little
 The young bird
 Can we keep the feeder on the balcony? (12-13)

In this dialogue, May acts selfishly and sacrifices the little bird without hesitation to prevent Dan from taking the feeder off. At the end of the act, they consider moving to a new house with a garden, and May leaves the bird on the balcony to its fate. Through this scene, May is shown to be scatter-brain, self-centred and egoistical woman who lacks the ability to take care of a living being.

Her parenting skills are questioned by the authorities in the last act, "He's a sleep", in which May is visited by a social worker, Abel, who came to check on her son, Sam. While Abel is talking to May about her child, Sam and taking notes about Sam's health, May feels anxious about her maternity's being relentlessly questioned by the authorities due to her notorious past. However, despite being infamous, she seems to be a caring mother who is doing her best for her child. Fearing that her child's sleep will be disturbed if Abel checks on him, May demands that Abel leave the house and come

back to examine him later on. However, determined to see Sam, Abel wakes him at last, and the play ends with Sam's cries.

Through the symbolic names "Abel" and "Sam", the playwright makes allusion to the Old Testament to reinforce the meaning of the play. Abel, the second child of Adam and Eve, was murdered by his brother Cain because of jealousy and became the first domestic victim (Genesis 4: 1-16). By alluding to this archetypal family in Genesis, the playwright shows that since the beginning of the human existence, the family has always been problematic.

In the play Sam is the other symbolic name given to May's son. By alluding to Samuel in the Old Testament, the playwright draws an analogy between the suffering of Samuel's mother, Hannah and May. In the Old Testament Elkanah had two wives, named Peninnah and Hannah. Feeling jealous as a result of Elkanah's affection towards Hannah, Peninnah, who had children of her own humiliate Hannah due to her infertility. Hannah prayed to God for a child, and God heard her prayers and gave her Samuel (1 Samuel 1: 1-28). In *strangers, babies*, on the other hand, the struggles of a woman who wants to give birth to a child in spite of the social pressure following her outrageous crime are depicted. Though their suffering results from different reasons, these two characters have the same common ground as they both want to have a child.

This act is prominent as it scrutinises the implementation of child protection services. Rose states that

[i]n different ways, at different times, and by many different routes varying from one section of society to another, the health, welfare, and rearing of children have been linked in thought and practice to the destiny of the nation and the responsibilities of the state. The modern child has become the focus of innumerable projects that purport to safeguard it from

physical, sexual, or moral danger, to ensure its 'normal' development, to actively promote certain capacities of attributes such as intelligence, educability, and emotional stability. (*Governing the Soul* 123)

The endeavour of the state regarding the protection of children is tackled in *strangers, babies*. In the play, the process of child welfare services such as the guidelines that should be followed, on the spot checks, and examining the child not only for cuts and bruises but also for "listlessness/ fearfulness/ evidence of malnutrition" (McLean, *strangers, babies* 73) are all mentioned. In the play, through Abel, McLean shows that

[c]hild protection legislation has imposed powers and duties upon local authorities, requiring them to evaluate the standards of care being provided to children by their parents through the agencies of social work, and to intervene into the family to rectify shortcomings, utilizing legal mechanisms where necessary. (Rose, *Governing the Soul* 123)

As indicated in the quotation, in the play anything that might pose a threat to the child's development is taken into account by Abel. Its sleep habits, weight, regular health checks and even the lyrics of the lullaby are examined by him.

However, the play also shows how this process could lead to trouble and anxiety through a social worker's lack of empathy and understanding. Though May proves herself to be a caring and nurturing mother, she is continuously under the pressure of proving herself to the authorities fearing that she might lose her child if something goes wrong. Moreover, Abel's alienating attitude increases her stress and anxiety.

In the beginning of the act, May informs Abel that her son, Sam is asleep so that Abel will not disturb him. When Abel takes notes regarding Sam's poor sleep habit:

May You don't have to write that down
Do you?

Abel Write everything down

That's the mantra

Never can tell what's

Relevant

May But he's just

Lots of children have trouble with

Sleeping (68)

As May is considered by the authorities to have a potential to pose a threat for her own child due to her criminal past, at first Abel appears to be cautious social worker. However, as the act progresses, it becomes gradually more clear that he lacks the empathy required for his occupation. For instance, when May expresses her desire not to be checked by welfare authorities which she thinks only cause distress, Abel says: "[t]hat boy has a vengeful family / At least we're on your side" (69). As a social worker, Abel appears to be incompetent since while he is trying to sooth her, he only worries her more by reminding her of the "vengeful family" of the child May probably killed or seriously harmed.

When May loses her control for a brief moment due to Abel's persistence in checking Sam and quibbling over his sleep habits, Abel reveals his exclusionary attitude:

Abel ...

But if I don't do this

Don't check your child

And anything happens

Who will be for the chop?

May Me

Abel Well, apart from you

You're not

I'm deemed to be

Responsible

May He's my boy
I look after him
He's my responsibility

Abel You know the way it is
A child from
A woman like you
You know what that means
I don't have to
Spell
It
Out (70 - 71)

In this dialogue, Abel appears as highly judgemental against May and consciously makes her feel socially excluded.

Moreover, in the play it becomes clear that as a mother May's knowledge on children exceeds that of Abel, who is expected to be well-informed about them due to his profession. When Abel insists on calling Sam baby:

May He's not baby anymore
Abel They're babies till they're six or seven
In my eyes
May No No
Babies
Then toddlers
They don't stay babies forever
Then/ infants
Abel Babies
All of them
May Then juniors (77)

With the solutions she has found for her child's lack of appetite, May also appears to be an interested mother with improved caring skills. For instance, she prepares finger-size

fresh fruits, and makes soups and pours them in ice-cube trays so her son can enjoy teething them. These practical solutions even arise Abel's interest, and he starts writing them down so his partner who is expecting a baby can make use of them.

Throughout the act, while Abel is sceptically and suspiciously questioning every detail, May gets so stressed over being misunderstood by the authorities that she feels the need to explain herself:

Abel Are you a bit frazzled?

May Frazzled?

Are you writing that down?

No

No

I'm not

Frazzled.

I am a bit tired

Do mums not get tired?

Ordinary mums

Do they not get tired? (71)

Her fears about being misunderstood increases so much that she tries to be careful with her words and hesitates in using the words that might suggest danger:

May ...

He doesn't like cutlery

Don't write that

He likes to feed himself (75)

The destructive effects of these stressful visits on May are most evident when she says she can't breastfeed her son as her breasts have dried up:

May Thin milk

...

Worry deteriorates the quality of the milk
And they kept coming
Making me worry more
... (74)

strangers, babies explicitly shows that "over the present century, a new visibility has been accorded to the child in its life within the household and outside it, and the 'private' family has been opened up to social powers and allocated social duties" (Rose, *Governing the Soul* 124). Moreover, the play revolves around a moral question: Is there a possibility for a woman who was involved in a child murder when she was a little girl to become a good mother?

At the core of *strangers, babies*, dysfunctional family relationships and their destructive effects on individuals' lives are explored. Therefore, the family institution is also tackled within the frame of family relations as well. In the second act, "The very smell", May's dysfunctional family of origin is dramatised through the relationship between May and her abusive father, Duncan. Her family of origin's disintegration and Duncan's alcohol addiction are also implied in this scene. In the fourth act, "Dark at half past three", the portrayal of May's relationship with her brother, Denis reveals more about their childhood traumas and abusive relationships in their family of origin. The effect of parental abuse on May's psychology is also shown in this scene as May has difficulty in focusing on a subject and making a proper conversation. During the conversation, while trying to understand May, Denis gets so lost that he makes such comments as "Fucking wander wander" (McClean, *strangers, babies* 52), "A complete and utter lack of control of the/function of the brain" (52), "Have a fucking thought/ You have half a fucking thought and you let it roam" (52), "And everybody else has to keep track of where you've been/ You stupid fucking cow" (53), and "I AM LOST" (57).

The detrimental effects of her family of origin both on her family of procreation and personal life are depicted throughout the play as well. For instance, in the first act "Greenstick Fracture", in which May's family of procreation is dramatised, May's relationship with her husband seems to be full of disagreements and conflicts. They even dispute over whether the right term for the birds' tweets should be "call" or "song". As the scene progresses, they quarrel about whether they should bring the bird to the veterinarian or not.

The act, "The Greenstick Fracture", -through its title as well- also stands for the breaking point in May's childhood. An analogy might be drawn between the injured bird and May. The line "[i]njured things can survive" gives a hint about her own life as well (7). Moreover, the lines "I've never seen a bird hurt its young / Have you?" (15) show her need for reassurance since she rightfully has fears about having and raising a child.

The third act, "Breasts and etcetera", also touches upon May's family of procreation. In this scene, May appears as a woman with masochistic desires who pursues extramarital sex and dates a man she found on the internet, thinking that he might inflict some kind of pain on her during intercourse as her husband wouldn't. It can be suggested that her desire to get hurt and humiliated might stem from her problematic relationship with her abusive father, Duncan.

Alluding to the unforgettable and soul-shattering Bulger Case, *strangers, babies* is a quite controversial play that revolves around a woman who has become a mother in spite of the fact that in the past she was a juvenile delinquent involved in the murder of a child. The play focuses on her family relationships and shows her hardships as a mother due to the interventions of welfare agencies. The play reflects current public

debates concerning the state's welfare agencies and explores wide range of subjects such as dysfunctional family, juvenile crimes and tutelary complex.



CONCLUSION

Family is quite a controversial subject since the family as a concept does not have an unequivocal definition (Gittins 155). In any examinations of the family institution, it should be considered that the family is culture-bound and time-specific (Barret and McIntosh 33). Moreover, while the family institution is explored, the Ideology of Marriage and Family should be taken into account as well since the institution and the ideology are interrelated and reinforce each other. However, in its own right, the family ideology is presumably much stronger than one realises (8). It should also be indicated that there is, and has always been, a wide gap between the portrayal of the family in the family ideology and the family in reality (Gittins 2). In spite of this gap, the family life as a model has permeated all spheres of society and its public institutions in such a way that the fact that society has a familial character should also be taken into account in the study of the family institution (Barrett and McIntosh 8). This thesis explores how the prevalence of the family ideology coerces individuals into conforming to its specifications and could lead to tragic outcomes when problems arise in the family life and family relationships (Arroba 8).

The family ideology reinforces the supposition that the individual finds happiness and comfort only through family relationships (Klepfish 97). However, in reality, the family home might turn into a place where one's very existence is threatened by a close family member (Hill and Tisdall 197). In British history, problems in the family institution have been brought to agenda every now and then, revealing that abusive family relationships are quite prevalent in the society (Hill and Tisdal 197). In the 1960s, parental abuse had been able to be diagnosed by means of the new radiology techniques for the first time, introducing the concept of "battered babies" to the

literature. The death of Maria Colwell (1973), Jasmine Beckford (1984), Tyra Henry (1984) and Kimberley Carlile (1986), and the abuse scandals in Cleveland (1987), Nottingham (1987, 1989), Rochdale (1990) and Orkneys (1991) created a great public concern and resulted in the questioning of not only the family life and family relationships but also the social work intervention. With the Bulger Incident (1993), delinquent children became the focus of attention, resulting in the reconsideration of the link between parental abuse or neglect and delinquency (Hill and Tisdall, 198, 207-208; Parton 46-48; Winter and Connolly 33-35; Garret 127; Franklin and Petley 148).

Thus, between 1979 and mid 2007 British governments sought to control, discipline and regulate the family institution (Knowles 33). Furthermore, changing family structures became much more evident in the 1990s and 2000s with the increase in the number of teenage mothers, lone parents, absent fathers and blended families, and owing to the developments in new reproductive technologies and the emergence of alternative family structures such as lesbian, gay and queer families. Thus, British governments were obliged to pay particular attention to the family institution in order to reconsider the family relationships in a fast-changing world. However, it should also be noted that policies concerning the family were considerably shaped by governments' economic policies and social control purposes during this period. (Barret and McIntosh 12). Margaret Thatcher's endorsement of the family autonomy, John Major's "back to basics" campaign, and Tony Blair's "Sure Start" and "New Deal for Lone Parents" programmes, and reforms in the home-school agreements in the School Standards and Framework Act of 1998 evince the governments' endeavours to reorganise the family as a self-sufficient and self-reliant organisation that requires little support from the state and to control the society by imposing more conventional life styles.

Within this conjuncture, between 1990 and mid 2007 playwrights turned to the family and dramatised dysfunctional and abusive family relationships, teenage mothers, absent fathers, reproductive technologies and alterations in the family structure. They also explored the effect of financial difficulties, crime, chronic physical and psychological illnesses, death, and marriage breakdown on family relationships. In the new writings and new works of this period, the family is present even in its absence, waiting to be recalled or mentioned by the characters.

In the light of the historical background, this thesis attempts to analyze Anthony Neilson's *Year of the Family*, Mark Ravenhill's *Handbag* and Linda McLean's *strangers, babies* within British theatrical context as representative texts that mirror family issues in British history by adopting a critical approach to the family ideology used by British governments for their economic interest and surveillance of society.

As a critical response to the UN International Year of the Family (1994), Anthony Neilson's *Year of the Family* dramatises the struggles and hardships of the individuals whose lives do not comply with the Ideology of Marriage and Family. The UN International Year of the Family evinces that the United Nations considers the family life and family relationships in need of being controlled and regulated (Rodger 2). During the 1990s in Britain, the increase in father absence, teenage motherhood and lone parenthood created an economic concern for the state. Major's endeavours to reshape the family institution through pro-family campaigns such as "back to basics" resulted from the economic concerns of his government which envisaged that unconventional family structures would lead to disruptions in the social policy (Rodger 122). However, as the family institution was held as a model by the government, those living outside the traditional family unit were discriminated and felt left out (DePaulo and Morris, "Singles in Society" 58-65).

In *Year of the Family*, Neilson dramatises that due to the importance given to the family institution in the society, individuals become vulnerable and pathetic when their family life is in crisis. In the play, family relationships turn out to be the characters' weakest point: Fliss becomes delusional due to her father's death, Claire compensates her father's absence by forming a romantic relationship with Dickie, a man old enough to be her father, and Sid tries to take revenge on his father after his father leaves his family for Claire. *Year of the Family* also explores individuals' desperate attempts to adhere to the prevalent family values in the society. In the last scene, in order to celebrate the New Year in a family atmosphere, Fliss and Claire create a pseudo family in which Tramp becomes their father and Dickie, dressed in woman's clothes, becomes their mother.

Year of the Family also revolves around family conflicts and dysfunctional family relationships. Neilson's treatment of the family life and family relationships include parental loss, blended family, sexual abuse by a step-parent, family disintegration and half-sibling relationships. Fliss and Claire, the half siblings of a disintegrated blended family, have a problematic relationship with each other because of the past dysfunctional relationships in their family. The dialogues reveal that the sexual abuse of Fliss by Claire's father, Brian caused the dissolution of this blended family in the play. The relationship between Sid and his father, Dickie, on the other hand, is another example of dysfunctional family as Sid overreacts to his parents' break-up and tries to take revenge on his father by having an affair with his father's young girl friend, Claire.

Consequently, the dramatic events in the play are generally illustrative of two things: Firstly, in a society where the family institution is given excessive and unnecessary importance, the characters feel bereft when a problem arises in the family.

Secondly, the family household might turn out to be a place where your physical and psychological wellbeing are in danger contrary to the safe and peaceful portrayals of the family in the Ideology of Marriage and Family.

As the time has progressed, attitudes towards same-sex relationship have changed as well. Gay movements from 1970s onwards, preceded by the politically mild homophile campaigns of 1950s have been quite influential in legislative amendments concerning same-sex relationships from 1990s onwards (Weeks 364; Garret 132). These legislative regulations have led to the formation of alternative family structures through civil partnerships, same-sex marriages, and new regulations concerning adoption and assisted reproductive technologies.

Mark Ravenhill's *Handbag* is a representative dramatic text that portrays how today's family structure and concept of the family have changed since Victorian times. With its two intertwined plots, *Handbag* dramatises contemporary same-sex family relationships and rewrites *Oscar Wilde's Importance of Being Earnest*. Through *Handbag*, Ravenhill shows that the familial practices are not universal but rather culture and time-specific. The household arrangements, the division of domestic sphere and the parental practices in the Victorian plot differ greatly from those in the contemporary plot. While in the Victorian plot breastfeeding the baby and showing excessive affection are thought to result in clinginess in a child, in the contemporary plot they are considered requisite for the healthy development of the child. In spite of these different practices, on the other hand, the babies in both eras suffer tragic consequences. Thus, *Handbag* shows that though family structures and family life styles have changed substantially since Victorian times, the family home in both eras is a dangerous place especially for children.

In *Handbag*, Ravenhill tackles consumerism in terms of family relationships by drawing a parallel between Victorian and the contemporary world. Ravenhill's portrayal of market-oriented and self-centred characters suggests that the depicted contemporary world is under Thatcher's lasting influence. The impact of Thatcher's highly selective use of Victorian ideals on the emergence of consumer culture in British society is reflected through the play's structure which intertwines both eras. The family in *Handbag* is depicted as an avid consumer in the capitalist society. In the contemporary plot, the similarity between the consuming habits of Lorraine and of her deceased mother, David and Susan's professions in the advertising agency, and Mauretta's financial investments on the future of her baby Jack show how consumerism is inherent in today's world.

Along with consumerism, the play also depicts commoditisation. While Phill's intercourse with David in exchange for money and his letting a drug dealer rape his daughter to get drugs show commoditisation of the human body, baby Earnest's being given to Sodomite Cardiff in a handbag by Prism in the Victorian plot display how the baby is treated as if it was an inanimate object. Ravenhill also touches upon reproductive technologies in order to show how the developments in reproductive technologies might lead to the commoditisation of babies. In the play, first Tom's sperms and then Baby Jack is recurrently commoditised. Baby Jack's congenital health problem, floppy larynx also signifies its commoditisation. Thus, while in the Victorian plot the baby is put in a handbag as if it was a commodity ready for future use, in the contemporary plot the baby is abused to death and put in a bin bag as if it was disposable.

In *Handbag*, though Mauretta, Susanne, Tom and David find an opportunity to start an alternative family together through in vitro fertilization, they fail utterly because

their relationships are influenced by heteronormative practices. Leading homonormative lives shaped by domestinnormative practices, these characters experience relationship conflicts when David and Suzanne emotionally or sexually involved with someone other than family members. Thus, Ravenhill shows that in spite of the changes in the family structures, the family is a problematic domain as the 'supposedly' alternative family disintegrate tragically at the expense of their baby's life.

Surveillance of moral and social behaviour is clearly seen in British governments' family related policies and welfare services. Linda McLean's *strangers, babies* explores the surveillance of family relationships and social control of the family life by focusing on child protection services. *strangers, babies* shows how dysfunctional family relationships could lead to tragic consequences by depicting the relationships of May, who was once a juvenile delinquent probably involved in a child murder. The play dramatises how parental abuse can be the underlying cause of delinquency through the dysfunctional relationships in May's family of origin. As the nature of May's crime hinted by her brother, Denis in the fourth act bears a resemblance to the Bulger incident, *strangers, babies* serves as a dramatic representation of this infamous murder case which created a great concern in the public during the 1990s.

Moreover, *strangers, babies* explores how a mother with a criminal past becomes subject to surveillance agencies. In the last act of the play, after May gives birth to her child, she is visited and questioned by the child protection social worker, Abel. May has become a caring mother who has learnt extensively about children and child care. Abel, on the other hand, seems ineligible to serve in social welfare profession with his ignorance, and judgemental, unempathetic and insensitive attitudes towards May. Through Abel's attitudes, the play criticizes the improper interventions

and unaccountable actions of child protection social workers that occurred in Cleveland, Nottingham, Rochdale and the Orkneys during the 1980s and 1990s.

strangers, babies explores dysfunctional family relationships through an abusive alcoholic father and a delinquent daughter who later becomes a wife searching for sadomasochistic sex through extra-marital relationships. While in the first act May's relationship with her husband seems to be conflictual, in the third act she has an intercourse with a married man in order to realise her sadomasochistic fantasies that she considers her husband would not approve. In the second act, her father, Duncan appears on stage as an alcoholic man who inflicts emotional and verbal abuse on his daughter. The fact that her mother is not around shows that May's family of origin has been disintegrated. In the fourth act, the dialogue between May and her brother reveals when they were children, they were hurt, and never loved and cared for.

In conclusion, *Year of the Family*, *Handbag* and *strangers, babies* are concerned with the family institution and portray alterations in the family structures, dysfunctional family relationships, delinquency, surveillance of the family, welfare intervention, child protection practices, family disintegration, blended families, same-sex families and reproductive technologies. These plays treat the family life and family relationships in a wider context to criticise and comment on the social, political, economic discussions on the family institution by holding a mirror to the significant family-related issues in British history. *Year of the Family* reflects that the family ideology which British governments used for their economic fantasies and social control discriminates the individuals outside traditional family structures. *Handbag* dramatises a 'supposedly' alternative family structure and depicts the family as an avid consumer that serve for capitalism. With its portrayal of once-a-delinquent mother, *strangers, babies* explores the relationship between child abuse and delinquency, and displays that the family life

is subject to surveillance through its portrayal of child protection services. Therefore, *Year of the Family*, *Handbag* and *strangers, babies* can be considered as representative texts that explore the family institution and family-related issues in Britain with their main focus on the prevalent family ideology, changing family structures, the family institution in the late consumer capitalist society, dysfunctional family relationships, the family as a social control mechanism, and surveillance of the family.



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ÖZET

1970'li yılların sonlarına doğru Britanya'da aile kurumu, demografik değişimler, kadın işgücündeki artış, toplumsal hareketler, kanunlardaki reformlar ve doğum kontrol hapları sebebiyle değişiklik göstermeye başlamıştır. 1979 yılından itibaren Britanya'da iktidardaki hükümetler, aile kurumundaki değişikliğin toplumsal düzeni bozmasından endişe ederek aile kurumunu kontrol etmeyi ve düzenlemeyi amaçlamıştır. 1990'larda ve 2000'lerde, insan üreme teknolojisindeki gelişmeler ve alternatif aile yapılarının ortaya çıkmasıyla aile kurumundaki değişiklikler daha belirgin hale gelmiştir. 1994 yılında Birleşmiş Milletler tarafından başlatılan 'Uluslararası Aile Yılı', aile kurumundaki değişikliğin ve aile ile ilgili konuların söz konusu dönemde küresel boyutta siyasi bir gündem oluşturduğunun önemli bir göstergesidir. Öte yandan, ulusal düzeyde, Margaret Thatcher'ın ekonomik açıdan devlete bağlı olmayan aile kurumunu desteklemesi, John Major'ın "back to basics" (köklere dönüş) kampanyası, ve Tony Blair'ın "Sure Start" (Sağlam Başlangıç) ve "New Deal for Lone Parents" (Tek Ebeveynli Aileler için Yeni Düzen) programları ile yasal düzeyde (School Standards and Framework Act 1998) ev-okul arası ilişkiler üzerine yaptığı reformlar, aile ideolojisinin, devlet tarafından kendi ekonomik amaçlarını gerçekleştirebilmek ve sosyal kontrolü sağlayabilmek için kullanıldığının göstergesidir. Bu bağlamda, bu tez, devletin ekonomik çıkarlarına hizmet eden ve toplumun gözetimini kolaylaştıran Britanya'nın aile politikalarına eleştirel bir yaklaşım sunar.

Çağdaş Britanya tiyatrosunda aile temsiline odaklanan bu tez, öncelikle aile kavramını irdeler; Britanya'daki aile kurumu ve özellikle 1979-2007 yılları arasındaki hükümetlerin aile politikaları hakkında bilgi verir. Aileyi farklı yönleriyle ele alan Britanya'daki çağdaş tiyatro oyunları hakkında bir inceleme verdikten sonra Anthony

Neilson'ın *Year of the Family*, Mark Ravenhill'in *Handbag* and Linda McLean'ın *strangers and babies* oyunlarının detaylı bir analizini yapar.

Bu tezde, Anthony Neilson'ın *Year of The Family* oyunu, ilk olarak 1994 yılında kutlanan Uluslararası Aile Yılı, John Major'ın "köklere dönüş" kampanyası ve aile ideolojisi bağlamında ele alınmaktadır. Mark Ravenhill'in *Handbag* oyunu, değişen aile yapılarının, eşcinsel ailelerin, anneliğin, üreme teknolojisindeki gelişmelerin ve tüketim toplumunun temsilleri açısından ve kuir çalışmaları çerçevesinde incelenmektedir. Linda McLean'ın *strangers, babies* oyunu, ailedeki istismar ve çocuklarda suç davranışı arasındaki ilişki, sosyal kontrol yöntemi olarak aile kurumu ve aile ilişkilerine devlet müdahalesi açısından irdelenmektedir.

Yukarıda adı geçen tiyatro oyunları, Britanya tarihinde aileyle ilgili büyük yankı uyandıran olayları ve aile kurumu üzerine yapılan dönemin tartışmalarını yansıtmaktadır. Bu tezde, bu oyunların, aile ilişkilerini tiyatro sahnesinde yansıtırken aileyi daha geniş bir çerçevede ele alarak devlet ve aile kurumu arasındaki ilişkileri yorumladığı savunulmaktadır. Tezin konusu olan oyunların, popüler aile ideolojisini, tüketici kapitalizmin aile üzerine etkisini, aile kurumu üzerindeki devlet gözetimini ve aile kurumuna devlet müdahalesini eleştirdiği öne sürülmektedir.

Anthony Neilson'ın *Year of the Family* oyunu, Birleşmiş Milletler'in düzenlediği Uluslararası Aile Yılı tarafından desteklenen aile ideolojisinin, geleneksel aile yapıları dışında kalan bireylerin psikolojisinde derin yaralar bırakabileceğini tiyatro sahnesinde karakterlerin çaresizce 'sahte' bir aile yaratma çabalarını yansıtarak gösterir. Mark Ravenhill'in *Handbag* oyunu, aile yapısındaki değişikliklere rağmen, aile kurumunun halen sorunlu olduğunu göstermektedir. Oyundaki Victoria döneminde geçen olay örgüsü, Oscar Wilde'ın *Importance of Being Earnest* oyunundaki karakterlerin

geçmişini yeniden yazarak aktarırken, çağdaş dönemde geçen olay örgüsü, homonormatif değerlerden etkilenmiş 'sözde' alternatif bir aileyi konu alır. İki olay örgüsünde de tüketici kapitalist düzenin olumsuz etkileri bebeklerin metalaştırılması üzerinden yansıtılır. Son olarak, Linda McLean'ın *strangers, babies* oyunu, çocukluğunda işlediği suç Bulger olayını akıllara getiren bir kadını konu alarak ailedeki istismarın çocuklarda suç davranışının ortaya çıkmasındaki etkisini irdeler, ve profesyonel anlamda yetersizliği ve yargılayıcı tavrıyla Britanya tarihindeki olay yaratan devlet müdahalelerini anımsatan bir sosyal hizmet görevlisi karakteri ile aile kurumu üzerindeki devlet gözetimini eleştirir.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Çağdaş Britanya tiyatrosu, aile, Anthony Neilson, *Year of the Family*, Mark Ravenhill, *Handbag*, Linda McLean, *strangers, babies*, BM Uluslararası Aile Yılı, aile ideolojisi, değişen aile yapıları, ailedeki istismar, çocuklarda suç davranışı, annelik, üretim teknolojileri, sosyal kontrol, devlet müdahalesi, tüketici kapitalizm.

ABSTRACT

Through the end of 1970s, British family institution had started to show alterations due to demographic changes, massive feminisation of workforce, social movements, legislative reforms and oral contraceptive pills. From 1979 onwards, fearing that social order would be disrupted due to the changing family institution, British governments aimed to control, discipline and regulate family institution. During the 1990s and 2000s, there were even more radical changes in the family institution owing to the developments in reproductive technologies and emergence of alternative family structures. The International Year of the Family (1994), an International observance initiated by United Nations, is indicative of the fact that family issues and changing family structures stirred up a global political interest in this period. At a national level, on the other hand, Margaret Thatcher's endorsement of family autonomy, John Major's 'back to basics' campaign, and Tony Blair's 'Sure Start' and 'New Deal for Lone Parents' programmes as well as reforms in home-school agreements in the School Standards and Framework Act of 1998 evince that the family ideology was used by the governments to attain their economic goals and to maintain social control. Within this context, this thesis takes a critical approach to British family-related policies which largely served for governments' economic interests and enabled surveillance of society.

This thesis, focusing on the representation of the family in contemporary British drama, first explores the concept of the family and provides background information about British family institution and family-related policies introduced especially between 1979 and 2007. Then, it presents a survey of contemporary British plays that explore different aspects of the family, before continuing with a detailed examination of

Anthony Neilson's *Year of the Family*, Mark Ravenhill's *Handbag* and Linda McLean's *strangers and babies*.

Anthony Neilson's *Year of the Family* is analysed with regards to the first International Year of the Family (1994), John Major's government's 'back to basics', and the Ideology of Marriage and Family; Mark Ravenhill's *Handbag* is examined in relation to the changing family structures, same-sex families, motherhood, the developments in reproductive technologies, and consumerism by drawing upon queer studies; Linda McLean's *strangers, babies* is discussed in terms of the relationship between child abuse and delinquency, the family as a social control mechanism, state interventions in the family, and the politics of child protection.

The abovementioned plays mirror the historically significant family-related incidents and contemporary debates on the family institution in Britain. In this thesis, it is argued that while dramatising domestic relationships, these plays also treat the family in a wider context in order to comment on the relationship between the family and the state. This thesis contends that these plays criticise the popular family ideology, the effect of consumer capitalism on the family, the surveillance of family relationships and the state intervention in the family.

Anthony Neilson's *Year of the Family* displays that the family ideology supported by the UN International Year of the Family might inflict deep psychological wounds on the individuals who live outside traditional family structures by portraying the characters' desperate attempts to create a pseudo-family. Mark Ravenhill's *Handbag* shows that in spite of the changes in the family structure, the family sphere is still problematic. While the Victorian plot dramatises the antecedent action of Wilde's *Importance of Being Earnest*, the contemporary plot deals with a 'supposedly'

alternative family that is heavily influenced by homonormative and domestic normative practices. In these plots, the adverse effect of the consumer capitalist system is reflected through the commoditisation of the babies in both eras. Lastly, Linda McLean's *strangers, babies* explores the effect of parental abuse on the emergence of delinquency in children by dramatising once-a-delinquent woman whose childhood crime bears similarity to the infamous Bulger incident and criticises the surveillance of the family by portraying a social worker whose incompetency and judgemental attitudes reflect the notorious state interventions in British history.

Keywords: Contemporary British drama, family, Anthony Neilson, *Year of the Family*, Mark Ravenhill, *Handbag*, Linda McLean, *strangers, babies*, UN International Year of the Family, Ideology of Marriage and Family, changing family structures, child abuse, delinquency, social control, state intervention, consumer capitalism.