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A Psychological Study of Familial Anxiety and Challenge in Selected American Plays

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Wasit University

College of Education for Human Sciences

Department of English



**A Psychological Study of Familial Anxiety and Challenge in Selected
American Plays**

A Thesis

Submitted to the Council of the College of Education for Human Sciences, Wasit
University, in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of
Education in English Literature

By

Karar Resen Ali

Supervised by

Professor Ikhlas Muhammed Nati (PhD)

2026 A.D

1447 A.H

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

وَأَن لَّيْسَ لِلْإِنسَانِ إِلَّا مَا سَعَىٰ (39) وَأَنَّ سَعْيَهُ سَوْفَ يُرَىٰ (40) ثُمَّ

يُجْزَاهُ الْجَزَاءَ الْأَوْفَىٰ (41)

صدق الله العلي العظيم

سورة النجم 39-41

Supervisor's Certificate

I hereby certify that the thesis entitled : (**A Psychological Study of Familial Anxiety and Challenge in Selected American plays**),by Karar Resen Ali , has been prepared and written under my supervision at the College of Education for Human Sciences / Wasit University, as a partial fulfillment of the requirements for degree of Master of Education in English literature.

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Date: / / 2026

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We certify that we have read the thesis (**A Psychological Study of Familial Anxiety and Challenge in Selected American plays**) and as an examining committee , we examined the student (**Karar Resen Ali**) in its contents and that in our opinion , it is adequate as a thesis for the degree of Master of education in English literature .

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Date: / / 2026

Dedication

To those who carried my ambition in their hearts before I carried it in mine.

To my dear father, who taught me that knowledge is the only weapon to face life, and who built for me a ladder of success from his patience.

To my beloved mother, whose prayers were the compass that guided me through the darkness of the nights ,and from whose tenderness I drew my strength .

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Abstract

This thesis attempts to explore the phenomenon of family anxiety, which is a psychological and sociological phenomenon that can be seen in some modern American plays, including *The Humans* (2016) by Stephen karam, *Rabbit Hole* (2010) by David Lindsay-Abaier, and *August: Osage County* (2008) by Tracy Letts. In terms of theories that will be applied to explore this phenomenon, the study will utilize Freudian psychoanalytic theory, which can explain the significance of the unconscious mind, conflict, and repressed desire in building a relationship between family members and creating anxiety in them. At the same time, this study will utilize family systems theory and family stress theory in explaining the transmission of anxiety in families. The thesis is also concerned with the social, economic, and political aspects of family anxiety, including such things as economic instability, unemployment, social inequality, and cultural influences. From the detailed examination of the selected dramatic texts, it was found that the modern American drama uses such techniques as realism and symbolism for portraying the psychological and emotional challenges faced by the contemporary family, showing the fragility of the balance between emotional support and inner conflict. It shows that family anxiety is a multi-dimensional notion that is formed because of the interplay between internal psychological and external stress-related factors. Moreover, the American theatre has turned out to be a valuable artistic tool in portraying this phenomenon, as it effectively captures the nuances of family dynamics and the impact of societal pressures on families.

Keywords: Familial anxiety, psychoanalytic theory, family dynamics, grief and loss, socioeconomic pressure, dysfunctional family, American drama

Chapter One

1.1 Anxiety in Family Dynamics and Psychoanalytic theory:

Psychoanalysis is a treatment method applied in the curing of emotional and psychological disorders. During psychoanalysis, Freud convinced his patients to discuss their dreams and early childhood freely in a patient-analyst relationship. Freud emphasizes the importance of fully understanding a person's early childhood existence, including their dreams. Identifying the underlying causes of psychological disturbances is a vital step towards constructing insight into the individual's mind, encouraging psychological development, and suggesting effective therapy (Fayek, 2017).

Psychoanalytic theory helps people to recognize the unconscious reasons for their behavior. This helps them to comprehend further the psychological and emotional impacts. Being aware of where they are coming from, people become better at managing psychological tension and inner conflict. Equipped with the knowledge, they can devise effective means to escape negative emotions and gain greater psychological equilibrium (Fayek, 2017).

Previously, the motivations behind human actions were explained via two main sources: dreams and magic. Our dreams surprise, confuse, and sometimes disturb us. Full of bizarre happenings, bizarre escapades, and vivid, often sexual visions, they can enchant as well as haunt us. Dreams often encourage individuals to reflect on their emotions and unexpressed desires. According to Freud, dreams are not meaningless; rather, they reveal unconscious wishes and unresolved psychological conflicts (Bressler, 2011).

Friedrich August Kekulé, a German organic chemist, provides a favorable response. Kekulé spent years studying the structure of the benzene molecule. He once saw a chain of atoms that resembled a snake devouring its tail while he slept. When he woke up and drew this snake shape in his notepad, he recognized that it was the graphical depiction of the benzene ring that he had been trying so hard to solve. In 1890, he reported his findings at a scientific meeting, Kekulé's experience is often cited as an example of how dreams may inspire creative thinking and scientific discovery. His account suggests that dreams can provide symbolic insights that help solve complex problems. So those dreams were not mere fantasies of the night but rich symbolic occurrences on which individuals and families occasionally staked their hopes, expectations, and terrors. Dreams were believed to have prophetic abilities, predicting something of the future or delivering messages from supernatural or divine sources. Hence, a single dream can instill either unlimited hope or eternal fear in a family. A reunion or prosperity dream can be interpreted as a sign of future success, marriage, or reestablishment, but a dream concerning death, fire, or shadowy figures can be understood as a warning of future illness, loss, or betrayal (Bressler, 2011).

Such heavy dependence on dreams as sources of direction also meant that families routinely invested great emotional significance in their interpretation, molding decisions, behavior, and even relationships according to what a dream seemed to predict. Dreams in this context served not just as individual experiences but as shared events—interpreted, feared, or rejoiced in the family circle. Such psychological impact was this dynamic: threatening or disastrous dreams could evoke in the family mass anxiety, family members becoming suspicious, hypervigilant, or upset emotionally in advance of the fulfillment of the dream. Giuseppe Tartini,

a violinist in eighteenth-century Italy, also found dreams to be of value. He once dreamed that the devil appeared at his bedside and volunteered to complete a somewhat challenging sonata for him in return for his soul (Freud S. , 1900).

When Tartini agreed, the devil picked up his violin and finished the incomplete piece. When Tartini woke up, he jotted down what he had heard in his dream. The Devil's Trill Sonata is Tartini's most well-known piece. Like many scientists and composers, many writers say that dreams have given them some of their best ideas. Magical beliefs have a deep influence on the shaping of emotional and psychological experiences within the family. The act of magic was not something superstitious in most of the ancient cultures and traditions. It was indeed a well-crafted system to explain inexplicable events such as illness, barrenness, death, or any form of war. When those phenomena had no scientific explanation, they were attributed mostly to curses, evil eyes, witchcraft, or supernatural interferences. In the home context, these beliefs tended to put psychological and emotional pressure on people, particularly when calamity was thought to be due to the actions, sins, or negligence of a family member in safeguarding the home spiritually (Freud , 1900).

The perception that one might be cursed or struck by black magic could lead to chronic psychological distress, interpersonal suspicion within the family, and heightened feelings of vulnerability. The fear was also fueled by traditional healers or community leaders who legitimized the belief that disasters were a result of magic, thereby inducing heightened tension within the family system. Families can respond by performing protective rituals, consulting spiritual leaders, or even isolating some members who are thought to be cursed or unlucky. These interactions created cycles of blame, secrecy, and repression of feelings, all of which are

contributing factors in family anxiety. That other people's and our dreams are fascinating to us cannot be dispelled. Whether because of their bizarre and often erotic nature or because of what seems to be their prophetic capacity, dreams urge us to inquire and to try to explore the unconscious is that aspect of our minds that we do not appear to have much control over. The Viennese neurologist and psychologist Freud is, without a doubt, the best researcher on the unconscious and its effects (Freud, 2018).

In 1900, Freud introduced the foundations of his theory of the human mind in his book *The Interpretation of Dreams*. It asserts that the mind is not empty; rather, it is the opposite. Freud's theory is that dreams best reveal the unconscious's contents and activities. Freud argues that we make our world as well as ourselves in the interplay between conscious and non-conscious ways of living, suggesting that our unconscious influences our perceptions, decisions, and interactions in profound ways (Arbiser & Schneider, 2013) .

The theories and practice of Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) provide the foundation for psychoanalytic criticism. While working with patients whom he diagnosed as hysterics, Freud theorized that the root of their problems was psychological, not physical. His patients, he believed, had suppressed incestuous desires that they had unconsciously refused to confront.

This connection highlights how unresolved or repressed family-based desires can become a core source of family anxiety as individuals unknowingly carry internal conflicts that shape how they interact with close relatives (Freud, 1953). Having his neurotic crisis in 1887, Freud undertook self-analysis. Results from his self-analysis, along with his research and patient

analyses, led Freud to speculate that fantasies and wishful thinking, and not just real experiences, play a significant part in the formation of neuroses.

1.2 Freud's Model of the psyche (Dynamic, Economic and Structural Models)

In family life, then, anxieties can be generated not just out of actual occurrences such as conflict or loss, but out of imagined conflicts, unmet longings, or fantasies regarding family positions, for instance, feeling inadequate compared to a sibling or desiring attention from a parent. One of Freud's key contributions was the model of the human psyche: the dynamic model. Freud developed various models of the human psyche throughout his life, which were the changing bases of his psychoanalytic theory along with his practice. Freud developed the dynamic model early in life, and according to this, our minds are a binary opposition consisting of the conscious (the rational) and the unconscious (the irrational). Freud's idea of a split mind explains how individuals sometimes behave in ways that they cannot explain, especially when strong emotions are involved, like families, where unconscious desires, fears, or experiences during childhood can unconsciously dictate behaviors (Bressler, 2011).

Freud referred to the conscious as the mind that observes and deals with the external world. It helps in coping with logic, reason, and consciousness. But Freud explained that we do not know the unconscious, and we mistakenly believe that all our actions are due to our conscious reasoning. This means that one may, for example, lash out at a member of his or her family or shut down emotionally without knowing why, when in fact the source of the reaction lies in repressed emotional conflicts stored in the unconscious. This irrational part of our mind, the unconscious, absorbs and retains our repressed desires, aspirations, fears, passions, and

illogical ideas. This word was not used by Freud, however; this is attributed to Carl Gustav Carus. For Carus and most of Freud's other contemporaries, the unconscious was a fixed device that accumulates and retains our memories (Bressler, 2011).

Freud developed a new understanding of the unconscious, describing it as a dynamic structure that stores repressed memories, unresolved conflicts, wishes, and desires. He argued that the unconscious is the source of two fundamental instincts: Eros, the life instinct associated with libido, love, and preservation, and Thanatos, the death instinct associated with aggression, destruction, and self-destructive impulses. Although these instincts may coexist, they often conflict with one another and influence human behaviour. Freud further maintained that unconscious thoughts and conflicts may emerge indirectly through dreams, slips of the tongue, memory failures, or other everyday mistakes. He referred to these unintentional errors as parapraxes, commonly known as Freudian slips, arguing that they reveal hidden wishes and unresolved psychological conflicts that remain outside conscious awareness (Bressler, 2011).

The economic model of the human psyche advanced by Freud is, in fact, an extension of, but still holds on to, the ideas that he had outlined in the dynamic model. The conscious and the unconscious are in a tussle to control a person's behavior, and the person's unconscious desires are clawing their way to the surface. Two ideas that Freud presents in the economic model are both descriptive and prescriptive of the human mind, articulated by the pleasure principle and the reality principle. Freud, then, asserts that the pleasure principle only pursues the pleasures and demands immediate satisfaction of the instinctual drive: pleasures that seek to be acted out in the most eminent way possible without regard to the social structures, which control morality and sexual repressions. Freud defined "cathexes" as an individual's psychic and instinctual energy

that aims to extract the maximum pleasure possible, since the goal of the pleasure principle is to achieve immediate relief from all suffering or the total elimination of pain at once. The pleasure principle is not typically allowed to operate freely in an individual's psyche because it is restrained by what Freud refers to as "anti-cathexes," which are forms of energy that counteract it, all while being monitored by the reality principle—this is the aspect of the psyche that acknowledges the necessity of social norms and restrictions on pleasure. Hence, Freud argued that these two sets of principles are at war in our inner lives (Bressler, 2011).

This inner conflict between desire (the pleasure principle) and limitation (the reality principle) usually occurs within the family environment, where individuals often suppress their emotional needs and personal desires to maintain family harmony, obedience, or social expectations. Over time, this repression can sow the seeds of frustration, guilt, or repressed resentment—seeds of family anxiety. In family functioning, this conflict usually lies beneath normal emotional conflicts, such as in a parent between responsibility and personal autonomy or a child between wish and parental authority. These may manifest as emotional isolation, miscommunication, or family anxiety (Freud, 2010).

Freud described yet another model of the human psyche—a topographical one. This sounds like the Freudian model, but not quite: it splits the psyche into three parts (rather than just two) the id, the ego, and a superego. The irrational, primal, unknowable, and unconscious aspect of the psyche is called by Freud the id. The id has but one desire: that the impulses of the pleasure principle be satisfied, and it contains our innermost secrets, our deepest desires, and our strongest fears. It also contains the libido, or our sex drive, and all of our psychosexual urges and all of our psychic energy. The id seeks immediate fulfillment of these desires because it is merely

the impulsive expression of primitive instincts, unconditioned by any controlling will. In Freud's model, the next component of the psyche is referred to as the ego or the conscious, logical, and rational part of the individual's mind (most of which takes place on a subconscious level). Although the id acts under the principle of pleasure, the operations of the ego depend upon the reality principle. The job of the ego is to control the magic's of the id and release them in safe forms of expression, such as through socially acceptable behaviors or creative outlets that satisfy the id's desires without causing harm (Bressler, 2011).

The superego, the third component of the psyche, functions as an internal censor, leading us to make moral decisions based on social constraints. The superego, in contrast to the id, functions in accordance with the morality principle and is mainly responsible for defending society and ourselves against the id. The superego, which stands for all of society's moral constraints, acts as a filter, stifling the impulses and wants that society forbids and pushing them back into the unconscious. In general, punishment is a manifestation of the superego. The superego will produce an unconscious sense of fear and shame if it is given free reign. The ego is responsible for mediating between the superego's demands of societal pressure and the id's innate (particularly sexual) urges. The ego suppresses and stores in the unconscious what it considers undesirable, and it has most commonly suppressed our early childhood sexual drives in all of us, which can lead to various psychological issues in adulthood if not addressed (Bressler, 2011).

Freud's psychoanalytic theory illustrates how intrapsychic conflicts and unconscious tensions within individuals can influence family relationships, particularly when these conflicts result from unresolved emotional needs, desires, and past experiences. Anxiety in the family can, from this model, be explained as a collective intrapsychological burden that develops as a

function of the dynamic between intrapsychic emotional issues and utilitarian issues such as marital conflict, divorce, financial stress, and social circumstances. These interplaying variables provide a psychologically unstable domestic setting, necessitating looking into family anxiety as a multi-causal disorder that must be understood fully in its etiology and conceived for an integrative approach to locating workable solutions (Freud, 1923&Fayek, 2017).

Family anxiety is stress upon the family. It is breaking the peaceful state of the family—the system is upset, stressed, disturbed, and out of balance. Family anxiety is, therefore, a change in the equilibrium of the family. This is not necessarily bad. It is an issue when the degree of stress (pressure or change) in the family system is too low or too high to the extent that family members are not satisfied or show signs of disturbance . When one family member is not satisfied or shows signs of physical or emotional disturbances, then the degree of family stress is not optimal for such a family. The family is at risk (Lindhout, 2008).

Metaphorically speaking, family stress can be compared to a force that presses upon or exerts pressure on the family system. Internal pressure in the family system indicates family stress, irrespective of the fact whether that particular force stems from internal or external sources. In case an engineer examines a bridge under stress conditions, he examines whether there is an increase in the weight carried by it; in case a physician examines a person for his or her health status, he/she will examine increased blood pressure. Similarly, in case the researcher of a family studies family stress, he/she will find decreased performance of the family and psychosomatic symptoms or physical and psychological symptoms among certain family members. The whole bridge stretches due to weakened support on any of its parts. Likewise, families are not immune to a similar phenomenon of stretching. Psychosomatic symptoms and

reduced functioning in family roles are indicators of increased tension in family members. Recall that conflicts in the family may not necessarily mean problems. On the contrary, in spite of tension, tension bridges and tension families are functioning very effectively. Similarly, as a bridge requires flexibility, so do tension families, as they must adapt to changing dynamics and maintain open communication to thrive despite their conflicts (Boss, 2002).

In highly stressed but intact families, there must be adaptability in family rules, roles, and problem-solving capacity. They must be changing all the time to accommodate the situation at hand, and there must be constant negotiating between the pressures and resources of the family. Such flexible family systems can take a lot of pressure because not only do they have support and strength, but they can also bend under pressure. Remember the bridge metaphor to better understand family tension. It is possible that some families just like and endure more stress than others. This characteristic also implies the significance of the family's view or judgment of a stressful occasion or condition. Maybe certain families become agitated without an endless succession of stressful events to arouse them or without the stimulation of having constant difficulties to resolve. Such families may go seeking new stressors (Boss, 2002).

They like to move around a lot, they travel a lot, they seek competition, and they like a challenge. They may do all sorts of stressful things without ill effects. Family stress is a neutral term. It is neither negative nor positive. It simply means pressure on the family. The quantity of pressure that results in the family and the expression of negative or positive consequences is a product, to a significant degree, of the family's perception and assessment of the situation. Family stress is nothing more than change—a disturbed equilibrium in the family system (Boss, 2002).

So if families are not at peace, the world is not at peace . Assisting families to cope with stress is beneficial not just to individuals and families but also to communities and society. Violence, disasters, racial and religious strife, and wars underscore the importance of comprehending a family's capacity to deal with distress, even trauma. It remains a task for researchers to know why certain families bounce back and perform under pressure, loss, and devastation. It is a challenge to all who are concerned with families- researchers, therapists, educators, social workers, health professionals, spiritual leaders, and policymakers—to help individuals manage day-to-day living amid stress. Families are living organisms.

1.3 Family stress theory and systems theory

According to family systems theory, boundaries are essential characteristics of families because they regulate the relationships and interactions among family members. Instrumental and expressive functions have to be fulfilled by the family, which will ensure the survival and growth of the organism, such as providing emotional support, nurturing, and fulfilling the basic requirements of family members, among others. From systems theory, we learn that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. In families, for instance, the family is not only made up of people; it is also made up of specific interactions and experiences, accomplishments, disappointments, and aspirations. Each family unit has its unique coherence. It becomes evident that the systemic potency of a family can be seen at times when one of its members encounters difficulties. The family becomes greater than the sum of its parts because it adds up strength, similar to how steel ropes are woven together to create a strong cable for a suspension bridge. The family's extra strength, gained through unity and working in the same direction, provides

additional support during crisis periods. Family professionals must value the family as a whole and its individual members (Szirmai, 2011).

According to the Family Stress Model, taking systems approach will enable us to understand how an individual may react differently when alone compared to when the kids come home from school, the father comes home from work, or the grandmother pays a visit. That is, the state of stress of the whole family is not the sum of the stresses of different family members. The family members might appear to be relaxed but can be hostile. For example, a parent showing excessive attention to their child has consequences for a sibling or mate who feels neglected. An ostracized family member withdraws or misbehaves to gain attention. The child may run away, and the spouse may act out in self-destructive ways or be unfaithful. A family member getting tickets for speeding may have a need for attention because of being neglected within the family dynamics (Boss, 2002).

When stress is present throughout the entire family structure, experts and researchers often focus solely on the individual who is acting out. One member of the family may occasionally behave as a scapegoat for the rest of the family system when the family's stress is expressed via their actions. One strategy used by families to shield them from change is to identify a scapegoat. Stability is not always useful because systems have a tendency to desire to remain unchanged. Even if a family seems to be doing well, the system needs to be changed if even one member is struggling or depressed, as ignoring this issue can lead to further dysfunction and impact the overall well-being of the family unit (Boss, 2002).

The family plays a vital role in the table of values in life and forms the core component of society. Every individual in the family gets molded by the entire system, which then molds the family's well-being and performance. The family is an open system with individualistic entities. The family forms a cushion between individual expectations and societal expectations. The family is responsive to the changing internal and external environment. Family crises are categorized as developmental and non-developmental. Family crises represent the existence of a dysfunctional psychosocial equilibrium in the family system. Family crises play a critical role in the development of the individual and the family system because overcoming conflicts is imperative for continued development in the family. Steps must be taken to ensure smooth family operations because any change in the family structure might lead to a shift in family function, such as stress and conflict, which can hinder individual development. (Hill., 2005).

Family anxiety is an intricate psychological condition that is felt by family members due to the pressures and stresses that they go through in their day-to-day lives. The sources of this anxiety can be both internal and external, and it exists in various forms, such as economic issues, health crises, problematic relationships within the family, or pressure to be a parent. Such stresses immediately impact the stability and mental condition of the family, leading to tension and emotional issues among individuals. Family anxiety is one of the leading topics of psychological and social studies since it influences relationships within members of a family and harms both mental and physical health. Satisfying this anxiety requires good communication skills and mutual aid to cope with shared crises and challenges (Hill., 2005).

The family is also seen as an interdependent system, where any stress or pressure experienced by one member of the family may spill over and reach the rest of the family. Such interlocking mechanisms can warp the emotional and psychological balance of all parties. When one family member is under stress—psychological, social, or financial—their reactions directly or indirectly impact the family environment, bringing tension to the relationship and a sense of shared stress and distress. Therefore, such pressure can potentially become an aggregate cause of concern, spreading beyond the stressed person to the entire family and leading to a family-wide feeling of concern that pervades everyday relationships and communication in the family (Szirmai, 2011).

Family anxiety is a serious issue that significantly affects all members of the family and undermines the cohesiveness of the family. If we learn about the reasons why such worry exists, we can find out the factors that have a direct impact on the relationship between family members. Learning how worry can impact family members psychologically, right from emotional to behavioral implications that disturb their day-to-day lives, is also needed. A more harmonious and close family setup can be established by tackling these demands with well-thought-out measures that will promote mental well-being and family relationships (Szirmai, 2011).

1.4 Marital relations and Family process variables

In marriage, several factors influence the marriage relationship and the family as a whole. Family anxiety is one of them that occurs due to a range of sources. From the perspective of family systems theory, family interactions become increasingly complex over time, and unresolved tensions among family members may contribute to the development of family

anxiety. Looking at the marital relationship, we find that family stresses can emerge from different challenges that the partners are experiencing, such as adjusting to their common life, bringing up children, or even managing personal crises. These stresses then find expression in conflict between partners, further adding stress and anxiety (Hudson & Rapee, 2005) .

These stresses can affect family relationships, resulting in variations of perception regarding certain matters between the spouses. For example, each of the spouses can have a different perception of some behaviors in the family, such as handling children's matters or making decisions in the family. These disagreements can lead to a disagreement of opinions, which makes one of the spouses unhappy or frustrated, thereby increasing family anxiety. In some other cases, these differences in perception between the spouses can bring about tension within the marriage relationship, creating emotional communication gaps within the couple. (Hudson & Rapee, 2005)

It is clear from sociological understanding that families are social institutions that play vital roles both for their members and the wider society. Families reproduce, raise, and socialise children; offer care for ill and old family members; and give emotional support to family members. It is clear that when we refer to families as social constructions, we recognise that they are socially constructed, defined, and culturally diverse. We refer to them as institutions because they involve bundles of roles and responsibilities. Family definitions have been made somewhat controversial because of cultural variations, changes in families, and politics. By the mid-20th century, social scientists were already able to formulate definitions of the family that appeared to be comprehensive in nature. For example, a sociologist of the family explained that:

The family consists of a husband, wife, and children born in their wedlock, though other relatives may find their place close to this nuclear group. The group is united by moral, legal, economic, religious, and social rights and obligations (including sexual rights and prohibitions and such socially patterned feelings as love, attraction, piety, and awe) (Laub, 2004, p. 15).

More people agree on what it means than on its history: Almost everyone agrees that marriage is a legal and social bond between men and women (Coontz, 2005) . Max Weber, a sociologist, said that marriage is a "stable sexual relationship" that the larger kin group agrees to and makes legal. It is also employed to establish guidelines for children's property rights (Collins, 1986) .

Marriage systems are usually monogamous (one man, one woman), but not all societies prohibit people from having several spouses. Marriage, be it polygamous or monogamous, does not occur in a cultural vacuum but, like families, is institutional. So, polygamy was often a means of increasing the population, ensuring that children were produced (male children in particular), or ensuring that all the women in society were taken care of by the men in the case of a shortage of men in the same way, polyandry, which is also uncommon, is linked to a shortage of women through practices such as female infanticide or poverty. Again, one thing that has always remained common in marriages is the gendered division of labour between women and men (Coontz, 2005).

In most cases, the tasks that had been undertaken by women included activities that could be done in a domestic setting (gardening, crops, collecting plants, weaving, making pottery, and tending to smaller animals). On the other hand, men's work included hunting, ploughing, and

herding cattle. Since the role of women is bearing children and lactating, they have become the natural guardians of children, and hence this arrangement forms the rationale behind the division of labour within the household based on gender. However, they did not usually exempt women from working in the economy, nor did they necessarily result in the dominance of men, as women often participated in various economic activities such as farming, textile production, and trade, contributing significantly to the household and community economy(Collins, 1986) .

The institution of marriage was at the centre of family concerns in colonial American society, where it was increasingly understood in contractual terms between men and women and their respective families. This understanding was reflected in the exchange of gifts between spouses and families, as well as in the social expectations and obligations assigned to each marital partner. Marriage was therefore viewed not only as an emotional relationship but also as an economic and social arrangement intended to ensure the stability and continuation of the family. Within this context, women's roles expanded to include activities such as participating in community events, managing household finances, and contributing to family businesses. However, the acceptance of these activities was often influenced by traditional gender expectations, as women's actions were generally considered appropriate when they were consistent with their husbands' approval and supported the interests of the family(Ingoldsby, 2006) .

Relationship and family functioning are critical aspects of treatment and assessment in couples and families. The effectiveness of a treatment plan may well be based on an accurate diagnosis of the problem and the prospects for resolution. Parenting in first-marriage families is

typically different from other families. Family process variables are the transactions and interactions between family members that describe the patterns of interchange of family member behaviors and the purpose or consequences of the interactions. Process measures assess the basic characteristics of the transactional behavior, including conflict, communication, and problem-solving (Heffer, 2003).

Therefore, how the differences are handled by the spouses also generates family anxiety. Whether the differences are handled by the spouses to create more emotional isolation or, alternatively, to further enhance communication and build a more stable relationship depends on the handling of the differences. Effective communication between spouses is one of the most important factors that can reduce family anxiety. If the spouses can express their feelings and concerns in a healthy way, this can alleviate family pressures and improve marital life (Heffer, 2003) .

Family systems theory distinguishes between family content and family process. Family content refers to the specific issues or events discussed within the family, whereas family process refers to the patterns of interaction and communication through which family members respond to these issues. For example, a disagreement between spouses about preparing their daughter for school represents the content of the conflict, while the repeated pattern of feeling unsupported or misunderstood reflects the family process. Thus, a statement such as “You never help me” may not only refer to household responsibilities but may also express deeper emotional concerns, such as a lack of support, cooperation, or appreciation within the marital relationship. Therefore, examining family process helps reveal the underlying patterns of communication and emotional interaction that influence family relationships(Watzlawick, weakland, & Fisch, 1974) .

The technique may also reveal patterns in transactional exchanges within family relationships. For example, when one partner makes a request and the other responds by referring to another task that needs to be completed first, the response may function as a way of avoiding the immediate issue or shifting the focus of the conversation. Although the content of the interaction may appear simple, its underlying process can reveal deeper communication patterns, such as avoidance, emotional distance, or a lack of cooperation between family members. Therefore, the same verbal exchange may have different meanings depending on the context in which it occurs. These patterns of interaction refer to the recurring sequences of communication among couples and family members and the consequences that result from these exchanges (Watzlawick, weakland, & Fisch, 1974) .

According to John Gottman, a leading researcher in marital and family psychology, patterns of interaction between couples play a significant role in determining the stability of marital relationships and the likelihood of divorce.. Happy and unhappy couples differ in how they communicate and in the ratio of positive to negative interactions. It is observed that every negative interaction is compensated by five positive interactions by the satisfied couples, thus creating a healthy balance, which supports the stability of the relationship. Unhappy couples do not have this balance, as the negative interaction takes focus or grows in relation to the positive interaction, often leading to an increase in the four primary negative patterns identified by Gottman: criticism, contempt, defensiveness, and emotional neglect or withdrawal. According to Gottman, there are four primary negative patterns, which undermine a marital relationship and cause its decline: criticism, contempt, defensiveness, and emotional neglect or withdrawal. These trends are ominous signs of dysfunctional relationships, as these tendencies lead to the growth of

tension phases and diminish the possibilities of mutual understanding between the spouses (Gottman,1994).

Initially, the spouses criticise each other excessively. Couples who feel and show disdain for one another move on to the next stage. The couple usually exchanges nonverbal facial expressions and emotions. Couples then tend to grow defensive and stop listening to one another. A spouse is more worried about how their partner will react than what they have to say. Couples who stonewall and cut off communication with one another are the final stage. Most couples redefine their relationship as completely negative at this stage, which is highly predictive of divorce. These tendencies may appear early in a relationship or grow over several years. Observational, interview, and self-report measurements form the basis of Gottman's research. Family affect is the type of emotional expression that family members exhibit (Gottman, 1993).

The nature of their communication, both in volume and tone, is not a mere detail but rather an integral aspect that defines interaction between family members. How a message is conveyed, in a soothing and assisting voice or with an anxious and aggressive tone, dramatically affects how the recipients react. In this vein, family interactions—and the emotions you express to your children during these interactions (especially negative ones like anger, frustration, and fear)—correlate more strongly than pleasure or displeasure in creating the emotional tone of your household. The perspective of family anxiety says that repeated exposure to negative or emotionally charged messages decreases the level of stability and psychological safety. Such exposure again increases anxiety response in your family, especially if it is compounded with limited emotional support or a common understanding. Patterns of emotional expression not only

permeate day-to-day interactions but also contribute to the occurrence of more severe issues, such as depression, marital disintegration, and a weakening of our emotional bonds (S.Robbins, Hervis, Mitran, & Szapocznik, 2001).

Thus, it is concluded that emotional family communication can be considered a key element of the production or diminishment of family anxiety. An atmosphere characterized by tension and negativity is generally more conducive to psychological distress, whereas constructive communication traits (positive emotional expression) combined with empathy can act as protective factors against anxiety and provide family systems with emotional stability(S.Robbins, Hervis, Mitran, & Szapocznik, 2001).

1.5 Attachment theory and emotionally focused perspective:

Attachment theory is a psychological framework developed by John Bowlby to explain the emotional bonds formed between individuals, particularly between children and their caregivers. Bowlby argues that early attachment experiences create internal working models that influence how individuals perceive themselves, others, and their relationships throughout life. These early experiences affect emotional regulation, trust, and the ability to develop secure relationships in adulthood. Later, Mary Ainsworth expanded Bowlby's theory through her research on infant-caregiver interactions and identified different patterns of attachment, including secure attachment, anxious attachment, avoidant attachment, and disorganized attachment (Johnson, 2004).

Attachment theory is closely related to family anxiety because the quality of emotional bonds within the family influences how individuals respond to stress, conflict, and insecurity. Secure attachment may provide individuals with a sense of safety and emotional support, whereas insecure attachment patterns may increase vulnerability to fear, emotional dependence, avoidance, and difficulties in communication. Within the family system, unresolved attachment-related anxieties can affect relationships among family members and contribute to tension, misunderstanding, and persistent patterns of anxiety. Therefore, attachment theory provides a useful perspective for examining how emotional experiences and relational patterns contribute to the development and continuation of family anxiety (Johnson, 2004).

The emotion theory presents a framework for understanding the family and provides an effective approach for examining family anxiety. The significance of this theory is that it corresponds with many existing studies that investigate issues in marital relationships. According to this perspective, emotions play a crucial role in interpersonal interactions, and intense emotional experiences may contribute to the emergence of family anxiety and increase relational difficulties (Johnson, 2004).

In this case, emotion theory is applied as a framework to examine how negative emotions, such as fear and insecurity, are produced through patterns of interaction and how they influence family anxiety and complicate family relationships. This view considers already existing studies devoted to the comprehension of changes in human relationships. The attachment theory has a theoretical implication for this case. This theory states that intimate interpersonal relationships determine personality. The main concept of this perspective is that everyone must have a safe emotional connection with loved ones. In case this need is not

fulfilled, family anxiety appears due to insecurities, threatening the appearance of conflicts and emotional distress in the family (Johnson,2004).

First of all, human beings are biologically predisposed to desire secure emotional relationships. The most primitive postulates of attachment theory are confirmed by the most recent research conducted among adults. To name but a few, we now know that the embrace of dependency and the ability to bond with people ensures autonomy and independency rather than getting caught up (Feeney, 2007) .

According to attachment theory, emotional reactivity is a key element in defining couple relationships and represents an essential aspect of secure attachment (Huston, Houts, Smith, & Caughlin,2001). In addition, recent neuroscientific studies using brain imaging techniques demonstrate that attachment-related responses, such as holding hands with a loved one with whom individuals share a close relationship, can reduce the way individuals respond to threat and stress (Coan, Davidson, & Schaefer, 2006).

Emotional loneliness, as postulated by Bowlby, is traumatizing to human beings .Bradley and Furrow later examined the themes of therapist content and the interventions applied to achieve effective change events, which they labeled 'blamer softening.' The softening process during Emotionally Focused Therapy can be described as the stage whereby the person focusing much on blaming another individual softens up and requests comfort and security from their readily available partner, thus illustrating how insecure they feel about themselves and their relationship needs. Some of the critical content areas that emerge during the softening process

include dealing with the anxiety of reaching out to one's partner and negative self-image, among others (Bradley & Furrow, 2004) .

According to John Bowlby, the attachment system is a "lifelong organization, prepared by early experiences, that regulates interaction with others." Similar to the parent-child relationship, the main aspect of adult attachment is the need for emotional availability and responsiveness, which will result in security of emotion in relationships, enabling family members to bond successfully and interact with others effectively (Hazan & Shaver, 1987).

Whether young or old, if the attachment figure does not attend to one's needs and wants for attachment and is considered unresponsive and out of reach, an attachment behavior pattern emerges as a norm. There will be anger, protesting, clinging, sadness, and eventually disengagement in adult-infant and marital relationships. Responding to loved ones when there is a need to attach eventually becomes a habitual response system(Shaver & Clark, 1994) .

Attachment patterns are classified into four categories: secure attachment, anxious (preoccupied) attachment, avoidant (rejecting) attachment, and fearful-avoidant or disorganized attachment. These patterns are based on an individual's perception of family relationships and their own role within the family system. Individuals with different attachment patterns may develop internal beliefs about whether they are worthy of care and whether they can rely on family members during times of crisis and adversity. These beliefs are not purely cognitive; rather, they are connected to emotional experiences and appear through repeated patterns of family interaction and behaviour. Over time, these patterns may develop into coping mechanisms

that directly influence individuals' responses to stress and contribute to the level of anxiety experienced within the family. Such patterns may become more evident when family members are emotionally unavailable or unresponsive, causing individuals to respond through protest behaviours, such as anger and tension, excessive dependence, or withdrawal and avoidance (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991).

Attachment theory provides another useful angle in helping to frame the underlying scientific basis for family anxiety and how these insecure patterns of interaction transfer within the family system, thereby leading to increasing deregulation as well as escalating tension and conflict. In affective therapy, such responses are considered reactions to family members' inability to form stable emotional bonds, and thus they represent one of the critical factors that fuel family anxiety and the stability of relationships within the family (Gottman, 1993).

This study reveals that emotional signals, in this case, facial expressions, are important in controlling interactions within intimate relationships, like in the case of spouses. Positive affect expression is considered, on average, the best predictor of relationship health and stability. Positive displays of emotion, including affection between the wife and husband together and enthusiasm in the wife, are the major predictors that positively predict longevity, whereas negative displays, including anger and contempt by the wife or fear by the husband, are the best predictors of disastrous paths (Gottman, 1993).

Since such negative feelings are repeated throughout the years in the family, there is a time when they end up being looped and irrevocable cycles that ensure that the relationship continues in a vicious cycle of stress. This cycle is usually exhibited in the form of a cycle where

one partner criticizes or blames the other, and the other turns back or avoids, which results in defensive responding. It is directly related to family anxiety because this trend continues to propagate the stress and deny any emotional security within the family. Their persistence leads to the destruction of relationships and is a strong indicator of increased probability of separation or divorce as the tension and arguing accumulate over time (Gottman, 1993).

The eventual aim of anxiety in couples should be to create a sense of personal security founded on the emotional responsiveness and accessibility of their attachment partners, but not to minimize conflict or bargain over personal differences. The differences are something that can be accepted and managed in a safe relationship; such differences are not necessarily harmful because they can contribute to a deeper understanding and development when the partners feel safe and supported emotionally. The basis of this long-lasting enhancement is the building up of new levels of trustful emotional involvement, which forms a healing emotional experience of association among the couple. Family assessment is an essential instrument of family interactions. In marriage, family pressures encompass the effects of the life cycle stage of the couple and any crises or problems the family might be going through, such as financial stress, health problems, or parenting problems that can put a strain on the family (Gittins, 1993).

Every stage of married life brings with it a unique set of challenges, and every stage of family life exerts a significant influence on relationship dynamics and family stress. As an example, as couples go through the stage of raising children, they may experience additional stresses from parenting tips, work-family balance, and handling behavioral problems that may happen in children. This pressure builds up and has a direct effect on the marriage relationship,

where partners can feel incongruent in their parenting, or even feel drained and without personal time for themselves (Gittins, 1993).

Despite all these stresses, it does not necessarily mean that it will be the end of the family conflict or marriage, but a test to create new coping mechanisms in addressing family anxiety and conflicts. Flexibility and resiliency are two of the most exemplary attributes that allow couples to bounce back from crises and reduce the stress of family anxiety. Besides, emotional sensitivity towards one another's feelings in the relationship helps see to it that the marriage is strengthened, which helps the couple overcome issues by building a relationship based on respect and understanding (Cherlin, 1996) .

Moreover, one cannot stress enough the importance of effective communication and openness between wives and husbands in handling sensitive issues. When couples can handle issues jointly in a spirit of cooperation, this can transform family stress into an opportunity for greater bonding and a stronger relationship. With the application of family assessment abilities, the spouses can identify both the strengths and weaknesses of the relationship; thus, they can determine the most suitable means to strengthen their family life. Family anxiety is, therefore, not merely an issue to be avoided, but a part of the learning and sharing process in married life that is geared towards enhancing the relationship and the family bond (Bernard, 1972).

Family can be viewed as a very resilient, stable system in the face of family anxiety. Even when family systems are facing tremendous external pressures, such as economic or social crises and complicated internal conflicts, they retrieve coping mechanisms that enable the family to remain cohesive and act almost collectively on a “survival instinct.” But that resilience does not

come without stress. Rather, those pressures can heighten family anxiety when family members are locked into intrusive and cyclical patterns of interaction. Some families may look as though they are impossible riddles, while their members regard the family as a central part of their identity and security system, so they cling, despite tension and anxiety (Waite & Gallagher, 2000).

Good and stable marriages tend to enhance the psychological, physical, social, and economic wellbeing of the family, hence decreasing family anxiety levels. On the other hand, family disintegration and divorce become a great source of stress due to the disruption of the stability and cohesion within the nuclear family structure. Disintegration may increase the family anxiety since it decreases the cohesiveness of the family system (Waite & Gallagher, 2000).

A concerted effort is being made to underline the advantages of marriage, even in marital trouble between partners. In a study of the University of Wisconsin National Survey of Family and Households, Waite and five co-authors examined data in a 2002 report. They found that the adults who reported in the late 1980s that they had been unhappy in their married life and divorced were, on average, unhappy or even unhappier five years later when they were surveyed, compared to those who had not divorced. Most of the people who remained in their marriages had, on average, experienced the worst and were in a happier, better place (Nock, 1998).

To the extent that they were able to control other variables like income, age, gender, and ethnicity, Divorce does not always result in reduced levels of family anxiety or an enhanced sense of stability and control in individuals' lives. In some cases, it may create additional emotional and psychological challenges that continue to affect family relationships. This implies

that divorce cannot be the immediate remedy to relieve tensions and instability in the family system. Thus, the results show that unhappy marital status does not imply that such people are worse off than those who prefer to divorce in relation to family anxiety. The two scenarios can be associated with various stress and instability trends (Nock, 1998).

Therefore, the breakup of an unhappy marriage is not necessarily the most effective method to decrease the anxiety in the family, as there is a risk of new anxieties connected with the loss of stability and family cohesion that can be produced by divorce. On the other hand, there are marriages that, though subject to stress, can indeed get better with time by reorganizing relationships and the pattern of interaction among family members, a factor that can help to alleviate anxiety and bring back some balance in the family, especially when couples actively engage in communication and seek professional support to address underlying issues (Nock, 1998).

1.6 The Psychological Effects of Family Disruptions on Family Anxiety:

At some point, however, men and women separate because living together becomes impossible for them. This usually happens after a long time during which the spouses have been denying themselves or disillusioned about their situation. In *Long Day's Journey Into Night* by Eugene O'Neill, one receives a positive portrayal of a family that denies itself. The family members continue speaking about each other in terms of total fantasy. Such tactics may shield them from debilitating conflict temporarily, but eventually, they prevent them from making changes when such changes should be made, leading to unresolved issues that fester beneath the surface. When all the accumulated anger and frustration explode in violent and abusive quarrels,

marriage ceases to be the sanctuary it once was meant to be. Unless something drastic happens, the marriage is headed for divorce. The impact of divorce has become so destructive that the very fabric of American society has been weakened (Popenoe & Whitehead, 2003).

The influence that has been exerted by the no-fault divorce policy has made the procedure too easy and has become part of a society that is lenient about divorce. The obsession that characterizes modern or postmodern societies with individualism and self-realization rather than covenants and sacrifices puts undue strain on marital relations. Furthermore, marriages are undermined by unrealistic expectations, the absence of equality, the disappearance of any sense of community that may sustain the family structure, and the prevalence of materialism. There are many reasons for divorce (Popenoe & Whitehead, 2003).

A divorce is usually a high-conflict period. Any abusive or violent pathology existing pre-divorce is certain to intensify during and adjacent to divorce litigation, including the risk of violence against family members. Ava Seigler found that cohabiting couples had a harmful toolkit of active, aggressive, and abusive forms of behavior toward one another in the context of divorce and custody disputes. Divorce is a legal concept and thus has an official date of dissolution, but most marriages dissolve over the course of years. Divorce is most often an experience that causes a crisis as both a public and an individual phenomenon (Seigler, 2005).

The ending of a marital relationship often results in emotional pain and psychological crisis. Despite the actions and decisions that lead to divorce, its socio-psychological consequences may have a more profound impact on individuals than its material consequences. Divorce is generally understood as a complex process that develops through several stages. The

first stage is pre-separation or emotional divorce, during which feelings of disappointment, dissatisfaction, and emotional distance begin to emerge. The second stage involves actual separation, which may include negotiation, sadness, regret, and psychological distress. The third stage occurs between separation and legal divorce and involves legal procedures, financial adjustments, additional grieving, changes in parenting arrangements, lifestyle transformation, and the development of a new emotional identity (Seigler, 2005).

The final stage of the divorce process is the restoration stage, during which individuals begin to reorganize their lives and develop new perspectives and goals. During this stage, divorced individuals may experience a process of personal rediscovery as they adjust to living independently and establish new social relationships. The emotional experiences associated with divorce may resemble those experienced after the loss of a life partner through death, as both involve processes of grief that may include sadness, denial, anger, and eventual acceptance. However, the main difference between loss through divorce and loss because of death is the fact that in the former case the person still lives. Furthermore, the presence of children makes the divorcing parties maintain some sort of connection, which can complicate the emotional process of divorce as they must continue to co-parent and communicate despite their separation (Seigler, 2005).

Family members have the right and duty to grow up in a two-parent home where the parents love each other and their kids. As divorce disrupts the parent-child bond, it would remain an option of last resort at all times. The long-term effects of divorce on family members have been discussed by researchers for the past four decades. While some scholars are optimistic about the adaptability and resilience of family members, the others emphasize the adverse impact

of divorce on family members. Before the late 1970s, there had been some efforts to minimize the adverse impacts of divorce on the family members (Seigler, 2005).

Research indicates that individuals in families experiencing separation or divorce usually lack economic and social stability in comparison to those living in families maintaining unity. However, the cause of this disparity is not straightforward or entirely conclusive. One theory is that the problem is not the divorce itself but the instability within the marriage that leads to divorce, exposing family members to psychological strain and stress because of parental issues. Conversely, certain scholars suggest that the effect of divorce within a family unit is usually temporary since it brings about transient trauma, but over time, family members adjust, and the influence of the trauma fades away. According to “Gordons,” the psychological problems experienced by offspring of divorced couples, particularly during their teenage or adult years, are not solely due to the divorce process but to the turbulent nature of the parent's relationship before separation, as well as their continued dispute after divorce (Gordons, 2005).

Lisa Strohschein (2005) suggested that children in families who will eventually divorce show higher levels of anxiety, depression, and antisocial behavior even before the divorce occurs, compared to children in stable families. But after the divorce itself, there is a particular and significant increase in anxiety and depression directly related to the separation event. Most researchers agree that divorce itself is a traumatic experience because it creates anxiety and instability within the family. A long-term study by Mavis Hetherington and John Kelly (2002) showed that daily changes in family life after divorce initially negatively affects its members. One of the most difficult things for children is the change in parental behavior, especially during

the post-divorce period when one or both of them begin to enter into new relationships, which increases children's feelings of confusion and insecurity (Strohschein, 2005) .

Most parents need at least two or more years to get used to being divorced, and both parents have issues with self-respect during the adjustment process. Other parents were vulnerable to becoming vindictive against their former partner, experiencing emotional breakdowns and depression, and feeling anxious about what the future holds for them. The transitional period will affect the family members since parents are not readily available to assist them emotionally, which can lead to feelings of neglect and increased stress among children and other family members during this challenging time (Hetherington & Kelly, 2002) .

The transitional phase is difficult for family members because the parents, who may be absent, find it challenging to offer support. If the parents do not have too much animosity at the time of separation, the adaptation process for the family members becomes easier. It helps that the parents who get separated still have a cordial relationship and continue loving their family members. The divorce of such parents reduces their disorganizing influence on their family members. Post-separation communication among parents is essential for optimal adjustment in the family members, as it allows for consistent parenting practices and emotional support, which can help mitigate the negative effects of divorce on children (Lamb, 1997) .

The relationship between marriage and the family is based on mutual commitment because marriage is supposed to be an institution of moral contract involving joint responsibility for both spouses. Success in such a relationship cannot be achieved through perfection but rather by embracing each other's imperfections, making tolerance a key factor in marriage. In this case,

both partners try to establish a positive relationship based on cooperation and dependence, where both parties utilize their capabilities to foster a solid relationship. As such, knowledge and emotions grow among both partners, thereby improving family stability, which can lead to a more harmonious home environment and better conflict resolution skills (Lamb, 1997).

Any disruption of such an equilibrium of understanding and tolerance will result in increasing tensions inside the family, which might eventually end in divorce. Divorce undoubtedly influences the family members because it is associated with the emergence of family anxiety and insecurity, especially in the case of children, whose routine life and relations with other family members undergo rapid change. To minimize these tensions, the spouses need to learn how to communicate effectively, use dialogue rather than arguments, and consult a counselor in case of necessity. Cooperation and tolerance toward each other even after divorce will considerably contribute to the reduction of family anxiety (Lamb, 1997).

Although divorce is not a central event in the selected plays examined in this thesis, discussing its psychological effects provides a broader understanding of the factors that may contribute to family anxiety. Divorce represents one of the major disruptions that can affect family bonds, emotional security, and patterns of communication among family members. Examining the psychological consequences of divorce helps clarify how the loss or transformation of family relationships may generate feelings of insecurity, stress, and emotional instability. Therefore, this discussion does not suggest that divorce is the main cause of family anxiety in the selected plays; rather, it provides a wider theoretical background for understanding how changes and disruptions within family relationships can influence the emotional dynamics of the family system (Lamb, 1997).

1.7 Socio-Economic and Political Factors Influencing Family Anxiety

International distance has shrunk because of almost instantaneous communication, so we are more conscious than ever of what is happening throughout the world: nuclear accidents, environmental disasters, economic downturns, terrorism, fuel shortages, mass starvation, and natural catastrophes. Through the news media and the Internet, we learn daily in our homes of tragedies and events over which we have no power. As Freud noted, repeated experience of external danger in the absence of perceived control induces what he called "reality anxiety," whereby individuals become psychically overwhelmed by uncontrollable stressors, leading to feelings of helplessness and internal tension (Freud, 1961) .

Family tension is heightened since we are being forced to bear witness to circumstances outside our control. For example, international free trade organizations in industry and farming can enrich one country while leading factory workers to lose their jobs and decreasing the income of family farmers in another. Because most of the stressors families are presently facing are outside the family, families do not have control over altering them. According to Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, such ecosystem-level influences have an indirect impact on the family system and tend to produce long-term psychological stress and erosion of coping capabilities (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

These situations lead to a feeling of "frustration and confusion," most particularly among mastery-oriented individuals trained to depend on self-reliance and analysis. Mastery-oriented individuals who are problem solvers and readily surmount obstacles will be frustrated and confused by restrictions beyond the individual. Besides, daily life presents problems such as traffic congestion, flight delays, hurried childcare provisions, lengthy queues for unemployment,

rising taxes, declining share prices, and rent raises. It is not accomplished. Contemporary families are more stressed than the previous generation. In the most advanced society in the world, American society, high levels of stress can be largely due to the battle for success by being assimilated into culture and challenges faced by families due to factors beyond their control, rather than a lack of family resources. Hence, the control-to-constraint ratio can be an indicator of a family's capacity to respond to stress (Robila & Tylor, 2018).

The political and ideological powers that shape and define family structures are influenced by hegemonic groups. Since the hegemonic groups construct these powers in a manner that favors their economic self-interests, they usually create social injustices that result in social agitation and disturbances. These structural inequalities not only destabilize society but also impinge directly on the family as a social institution, thus adding to the stress and strain within families. Economic circumstances, including unemployment, poverty, and social inequalities, establish the environment in which families operate and adjust. They tend to initiate or increase family stress and dysfunction. In the past, these inequalities were manifested in the experiences of immigrant families, particularly during the 1600s to early 1900s, when many were subjected to economic exploitation and ethnic discrimination that led to squalid living conditions and weakened family unity (Taylor, 2018).

The criticism of social class became popular in the 1960s because of how well it was understood in relation to attitudes and behavior. But in the United States, social class awareness remained peripheral, and it has been a very frustrating experience for scholars who study social class issues. The concept of the American Dream, the general perception of the US as a middle-

class nation, and the belief that someone can move up classes as a result of working diligently are just some of the factors that obscure the fact of social class. Talking about economic disparity, particularly by politicians, is considered to be instigating "class warfare" (Perrucci & Wysong, 2007).

The issue with American social class awareness is that they deny the existence of different social classes, such as the rich, the middle class, and the poor. Rather, it lies in their ignorance of the dynamics between these classes, the significance of worker exploitation, and the perception of social inequality as unjust and everlasting. Ignorance of the influence of social factors such as inadequate schooling, working conditions, and racism in maintaining class disparities is common. Another reason why social class inequalities are ignored is the focus on racial politics. There has been a more marked increase in social class inequalities in recent decades than ever before. Ever since the 1970s, there has been a downturn in industry; a weakening of organized labor and thus its ability to fight for the rights of the workers in terms of wages and benefits; globalization of the labor force; and enactment of legislation that has favored the rich(Perrucci & Wysong, 2007).

The growth of the post-industrial economy has been critical in increasing social stratification within the United States; it initially resulted in the demise of many well-paying industrial employment opportunities, and over time, within the global economy, it has led to the breakdown of the wages and salaries of white-collar workers. The widening economic disadvantage has contributed to American fears of employment insecurity and growing sensitivity to issues of social class. Surveys show that most Americans now regard job loss as a distinct likelihood, and a number of individuals who had been in their middle-class view have

found it progressively harder to meet their simple monetary requirements. As a result, they are getting increasingly critical regarding class inequality and more pro-governments-interference.

(Perrucci & Wysong, 2007) .

Families are care giving institutions that differ from one culture to another and evolve throughout history. Their primary function, in historical terms, is to assist in the economic subsistence of their members; thus, the family form evolves in response to the economic environment, and cultural ideologies and legal systems emerge to enable such adaptation. Human society has been developing throughout history, becoming more complex and heterogeneous in terms of class. In consequence, people's way of life and their living standards depend both on financial conditions and on the functions played by families within this financial system. When the economy progresses, new elements appear, influencing the formation of the family and changing its character and stability, such as shifts in employment opportunities, changes in social norms, and evolving gender roles. But ideology and politics also affect family systems and relationships, so economics isn't the only force. That is why one may not say that there exists any inevitable link between family structure, economy, or ideology, since all these elements are interrelated in many ways. Individuals are not merely passive subjects of these elements' influence; they have the opportunity to engage with them, make their own decisions, and shape their attitudes, thereby having a major impact on their family structure (Jayakody, Thornton, & Axinn, 2008).

In reality, the family and the economy, as social institutions, interact and influence each other; therefore, changes in one may also affect the other. The family is not an independent

institution; it is connected to other social institutions like religion or labor, and it receives changes from the economy and ideology (Hareven T. K., 1991).

Taking into account the abovementioned facts, one can assume that family anxiety can no longer be caused by internal family issues but can be related to external reasons, including economic or political crises. These stressors, which cannot be influenced by the family, affect the security of family members and thus lead to increased tension and uncertainty among them. Thus, external pressure causes a weakening of the family's capacity to handle difficulties. On the other hand, the reduction of family anxiety can take place not only by altering the external environment but also by improving the internal environment in which coping with family anxiety will occur. It presupposes establishing successful communication between the family members, the development of cooperative and mutual relations between them, and gaining mental strength for coping with stress. It is also vital for the family to recognize that external factors affect them and that they are not to blame, as this will help lessen feelings of helplessness (Hareven, 1991).

1.8 An overview of American drama and its role in portraying family anxiety:

The development of American drama reflects the social, cultural, and psychological changes that have shaped American society. Although American theatre emerged later than the theatrical traditions of Europe, it gradually developed its own identity by addressing issues related to individual experiences, social conflicts, and family relationships. From early dramatic forms to modern American theatre, playwrights have used the stage as a medium for exploring human struggles, emotional conflicts, and the complexities of interpersonal relationships. In particular, modern American drama frequently portrays the family as a central space where

psychological tensions, social pressures, and unresolved conflicts appear. Therefore, American drama provides a significant literary context for examining family anxiety and the ways in which playwrights represent the emotional challenges experienced within family relationships. Drama's unsound development as both a literary genre and a theatrical art form was caused by several circumstances, such as the influence of Puritanism on artistic expression, and the tradition still exists today, often manifesting in the ongoing struggle between artistic freedom and societal norms. You can learn about the history of American play with a quick historical tour. During the period 1649–1660, England was passing through a difficult period as it struggled against the radicalism of the Puritans, a religious sect that often claimed to be an Anglican offshoot. Since the year 1548/1549, Oliver Cromwell, the Puritan ruler, ruled England for eleven years (Craik, 1977).

The evolution of American drama in particular and writing in general was influenced by three clearly identifiable influences. Pursuing individuality was the first step toward creating a distinctive body of work that would be wholly American. The second stage was inciting nationalist sentiments in the wider public, inspiring them to want control over recently acquired lands. Ironically, despite its unintended nature, this step was as British as it could be. The third was a desire to sacrifice your life in defense of your country, along with a sense of patriotism. In addition to the lack of a robust literary legacy, drama in America faced additional potential challenges. American drama was never able to equal the grandeur of its British competitors, partly because Puritans disliked and mistrusted the potential social purpose of theatre, which led to a cultural environment that undervalued theatrical expression and limited its development. Another factor contributing to the continued shelving of American dramas is "generic hegemony". Prose and poetry have historically been valued more highly than drama at American

institutions, which has caused aspiring writers and students to treat this art form with less regard and seriousness. Paradoxically, a nation that has long desired an indigenous identity has neglected to acknowledge, cherish, and preserve its own indigenous literature, especially plays (Richardson, 1993).

According to many studies regarding the content of the syllabi of various colleges and universities in America, there is evidence to suggest that either there is no recognition at all of drama or, if there is any recognition, then only drama written by whites can find its place in the curriculum. The truth remains that most of the drama of American drama is based on work done by three of the greatest writers of American drama, namely Eugene O'Neil, Arthur Miller, and Tennessee Williams. Nevertheless, some additional names could also be added to the list, like Edward Albee, David Mamet, August Wilson, and T.S. Eliot, among a few others (Murphy, 1992).

It would be reasonable to argue that the viewpoint on American theatre has to be reconsidered. The passage of time has led to the neglect of a substantial body of Native American drama, underscoring the necessity for a renewed emphasis on these works to guarantee their recognition and appreciation in modern American theatre discussions. Drama in America takes an intriguing turn as we move into the twenty-first century. According to Kenneth Macgowan, "The American Drama Comes of Age" in the 1920s. According to John Corbin, the plays of William Vaughn Moody and Percy MacKaye "challenge comparisons with the best work of the modern stage in any country", notwithstanding their immaturity. Moody's plays include *The Great Divide* (1907), *The Canterbury Pilgrims* (1903), *Sappho and Phaon* (1907), *Jeanne D'Arc* (1907), *The Scarecrow* (1908), *Anti-Matrimony* (1910), and *The Mystery of*

Hamlet, King of Denmark, or What We Will, a quartet of plays considered prequels to William Shakespeare's Hamlet.

American Drama had moved away from melodrama, which was the dominating subject matter of the century, and focused on new themes of psychology; the position of man within the society (as exemplified by the dramas of O'Neill), relations within the family and society (as illustrated by Miller's drama), problems related to race relations (as described in the dramas of Wilson), and love and sex and death (as illustrated by Williams's dramas) have been the dominant themes of drama in the twentieth century. The genre's success was due in part to new stagecraft, forms, techniques, and acting methods, which allowed for more nuanced portrayals of complex themes such as psychology, family dynamics, race relations, and existential issues in love, sex, and death (Dunlap, 1963) .

As a reaction against romanticism, which emphasized the depiction of men and manners through a language so refined and elevated as to make it doubtful if the truthfulness of the picture was believable, realism evolved toward the end of the 19th century and dominated the 20th century as far as drama was concerned. In simple terms, realism in the theatre is the depiction of life as it actually is. It involves showing characters and events in their most authentic form without any language sophistication (Murphy, 1992).

The dramatist uses realistic settings, clear language, and situations that are close to reality. The dramatist demonstrates how the characters solve different problems, take care of the household, and manage daily affairs; their only superpower lies in their minds. Realism is related

to naturalism, but once the characters acquire options, things become very different. In a realist play, once the character chooses to become compulsive, or rather, do things through highly premeditated moves, his reaction to the stimulus will not be as simplistic as it would be for the character in a naturalist play. In a realist play, the character does not necessarily react in proportion to the stimulus; there might be more to consider, such as their psychological state, past experiences, and the complexity of their motivations (Murphy, 1992).

The backdrop is uninteresting, the costumes are regular, and the dialogue resembles ordinary conversation. One exciting aspect of realism in plays is that they have a protagonist like Nora in Henrik Ibsen's play "A Doll's House", who struggles to speak up against social injustices. The evolution of modern dramatic literature has been heavily impacted by Eugene O'Neill. Modern drama and realism were developed by O'Neill, who began this trend with his acclaimed literary masterpiece "Long Day's Journey Into Night", along with Arthur Miller and Tennessee Williams. William maintained his legacy by producing dramas such as *A Streetcar Named Desire*, which have received the distinguished Pulitzer Prize for Drama. August Wilson, the most renowned African-American dramatist, has made substantial contributions to American realism (Abbotson, 2005).

O'Neill talks about the lives of those who are marginalized in society, while Wilson talks about his own experiences. August Wilson's life exemplified the difficult existence of black people in America. Social realism is a common term used to describe Miller's realistic approach. Distinguishing between Socialist and Social Realist In this situation, realism is crucial. Although social realism means the representation of the sufferings of workers as well as the sociopolitical

conflicts present during any specific period, socialist realism is an official art movement that got approval from Stalin in the USSR and was eventually adopted by its other allies. This is because socialist realism is mainly concerned with communist ideologies and the process of becoming a perfect socialist. Therefore, it is much more of a political objective rather than a realistic representation of life and its subjects, usually encouraging the values of the government and praising the working classes (Abbotson, 2005).

There was a great change in values in American society after World War II, especially in terms of family dynamics. The functions played by family members have been greatly altered due to these changes in cultural values, resulting in a father who is ineffective, distant, or often absent; a mother who tries hard to keep the family intact; and highly rebellious children. Families act as agents of this change since they tend to challenge the claims of society, often advocating for new roles and expectations that reflect their evolving dynamics and values (Meserve, 1994).

The state of shifting family and cultural ideals is not unique to American contemporary drama. As pointed out by Meserve (1994), the modern post-war theatre that seeks out new values in the changed world and seeks to discard the old ones indeed questions the old virtues and values. Besides, in addition to rejecting obsolete paradigms, it endeavours to challenge rigid values, shatter illusions of security, and contest questionable ideals. The negative effects on the family emanate from the impact brought about by social myths that exist in society. There is a feeling of voidness whenever there is hollowness in the myths, dreams, or values that are upheld.

The plays *The Humans* (2016) by Stephen Karam, *Rabbit Hole* (2010) by David Lindsay-Abaire, and *August: Osage County* (2008) by Tracy Letts shows how the American family was

subjected to the negative consequences of the success theory (Nelson, 1970). The protagonists are chasing the unattainable American Dream, where society scrutinizes facts and fiction to reconcile the hard reality that is unaffected by popular mythology with the professed dogma of certain success. Family appears to be both a source of comfort and a cause of anxiety in American drama; it is both a safe haven and a battlefield that involves all of its members. Because it is a collective entity made up of devoted people, it is a profoundly contradictory institution. According to Abbotson, there is "a relentless fight going on between the two principles" (p. 46). Rough individuality frequently appears to be incompatible with being accountable to a higher familial unit. It is difficult to break free from the institution of the family. Even if one is no longer physically tied to one's family, it can be nearly hard to escape their links, roots, and obligations at times (Abbotson, 2005) .

According to Bigsby, Arthur Miller's statement that "the way I see life, there are no public issues; there are all private issues" (p. 8) underlines the primacy and significance of the family in play. As a result, public issues are diminished and viewed as extensions of private concerns. Public issues are metonymized by private ones. The macrocosm of the entire society is metaphorically represented by the microcosm of the family.(Bigsby, 2008).

every society is held together by a myth system (family) all social relations, the very texture of human society, are myth-born and myth-sustained. Wherever he goes, whatever he encounters, man spins about him his web of myths, as the caterpillar spins its cocoon. Every individual spins his own variant within the greater web of the whole group. (MacIver, 1947, p. 30).

Similarly, according to Van den Berghe (1975) in *Man in Society: A Biosocial View*, power struggles are the basis of all human organizations. In his view, dominance is organized since man is a human animal that possesses all animal characteristics in addition to other qualities., which he attributes to man via enculturation and what he refers to as "civilization," which is similar to some monkey species. In order to regulate the access of limited resources, the power-ordered societies are established. He contends that a belief in consensus is fostered by many human communities. But even in organizations that claim to be grounded on equality and sharing of resources, such as the monastic orders, you can usually find a power dynamic at work by breaking the illusion of consensus and revealing underlying hierarchies that often infiltrate decision-making and allocation of resources. Families are considered to be under a power system and display a comparable dynamic of power distribution as society as a whole (Berghe, 1975).

According to Van den Berghe (1975), paternalism is "possibly the most common pattern and rationale for rule."Therefore, in a society with a ruler, emperor, or dictator, the ruler is like a father to his sons. He characterises the family as "benevolent tyranny," in which the two ideas are constantly at odds. There will always be conflict over inheritance and power. Van den Berghe also uses an analysis of the family's internal dynamics to explain violence, suggesting that the ongoing conflicts over inheritance and power can lead to aggressive behaviours among family members.

relations of dominance and submission rest ...on violence or threat of violence which is the ultimate argument in a power contest. The average family is no more exempt from

violence and conflict than the average state, though our ideology concerning the family makes us reluctant to accept that fact (Berghe, 1975, p. 119).

The family's portrayal in plays and theaters altered as society underwent the aforementioned transformations. American writers leaned on English plays and style during that period of transition. As a result, original American plays were required. Prominent playwrights were drawn to this problem, which led to "a new cultural product that spoke not of the abandoned world but of the world in making, as the old personal and social ties were deserted and nostalgia for the old familiar places and habits was balanced by the necessity of new virtues in the new place" (Bigsby, 2008).

A similar point was made by Edgar Allan Poe, who grew up in a theatrical home. We have to get rid of all models, according to Bigsby (cited in Wilmeth, 2005). The Elizabethan theatre should be closed. We require our ideas—principles of dramatic action derived from the timeless fountain of nature rather than from the ancient dramatists. According to Miller (1896), melodramas were popular because they "helped them create a sense of identity [...] troubled with questions of class and authenticity" as people moved to cities after the war.. They supported middle-class ideals like virtue, frugal living, diligence, domesticity, and patriotism (p. 235). Additionally, it provided a respite from the harsher realities of everyday life while also validating the audience's position as people within a society, allowing them to escape their struggles and reinforcing their social values and beliefs. As a result, it served the audience's popular taste and had some therapeutic benefit. As Miller claims:

It was not the reality but the myth of America that the audience wanted to see in the theatre, [as well as the fact that] playwrights aimed for commercial success, so it was logical that they set their task to please the public, not to offend it. (p. 238).

Thus, it would seem reasonable to say that a new and freeing counter-current emerged in modern drama following World War I, with playwrights adopting a somewhat critical posture. According to Abbotson (2005), the late 1940s and early 1950s saw the emergence of fresh, serious, and critical plays that challenged naïve assumptions, nostalgia, and the blinding influence of tradition. As Bigsby says of Miller, they raised the alarm "against the coercive power of myth and the constant temptation to deny responsibility for the world we make."

Theater has ever been a reflection of society; it mirrors its victories, tragedies, and wars. In the American stage, more specifically in and after the 20th century, one of the prime topics of examination has been the breakdown and rebuilding of the family unit. As a response to the pressures placed on the traditional family unit by war, financial crises, urbanization, and shifting moral standards, playwrights employed new stage techniques to realistically depict these fears.

One of the most influential techniques in portraying family anxiety is realism. Realism arose in response to Romanticism's idealism, showing life in all its complexity and flaws. Through realistic dialogue, authentic domestic settings, and emotionally raw performances, playwrights expose the unspoken tensions, disappointments, and psychological burdens carried by family members. One way in which the play takes on this realism is by grasping onto the oppressive atmosphere of a New York apartment and an uneasy conversation among family members over an entire Thanksgiving meal. The dialogue is naturalistic: it is interrupted, goes on

tangents, and is filled with meaningful silences, following the rhythm of a real family conversation. Karam has chosen to forego any climactic confrontations or revelations; instead, tension builds incrementally, weighed down by economic struggle, illness, aging, and the unsaid terror offered up by each character. This dark realism lends the play chilling verisimilitude, forcing the spectator to acknowledge the insidious evil that may, in quietude, be afflicting the very persons of his own family (Meserve, 1994) .

Modern American drama usually explores a psychological world that marks intrafamilial interactions and reflects surface familial issues using a symbolic style. Tracy Letts's *August: Osage County* depicts the family's rural residence as a potent emblem of emotional deterioration and incarceration, as three generations are compelled to live under one roof in a tangle of secrets, denials, and mutual accusations.

Violet, the dying heroin addict mother who stands for emotional repression and poisonous inheritance from one generation to the next, has particular symbolism. "You people had everything handed to you on a silver platter, and you squandered it," she yells at one of the most pivotal points in the drama. The words now represent loss, guilt, and abandonment rather than only an insult. Violet starts to represent a past that refuses to stay buried, fiercely reminding her children of their expected mistakes and betrayals.

Such symbolic conflict dramatically affects character development by placing each family member in an emotional struggle, not only with one another but also with their own internal experiences. The characters develop not only through their words and actions but also through symbolic encounters that reflect deeper issues of identity, disillusionment, and rejection.

Symbolism functions as a dramatic device that reveals the internal struggles of the characters and enriches the interpretation of their emotional experiences.

David Lindsay-Abaire's "Rabbit Hole" examines a family adjusting to the sad death of their young child, so family conflicts take center stage. The drama closely explores the emotional challenges and inner conflicts of the characters, and the use of set design, lighting, and language is crucial in communicating these underlying tensions. Every component together produces a psychological environment that captures the inner conflict of the family. Here, we will look at how these components help to portray the family worry that defines the interactions and experiences of the characters.

The dialogue in David Lindsay-Abaire's *Rabbit Hole* plays a significant role in revealing the increasing emotional conflict and family tension experienced by the characters. At the beginning of the play, Becca's and Howie's conversations are restrained as both struggle to maintain a sense of normalcy after the loss of their child. However, as the drama progresses, their dialogue becomes more intense and confrontational, reflecting the deterioration of their communication and the emotional distance that develops between them. The words of the characters get harsher, loaded with guilt and unresolved suffering. The intense arguments between Becca and Howie, for example, highlight how each is battling survivor's guilt and the anxiety about losing each other. Emphasizing their incapacity to connect and communicate their suffering, their conversation swings between fury and grief. Both of them withdraw into their silences, unable to completely express their emotions, so this broken communication shows the fight for emotional closeness.

Set design, lighting, and conversation taken together form a coherent emotional landscape reflecting the inner conflicts of the individuals. The home's restricting areas represent the family's emotional isolation, while the lighting accentuates the changes in their emotional states, from hope to hopelessness. As the protagonists seek to express their loss, the conversation reveals their growing estrangement. These components taken together create an immersive environment in which the family's unresolved tensions and emotional suffering are intensified, illustrating how trauma and loss reveal themselves in both the physical and psychological spheres of their life.

Chapter Two

2.1 Familial Tensions in Stephen Karam's *The Humans* (2016):

Stephen Karam is a well-known American screenwriter and playwright who was born to an American-Lebanese family in 1979 in the United States. He was brought up with a low theatrical presence, yet his initial experience with the first grade, during which he attended the play *Little Shop of Horrors*, where he saw his sister acting in it, created a strong impression on him and helped him to build up his interest in the field of theatre (StageAgent, unknown).

He joined at Brown University, where he studied English literature. It was during his undergraduate education that he first entered the world of theatre by reading texts in the literature department of Trinity Reproduction, which provided him with a rudimentary idea of how the stage operated. In 2002, he graduated and then continued his training at the Utah Festival, where he encountered P.J. Paparelli, with whom he would later team up to create a play called *Columbines*, inspired by the Columbine incident. The play was first performed at the New York Theatre Workshop, and it was the first stage production of Karam (StageAgent, unknown).

He then wrote the play "Discourse and Debate", which impressed Todd Haynes, the artistic director of the Roundabout Theatre Company, who further established him in theatrical circles. Karam's style of writing can be defined as family-centred and identity-centred, with social pressures, humour, and deep humanism, with a specific emphasis on describing family anxieties and changes of modern life. His work has earned widespread critical recognition and numerous prestigious awards. In particular, *The Humans* won the Tony Award for Best Play and the Drama

Desk Award for Outstanding Play in 2016, confirming its significance in contemporary American theatre (StageAgent, unknown).

Stephen Karam explores the theme of family anxiety in his play *The Humans* (2016), presenting a psychologically rich portrayal of the contemporary American family. The story of the play is about a Blake family, who enjoys a traditional Thanksgiving dinner in the apartment of their daughter in New York, which gradually turns into a soul-changing experience of family discord, emotional meltdowns, and unresolved fears that fill the very air of their family.

This chapter will focus on the psychodynamics of family anxiety as exhibited by the play with a perspective on the latent emotional anxiety each of the family members has that contributes to the overall mood of existential discomfort. The argument is rooted in the psychoanalytic theory of anxiety by Sigmund Freud, who holds the view that anxiety is not merely due to external threats but also due to the internal struggles between the repressed desires, ego, and superego. The concept of family anxiety, in this case, is considered as having a stratified experience – a complex of personal anxieties aggravated by the economic deprivation, emotional alienation, fear of failure, and inadequacy.

This analysis is primarily about the character of Erik Blake, the patriarch. He is the epitome of a traditionalist father who is existentially challenged by the loss of the job that he has been living for all his life, his declining economic security, and the increasing emotional detachment between himself and his daughters. But it is not only Erik who is anxious, but it is also all over the family. The older daughter is at work under stress and emotionally unstable; the younger has to cope with chronic illness and with the sense of complete insecurity; the mother

has to live with the symptoms of cognitive impairment and emotional dependency, and the grandmother symbolizes the weaknesses of old age and complete helplessness.

The physical environment, a small apartment on the ground floor of an old building in New York, is also quite significant in expressing and developing the anxiety of the family as a whole, along with the psychological aspect of the characters. The apartment, with its disturbing sounds, flickering lights, gloomy atmosphere, and claustrophobic spatial organization is an outward signifier of inner disintegration and mental suffocation in the family. According to the theory of Gaston Bachelard in his book, *The Poetics of Space*, which examines how material places relate deeply with the inner world of the psychological state, the apartment is no longer viewed as a dead and lifeless spatial background but becomes a space with psychological meaning. It becomes a symbolic item that symbolizes the emotional degradation and the mental conflict of the family and its gradual degradation.

By doing so, this chapter will present an in-depth psychological literature on *The Humans* (2016), delving into how family anxiety is shaped and manifested through the interactions between characters, the family, and the symbolism of space. The environment itself becomes a participant, which echoes and adds to the feeling of fear, vulnerability, and frailty for the family in front of the social and personal drama.

2.2 A Critical Synopsis and Structural Analysis of *The Humans*(2016).

The Humans is a play by Stephen Karam, whose action is set in a tiny basement apartment in the Chinatown neighborhood of New York. The Blake family is present to have a Thanksgiving dinner. The play begins with the family arriving at the apartment of their daughter,

Brigid, who is now residing with her boyfriend Richard. Parents Erik and Deirdre come to the rescue, as well as sister Amy, who has health and emotional problems, and grandmother Fiona, who has dementia and needs constant attention. Right from the very beginning, tension can be felt, disguised by niceties and chit-chat.

The differences between the members of the Blake family become more pronounced as the evening progresses. The parents denounce the decisions of Bridget, especially the one that she has a casual affair with Richard, and she does not have a career to hold on to. In the meantime, Amy shows her health problems and lack of emotional connection, whereas Grandmother Fiona attempts to attract attention by talking incoherently and insisting on constant attention. The conflict intensifies even more when it is discovered that Father Erik has just lost his job, leaving the family in financial crisis and only contributing to his stress and internal conflict. The clear division of classes between Richard, a child of an affluent family, and the rest of the family members, who are merely trying to cope with harsh economic and psychological stresses, becomes even more evident.

Throughout dinner, the relationships disintegrate slowly, family talks turn into painful confessions and hidden conflicts, and the condition of the grandmother is getting worse, and all people begin to feel the need to take everything under control. When the guests have gone at night, Richard is left alone in the apartment, frightened and confused by strange noises and an overall feeling of insecurity. This picture represents the deepest psychological disintegration and the loss of security in the family.

2.3 Fractured Bonds : Impact of Social and economic pressures on the Family unit.

The tension experienced by Erik reflects the impact of both social and economic forces that create a setting of tension and stress within the family. He is struggling with economic hardship as he has been missing his career as an equipment supervisor in a Catholic school. He is no longer in a position to sustain the needs of his entire family. The rising cost of living in New York feeds his fear for the future. Besides the financial burden, he also carries the stress of losing his previous social standing, which further inflicts emotional suffering on him. These stresses create a tense environment that not only affects him but also the entire family and results in shared family anxiety (Lindhout, 2008). This is revealed through the following dialogue:

Erik: I'm not getting my pension now, they could fire me before it kicked in,

Aimee: can they take it away ?

Erik : It's complex...they can do (karam,2016, P.131).

This quote shows that Erik's family is going through a financial crisis. He had been an equipment manager at a Catholic high school for twenty-eight years, a happy life indeed. He was dismissed for a relationship with a teacher before he had his 65th birthday. But when his job is snatched away literally overnight, he loses standing in the community—along with that impending bankruptcy staring him right in the face—one where perhaps a new future may also be on the horizon as he lurks with uncertainty, fearing depriving his family of a free life (Freud, 1949).

He can not get another job in the meantime. He is too elderly to find employment. To find a good career in America, one must be highly educated, talented, and just graduated. Higher

skills are necessary for a decent career and income. Erik's hope for a stable and secure life is undermined by financial difficulties, declining health, and early retirement, which make it increasingly difficult for him to maintain the family's economic stability. Additionally, the aforementioned occurrence shows a connection to Sigmund Freud's concept of anxiety. Due to his job loss, the main character experienced financial pressure. Stress is what causes anxiety (Freud, 1949).

The increasingly high cost of living in the United States is a source of great concern for Eric about his future, as he finds himself burdened with an increasing financial burden of bearing the medical care expenses of both his mother and daughter. This concern is heightened by the fact that health care costs in New York City are higher than the national average, and they continue to rise at a significant pace. The following dialogue can reveal how these economic pressures have deepened Eric's sense of tension and financial instability.

Erik: the cost of taking care of Momo's been a surprise,
you wouldn't even believe how much the medical stuff costs.

Brigid: Can Mom not retire now? (p.133).

This can be seen in the above dialogue, where Erik is unable to afford the treatment for his mother, and this demonstrates that the family's anxiety is affected by the financial pressures on the family. Stephen Karam's decision to set the play in New York City highlights the high cost of living and health care, intensifying the psychological and financial pressures experienced by the Blake family. This has been aggravated by the fact that he has lost his job and can no longer

afford to meet medical bills. Erik's retirement income is no longer sufficient to meet the family's financial needs, placing additional strain on the family (Freud, 1949).

Another issue causing family anxiety is that after his daughter (Aimee) loses her job as a lawyer because of her sickness, Erik has to take care of his family members with scarce resources, and that creates an atmosphere of constant pressure and instability. This is the perspective in which the case of Erik can be considered as an exemplar of family anxiety due to concomitant economic and health elements (Freud, 1949).

Erik's experiences can be interpreted through the lens of Sigmund Freud's theory of anxiety. According to Freud, anxiety is a feeling of psychological tension and emotional distress that arises in response to internal or external threats. Applying this theoretical framework to *The Humans* reveals that Erik's financial worries and his inability to meet his family's medical needs contribute significantly to his psychological anxiety (Freud, 1949). This can be illustrated by the following quote:

Brigid: can't you hire someone to help with?

Deirdre :It'd cost a hundred bucks a night to hire someone to watch her,
a hundred bucks to make sure she doesn't fall and get hurt (p.91).

The following quotation illustrates one of the manifestations of family anxiety, namely the burden of New York City's high health-care costs. The quotation indicates a tension in the family. Erik is not capable of giving the required care to his mother. This worsens his worry over his failure to fulfill his family duties. Erik has a low income, which worsens his plight since he

cannot afford to take care of his mother. He is unable to employ someone to care for his mother, and therefore, he is under pressure all the time. This monetary strain turns into a source of conflict in the family. This issue is applied to other issues, like the high cost of education, which increases the sense of instability of the family (Bachelard, 1969). This issue can be depicted in the following quote:

Brigid: No, I work as a bartender most nights. You have no idea
how much debt I have from my education.

Erik: Yes, I am aware of someone who declined to attend
a public school. (p.33).

The quotation above clearly indicates that Brigid chose to join a private school rather than a public institution. The reason for such a decision was her desire to realize her dreams and have a favorable social status. Unfortunately, such a move has put her under enormous financial strain. She confesses that she earns money by working as a waitress to pay her debts. This choice has resulted in debt complications following her graduation, and she finds it difficult to settle them. It is not an easy task to find employment in New York. This has now become a family issue, considering that the whole family is affected, especially with Erik being out of work with no savings (Bachelard, 1969).

Aimee: Do you have anything savings? Dad, do you have any savings?

Erik: We have no savings.

Aimee: We've been strained (p.134).

The discussion that took place between Erik and his daughter (Aimee) exposes a definite financial crisis that the family is suffering through, since it has become obvious that he lacks savings. Her panic is evident through her repeated question, "Do you have savings?", which indicates her concern about the future and the unstable living conditions of her family. The loss of employment by Eric adds to her anxiety because, at this time, he fails to earn income and save for the future. Hence, it is apparent that there is a presence of anxiety within the family due to the family's financial difficulties and decreased financial stability (Szirmai, 2011).

However, this issue can also be examined from a psychological perspective. According to Sigmund Freud, anxiety develops when individuals experience psychological tension resulting from internal conflicts, fears, or frustrating circumstances. In Erik's case, the quotation reveals that his financial concerns extend beyond economic difficulties and become a source of emotional distress. His inability to provide sufficient financial support for his family creates feelings of pressure, insecurity, and instability, which contribute to his anxiety within the family context. This interpretation is supported by Szirmai (2011), who explains that persistent worries and unresolved concerns can negatively affect an individual's psychological state. Therefore, Erik's financial struggles demonstrate how external pressures can generate internal anxiety and influence family relationships.

Erik: Rich, I'll tell you to save your money right away.

By my age, you know, I thought I would be settled, but man, it never ends.

Our dishwasher just broke, mortgage, auto payments, internet, etc.

Richard: oh man.

Erik: In an effort to save some money, I even started cutting my own hair (p.40).

Erik struggles to live a better life in New York, as the quotation above demonstrates. He is unable to save money for the future because his payments are too high. The protagonist is forced to rely on his paycheck for survival. He is unable to effectively manage his funds due to his poor income. Additionally, they spend a lot of money because of the American way of life. As a result, they have to take on a lot of debt to support their way of life in America. To obtain social prestige, they must purchase a home, a vehicle, and branded products. Even still, they are aware that their salary is insufficient to pay for everything, which creates a constant struggle to balance their financial obligations with the desire to maintain their social status. He must uphold his social standing to gain prestige. His social standing is impacted by his financial issue. The protagonist becomes concerned about losing his standing as a result. He becomes nervous about any issues that have an impact on his social standing (Freud, 1953).

The anxiety experienced by Erik reflects the tension felt by the average American individual under socioeconomic pressure. This anxiety appears through three clear symptoms. The main character first struggles to fall asleep. Secondly, he experiences nightmares. He suppresses all of his issues during the day, but they resurface in his nightmares. The protagonist experiences panic attacks at the conclusion. First, the protagonist's inability to fall asleep was a sign of anxiousness. Because he worries for his daughter, the protagonist is unable to sleep. The dialogue that follows illustrates it:

Erik: Do you want me to report the noise to the supervisor?

Brigid: No, no, people are noisy in New York. How come you're so

Deirdre: He hasn't been sleeping; he had a difficult night.

Brigid: How come you haven't been sleeping? How are you?

Erik: Deirdre Don't discuss this, please (pp. 15-16).

Erik struggles to sleep, as evidenced by the interaction between him and his wife in the quotation above. Erik's overwhelming concern for his family's future is evidence that he suffers from anxiety. He has trouble to sleep because of his issue. The dialogue above takes place in New York. The protagonist's inability to accept the changes that take place in America is depicted through the scenery. He started to be annoyed by his neighbor. It is a response to his difficulty falling asleep. "Hey, he had a rough night / he hasn't been sleeping." It indicates that Erik struggles to sleep and has a nightmare. The protagonist's anxiety over his daughters, who live far from him, causes him to have problems falling asleep. In addition, one of his daughters is unwell. In addition, one of his daughters is unwell, and her health condition causes him to worry about her (Boss, 2002) .

In addition, he suppresses his whole issue and lets it out through nightmares. Erik did not wish to share his dream with his daughters, as evidenced by his statement, "Deirdre, please don't talk about the matter." The discussion above illustrates the core idea of anxiety, which is "repression." The protagonist in this analysis employed repression as a coping strategy to get rid of his nervousness. He let his repression out through nightmares. Due to a tragedy involving his daughter, Erik has difficulty falling asleep. He worries about his daughter's safety as a result (Freud, 1973). The following exchange supports it:

Erik: I've been having trouble falling asleep, and I told
Father Quinn that just thinking about losing you all makes me think about.
Aimee: What are you saying?
Erik: while you were absent. What are you [saying?], Aimee
Erik: This firefighter was carrying a corpse wearing your similar suit?
Aimee: Father (p.140).

Through this dialogue, the influence of psychological and emotional stress on Eric's character can be observed. He is not resting or sleeping because he is constantly thinking about losing his family members, especially his young daughter, Aimee. His speech begins to be disconnected and disrupted, which is a sign of his unbalanced psychological state. His fears are greater than abstract apprehension; They exist in their physical embodiment as a grotesque nightmare in which he describes an image of a firefighter carrying a corpse wrapped in a jacket identical to his daughter's and covered with a heavy blanket of ash, as if the body were frozen. The grotesque nature of this nightmare lies in the disturbing combination of death, loss, and the painful resemblance between the corpse and his daughter, reflecting his deep psychological trauma and fear of losing his family.

The tension in his narrative is gradually increased to a faceless face, as though what he loves has disappeared. Such symbolic imagery being used shows extreme fear of the void and loss and marks the start of a panic attack Eric is experiencing because of accumulated psychological tension and repression. This scene depicts one of the symptoms of anxiety and demonstrates how social tensions and family tensions shape the individual's experience of

anxiety. Secondly , the protagonist experiences a disturbing dream , as illustrated in the following quotation :

Brigid: Explain. Big Guy, hurry up.

Erik: I've experienced this [repeated dream] on several occasions.

There will be a woman.

Brigid: Well, and.

Erik: (trying to recall) I can see that her face is facing away from me.

Deirdre: What? Just let us know—Erik:...her mouth and eyes are covered with skin (pp. 74-75).

Erik had a nightmares, as the exchange above demonstrates. In his fantasies, a faceless woman appears. It is connected to his New York tragedy. Erik observes a woman's death during the accident. That accident becomes a nightmare for him because he cannot forget it. He had a horrible dream, as evidenced by the statement, "her skin's stretched over her eyes and her mouth." The aforementioned occurrence can be connected to Sigmund Freud's theory of anxiety and the role of dreams in expressing unconscious fears. According to Freud, dreams may reveal repressed thoughts and unresolved emotional conflicts that cannot be directly expressed in conscious life (Freud, 1900). In Erik's case, the disturbing nightmare of the firefighter carrying a corpse resembling his daughter reflects his unconscious fears about loss, death, and his inability to protect his family. Therefore, the dream functions as a psychological expression of the anxiety and emotional pressure that Erik suppresses in his daily life. The following quotation bolsters the previous point:

Brigid: How are you doing? Is that why you aren't sleeping.

Erik : I'll sleep tonight.

Deirdre :Oh, so you'll tell him details / about your dream /

but you won't tell me? Erik: No, folks, I can't even recall it; I have nothing to say (pp.54-55).

The above quote reflects that Erik has a poor dream due to his concern for his daughter. The main character was not willing to discuss his dream with his wife. He suppresses his whole issue, and it turns into a nightmare. It is connected with the theory of defense mechanisms. The protagonist used repression as a coping strategy. He represses his issue whenever he feels anxious in order to release his tension. It is reflected in the saying, 'I don't even recall, so I have nothing to say', which is evident because Erik did not intend to discuss his dream with his wife. In addition, the troubling dreams he gets act as a channel of such repression. Sigmund Freud, in his book *The Ego and the Id* (1923), has it that repression is the major defense mechanism whereby the ego forces dangerous thoughts into the unconscious, and these repressed emotions are released in dreams or neurotic conditions. This applies directly to Erik since the fear of the loss of his daughter is repressed so that it returns symbolically in the form of a nightmare, which he does not like to talk about.

Moreover, Erik employs another appraisal defense mechanism, which is displacement, in cases when he becomes anxious. He does not directly face the true cause of fear but dumps this on hurtful, disintegrating dream images. This is reflective of the idea by Freud that the mind

tends to divert emotional energy, which is contained in a harmful object, and divert it into a harmless alternative by the process of displacement (Freud, 1961).

Erik drinks. Richard and Brigid prepare food in the kitchen alley (p .36)

Richard smiles, Erik drinks. Beat Erik takes a sip of beer (p.40)

Erik is alone for a few beats, lost, processing his discovery (p.141)

It is demonstrated through stage direction that the protagonist always consumes alcohol when he is nervous. As a means of displacement, the main character consumes alcohol. The protagonist experiences less anxiety as a result. The word "drinks" refers to the idea of a protection system. Alcohol is consumed by the main character to ease his anxiety. It serves as a sort of defensive system to keep his life safe from anxiety. At the conclusion, the main character experienced panic attacks. It is evident from the previous quotation.

Erik's labored breathing sounds

Erik is reaching for a chair

Erik is pulling it to the main door downs

Click-clack, click-clack

Erik's breathing becomes labored.

Click-clack, click-clack

Erik looks toward the door as his heart races (p.146).

The protagonist's psychological distress is reflected through his physical reaction, as indicated by the stage direction: "Erik's heavy breathing, click-clack, click-clack, click-clack."

This description suggests that Erik experiences intense emotional pressure at this moment. His heavy breathing can be interpreted as a manifestation of anxiety caused by fear, guilt, and emotional conflict. The scene reveals Erik's struggle with the consequences of his actions and his concern about disappointing his daughter. Therefore, his physical response provides dramatic evidence of his internal anxiety and the psychological burden he carries within the family relationship.

Erik: What's going on with me? What's the matter with me?

I can't believe this is happening to me. Oh my god,
how could I have (p.147).

Erik experiences panic attacks, as demonstrated by the quotation above. It describes how he responds to anxiety. It happens when Erik is breathing heavily and immobile. He is afraid of dying and has chest pain. When he senses that he is in danger, he reacts with a panic attack. The aforementioned phenomenon is related to Sigmund Freud's central thesis. This concept derives from the term "released," which is linked to the idea of "repression." According to Freud, people might lessen their fear by releasing themselves. It is a form of repression that will come to light through a nightmare (Freud, 1961).

In Erik's family, anxiety arises from the total of both psychological and economic factors. He loses financial stability, fears for his daughters' future more than he usually would, and lives in a frightening, unstable, expensive place—all experienced as greater insecurity and threat. The panic attacks and recurring nightmares highlight how this stress transforms into an internal struggle of willpower, resembling a Freudian model that impacts his physiology, making it ultimately impossible to repress what is occurring in his psyche without some form of

expression, even if it involves a violent release. That is, anxiety is located not exclusively in an individual but also suggests a disjunction of the family system that today leads to an uncertain future, which threatens all hope and scalable balance. This underscores the fact that family anxiety is a centerpiece in Erik's experience and suffering (Freud, 1961).

2.4 Theatrical space as a Mirror of Familial Disintegration in *The Humans* (2016):

Taking its cue from Gaston Bachelard's *The Poetics of Space*, where physical space is intertwined with the human psychological state, Karam's play reckons and uncovers how much space can be a powerful dramatic element that serves to amplify both psychological and familial tension. Karam further employs the New York apartment where the Blakes assemble for Thanksgiving as a signifier of their precarious and tenuous psychological state. The creaking floors, dim lights, spooky voices, and stifling air all create a lively, charged atmosphere for the space, which serves as a representation of the character's anxieties about aging, death, isolation, and financial stress. The two-level design of the apartment, one of them being underground, also symbolizes the character's sense of being trapped with their fears and internal psychic condition. They are dissolved, and space becomes a figure of drama that intensifies the vulnerability of the family and expresses its deep existential anxiety (Bachelard, 1969) .

The central idea in Bachelard's *The Poetics of Space* says that home is a memory space that defines your psyche and existential life. The residents of the houses are always reminded of home dwellers around every corner. Bachelard goes so far as to describe the house as the "topography of our intimate being," and thus houses are not simply physical houses we inhabit but psychic spaces that hold a wide array of feelings, desires, and dreams. That hidden attic, that

dark hallway, and those corners of the house connect with our lives in so many ways, reminding us of what was once alive (Bachelard, 1969).

For their occupants, those houses provide a comfortable haven from life's annoyances. Bachelard contends that "man would be a dispersed being without it [home]. " It gives him steadiness through life's ups and downs. It is both body and soul. It is the first world of man. The dramatic setting can be examined more thoroughly and clearly by using Bachelard's concept of space as a systematic approach to location interpretation in drama. In essence, it becomes simple to understand how a location and a person's psychological state interact (Bachelard, 1969).

As cited in *The Poetics of Space* (1969), according to Bachelard, the places in the house not only provide space but also have a psychological impact on the individual, particularly in the basement and corners. Different places in the house may mean different things to the individual based on the experiences and memories he or she associates with them. It could be the case that the individual feels safe when he is in a place by himself, away from all people, which provides him with the sense of security and comfort, as he does when he is in a cave or his own private room where he contemplates. On the other hand, the place could bring fear to him if he has terrible memories associated with the place or if the place is filled with darkness and strange noises that make him feel uneasy and insecure. Therefore, according to Bachelard, the place doesn't possess a fixed meaning but a dynamic meaning based on the emotions and memories associated with the person.

One of the fundamental concepts that Bachelard addresses in the philosophy of space is the notion of verticality: he differentiates between high and low space, comparing them in terms

of their relation to the psychological condition of the person and the tensions that he is subjected to. High places (attics) are commonly linked to quiet, good isolation and the feeling of some sort of safety, and the person feels temporarily out of the pressures of living. The basement is symbolic of the hidden world in the soul, i.e., the subconscious, where fears and unspent anxiety collect.

High places symbolize the urge of an individual to get out of the stress and to find peace, whereas low places are the penetration into anxiety and internal conflict. Therefore, this opposition can be interpreted as a manifestation of a profound psychological conflict in a human being between his desire to find his security and stability and his conformity to inner and outer pressure and fears (Abdelfadeel, 2024).

When the idea of upper and lower levels of the home is linked to the concept of family anxiety. This comparison becomes directly and clearly meaningful in understanding what is happening within the family. The highest (like the attic) represents the sense of what the family would like to be perceived as, which is calmness, cohesion, and emotional control. It suggests that the family appears to know each other and seems to be stable. Quite to the contrary, the bottom (the basement) is the real psychological truth of the situation that has never been talked about, where all the issues of the family members, including fears, financial concerns, tensions between individuals, and the unpredictability of the future, are gathered. They can be looked at as suppressed and repressed feelings, which are stored in the basement as the items stored in the basement (Abdelfadeel, 2024).

Karam presents a vivid portrayal in his play of how a family conflict is brought out in the name of place. The family gathers in the apartment, which is not only a regular place where the events occur during Thanksgiving. The location has instead turned out to be a productive aspect that unveils the strains that prevail in the family. They are physically present at a single point, but they have tensions and pressures within them that influence how they interact. This interpretation is best illustrated by the description of the top floor of the apartment; it is two rooms divided by a hole. There is a big window full of bars; however, they do not admit the sun. There is also only one piece of furniture in the place. These facts are not accidental but have profound psychological implications. The bars and the absence of light give a sense of imprisonment, symbolizing the family members' sense of psychological suffocation and isolation despite being together in the same place (Abdelfadeel, 2024).

The almost-empty house, as far as furniture is concerned, is a way of reflecting the emptiness of their lives and their sense of security and stability. Therefore, this characterization can be associated with family anxiety because the place is a manifestation of an internal condition the family is in, whereby individuals do not feel secure and experience anxiety and tension that do not allow them to develop warm and sound relationships with each other. (Abdelfadeel, 2024).

The apartment's ground floor is schematized with two windowless rooms, separated by a wide gap; a small kitchen positioned narrowly and awkwardly between the stairs and the wall; and a no-frills table and some scattered boxes. This information is indicative of a disharmony in the family; the kitchen is placed in a humiliating manner, representing a flaw in the relationships amongst family members, particularly with an obvious rift between the three generations, which

adds tension and misunderstanding between them. The lack of windows implies seclusion and constriction; the members of the family are in fear and anxiety, as it is obviously the condition of family anxiety where the members live. They are unable to “breathe” psychologically or get out of the cycle of anxiety that surrounds them (Abdelfadeel, 2024).

Overall, the absence of furniture in an apartment, including a single chair, a plain table, and boxes here and there, symbolizes emotional emptiness and turmoil in their lives. Their simple table, which is meant to be a communication table, turns into an emblem of the frailty of their relationships, as they attempt to remain a family in the wake of the fear and uncertainty they experience. Hence, the upper and lower floors do not merely represent a spatial division but rather symbolize the state of distraction and anxiety that dominates Blake's family members, as each member experiences internal conflict, making family ties weak and threatened in light of this constant anxiety (Abdelfadeel, 2024).

The corroded and dusty floors of the apartment in New York are a symbol of the poor financial status of Erik, whose life is full of economic stress and worries, which further aggravate his anxiety and fear. This is not just in the financial aspect alone, but it becomes one of the biggest causes of family anxiety as the financial stress extends to the psychological strains in the family. The darkness and sound on the floor of the apartment also indicate a gradual collapse, a state of loss of stability in the family. It is not only the economic angle but also a moral issue, the marital infidelity of Erik, which puts his image in question before himself and his family, and impacts his bond with his wife and daughters in a negative way (ozcan,2023).

By owning his error in front of his daughters, Erik shifts the blame outwardly, but deep down, he displays a weak self-image and a sense of an inept father and a worthless husband. This confession occurs in the cellar, where symbolic meaning is significant; the cellar is the place where secrets are unveiled, and repressed fears are brought to light. In this respect, the basement represents the family anxiety depth in which the feelings of guilt, fear and weakness merge. The claustrophobia and gloom of the location also depict the psychological condition of Erik, who appears to be trapped in his errors, incapable of escaping them, which exacerbates the situation of anxiety in the family and makes relations between its members even more fragile (Ozcan,2023).

As a father, Erik faces insecurity because he cannot guarantee safety to his family due to all the problems they have been dealing with lately. Erik's standing in the family is unstable, and trust in him is diminished due to the demise of his relatively steady job and the secret relationship. In this case, the problem of family anxiety is evident as the father's inability to perform his duties results in the feeling of instability in the family. The irregular spiral staircase, which leads upstairs, is an indication of Erik's failure to combine his responsibilities as a father and mistakes as a person. He has lived all his life in conflict, and the conflict in his inner world does not stay unnoticed because it is demonstrated in the man's actions and psychological state (stasio,2016).

That is how the man's problems manifest themselves in recurrent nightmares when Erik awakens in a sweat. The man has a struggle going on in him as the father cannot cope with his need to get back to his powerful role, although he knows that he is incapable of fulfilling this

responsibility. Additionally, the uncomfortable layout of the building as well as the setting of the play contributes to this theme. It is clear that Erik is mentally unstable due to his condition. In this regard, the author has succeeded in showing how place can serve as a tool to reveal family worries via the father's suffering and his influence on the entire family (stasio,2016).

Another example of the anxiety that prevails among family members is Deirdre, Erik's wife. She is psychologically unstable because she has several fears; the first and the most obvious are ageing, failure and economic pressures, which are manifested in the poor quality of the apartment she resides in. She is more anxious as she nears retirement age, particularly with her diminishing position at work and her poor position in the family. This sentiment is affirmed when her husband tells her that her absence will not have any impact on the workflow, like her presence does not count. It is at this point that Deirdre is at the height of her mental meltdown, as she declares her great disappointment and that she feels sidelined in the workplace(ozcan,2023). The psychological distress is also compounded by the effect of the work environment in which Deirdre feels very marginalized, and her long-term efforts are never rewarded. She is bitter in pointing out that:

Deirdre: I'm working for two more guys in their twenties, and
just 'cause they have a special degree, they're making five times
What I make, over forty years (p.50).

Deirdre experiences a strong sense of unappreciation, and it is not only in the work environment that she feels this way but also in her life in the family as well. Her marriage has been long, and after many years of being married, she is brought into the shock of her husband

being unfaithful to her, and her children fail to listen to her conservative-mindedness but instead go on with her sacrifices without considering their true value. This scenario exposes her to psychological stress at all times and causes her to live in family anxiety caused by a lack of emotional appreciation and support in the family (smith,2021).

Moreover, Deirdre experiences an internal conflict between maintaining her moral role and providing emotional support for her family, despite the clear differences between her values and those of her daughters. Deirdre is a devout woman who believes in prayer and Heaven, whereas her daughters hold more liberal views and do not share the same religious beliefs. These differences in values create tension within the family and increase Deirdre's sense of isolation and misunderstanding. As Smith (2021) observes, the old house functions as a symbol of Deirdre's emotional condition, reflecting her exhaustion, vulnerability, and determination to preserve her role within the family. Therefore, the house becomes a representation of the difficulties and anxieties experienced within the family environment.

Deirdre lives in a state of constant anxiety caused by her economic circumstances, even in the most basic aspects of her day-to-day life, which has been caused by the economic pressures on her psychological state. It is also a vital component of the concept of family cohesion due to its sacrifices, yet this aspect is not properly valued. Conversely, this concern stretches to Aimee, who, with a chronic illness that has impacted her mental health and work life, has lost her employment and started to fear the future, in particular, the prospect of losing her independence and becoming a child of her parents. The play, therefore, demonstrates that family anxiety is a consequence of financial and health stresses in the family(ozcan,2023).

In addition to being sick and financially weak, Aimee is experiencing an emotional meltdown caused by the recent separation from her lover, Carol. The separation led to loneliness and a tremendous degree of psychological pain, manifested either through tears or a sarcastic voice, which bore emotional pain. At one scene, Aimee was trying to speak to Carol so that she could make her feel less lonely, but the reaction was poor, and she had to burst into tears. In other scene, Aimee articulates herself through sarcastic expressions:

Do I hold off on saying, "I shit out of a hole in my belly,"
until the third date? Is that a thing for the fifth date? (p.82).

She was making very critical statements because of concerns about her health and the effects of the disease on her future life. This attitude may be interpreted as a psychological process to help her deal with negative experiences and reality. (Özcan, 2023).

Karam gives clear image of Aimee's internal conflict and sense of alienation through the Manhattan apartment. where Aimee's presence on the lower floor and the kitchen's location behind the stairs suggest her feeling of instability . Aimee finding it difficult to communicate with her family members and this indicates the extent of her feeling of alienation. According to the events, isolation is not a personal situation but a family matter as all family members feel alienated and find it difficult to communicate with each other despite being united. The dark environment and dim lighting indicate her negative outlook on the future and her feeling of despair that her life will be better. Thus, the apartment becomes a living reflection of the physical and psychological pain that the family members are experiencing (smith,2021).

As the youngest daughter and an apartment owner, Brigid is a clear illustration of how family anxieties are developed within families. Even though she has her own apartment and is in a relationship with Richard, she experiences a lot of stress due to her inability to develop professionally as a composer. The lack of achievement in this area and her partly dependent financial position make her undergo the same kind of psychological distress as her sister, increasing her insecurity further. The lack of appreciation of her achievements and her debt from studying, as well as the high expenses related to living in Manhattan, prevent her from obtaining real independence despite her continuous attempts to accomplish this goal (Smith, 2021).

Her sensitivity and criticism of her parents' comments are heightened by her insecurities, which make her feel threatened by them. Even those that are in her best interest become an additional source of stress. Whenever her father, Erik, shows his concerns regarding the safety of her in Manhattan, she lashes out at him, saying:

You don't realize how much debt I have from school (p. VIII) .

This area is safe ... Yeah,

That's why I can pay for to stay here

you don't like to give me any money to assist me (p.25) .

Her reaction is an evident example of the defense mechanism, which attempts to safeguard one against experiencing any sense of failure or dependency upon others. Therefore, in such a scenario, family anxiety emerges as a consequence of the interaction between economic pressure and family obligations (Freud, 1919).

The Blake family's fear is clearly personified in Momo. She is more than just the character who exemplifies her own fear because her state of being is a metaphor for the family's fear. As Momo ages, she becomes lost in her own world, even within her own family, and cannot even articulate her thoughts and experiences with the few words she knows. Her deterioration represents not only her current situation but she also creates a sense of chaos in the Blake family. One of the few sentences she is able to articulate is "You can never come / You can never come back" (p. 135). This can be interpreted as a loss of the past and can be used as an expression of a sense of loss and change in the family. Another line of Momo's is "Where do we go? Where do we go?" (p. 129). This indicates the confusion not only of her own mind but the confusion of the Blake family as a whole. (Freud, 1919).

The repetition of these queries is connected to the family's fear of growing old and dying, with Momo's predicament symbolizing this. She is a source of both love and stress; the family is attentive in their care, but the level of care they give is psychologically and financially burdensome, heightening their anxiety. Momo's character is thus successfully used by Karam to emphasize the complex relationship between love and anxiety in the family. Despite their contrasting personalities and shared anxieties, love, responsibility, and tolerance are key elements that enable the Blake family to cope with the challenges threatening their stability (Stasio, 2016).

Chapter Three

A Psychological Reading of David Lindsay-Abaire's *Rabbit Hole*(2010).

3.1 An overview of Lindsay-Abaire's *Rabbit Hole* (2010):

David Lindsay-Abaire is a screenwriter and American playwright who won a Pulitzer Prize in 2006 for *Rabbit Hole* (2010). Nicole Kidman starred in a later film adaptation of this play. He was born on November 30, 1969, in Boston, Massachusetts, in the working-class neighbourhood of South Boston, and his upbringing significantly impacted his writing. His scholarship to the prestigious Milton Academy, along with his studies at Sarah Lawrence College and Juilliard, shaped his attitude towards class and social issues, which are also reflected in his work. His outstanding plays included *Fuddy Meers*, *Wonder of the World*, and *Poor People*, where he addressed the issue of economic inequalities with the help of an example of a struggling single mother. His former play, *Kimberly Akimbo*, has also been adapted into a successful Tony Award-winning musical that opened on Broadway in 2022 (Hagan, 2024).

In addition to his involvement in theatrical art, Lindsay-Abaire has ventured into the filmmaking industry, contributing to the scripts of films such as *Oz the Great and Powerful* and *Rise of the Guardians*. His ability to bring about comedy and serious matters has earned him popularity in creating complex characters, particularly strong female characters, and in discussing grief, illness, and social problems. Lindsay-Abaire is now residing in Brooklyn with his family, and he also has a massive influence in the world of theatre and film (Hagan, 2024).

The play *Rabbit Hole* (2010) is written by David Lindsay-Abaire; it is a play about a protagonist named Becca who endured the traumatic event of the loss of her only son, named Danny, due to a car accident. It is eight months later, and Becca has yet to cope with her grief.

The sorrow she is going through due to her traumatic experience leads to Becca being a judgmental, rude, egoistic, and depressed individual. She is also in conflict with herself and others around her, including her sister, mother, and husband, not only because of the conflicting emotions stemming from her traumatic experience but also due to her undesirable character, which creates further discord.

To alleviate her sorrow, Becca attempts to avoid remembering Danny by concealing some pictures and artwork of him and donating Danny's clothes to charity; she even instructs her spouse to sell the house and relocate since she cannot withstand the recollection of Danny. This incident is presented in Act One, Scene One. Becca is arguing with her sister, Izzy, because Becca accuses Izzy of being drunk and fighting in a bar after Izzy informed her that she had punched a random woman who abruptly swore obscenities at her. Becca is not only displeased and shocked by Izzy's behaviour at the bar but also by the news of Izzy's pregnancy.

Such irony is on Becca's part; she lost her child only months ago, but now she has to deal with the fact that her sister is going to have a child. She feels that somebody needs to listen to her, so Becca refers to her husband, Howie, and informs him about what has happened to Izzy. Becca and Howie differ in their opinion about the case of Izzy, which leads to their quarrel. Other than the argument concerning the case of Izzy, there is a second argument regarding their sexual relationship, which is loose as well, since Danny dies, and Becca is a sensitive person. One day, Becca gets into a conflict with Howie over a home videotape containing recordings of Danny before his death. The videotape, which holds precious memories of their son, is accidentally erased when Becca records a television programme over it.

Howie accuses Becca of intentionally ruining the tape because she tends to discard Danny's possessions. Eventually, Becca realises that throwing away Danny's belongings is unnecessary because she cannot forget him and does not want to forget him. One day, Jason, who has the tragic accident of hitting Danny, comes over to Becca and requests her apology. They discuss many things, including fiction. When Becca mentions rabbit hole fiction, they discuss the concept of an infinite area filled with inexhaustible possibilities, including the existence of other versions of ourselves in alternate lives. As she speaks about it, a nice idea enters the mind of Becca: she has versions of herself where she has a happy life.

This is the reason she is motivated to rise out of her traumatic experience, restore positive relationships once more with others around her, like her sister, mother, and husband, and resume her normal life. Scene four was the final part of the story when Howie came back to work; the conversation between Becca and Howie does not contain any further quarrels. Becca even goes to the extent of proposing to Howie to take a second thought about the house; the scene simply shows that Becca does not mind whether they move out of the house or not, because she also loves the house. Finally, the conflicts are resolved, and her evolving character demonstrates improvement after facing these challenges, leading to a new understanding of life with the help of the rabbit hole.

3.2 Psychological analysis of family tension and grief in David Lindsay-Abaire's *Rabbit Hole*(2010):

Grief is a powerful emotions that impacts people in different ways and results in possibilities for health or depression. Lindsay-Abaire's *Rabbit Hole* discuss the issue of grief for a lost child. the impact of losing a family member ,especially a child, vary from one character to

another. The characters struggle to let go of their feelings of mourning and attempt to find ways for emotional recovery. The psychological analysis offers an important theoretical ground to discuss the ramifications of grief on the individual and the family. The play shows that theatre has the potential to discuss and emphasize repressed feelings like denial and grief. Family emerge as a group of struggling people that want to find middle ground and better connection and interaction. Theatre stresses actual struggles in order to solve them. It avoids the perfect portrayals of families and people as perfect angelic figures which has little to do with most families. This paper analyzes the impact of grief on family ties and discusses the possibility of healing after losing a loved one. It applies the psychological analysis to the study of grief on family members. The paper concludes that grief as presented by the playwright is a necessary stage that human beings experience after loss and it is a necessary part of healing and moving forward in life (Schoo, Azhar, Mughal, & Rout, 2025).

This thesis hypothesizes that drama can serve as a powerful medium for exploring and understanding human emotions and psychological distress. Experiencing the loss of a child can profoundly affect an individual's psyche, often causing depression, guilt, anger, or other emotional responses. Theatre provides a unique space to observe and depict these reactions. It allows performers and audiences to confront and reflect on complex feelings in a controlled setting. By engaging with characters' emotional journeys, drama helps to reveal the underlying processes of grief, suffering, and coping. Theatre can create an emotional outlet that is difficult to achieve through other means. It is expected that through witnessing and participating in theatrical representations of loss, individuals can gain insight into human vulnerability and survival. The analysis focuses on theatrical drama a form of art that help individuals to realize emotional understanding and psychological exploration (Schoo, Azhar, Mughal, & Rout, 2025).

Grief in the play profoundly affects family relationships because each character responds to loss in their own unique way. The play presents grief as more than just sadness; it encompasses guilt, anger, denial, and the relentless search for meaning in loss. The play suggests that healing is not quick or simple. It begins only when the characters recognize that grief may never fully disappear but can change over time into something bearable. The study anticipates that while grief can initially damage relationships, in the long run it may create opportunities for acceptance, empathy, and reconnection within the family. Grief is a universal reaction to the loss of a loved one. It is understood to be a transitory process, rather than a permanent one. While most people adjust within a year to the loss, some experience prolonged grief disorder which arises when the person fails to heal the grief. Acute grief is often marked by sadness, crying, and sleep disturbances, but usually requires no treatment. However, the grief can develop into prolonged grief disorder involves enduring emotional pain and difficulty in adapting to the loss. A lot of grieving individuals struggle in recovering from the loss of a loved one which put them in danger of prolonged grief (Schoo, Azhar, Mughal, & Rout, 2025).

Grief refers to the emotional response to loss, which is most often associated with death but may also occur in other forms, such as receiving a terminal diagnosis that brings anticipatory loss. Reconstructing identity after such a loss depends largely on society since one's new sense of self is shaped in relation to other people's help. Adapting to loss requires integrating it into a different perspective. The change of perspective enables survival and leads to growth. The ability to mourn represents a significant stage in personality development, while the inability to do so can disturb the formation of a close relationship. Grief is a painful process that people often attempt to deny. The earliest systematic ideas about loss were shaped by Freud's psychoanalytic

theory. While grief can contribute to pathology and illness, it may also fuel creativity (Devan, 1993).

Grief can be categorized as uncomplicated or complicated. In uncomplicated cases, people may seek help from religious leaders, healers, or counselors, whereas complicated grief often requires psychiatric or medical treatment. Health professionals themselves are vulnerable to what is termed “occupational grief,” particularly those working in oncology, hospice care, neonatal pediatrics, psychiatry, and social work, where repeated exposure to loss is common (Devan, 1993).

Grief is usually linked to death and existential suffering. There are five dimensions of grief: physical, emotional, cognitive, social, and spiritual. Freud’s *Mourning and Melancholia* laid the groundwork for systematic grief research, even though his main focus was melancholia. By the late twentieth century, the field had advanced with theories such as *Continuing Bonds* and the *Dual-Process Model (DPM)*, which marked a paradigm shift in how grief and grief interventions were understood (Guldin & Leget, 2024) .

The effect of a death can differ greatly, depending on the relationship and the kind of experienced loss. Nature of relationship plays a key role, whether it is physical, emotional, or both. Spousal bereavement is one case where physical and emotional closeness combine. When two people share a home and a deep attachment, the loss can be very serious, especially if the surviving partner depended on the other. The daily absence of someone who was once always present leaves a major gap in everyday routine (Lloyd, 2017) .

Rabbit Hole (2010) is one of David Lindsay-Abaire's best-known plays. The play explores grief as a profound human experience that can threaten the stability of personal and emotional relationships, particularly within the family. This grief centers on the loss of a child, a tragic event that causes severe psychological distress for family members. The loss of loved ones often leads to deep emotional trauma, and the accompanying grief can directly impact family cohesion and internal relationships. (Gelcer, 1986) .

Rabbit Hole (2010) has been studied from different perspectives at the hands of academicians and critics. One of the studies that focused on this play is “Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder in David Lindsay-Abaire's *Rabbit Hole: A Psychoanalytic Study*” (2023) by Mark Binyamin Sobhi. This study applies psychoanalytic theory and Glenn R. Schiraldi's ideas on PTSD to *Rabbit Hole*. It explores how the play's characters, particularly Becca, exhibit symptoms of trauma after the death of her son. The analysis connects Freud, Jung, and Lacan's ideas to modern trauma theory, highlighting how grief manifests through defense mechanisms and coping strategies.

Also, there is “Coming to Terms with a Tragedy: A Psychoanalytic Approach to Lindsay-Abaire's *Rabbit Hole* and *Harling's Steel Magnolias* (2022) by Rasha Farouk Hamza. This paper studies how characters process grief and trauma using psychoanalysis and PTSD theory. It compares Becca's and Howie's coping strategies to those in *Steel Magnolias*, showing how different individuals confront loss. The research emphasizes that grief responses vary from denial to gradual acceptance, and that literature provides a space to observe these psychological processes (Gul, 2023).

Lujain Alharbi, Rawdhah Alnafie, and Amani Alghamdi (2025) study the play in their article “*Defying the Traditional Stages of Trauma Healing in David Lindsay-Abaire’s Rabbit Hole and David Auburn’s Proof: A Deconstructive Analysis.*” This study challenges the conventional model of linear recovery from trauma. Through a deconstructive reading, it shows that Becca’s grief does not follow neat stages but exists in tension with healing, isolation, and reconnection. The paper highlights how grief is fluid, unstable, and intertwined with both vulnerability and resilience, offering a complex view of mourning beyond traditional psychology.

Finally, there is “Becca’s Survival Attempt After the Death of Her Beloved Son in David Lindsay-Abaire’s *Rabbit Hole: A New Criticism Study*” (2015) by Lutfita Maudy Prastikasari. This research focuses on Becca’s character and her struggle to survive emotionally after her son’s death. Using a New Criticism approach, the paper analyzes how characterization, plot, and symbolism express her attempts to regain stability. The study shows how grief reshapes identity and underlines the human effort to find meaning after tragedy (Gul, 2023).

Thus, previous studies have primarily examined Becca's character and her coping mechanisms. Building on these studies, the present thesis investigates how grief functions as a source of familial anxiety and examines its impact on the emotional dynamics and relationships within the family in *Rabbit Hole*. *Rabbit Hole* (2010) is a play about traumatized family. The play centers on Becca and Howie, whose four-year-old son Danny dies eight months before the opening scene. Danny runs into the street after their dog when Howie forgets to close the door while Becca is on the phone with her sister Izzy. The accident leaves every family member feeling a burden of guilt. Lindsay-Abaire shows a family that carries the difficulty of loosening

the grip of a trauma. Despite their differences, misunderstandings, and conflicts, the family cannot find ways to reconnect (Gul, 2023).

Lindsay-Abaire's title deliberately recalls Alice's fall into the rabbit hole. She descends into the unknown madness, or a separate world from which she wants to escape. The parallel is clear between that imagined descent and the strange, disorienting emotions of early grief that Becca feels in the play. Becca suffered deep loss while the world continues to move on. The question becomes how, or even if, one can return to "normal." This is the struggle that Becca, along with the other characters, must confront in the play. The play asks whether there can be a right or wrong way to grieve. After losing a child, the coping strategies of the family diverge, creating tension between them. Domestic plays have long been favorites of American audiences. Reports of rising violence, domestic tensions, and abuse have made representations of family life even more relevant. As Briganti and Mezei notes, "the house and home are frequently perceived as symbols of the self, the psyche, and the body" (p.8). Therefore, examining the home space can reveal the nature of relationship among its residents (Gul, 2023).

In the past, Becca enjoyed a stable and happy life; she was a happy mother, a loyal friend, a supportive wife, a caring sister, and a religious woman. After Danny's death, her personality changes drastically. She becomes depressed, judgmental, and turns away from religion altogether. This transformation shows how grief can impact a mother. Becca's grief and bitterness affect her relationships with those close to her: her husband Howie, her sister Izzy, her mother Nat, and her old friend Debbie. The play starts with a conversation between Izzy and Becca over a fight that Izzy had with a woman at the bar. Their talk gradually changes to hint at Danny's death. Izzy blames herself for keeping Becca occupied on the phone while Danny was

running behind the dog. When Izzy admits she is still coping with Danny's death, Becca responds cruelly: "You're not allowed to use him to justify your own shit" (Lindsay-Abaire ,2010, p.14).

Becca uses sharp language and throws accusations towards everyone as a way to mitigate her pain. It turns out that her relationship has been destroyed even with her own mother and best friend Debbie. During Izzy's birthday gathering, Becca's mother, Nat, recounts the story of Aristotle Onassis, who believed his son's death was an assassination rather than an accident. He even went as far as putting an award to the one that can prove that his son was murdered. Nat's story suggests that denial of accidental loss is destructive, yet Becca interprets it as a criticism of her own grief. She attacks her mother saying that: "You never just talk. It sounds like you're just talking but it's always so much more, isn't it" (p. 68).

The tension escalates when Nat compares Danny's death to that of her own son Arthur. Becca is a grieving mother and she believes that her pain, like her son, is unique to her alone. She does not want anyone to show a sign of comparison with her child or with her loss: "You know what I wish?! I wish you would stop comparing Danny to Arthur! Danny was a four-year-old boy who chased his dog into the street! Arthur was a thirty-year-old heroin addict who hung himself" (p.75). Her bursting words and tears shocks her family, especially Nat, as Becca shows no regard for her mother's grief over her own son (Li, Laursen, Precht, Mortensen, & Olsen, 2005).

Research on grief as a trauma shows its severe psychological and physical consequences. *Stroebe, et al. (2005)* found that grieving individuals, particularly those suffering from extreme loneliness and depressive symptoms, face a great risk of suicidal ideation (Stroebe, Schut, &

Stroebe, 2005) . Similarly, Li, et al. (2005) state that bereaved parents, especially mothers, were more likely to experience a psychiatric hospitalization than non-bereaved parents. This high risk for mothers remained present for more than five years following the child's death (Li, Laursen, Precht, Mortensen, & Olsen, 2005).

As a result of her son's death, Becca underwent a radical change in her personality and psychological state. She became angry and bitter and lost her ability to attain inner balance and reconcile her emotional feelings with her religious faith, leading to a profound psychological conflict that affected her behaviour and relationships with others:

Nat: I don't know why you don't believe in God anyway. Ibrought you to church every Sunday. You used to believe in God.

Becca: Well I don't anymore (p.74) .

Debbie was a close friend to Becca. Yet, she vanishes from Becca's life after Danny's death. She never calls or visits, which Becca perceives as deliberate abandonment. Howie excuses Debbie's absence by saying that "obviously if she hasn't called you it's because she doesn't know what to say" (p.35). Becca, however, rejects this explanation, insisting: "I would've been there for her if God forbid something had ever happened to Robbie or Em. I wouldn't have vanished the way she did" (p.35). This exchange shows Becca's bitterness and sensitivity to abandonment. Her child's death is the severest form of abandonment that a mother can experience (Douglas et al. 2019).

One of the most intense conflicts between Becca and Howie centers on the video tape. The tape contained touching home videos of Danny's childhood, and Howie cherished it deeply.

Watching it every night before bed gave him comfort. The tape held happy memories of his son. However, one evening, when he put the tape into the player, he was shocked to discover that it had been erased. Someone has recorded over it. It turned out that Becca was the one who had taped over it. She explained that she had thought the tape inside the player was *Pride and Prejudice*, not Danny's tape. She did not realize that Howie had switched the tapes last night. Despite her explanation, the mistake gave Howie an opportunity to release his frustration about Becca's continuing grief and treatment of Danny's belongings. He accused her of deliberately erasing the video, interpreting her action as part of a larger pattern of behavior: "You're trying to get rid of him. I'm sorry, but that's how it feels to me sometimes. Every day, it's something else. It feels like you're trying to get rid of any evidence he was ever here" (p. 83).

Howie's accusation reflects his fear that Becca is trying to erase Danny from their lives. From the very beginning of the play, Becca has attempted to give away reminders of her son. She planned to donate Danny's clothes to charity, removed his paintings from the refrigerator, boxed up his photographs, and even sent their dog Taz to her mother's house because it reminded her of the accident. To Howie, all these actions suggest a desire to move on by erasing traces of Danny's existence. Every grieving person undergoes a process of denial as part of healing, followed by restoration-oriented process that aims adapting to new life after the loss. his incident captures the deep divide in their grieving process. This process aims at creating a new type of life style, activities, and solving challenges that came with the loss of the person (Douglas, Whiteoak, Maio, Drummond, Knox, & Bridge, 2019).

Howie finds solace in preserving Danny's memory through objects, routines, and rituals, while Becca tries to cope by removing reminders that intensify her pain. Their opposing strategies clash and turn their home space into an emotionally charged one: "It's not just the tape! I'm not talking about the tape, Becca! It's Taz, and the paintings, and the clothes, and it's everything ! You have to stop erasing him! You have to stop it! You HAVE TO STOP!" (p.86). Eventually, Becca comes to an important realization: Becca cannot erase Danny's memory, nor does she want to. In one of the play's most powerful moments, her response to Howie's accusation reflects her deep attachment to his memory.

Do you really not know me, Howie? Do you really not know how utterly impossible that would be? To erase him? I'm trying to make things a little easier on myself by hiding some of the photos, and giving away the clothes, but that does not mean I'm trying to erase him (p. 86).

Thus, Danny's memory is permanently engraved in Becca's mind, no matter what steps she takes to ease her pain. Her attempts to put away reminders are not about forgetting her son, but about finding a way to deal with her grief. Becca's trauma, however, also leads to tense encounters outside her marriage. In one supermarket scene, she notices a boy crying hysterically because his mother refuses to buy him sweets. Becca intervenes, asking the mother not to disappoint her child and to appreciate what she has. But the woman responds angrily, telling her to mind her own business. Becca loses her temper and slaps her across the face in a fit of rage.. This loss of control reveals that she has a trouble controlling her emotions and physical

responses. Her failure to cope with Danny's loss make her disturbed and socially anxious (McLeod, 2024) .

Her strained relationships also extend to her sister Izzy. When Becca learns that Izzy is pregnant, instead of supporting her, she reacts with hostility. She accuses Izzy of being irresponsible and even questions whether she should keep the baby or give it up for adoption. Becca's bitterness toward Izzy's pregnancy reflects her inability to process the unfairness of losing her own child while others continue to have children.

The accidental erasure of the home videotape containing recordings of Danny before his death escalates into one of the most heated conflicts between Becca and Howie. Although Howie accuses her of deliberately destroying Danny's memory, Becca admits that erasing him is impossible. She clarifies that her attempts to donate his belongings or hide his photos are not about forgetting Danny but about managing her grief. In the end, Becca acknowledges that nothing she does will make Danny's absence less painful, and no action will ever erase his presence from her heart.

HOWIE: Your wanting to sell the house.

BECCA: We already talked about it.

HOWIE: Taz. Sending Taz to your mother [...] he was a reminder.

BECCA: Yes, he was a reminder. So what? (p.47).

One of the most important turning points in *Rabbit Hole* comes through Becca's evolving relationship with her mother, Nat. Earlier in the play, Becca reacts angrily when Nat compares Danny's death to the loss of her own son Arthur. But later, Becca's attitude begins to change.

When Becca and Nat are sorting through Danny's belongings, Nat once again mentions Arthur, then quickly regrets doing so, fearing it will upset Becca. Instead, Becca surprises her mother by accepting the reference: she admits that Arthur was her brother, and she even seeks to learn from Nat's experience. This shift shows Becca beginning to move toward healing. She asks Nat directly:

BECCA: This feeling, does it ever go away?

NAT: No, I don't think it does. Not for me it hasn't. And that's going on eleven years.... I do not know. The weight of it, I guess.

At some point it becomes bearable. (p.129).

They talk about the one thing that they have in common at the moment, grief. Becca learns that grief may never disappear completely, but it can become bearable over time. Becca realizes that her mother's way of accepting tragedy is the only way forward. Acceptance, rather than denial or avoidance, is the first step toward surviving trauma (McLeod, 2024) .

Other characters in the play embody different coping strategies. Izzy, Becca's sister, was very close to Danny and shared many playful moments with him. His sudden accidental death is also traumatic for her, yet she responds by embracing life. She enters a new relationship, becomes pregnant, and chooses to celebrate the baby telling everyone that she is eager to fully experience motherhood. Although Becca sometimes doubts whether Izzy is truly grieving, Izzy insists that she is still coping with Danny's loss in her own way:

IZZY: I wasn't using him as an excuse. I was just saying that it's been
hard to pull it together, that's all. For all of us.

BECCA: Don't do that.

IZZY: Hey, I'm still coping too, Becca. I know it's not the same, but it is
still hard. Okay? (p.13).

Howie is the complete opposite of Becca. Instead of shutting himself off from everyone around him, he tries to cope with his trauma by staying socially active. The play shows that Howie attends support groups to help manage his grief, unlike Becca, who rejects the idea and calls the group members "God-Freaks." In the first scene, Howie attempts to spend a romantic evening with Becca but she becomes angry and irritated. Howie's goal is to restore normalcy in their relationship and save their marriage, which has been negatively impacted since Danny's tragic death. He even suggests, "I think you should see someone. I know you're not one for therapists, but I think you should. We could go together if that'd help. Or maybe you could try the group again" (p.55). Howie wants Becca to return to therapy or the support group to help her cope, but she refuses and instead suggests selling the house to erase Danny's memory (McLeod, 2024) .

Howie maintains friendships and continues activities he enjoyed before the tragedy. Becca, in contrast, has cut off contact with Debbie for months because of a missed call. Although it may seem that Howie has moved past his trauma, several moments in the play reveal that he has not fully healed. What Becca experiences is Denial. Denial is a defense mechanism that works by rejecting or refusing to accept painful realities, thoughts, or emotions. It acts as a shield

by preventing conscious awareness of threatening or negative experiences. Freud described denial as an “ostrich policy,” a common way for adults to avoid distressing truths. Later psychoanalysts also emphasized that denial has a dual role. It can serve as a coping tool but can also create psychological problems (McLeod, 2024) .

According to psychoanalytic theory, denial is a defense mechanism that may temporarily reduce anxiety and protect self-esteem. However, excessive reliance on denial can prevent individuals from confronting problems, hinder personal growth, and create tension in relationships. In child development, denial appears as an early and normal psychological response among young children, but it usually decreases as cognitive abilities become more mature. Some adults, however, continue to rely on denial, particularly in situations involving emotional difficulties or troubled relationships. External denial involves avoiding situations, discussions, or information that may reveal uncomfortable realities, such as refusing to accept a medical diagnosis. Internal denial, in contrast, is less visible because it operates within an individual's thoughts and emotions. It involves unconsciously rejecting painful feelings, memories, or realities, which makes the underlying problem more difficult to recognize and resolve (McLeod, 2024) .

As a psychological defense mechanism, denial operates unconsciously. Individuals usually do not realize that they are using denial or recognize the underlying motives behind this defensive response. Through denial, a person unconsciously refuses to accept painful realities, emotions, or experiences that may cause psychological distress. In psychoanalytic theory, defenses are considered most effective when they function outside of conscious awareness, protecting the mind from distress. Thus, Becca aims to protect herself from her the fact that her

personality and attitude have changed after her child's death. She refuses to speak calmly about him or to see anything that belongs to him. Her denial of her condition escalates the troubles between her and everyone else. Becca's believes that her life is altered beyond repair. She also think that she cannot help negative feelings but the truth was that she can continue or change that with her choice. The choice she made was to find ways to cope and survive her current trauma (Farouk, 2022) .

Becca begins to take her condition seriously and decides to take classes away from home. Another key factor in Becca's healing is taking a drama class in a different town. She says, Did Izzy tell you I was taking a continuing ed. class? We're reading *Bleak House*. Isn't that hilarious? He handed out the syllabus and I just laughed. *Bleak House*. Of course no one knew what I was laughing at, which was great. (Nat looks up at her) It's in Bronxville so no one knows me. I'm normal there. That's what I like best about it. I don't get 'the face' every time someone looks at me (Lindsay-Abaire,2010, p. 139). According to Becca, the exaggerated sympathy from people in her town frustrated her more than it comforted her. Leaving the house and spending time elsewhere was also important because the home constantly reminded her of Danny. Engaging in activities outside the house helped her start to feel better (Farouk, 2022) .

However, the most significant factor in Becca's healing is meeting Jason, the boy who accidentally caused Danny's death. Jason wanted to talk to both Becca and Howie to apologize for what happened. Even though it was unintentional, he felt deep guilt and wanted to make amends. He explains:

It's a thirty zone. And I might've been going thirty-three. Or thirty-two. I would usually look down, to check, and if I was a little over, then I'd slow

down obviously. But I don't remember checking on your block, so it's possible I was going a little too fast. And then the dog came out, really quick, and so I swerved a little to avoid him, not knowing, obviously ... (Beat.) So that's something I thought you should know. I might've been going a little over the limit. I can't be positive either way though (p.159).

This quote shows the great regret Jason feels. That is why he dedicated a short story to Danny's memory and asked Becca and Howie for permission to include Danny's name in it. Towards the end of the play, Becca begins to accept her son's fate, especially when she reconnects with the person that drove the car that hit him. Jason, the seventeen-year-old boy who accidentally hit Danny, represents yet another perspective on trauma. He appears to be haunted by guilt and regret. He struggles with the knowledge that his actions led to Danny's death (Farouk, 2022).

Jason, the one who accidentally killed Danny, goes to Becca's house to apologize. They talk about many things including fiction. When Becca brings up rabbit hole fiction, they discuss the idea of an infinite space with endless possibilities and different versions of people living other lives. This thought gives Becca comfort. She imagines another version of herself living happily, and this motivates her to recover from her trauma and rebuild her relationships with her sister, mother, and husband. Becca learns from Jason's method of coping and decides to embrace her family and her pain. Jason copes by channeling his feelings into creative activities, especially writing. He contributes fictional stories to his school magazine and dedicates one of them to Danny. In this story, he imagines a rabbit hole that can transport people to a world of happiness,

free from pain and loss. His writing symbolizes an attempt to create redemption through imagination (Farouk, 2022) .

JASON: Yeah, because infinite space means...it means it goes on and on forever, so there's a never-ending stream of possibilities (p.143).

The title of the play refers to Jason's story, which is fully explained at the end through his narration of his fictional writing. As Farouk's close reading suggests, the concept of the rabbit hole in Lindsay-Abaire's *Rabbit Hole* is connected to Lewis Carroll's classic novel *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865). In Carroll's novel, Alice follows a white rabbit into a hole in the ground that leads her into an unfamiliar world filled with strange characters and unexpected experiences. The rabbit hole symbolizes a journey into unknown territory and a confrontation with confusing and challenging realities. Lindsay-Abaire draws on this symbolism to represent Becca's emotional journey through grief after the death of her son, Danny. Her conversation about the possibility of another version of herself, one who experiences a happier life, marks a turning point in her understanding of loss. Rather than remaining trapped in despair, Becca gradually begins to accept her grief and attempts to rebuild her connection with her family (Farouk, 2022) .

Generally, the tragedy Lindsay-Abaire presents lies not only in Danny's death but in the fact that it was both accidental and avoidable. Each character feels some degree of guilt, though they also know that their guilt carry no real weight. There is no single villain to blame; accidents happen and sometimes they are inevitable. There is nobody that can prevent dogs from chasing

squirrels, children from chasing dogs, or drivers from being distracted while driving. The story ends in scene four when Howie returns from work. There are no more arguments between Becca and Howie in their conversation. Becca even suggests reconsidering the house, saying that she no longer insists on selling it because she also loves it. By the end, Becca's character treats grief as a new found land that she can decide how to inhabit it or how to leave it.

Grief is a force that changes everything in a family. In the play, each character experiences loss in a different way. Their choices to survive the pain impact their relationships. The play shows that grief can lead to conflict and misunderstanding. Becca, the mother, tries to forget her son. She gives away his clothes and belongings. She removes reminders of him from her life. This is her way of coping. She believes that forgetting can ease the pain. Howie, her husband, does the opposite. He holds on to every memory. He keeps everything that reminds him of their son. This creates tension between them. Their ways of grieving are in conflict. Becca wants to move forward while Howie wants to hold the past close. Their different paths make it hard for them to connect.

Other family members bring more feelings into the play. Izzy and Nat have their own ways of dealing with loss. They also carry pain and confusion. Their presence does not always bring comfort, in fact, it often adds misunderstanding. Everyone struggles to find meaning in the loss. The play shows that grief is a search for something that is gone. Each character reacts in their own way. Grief affects thoughts and actions and changes the way people relate to each other. Healing takes time and does not happen quickly. The play suggests that grief can never fully disappear. Pain may lessen over time. Acceptance is the first step. Becca's journey shows

this clearly. She finds peace when she allows herself to feel her pain. She imagines a version of her son that is happy and safe.

She learns to accept that he is gone and does not try to forget completely. She does not try to escape the loss. Rather, she makes the choice to continue living. This choice is a small step toward healing. It is a way to reconnect with herself and with her family. The play also shows that conflict is common when people grieve differently but over time, understanding can grow. Families may find ways to support each other. They may learn to respect each other's grief as it can open the door to empathy and connection. The play suggests that suffering and loss can bring people closer if they want to.

The study concludes that grief is a process. It destroys relationships in the short term. It can also create space for acceptance and reconciliation later. The play emphasizes that moving through grief is a choice that people make to survive it and find moments of peace.

Chapter Four

Familial Panic and Affective Pandemonium in Tracy Letts's *August Osage County*

4.1 Overview of Tracy Lett's *August O Sage country* (2008):

Tracy Letts was born in Tulsa and brought up in Durant, Oklahoma, and his childhood was difficult due to a painful experience of family life and conflict and intergenerational trauma. His grandfather had killed himself and his grandmother had gone on to become addicted to pills when Letts was. Only 10 years old stalked his early years of poor actor, and would come to serve as the model of his Pulitzer Prize-winning masterpiece *August: Osage County*.

His parents are writers and academics, and Letts was stimulated to develop his creative part in his early life. At the beginning of his twenties, Letts relocated to Los Angeles where he entered the acting business, yet he discovered life to be very tough and unsatisfying in Hollywood. He later moved to Chicago where he did his apprenticeship in the highly regarded Steppenwolf Theatre Company where he practiced as an actor, writer, and director and wrote plays like *Killer Joe* and *Man From Nebraska*. *August: Osage County* was a successful production that made Letts start accepting more acting roles. He has starred in a popular revival of Edward Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf*, and would go on to be featured in major parts in the television drama *Homeland* and the independent dramedy *Lady Bird*.

The concept of heredity, dynastic pressure, and the outcry of affluence and domination that Tracy's family represented (and still represents) in American history can be found in the pages of *August: Osage County*. The main issue of the play the death of the patriarch of a troubled family, reflects and predicts the future changes that would befall America in the next

few years in the shape of the shocking financial crisis of 2008 and the election of Barack Obama as the first Black president of the United States of America.

The play *August: Osage County* is a drama about family that has been affected by the works of Eugene O'Neill, Tennessee Williams, and Sam Shepard. The play *Long Day's Journey into Night* by O'Neill, which occurs throughout one day, has similarities with the play *August: Osage County*. These similarities are based on the idea that both plays were written with personal experiences of family life of the authors. *Long Day's Journey into Night* by O'Neill is based on O'Neill's experience in his family, where there was illness of his father, morphine addiction of his mother, and many emotional problems in family life. Also, Letts was inspired by his family life and emotional problems in the family that helped him to create a picture of family life full of addiction, illness, and destruction of family relations (LitCharts, n.d).

The action of the play takes place in 2008, during the summer, on the territory of a large house in Osage County, a rural area in Oklahoma. Beverly Weston, a poet and retired professor, hires Johnna through a series of interviews and asks the woman to become her housekeeper to take care of his wife, Violet, who has mouth cancer and is addicted to painkillers. Violet is erratic due to being under the influence of drugs, and Johnna is eventually employed. Soon after, Beverly goes missing, and the family members flock together at the home. Violet has a sister, Mattie Fae, who remembers burning the books of Beverly several years before, whereas Ivy, the middle daughter of Violet, disagrees with her sister. Soon, Violet informs them that the boat belonging to Beverly had been discovered, which means that something bad was happening. The first daughter, Barbara, comes in with her estranged husband, Bill, and their daughter, Jean. Sheriff Gilbeau arrives and tells violet about his drowning.

Three days following the funeral, the family sits down to dinner, which was made by Johnna. Karen, the youngest daughter, comes in, accompanied by her fiancé, Steve, and brags about their honeymoon in Florida. Ivy reveals that she has someone she dates but hides his face. Little Charles, the son of Mattie Fae, does not even attend the burial, a fact that angers the mother. Meanwhile, Steve is flirting with the fourteen-year-old Jean, and it is later disclosed that Ivy has a secret boyfriend who is her cousin, Little Charles. At dinner, Violet, who is drunk, strikes out at the family, causing havoc. Barbara also challenges Violet over her addiction and insists that all her pills be turned in. At some point, the sisters talk about the manipulative character of Violet and the intention of Ivy to run off with Little Charles to New York. Violet tells about her abusive childhood, and she and Barbara are reconciled briefly.

When Mattie Fae treats Little Charles (Beverly's bastard son) in an inhumane manner, her husband, Charlie, gets furious in defense of his son. Barbara later finds out through Mattie Fae that Little Charles was Beverly's bastard son and Ivy's half – brother and her boyfriend. In the meantime, Steve is molesting Jean as they smoke marijuana, but Johnna steps in and beats him. The event results in a violent family crisis. Bill confesses that he is permanently leaving his wife, and Karen leaves with Steve. As they go on, Sheriff Gilbeau tells Barbara that Beverly lived in a motel before his suicide.

At the dinner table, Ivy attempts to tell about her affair with Little Charles; but Violet cuts her off and ends up telling her about the fact that Little Charles was her half-brother. Shocked, Barbara understands that Violet was aware of the truth. Ivy promises to go and not say anything to Little Charles. Violet and Barbara quarrel and accuse one another of the death of Beverly. Eventually, both Ivy and Barbara leave the house, abandoning Violet. Left alone with Johnna,

Violet repeatedly laments the departure of her family members, saying, "and then they are gone," expressing her fear of being left alone after everyone has abandoned her.

4.2 Familial Panic and Affective Pandemonium in Tracy Letts's *August: Osage County*

The family is most often conceived as a natural arena of love and care, not homelessness. However, a more tangled but also unpleasant gift of family life is frequently presented through text, not only constructed by affection but also by strength, expectation, and loss. The American writer Robert Penn Warren supports this argument by discussing the psychological reality of the parent-child relationship. A baby is a mix of both parents. All of them will be squeezing their hams trying to obtain them back. Philosophically and emotionally, when a child is born, it not only brings unbounded joy but also causes a change in the identity of its parents. They sacrifice their freedom, time, and dreams to the child who turns into a symbol of their loss and the one they love. It is felt that something has been lost, and consequently, this causes them to retrieve it somehow by the child (Warren, 1959).

Within the family system, sons and daughters continue to be influenced by their parents' expectations even after reaching adulthood. Rather than being viewed as independent individuals, adult children may become the recipients of their parents' unfulfilled ambitions, unresolved desires, and projected hopes for the future. These emotional projections create psychological pressure, fostering persistent feelings of guilt, tension, and anxiety that affect family relationships. In *August: Osage County*, this dynamic is reflected in the lives of Violet's adult daughters—Barbara, Ivy, and Karen—whose personalities and life choices are deeply shaped by years of dysfunctional parenting, emotional neglect, and unresolved family conflict. Consequently, the play demonstrates that the effects of harmful parenting extend beyond

childhood, continuing to influence adult children and contributing to the emotional fragmentation of the family (Warren, 1959).

In addition to the inherent tie, parenting is the act of nurturing a child and helping him/her to physically, socially, psychologically, intellectually, and financially develop from childhood up to adulthood. Parenting is thus a relationship that has numerous dimensions in the relationship between the children and their parents. In this human development process, parents, therefore, directly and consequently influence the process of socialization and success in life and have an influence on their children. Good parentage produces good kids and vice versa because of lousy parentage. Furthermore, the harmonious family life and nurturing homes have a positive effect on the future attitude embraced by children-adults; meanwhile, awful marital relationships affect children-adults, causing them to develop negative attitudes (Mahapatra & Batul, 2016).

Among the most important plays in American theater of the twenty-first century is *August: Osage County*, written in 2008 by Tracy Letts. In his play, the author depicts the negative outcomes that can occur due to the dysfunctionality of family ties. He depicts how poor parenting, neglectful behavior, addiction, psychological pressure, and unresolved conflicts destroy trust and interaction between family members. The main character of the play, Violet Weston, can be viewed as a negative parent who controls other people's behavior, emotionally manipulates them, and has an alcohol addiction.

Violet gains much power out of her losses, which are addiction, disappointment, and loss of her sense of self-identity. Violet would like to stamp her identity in life using her children, and especially her daughters. Violet attempts to show her love in a demeaning manner, talks in an

incoherent fashion, and represses her emotions. The chapter delves into the motives as to why parental authority, particularly Violet's, is not beneficial in calming down the Weston family, but in fact serves as a trait catalyst in instigating trouble in the minds of people living within this family. Poor parenting is reflected in the circle of the former abused children, who become abusers of their children or find love and care in other people as substitute parents. This play contains the reasons why parents are bad in relation to Violet in her specific case, as well as the psychological impact of her aggressive behaviour and lack of care towards her three daughters. The relevance of the study is to establish the shape of the characters of the daughters in handling the issues of life (Fahy, 2020).

The mental health and development of a child can be significantly affected because of all forms of bad parenting. Abuse by names, blaming others, or ignoring someone can ruin the self-esteem of a child and cause psychological wounds. The manipulation of behaviours, including invasion of privacy, denial of autonomy, etc., may hinder the ability of a child to become a self-sufficient individual with self-respect. By manipulating, which can include employing guilt or shame to manipulate behaviour, children may develop feelings of fear within, and they will lack confidence in themselves and feel unworthy (Marcin, 2020).

Parents who are selecting a partner with a drinking problem are possibly exposing their child to the risk of developing an alcohol use disorder before they are born. The concept of the nonrandom partner selection (also referred to as assortative mating) is pegged on a study that revealed that alcohol abuse problems increase an individual's tendency to marry alcohol abuse problems (Windle, 1996). That portrays them as bad parents even before they become parents by selecting a mate who is an alcoholic, just as they are, to understand what the environment will be

like for their children in the future. Beverly and Violet are both alcoholic parents, and it could be noticed when Beverly declares, 'My wife takes pills, and I drink. That is the trade we've cut' (Letts, 2008, p. 11).

Beverly does not have numerous scenes in the play to demonstrate the impact of his drinking as compared to his wife, Violet. Violet favors Johnna over the daughters. Favoritism does not signify intimacy, but rather it denotes being entangled. There is a possibility that the sibling desired has a similar level of psychological maturity as that of his parents. In case a person has an independent, self-sufficient personality, his parents would not have regarded him as a needy child, and he or she could play the role of rescuing parents. Self-reliant children who do not need the influence of parents are left alone and are in a more independent and self-governed life (Gibson, 2022) .

Along with the future concern about how detrimental parenting may be to relationships, it is also useful to consider the past. The individuals who adopted the destructive parenting styles were usually those who suffered hostile parenting themselves. The relationship of parents to the children themselves can present some anxieties, shortcomings, and worries from their childhood. It is clear that in some instances, the abusive parents have emotional traumas and fail to either control themselves and abuse other people or hold their children so close to them that they stifle their growth. Some of these types of insecure attachment may be exhibited through the behaviour in abusive relationships. The family anxiety may be brought about by issues within the relationship of the parents, fighting, or fear of rejection, separation, or loss. Parents can mistreat their children as a way of keeping them in check and having them emotionally and physically attached (Dunham & Dermer, 2011) .

According to Bowlby's attachment theory, the type of attachment that children develop with their parents (provided they are positive and responsive) is key in the growth of emotional, social, and cognitive abilities in childhood. He believes that the history of relationships experienced by a child and the parents forms the background of the child on the issue of whether the child believes that he is loved and whether the child can manage emotions acceptably. On the other hand, the insecure or appositive or unresponsive attachments of the child to their parents may also affect them negatively (Gillath, Karantzas, & Fraley, 2016).

In *August: Osage County*, one of the causes of Violet Weston's toxic parenting was the fact that Violet was attached to her mother. This is disclosed in many talks of the play. One of these examples of insecure attachment of Violet to her mother is her angry flashbacks of her childhood. During the dinner scene, Violet starts attacking each of the family members, but when Barbara advises her to cease attacking the members, she repeats, You ever been attacked in your sweet, spoiled life? (Letts, 2008, p. 94). And she begins to tell Barbara what it is like to attack the family.

She narrates to her a story of how one of the boyfriends of her mother hit her with a hammer and how she, Mattie Fae, shielded her hitting her instead. This depicts the nature of the mother and the atmosphere of their family. The other scene that illustrates that Violet has a toxic mother is when Jean implores her mother to cease lying as Barbara informs the family that Jean is not a true vegetarian. All the laughing is broken up when Violet comes in and says:

"Y'know... when I ever called my mom a liar? Then the silence starts,

as she would have clucked my goddamn brain off my shoulders (Letts, 2008, p. 91).

That shows the sort of relationship that she had with her mother. Violet is used to show how terrible her upbringing was. To elaborate on this point, she includes an example of an experience in her childhood that illustrates her poor relationship and insecure attachment with her mother. Violet dreams of getting a pair of cowboy boots to impress a crush, but her mother plays a nasty game of replacing the worn-out men's work boots as a Christmas gift, making her feel disappointed and mocked. This experience shows that Violet needs praise and love, which is contrary to what her mom prefers, to engage in ridicule and emotional cruelty.

The event highlights the deep traumas of her mother being an ignorant person. That affects Violet and her acidic temper and lack of good relations with her children, especially when she states, "my mommy was a nasty" (p.107). This shows how much hatred and pain Violet experienced in her childhood, as well as the degree of toxicity of her parental bond. That is a generational dysfunctional cycle. The relationship between Violet and her mother is further complicated by the fact that she also goes through periods of weakness and desires to be parented. Despite her loud character and destructive nature, Violet has an internal desire for her mother to show approval and confirmation. The effect of neglect by parents on the psychological well-being of Violet is devastating, as evidenced by her vulnerability (Fifer, 2013).

The emotional instability and unpredictable behaviour of Violet give the people around her an uncertain and unstable environment and disclose the underlying issues and insecurities underlying her attachment pattern. Her husband did leave, and she resorted to her daughter, Barbara, since she was not able to live independently. She needs someone to rely on. She continues telling her that she should not go away and stay with them when her elder daughter, Barbara, arrives. During the last scene, when Barbara has gone, Violet turns to Johnna to comfort

her, although she was critical of her earlier. Violet, however, quickly realises that Johnna is the only source of support she has left to lean on.

The disrupted relationship that Barbara has with her father and parents is particularly with her mother Violet, which affects her relationships with her other family members immensely. The disrupted childhood of Barbara, including her psychological baggage of belonging to her parents, may result in the inability to develop positive and affectionate relationships with other family members. The final chain of harmful parenting that starts with the mother of Violet and proceeds to her relationships with her children is represented by Barbara. Barbara is not willing to repeat the same cycle, yet the tragic situations and secrets that she reveals and finds out about make her become nothing but her mom, role model, a bad parent to Jean. Jean is on the other hand presented as a talkative, astute and bright girl. She is a mature girl who is ahead of her times and has a caustic and sarcastic type of humor (Fifer, 2013).

Jean does not fear to voice her opinion and constantly criticizes the unhealthy relationships within her family. Nevertheless, it is essential to keep in mind that the experiences and the situations that the family goes through also shape the personality of Jean. Caused by the development of the play and unveiling the secrets and tension of the family, the character of Jean is changed and meets her personal battle. She decides to tell Johanna of the separation of her parents at the beginning of the play: "My Mom and Dad are separated now" (p 42) and the adultery of her dad: he is cheating on one of his students who is a grader (p. 42), rather than challenging her mother.

However, as the play progresses and more of the family secrets are revealed, she becomes frustrated with her parents and the problems surrounding her. She starts to establish her own identity and tries to break free from the family environment. This quest of self discovery and defiance against dysfunctional family life shapes the personality of Jean and the relationships with her mother. She is courageous enough to protect herself once they discover that she is about to have a romantic affair with an older man. To which her father cautions her not to be too young that she retaliates furiously by arguing that her age is just a few years less than your Barbara that you like them (p.120) before Barbara. Jean has a complex and strained relationship with her mother, which reflects the dysfunctional relationship structure of the entire Weston family (Fifer, 2013).

At the start of the play, the relationship between Jean and Barbara seems to be remote and strained. Barbara goes through a trying time in her life, being able to deal with the separation of her marriage and the declining health of her mom, Violet. This strains her relationship with Jean, and both of them are not always on the same page on various topics. Barbara is not emotionally available which contributes to the discontent and alienation of Jean. Due to the loose bond with her parents and her powerful character, she does not hesitate about meeting people and following her own intentions without minding about other people. She is an avoidant type of attachment, as she smokes in spite of her mother. This indicates that she is self-reliant, in the sense that she does what she desires even without consulting anyone and does not depend on parents and others.

The opening scene of *August: Osage County* provides the audience with the first impression of Beverly Weston, Violet Weston's husband. Through his conversation with Violet, Beverly reveals his personal struggles, including his alcoholism and the difficulties within their

marriage. Beverly, a retired university literature professor and poet, introduces Johnna, a Native Cheyenne woman, to the Weston household and hires her as a housekeeper and cook.

Beverly: Violet. My wife takes pills and I drink. That's the bargain we've struck . . . (p.11).

As a result, their marital relationship has remained at the level of coexistence, only to the extent that each of them manages single-handedly with his/her issues. Beverly and Violet like being isolated instead of dealing with their problems collaboratively. The distance of connection is therefore increasing further because their daughters will be left to contribute towards the failure of the marriage relationship of their parents. Apparently, there has been no specific reason as to why Beverly has lost interest in most things and yet he is an alcohol addict. He has written just one successful book, and has abandoned writing forever. His fatherhood life is dark, like family is one of the things to which he is not more interested (Fifer, 2013) .

The opening scene of *August: Osage County*, written by Tracy Letts, begins with Beverly Weston's quotation from T. S. Eliot's poem *The Hollow Men*. This quotation not only reflects Beverly's personal despair and emotional emptiness as a father and husband but also symbolizes the deeper sense of isolation, dysfunction, and emptiness within the entire Weston family(Kochman,2011).The line in the poem quoted above, "Life is very long", is a good foreshadowing of what he is about to do: suicide.(p.10).

Mr. Weston's family reunited before discovering news of his demise. A family gathering is often filled with an atmosphere of love, tenderness, reassurance, and family warmth. However, the Weston family was the opposite, as it depicted isolation and loneliness for us. Gabriela

Glavan cites the crowding of the theatre, by which she means the large number of characters and the overlap of their movement and dialogues in one space, which creates a feeling of chaos and family tensions, especially in the relationship between the mother and her daughters. The house and its atmosphere also metaphorically symbolize the nature of the tense relationships within the Weston family (Glavan, 2015).

As Tracy depicted, “They have a family home that hasn't undergone structural maintenance” (p. 9). The Weston family home reflects a state of neglect and decay spanning many years. Lacking care and maintenance, the sun is blocked by closed windows and curtains, plunging the house into darkness. The stifling heat, exacerbated by the malfunctioning air conditioning, intensifies the feeling of suffocation, as if the place itself were driving its inhabitants to flee. This unhealthy space symbolizes the troubled family environment in which the daughters were raised, fraught with dark issues such as suicide, alcoholism, drug abuse, divorce, and illicit relationships. Furthermore, Violet's extreme sensitivity to light, a consequence of her medication, compels her to keep the windows tightly closed, further deepening the pervasive darkness (Thornton, 1991).

Beverly and his wife avoid looking at each other or confronting the truth, preferring silence to confrontation. Beverly's feelings of being alone and inability to solve his problems, coupled with the lack of emotional support, led him to suicide. Meanwhile, Violet's suppression of her annoyance and her disappointment at confronting her husband's betrayal transformed her into a sharp, aggressive, and bitter person, characterized by shouting and resentment. This mutual silence created a deep gap between them, negatively impacting their daughters, who absorbed the

atmosphere of tension and coldness. As a result, a disgusting and damaging family environment developed, driving each of them to contemplate running away (Thornton, 1991).

The family home environment contributes to shaping children's tendencies towards independence or escapism through romantic relationships. A tense family climate pushes them to seek external alternatives such as marriage or engagement, while a healthy relationship between parents fosters a stable environment that develops strong family bonds and reduces children's tendency to rush into early relationships as an escape from an unsuitable reality (Thornton, 1991).

The bad parenting or negative parenting almost correlates with poor outcomes for children. Low parental levels of love and warmth mean that the children of such parents will develop behavioural problems due to their sense of insecurity and lack of emotional warmth. Therefore, the absence of parental support may result in depression and the inability to make the right decisions because of insecurity (Knopf, 2015). The three Weston daughters are not happy, and cannot make the correct choices they simply desire to leave their cold house. The marriage between Barbara and her husband is one of failure.

It appears that the marital relationship between the parents was clearly reflected in the eldest daughter, as she reproduced the same pattern in her married life. Barbara, like her parents, suffers from a lack of intimacy in her relationship with her husband, which brought their marriage to the brink of collapse after Bill's infidelity. Despite this, the couple seeks to hide this emotional rift when they reunite after Beverly's disappearance. In contrast, the mother understands the nature of this relationship because she has lived through a similar experience, which is evident in her description of her relationship with her husband as one based on isolation

and emotional emptiness. She says that they live together in psychological darkness, abandoned and deserted, wasting their lives without a real connection (Letts, 2008, p. 136).

Was this your concern? Is it possible to get here back in time to see
the Phantom of the Fucking Opera? (pp.68-69).

Barbara is presented as a character who suffers from failing in her roles as a wife and mother, which negatively impacts her relationship with her daughter, Jean. She displays a marked indifference to significant family events, such as the death of her grandfather, appearing more interested in superficial entertainment than in grieving her loss. This behaviour reflects a breakdown in emotional communication within the family, as well as weak family ties, which can be explained as a direct result of the lack of emotional support and attention from the mother (Glavan, 2015).

Jean would rather watch TV than communicate with her family; she is not available to her mother who requires her to come through this challenging period. Jean does not show any emotions towards the constant fight between her parent and their choice to divorce. This is due to a bad marriage of Jean making her self-centered. Separation leads to loneliness, which in turn leads to a loss of self-esteem. While the whole family sits in the living room, Gene is on the stairs smoking marijuana, Johnna is the one who sees her and she is concerned with the thought that a teenage girl alone does what she pleases (Glavan, 2015).

The relationship between Barbara, Bill, and their daughter Jean reveals a clear breakdown in communication and family attention. The parents are unaware of important aspects of their daughter's life, such as her marijuana use. Her personal choices, like following a vegan diet, are

not appreciated or respected, but rather ridiculed by family members, reflecting a lack of understanding and emotional support. This serves as further evidence of the negative impact of troubled marital relationships on children. Through this strained relationship, Tracy illustrates how troubled marriages negatively affect children. Parents become preoccupied with their personal conflicts and feelings of loneliness, neglecting their children's psychological and emotional needs. As a result, children tend to isolate themselves within an unhealthy family environment, lacking communication and cohesion (Glavan, 2015).

“My mum was an awful, mean old lady. I must be getting it there” (p.107) .The lack of a healthy relationship between Barbara and her daughter is a clear indication that Barbara has been influenced by her mother, Violet, who herself experienced a similar family dynamic. This reveals the transmission of disruptive behavioral patterns across generations, from grandmother to daughter and then to granddaughter. Violet openly admits that she acquired this aggressive tendency from her mother, from whom she received no humane treatment based on care or support, which contributed to the entrenchment and perpetuation of this behavioral pattern within the family structure (Glavan, 2015).

The relationship between Violet and her daughters reveals a pattern of verbal abuse and mistreatment, most notably in her treatment of her daughter Ivy through hurtful comments about her appearance and self-confidence. Despite Karen's attempts to downplay this and insist that their mother is loved, Violet's behaviour reflects a deep emotional disturbance. Violet tries to justify this aggression by referring to her own childhood, where she claims to have been mistreated by her mother. She recalls a painful memory of receiving an old, dirty pair of shoes as a gift instead of the new ones she wanted, symbolizing emotional neglect and deprivation. This

experience demonstrates that domestic violence doesn't arise in a vacuum but is often the result of repressed psychological suffering, leading to a vicious cycle where patterns of abuse are passed down through generations, with the victim eventually becoming a perpetrator of the same behaviour (Glavan, 2015).

The three daughters were negatively impacted by the parenting styles of both Violet and Beverly, as the nature of their relationship contributed to an unstable family environment. Although Beverly showed love for his daughters, he indirectly contributed to increased tension within the family by adopting a silent approach and avoiding confronting marital problems. This weakened family communication and diminished the sense of warmth and stability within the home. Conversely, Violet also contributed to this turmoil through her emotional withdrawal and refusal to engage in dialogue, which later affected her relationships with her daughters. Elizabeth Fifer (2013) suggests that Tracy's play highlights familial anxiety and tensions as a direct result of dysfunctional marital relationships and a lack of effective communication, leading to the breakdown of family bonds and a decline in psychological stability within the family (Fife, 2013).

Karen is introduced as the youngest daughter who returns to the family home after learning of her father's kidnapping and attends his funeral. She arrives with her new fiancé, Steve, creating a striking contrast between the somber nature of the event and her bringing an outsider at a time of heightened tension and emotional turmoil within the family. Karen's character reveals a state of emotional instability and fragmentation in her personal life. She seeks love and care outside the family, leading her into unstable and unsuccessful relationships. She doesn't seem shocked by Steve's inappropriate behaviour towards her niece, Jean, but rather

tends to justify his actions instead of questioning them, reflecting a state of denial and emotional dependency. Ultimately, despite recognizing the unreliability of the relationship, Karen clings to it, revealing a vulnerability to emotional distress and a need for any form of emotional support, however unstable (Fife, 2013).

Ivy is the second daughter to spend her years with her parents without marriage, but like the rest of the Weston family, she suffers from feelings of deprivation, despair, and emotional emptiness. In light of this turbulent reality, Ivy finds emotional refuge in her relationship with her cousin Charles, where a relationship based on understanding and psychological need develops between them, and he becomes the only person informed about her cervical cancer diagnosis. Their relationship reaches the point where they decide to run away together and live away from the family environment (Fahy, 2020).

However, this path is shocked when Violet reveals that Charles is, in fact, the half-brother of her daughter, Matty Faye, which puts the relationship in a forbidden framework and leads to its collapse. Ivy faces this reality with feelings of anger and despair, but at the same time, she insists on continuing with her plan as if she is ignoring what has been revealed in an attempt to escape her turbulent family reality, while blaming her mother for this revelation. In this context, Tracy Letts highlights the family members' move away from the concept of family warmth through the symbolism of food and its rituals inside the home. The shared table and cooking, as essential elements in building a healthy family environment, are absent from the Weston family, which reflects the weakness of the parental role and the disintegration of family ties and indicates the absence of containment and care within the home (Fahy, 2020).

Violet relies on her maid, Johnna, to prepare meals for the family, suggesting that the food Jonah provides is a measure of stability and family cohesion that the Weston family lacks. During the family gathering around the dinner table, their comments on the food are frequent compliments, reflecting an underlying sense of deprivation from the experience of a close-knit family and warm home meals. Their inability to sit together and eat normally underscores the absence of care and connection within the household. Tracy Letts raises a poignant question: Is this familial warmth emanating from an outsider, rather than the parents themselves? This deepens the sense of dysfunction within the family structure. However, these brief moments of intimacy are quickly shattered when Violet disrupts the dinner by picking a fight with Barbara, reflecting the ongoing tension and inability to maintain any semblance of stability (Fahy, 2020).

Violet returns home after the death of Beverly Weston to be welcomed back with the words "Welcome back" (p.34). This act of affection is one that Violet does not come to expect from her relatives. It points to the emotional coldness that reigns inside the Weston family. At the same time, the attitude that the three daughters of Violet have towards her indicates that there are consequences of poor parenting practices and the inability to form emotional ties inside the family.

Ultimately, Violet is left alone to confront the consequences of her familial losses, as evidenced by her words: "Then you left, and Beverly; then you left.' And Barbara, then you left" (p.138). This scene captures the culmination of the family's disintegration, where the mother becomes utterly isolated after the bonds that were supposed to unite the family have crumbled. This tragic situation highlights the idea of mutual neglect within the family, as the mother's

suffering is ultimately interpreted as a direct result of a dysfunctional educational and emotional relationship and her failure to fulfill her maternal role healthily, leading to family disintegration and a lack of mutual support among its members (Glavan, 2015).

In conclusion, Tracy embodies a clear case of family anxiety stemming from the breakdown of bonds within the Weston family. The events reveal a family suffering from constant conflict and a lack of emotional support, creating a psychologically unstable environment that affects all its members. The text demonstrates that weak family communication and the accumulation of internal crises transform the family into a source of tension rather than a space of safety and support, which explains the pervasiveness of this anxiety across relationships and generations within the family (Glavan, 2015).

Conclusion

In this thesis, the phenomenon of family anxiety was analyzed through the lens of modern American plays, focusing on its nature as a multifaceted and complex phenomenon. The thesis relied on a theoretical background of the concepts of psychoanalysis developed by Sigmund Freud, along with the such as theories of family systems and stress. Thus, this thesis attempted to reveal the causes and mechanisms that lead to the emergence and maintenance of anxiety in the family setting. It should be noted that family anxiety cannot be explained by any one reason but is formed through complex interactions between psychological struggles and sociological and economic hardships.

According to psychoanalysis, this thesis has revealed the importance of the subconscious mind in determining behavioral responses in family situations. Unsatisfied needs, unresolved childhood experiences, and conflicts within the mind between the id, ego, and superego are essential elements in interpersonal relations. These psychological factors may have a subconscious impact on people's relations by appearing in covert ways, such as misunderstanding, emotional detachment, and arguments, further adding to family anxiety. It is evident from this thesis that much of the tension seen within families is not only due to current situations but also because of past experiences and fears stored in the subconscious.

Besides the psychological aspect, this thesis has emphasized the need to consider the family as a holistic unit. The family systems approach has illustrated the fact that anxiety is not something isolated to one particular person but something shared by all individuals in terms of how they contribute to the family's functioning. If one member gets stressed, the effect trickles

down to other people, leading to a chain reaction and disturbance of the system as a whole. This also clarifies the reason why anxiety persists in families even when the cause of such a problem is long gone. It also emphasizes the role played by patterns of communication, division of roles, and relationships in intensifying or resolving problems among family members.

Indeed, the analysis of the selected plays – *The Humans*, *Rabbit Hole*, and *August: Osage County* – serves as the source of practical examples that can be used when exploring the issue of family anxiety in modern American theatre plays. As a rule, families are depicted as emotional entities characterized by such features as love, disputes, fears, and insecurities. In order to create dramatic family stories, the authors utilize dialogues and settings that contribute to the depiction of the specific atmosphere. For instance, in *The Humans*, family anxiety is revealed through the prism of such concepts as economic insecurity, ageing, and existential fears. In turn, in "The Rabbit Hole", family anxiety manifests itself through the prism of tragic losses and difficulties in overcoming grief. Finally, in *August: Osage County*, the issue of family anxiety is raised through depicting a dysfunctional family filled with long-lasting disputes, addictions, and anger.

Additionally, the study has revealed the importance of socio-economic and political elements in creating family anxiety. Family anxiety becomes more prevalent in times when the economy is not stable and when people are jobless, especially when there is inequality among members of society. Such elements generate a feeling of fear and uncertainty that can affect the emotional health of family members. Family anxiety can therefore not be considered an internal issue; rather, it is directly influenced by socio-economic and political factors. In this case, the relationship between the two concepts is evident through the portrayal of modern American

dramas, which are reflections of social reality in terms of how social factors affect the dynamics in families.

While the impact of family anxiety may be overwhelming in many cases, one should note the ability of these people to find ways to overcome stress and adapt to changing conditions. Family anxiety, in some cases, may become a motivation for change because it makes individuals think about possible changes. By means of communication, emotional support, and understanding of one another, members of a family may learn how to live with one another again. Therefore, the concept of flexibility that refers to family systems is significant in terms of adaptation and the ability to keep family balance. In most cases, plays depict negative aspects of the relationship between family members. However, there is a possibility that after facing some difficulties, families may heal and reconcile.

Communication as a process that helps people share their feelings is of particular importance when it comes to overcoming family anxiety. Failure to discuss the problems and emotional barriers may only increase misunderstanding and conflict within families. Meanwhile, by using communication and expressing emotions, members of a family may learn how to get along with one another. Such an idea is supported by theoretical perspectives, which emphasize the importance of communication in family psychology.

Considering the above results, it can be argued that family anxiety is a complex and dynamic process influenced by various psychological, interpersonal, socio-economic, and cultural factors. The analysis of Stephen Karam's *The Humans*, David Lindsay-Abaire's *Rabbit Hole*, and Tracy Letts's *August: Osage County* demonstrates how modern American drama

represents the different causes and consequences of family anxiety. In *The Humans*, family anxiety emerges through economic insecurity, ageing, and fears about the future, while *Rabbit Hole* presents anxiety through grief, loss, and the struggle to cope with the death of a child. Similarly, *August: Osage County* reveals how dysfunctional parenting, addiction, unresolved conflicts, and emotional wounds contribute to the breakdown of family relationships. Through these dramatic representations, the thesis highlights that family anxiety is not caused by a single factor but develops through the interaction of psychological experiences, family dynamics, and social pressures.

The examination of these plays sheds light on the complexity of human relationships and the challenges faced by families in contemporary society. Although the selected dramas portray families experiencing conflicts, pain, and emotional distance, they also suggest the possibility of healing through communication, understanding, and emotional support. Therefore, the study demonstrates that family anxiety is not only a source of suffering but also a condition that may encourage individuals and families to recognize their problems and seek reconciliation.

Furthermore, the analysis of the selected plays demonstrates that family anxiety appears through diverse perspectives despite the similarities that connect these dramatic works. The three plays represent different playwrights and different social contexts, which enriches the understanding of family anxiety in modern American drama. In *The Humans* by Stephen Karam, family anxiety is explored through the experiences of an ordinary American family facing economic insecurity, ageing, health concerns, and uncertainty about the future. In contrast, Lindsay-Abaire's *Rabbit Hole* presents family anxiety through the devastating experience of parental grief and the struggle of a family attempting to cope with the loss of a child. Meanwhile,

Tracy Letts's *August: Osage County* portrays a more complex and fragmented family structure in which anxiety emerges from dysfunctional relationships, addiction, unresolved trauma, and long-term conflicts among family members.

The selected plays also differ in their settings, which contribute to the representation of various forms of familial anxiety. While *The Humans* is set primarily in a Manhattan apartment, reflecting the pressures of contemporary urban life, *August: Osage County* moves to a rural environment that exposes the hidden tensions and conflicts within an extended family. Although these plays present different families, locations, and social experiences, they share common concerns related to emotional suffering, communication failure, insecurity, and the challenges of maintaining family bonds. Therefore, this thesis contributes to the study of family anxiety by exploring how this phenomenon is represented through diverse playwrights, populations, family structures, and settings in modern American theater.

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المستخلص

تحاول هذه الأطروحة استكشاف ظاهرة القلق الأسري، وهي ظاهرة نفسية واجتماعية يمكن رؤيتها في بعض المسرحيات الأمريكية الحديثة، بما في ذلك "البشر" لستيفن كرم، و"حفرة الأرنب" لديفيد ليندسي أبابير، و"أغسطس: مقاطعة أوساج" لترايسي ليتس. ومن حيث النظريات التي سيتم تطبيقها لاستكشاف هذه الظاهرة، ستستخدم الدراسة نظرية التحليل النفسي الفرويدية، والتي يمكن أن تفسر أهمية العقل اللاواعي والصراع والرغبة المكبوتة في بناء علاقة بين أفراد الأسرة وخلق القلق لديهم. وفي الوقت نفسه، ستستخدم هذه الدراسة نظرية النظم الأسرية ونظرية الضغوط الأسرية في تفسير انتقال القلق في الأسر. تهتم الأطروحة أيضًا بالجوانب الاجتماعية والاقتصادية والسياسية للقلق الأسري، بما في ذلك أشياء مثل عدم الاستقرار الاقتصادي والبطالة وعدم المساواة الاجتماعية والتأثيرات الثقافية. ومن خلال الفحص التفصيلي للنصوص الدرامية المختارة، تبين أن الدراما الأمريكية الحديثة تستخدم تقنيات مثل الواقعية والرمزية لتصوير التحديات النفسية والعاطفية التي تواجهها الأسرة المعاصرة، مما يدل على هشاشة التوازن بين الدعم العاطفي والصراع الداخلي. لقد ثبت أن القلق الأسري هو مفهوم متعدد الأبعاد، ويتشكل بسبب التفاعل بين العوامل النفسية الداخلية والعوامل الخارجية المرتبطة بالتوتر. علاوة على ذلك، فقد تبين أن المسرح الأمريكي أداة فنية قيمة في تصوير هذه الظاهرة، لأنه يجسد بشكل فعال الفروق الدقيقة في ديناميكيات الأسرة وتأثير الضغوط المجتمعية على الأسرة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: القلق العائلي، نظرية التحليل النفسي، ديناميكيات الأسرة، الحزن والخسارة، الضغط الاجتماعي والاقتصادي، الأسرة المفككة، الدراما الأمريكية.



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قسم اللغة الإنجليزية

دراسة نفسية للقلق والتحدي الأسري في مسرحيات أمريكية مختارة

رسالة

مقدمة إلى مجلس كلية التربية للعلوم الإنسانية، جامعة واسط، وهي جزء من متطلبات نيل درجة

الماجستير في الادب الانكليزي

تقدم بها:

كرار رسن علي

بإشراف :

أ. د اخلاص محمد ناتي