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**A Disability Theory Application in 'Buried Child'
and 'The Curious Incident of the Dog in the
Night-Time'**

ABSTRACT

Disability study is an interdisciplinary field that examines disability as a social, cultural, and political phenomenon within the literary text and is also concerned with the representation, portrayal, and experiences of individuals with disabilities. This research examines the representation of mental and cognitive disability in two plays, "Buried Child" by Sam Shepard and "The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time" by Simon Stephens. It hypothesises that these two plays show disability theory's applications in their texts. It follows the disability theory as guidance for analysing them to clarify the understanding of how mental and cognitive disabilities are portrayed and their importance in these dramas. It is limited to Sam Shepherd's and Simon Stephen's plays. It begins with an introduction and a discussion and concludes with a summary of the findings that support the previously stated hypothesis.

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تطبيقات نظرية الإعاقة في روايتي "الطفل المدفون" و"حادثة الكلب

الغريبة في الليل"

الخلاصة:

دراسة الإعاقة هي مجال متعدد التخصصات يدرس الإعاقة كظاهرة اجتماعية وثقافية وسياسية ضمن النص الأدبي، كما يهتم أيضاً بتمثيل وتصوير وتجارب الأفراد ذوي الإعاقة. يتناول هذا البحث تمثيل الإعاقة العقلية والمعرفية في مسرحيتين هما "الطفل المدفون" للكاتب سام شبيرد، و"حادثة الغريبة للكلب في الليل" للكاتب سايمون ستيفنز. ويفترض هذا البحث أن هاتين المسرحيتين تظهران تطبيقات نظرية الإعاقة في نصوصهما. ويتبع نظرية الإعاقة كمرشد لتحليلها لتوضيح فهم كيفية تصوير الإعاقات العقلية والمعرفية وأهميتها في هذه الأعمال الدرامية. يقتصر هذا البحث على مسرحيات سام شبيرد وسيمون ستيفنز. ويبدأ بمقدمة ومناقشة ويختتم بملخص للنتائج التي تدعم الفرضية المذكورة سابقاً.

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مجلة الدراسات التاريخية والحضارية مجلة الدراسات التاريخية

Introduction

Disability is a painful and avoidable condition that anybody may face throughout his/her life. The theorist Asch Adrienne once said, "Recognising

Death while Affirming Life: Can End of Life Reform Uphold a Disabled Person's Interest in Continued Life?" in *The Hastings Center Report*, 2000. Adrienne Asch, a prominent academic in the field of bioethics, is recognised as one of the early pioneers who introduced a disability studies perspective into the realm of bioethics. Asch critiques the assertion "better off dead than disabled" by demonstrating that disability does not inherently detract from an individual's quality of life. Contrarily, she contends that healthcare professionals need to prioritise treatment modalities that promote the autonomy of individuals with disabilities. In addition, she provides practical recommendations for carers to validate the dignity of those undergoing end-of-life care. (Disability Studies: Foundations & Key Concepts) The treatment the disabled one faces in his life determines his fate. Disability, in this context, is defined as a condition or function judged to be significantly impaired relative to the usual standard of an individual or group. The term is used to refer to individual functioning, including physical impairment, sensory impairment, mental illness, and various types of chronic disease.

This paper will analyse two works of fiction: "The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time" by Simon Stephen and "The Buried Child" by Sam Shepard. It will focus on the theme of mental and cognitive disabilities by using disability theory to analyse how authors depict the disabilities of their

characters, how the characters deal with mental illness, and how the characters manage to fit in with society.

Simon Stephen, a renowned modern playwright who gained prominence in continental Europe and Britain, began his career as a dramatist in the late 1990s. Being a playwright for in-year-face theatre, Stephen has seen the Thatcher era, periods of economic and social transformation, and a golden age of capitalist ideology and economy. In "The Curious Incident of the Dog in Night-Time," Simon Stephen illustrates a particular kind of genetic handicap through the character Christopher, who has autism and explains his actions. In addition, Sam Shepard was an American actor, playwright, director, and screenwriter whose career lasted for fifty years. Ten Obie Awards were given to him for his directing and writing. In addition to various books of short stories, essays, and memories, he wrote forty-four plays. Sam Shepard explores many forms of mental disabilities through the figure of Tilden, the family's eldest son. (Sumarsono, Irwan, et al., ٣٤٦)

Methodology and Theory

Reading for disability studies entails analysing a text beyond traditional interpretations, paying particular attention to the author's implications for mental and cognitive disabilities. Through the lens of disability studies, this study critically examines issues connected to mental and cognitive disability in "Buried Child" and "The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time." For this reason, the disability studies approach is employed as an analytical tool.

The late 20th-century disability civil rights movement gave rise to disability studies. Early research makes a distinction between the medical model of disability, which places mental and physical impairments in the bodies of specific individuals, and the social model, which considers people's disabilities as a result of their environment. The social model identifies limitations based on both architecture and attitudes as the primary cause of disability. In recent years, the discipline has broadened to cover people with a variety of disabilities, including mental and chronic illnesses, in addition to physical ailments.

Lennard J. Davis is a professor of disability and human development, English, and medical education at the University of Illinois at Chicago. He is the author of many works and has mentioned that it is necessary to comprehend the notion of "able-bodied" to comprehend the concept of "disability." There is a dynamic relationship and interaction between these two words. Being "able" could imply being normal or imperfection-free. However, the word "able" is also complicated. (P. 9) Disability is the condition that causes one to be abnormal or different from the majority, and disabled means someone who is deemed abnormal by various institutions. (Davis 2018). Davis's approach to disability studies is predicated on understanding the distinctive experiences of individuals with disabilities and understanding social construction. He highlights the significance of tackling social difficulties and injustices related to disability, including marginalisation and rejection. Additionally, he argues that it is critical to recognise the abilities of individuals with disabilities

to effect change and have fulfilling lives. (Davis, 2016). In this paper, the mental implication of disability is intended, not the physical.

Discussion

Summary of "The Buried Child"

In 1978, "The Buried Child" by Sam Shepard had its global premiere. The drama, set on a dilapidated farm in rural Illinois, explores themes of fractured families, hidden secrets, and the declining American dream. The central narrative focuses on the dysfunctional American family of Dodge and Haley. Haley, Dodge's wife, often leaves home to go to church or the burial of their son Ansel. Meanwhile, Dodge, an old drunkard, spends most of his time on a shabby sofa. Their two sons, Tilden and Bradley, are dealing with personal issues. Tilden, the oldest son, appears damaged and unstable when he comes home after a long absence. Bradley is an angry, violent man with a wooden leg. (Sumarsono 347-348)

The dark truths of the family's past are gradually revealed due to Tilden's arrival. Tilden pretends to have found a bundle of vegetables in the backyard, including a human leg bone and carries it home. This revelation symbolises unresolved family traumas and hidden secrets. Later in the play, Vince, Tilden's son, also stays at the dorm. Shelley, Vince's girlfriend, attends the first meeting of his family. The family did not know about his life, so they could not identify him. (Sumarsono 347-348)

The play depicts the disintegration of family ties and the disintegration of the American dream through the characters' encounters, revelations, and strange relationships. It turns out that Tilden and Haley had a child together, which was buried in the backyard. This buried child symbolises the long-repressed guilt of the family and the dark secret. (Sumarsono 347-348) At the end of the play, the house represents corruption and decadence, reflecting the state of the family. The reappearance of the buried child makes the heroes face their past and the repercussions of their choices, leaving them to suffer from guilt, illusions, and broken identities. (Sumarsono 347-348)

Mental Disability in Sam Shepard's "Buried Child"

"The Buried Child" by Sam Shepard deals with the topic of mental and cognitive disabilities through his complex and troubled characters. One of the main characters, Tilden, represents mental instability and trauma. His fragmented speech, erratic behaviour, and general confusion indicate the presence of cognitive impairment, possibly caused by long-term psychological trauma. Tilden's return home and the discovery of the buried child serve as motives to uncover the secrets of the buried family and the devastating effects that these hidden traumas have had on the mental health of the characters. Through the character of Tilden, Shepard provides a touching portrait of how mental and cognitive disabilities manifest and affect individuals' lives. Tilden's inability to communicate effectively and his confused state reflect the challenges faced by individuals with cognitive impairments. The play embodies the

confusion, frustration, and isolation experienced by individuals with these disabilities and highlights the importance of empathy and understanding, especially for Tilden.

The illegitimate relationship between Tilden and his mother manifests itself in the form of emotional tensions and mental distractions for Tilden. He suffers from ambiguity and confusion about his identity and origin, which negatively affects his psychological development and stability. This relationship increases the complexity of events and relationships within the family, generating conflicts and tensions between Tilden and other family members. By depicting this illicit relationship, the play highlights the negative impact that unhealthy and unnatural relationships can have on the mental health of mentally disabled people. Furthermore, the play raises questions about the social and cultural contexts surrounding mental and cognitive disabilities. It calls for a critical examination of the marginalisation and stigma faced by individuals with disabilities, as well as the societal tendency to bury and ignore their struggles. Shepard's portrayal challenges the public to confront these issues and consider the consequences of neglecting the mental health and well-being of individuals with disabilities. It is achieved through Tilden's character, who represents a perception of mental disability and its challenges in a socio-cultural context. Tilden is ignored and marginalised by the family and society. He has a unique point of view and unconventional thinking.

Portraying the character of Tilden prompts consideration of the effects of this marginalisation on

the individual and his need for support and respect. Shepard's photography calls to draw attention to the issues of societal marginalisation of individuals with mental and cognitive disabilities and to spread awareness of the importance of promoting respect and community solidarity.(Almaarroof, ۲۰۱۷)

The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time " and Mental disability

The protagonist of "The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time" is Christopher Boone, a ۱۵-year-old with autism spectrum symptoms. Christopher lives with his father in the British town of Swindon, about ۷۰ miles west of London. One evening, Christopher learns that his neighbour's dog, Wellington, was killed with a pitchfork. Feeling unsettled by the encounter, Christopher strikes a police officer who tries to take him away from the dog. Christopher is not fond of touching people. Christopher is finally returned to his father after being taken into custody and interrogated regarding Wellington's death. Against his father's advice to avoid other people's matters, Christopher finds out who killed the dog. (Robert ۳)

Christopher's teacher, Siobhan (pronounced SHO-VAHN), suggests writing a story about Wellington's fate. In Simon Stephens' play, Siobhan sometimes reads aloud passages from Christopher's book, while other times, Christopher speaks directly to the audience. Though there are a few narrated scenes, most of the acting is done by the cast, many of whom play multiple roles. Over the next two years, we get to witness a glimpse of Christopher and his mother's daily

lives as we watch Christopher's father break the news of his mother's death to him. (Robert 3)

The readers discover the specific school Christopher attends and that he plans to sit for the A-levels (college admission exams) ahead of other students. Christopher gives readers a glimpse into his mind and his distinct viewpoint on the world through his work. (Robert 3)

The ten-member ensemble of performers tells the play's story through choreographed dance and spoken lines. Those who play multiple characters can often switch just a single costume accessory. Aside from many lighting, music, sound, and video projections, the stage design is also relatively straightforward, enabling the actors' actions and the text to let readers imagine a wide range of various locales with only a few minor scenic modifications. (Robert 3)

Christopher begins his investigation into Wellington's death by knocking on neighbours' doors and questioning people he has never talked to before, despite his extreme discomfort with strangers. Ultimately, his investigations lead him into a world of unknown people and places. (Robert 3)

In "The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time," mental disability is portrayed through the character of the young Christopher Boone. Christopher has autism spectrum disorder, a brain development issue that affects how a person sees and interacts with other people, leading to difficulties with communication and social interaction. Christopher's

disorder affects his ability to socialise and understand emotions and social interactions in unconventional ways.

Through Christopher's unique perspective of the external world, mental impairment is portrayed. Though highly skilled in mathematics and responds to patterns and repetitions, he cannot comprehend emotions or regularly interact with others. He was a social outcast. Christopher finds it challenging to comprehend feelings and interact with others in conventional ways. For instance, he becomes anxious and perceives someone trying to touch him as a breach of his personal space, as represented in the text.

"So I would have to be a... but it would be like playing a computer game" (Stephen ٢١)

"I cannot be on my own with you because you are a stranger "(Stephen ٢٥)

Christopher starts his inquiry into Wellington's death by knocking on neighbours' doors and questioning people he has never spoken to before, even though he dislikes socialising and being around strangers. Ultimately, his investigations lead him into a world of unknown people and locations. Here, the readers observe Christopher's challenges in developing trusting social bonds and comprehending the feelings and social requirements of others. Since he is not required to comprehend emotions and social relationships similarly, he feels more comfortable with the dog. Christopher experiences hypersensitivity to outside stimuli and

lighting, noise, and abrupt changes in his surroundings. It makes him anxious and hard to focus and engage with the outside world. Christopher's description of an exchange with someone demonstrates this sensitivity in the text.

And she jumped backwards and disappeared ... and speared her fingers like a fan "(Stephen ٢٦)

.Readers witness Christopher's emotional reaction to the abrupt change in his daily schedule. He suffers panic attacks and finds it difficult to adjust to abrupt changes, which is indicative of how tough it is to deal with unforeseen events and environmental changes. In addition, because of circumstances that highlighted his mental illness and his acute fear of change, Christopher depends heavily on structure and regularity. He experiences excellent anxiety whenever anything unusual happens in his daily life. It can cause an attack of anger or panic .

I knew that the train station was somewhere spiral... And I found that was how I found The station" (Stephen ٤١)

Why are you swearing ? Have you started ?has the train started?" (Stephen ٤٥)

I can see the question but I can't read the question because when I look at the words the all seem confused and mixed up and the wrong way to me" (Stephen ٤٥)

Christopher learns to manage his anxieties, emotional outbursts, and social difficulties during this adventure.

These attitudes highlight the difficulties Christopher has in communicating and interacting with others because of his mental illness while also emphasising how important it is for others to understand, love, and support those who have mental disabilities so they can overcome obstacles and move forward in life.

Comparison Of Two Plays Based On Mental Disabilities

Regarding disability investigation, the two plays will be compared in this paper. The character of Tilden in the play "The Buried Child" represents the mental illness and trauma resulting from an illicit affair with his mother. It causes mental distraction and leaves him feeling unsure of who he is, which has an impact on his psychological stability. Through Tilden, the author paints a vivid picture of mental and cognitive disabilities and their effects on individuals by depicting this illegal and unhealthy relationship in order to highlight the detrimental effects it had on him as well as the reasons behind his mental health issues.

In contrast, Christopher, a teenage boy with an autism spectrum condition, is the main character in the play "The Curious Incident of the Dog at Night." The play provides an inside look at Christopher's distinct mental processes, as well as the obstacles and forces he experiences, from his point of view. By giving a sympathetic picture of Christopher's experiences and stressing his intelligence, growth potential, and

understanding, the play tackles the problem of mental difficulty.

Both plays delicately address mental illness and seek to humanise the people impacted by it. The plays investigate how mental illness affects relationships within families and broader society. "The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time" emphasises acceptance, understanding, and the potential for personal growth despite the difficulties faced by a person living with a mental disability, whereas "The Buried Child" emphasises the degradation and stress caused by mental decline.

The portrayals of characters with mental problems in "Buried Child" and "The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time" are both thought-provoking. They offer complex viewpoints on the matter, highlighting the challenges, resiliency, and potential of those with mental disabilities.

Conclusion

It is noticeable that both Sam Shepard's "The Buried Child" and Simon Stephens' "The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night" give significant insights into difficulties and issues related to disability theory—more significantly, mental impairment—when applied to the plays—mental illness's influence on individuals and their relationships.

Through an examination of the character's internal struggles and emotional pain, "The Buried Child" delves into the psychological aspects of mental limitation. This play encourages readers to consider

how society feels about mental health and the significance of providing understanding and support to individuals who are suffering from mental illnesses. Nonetheless, "The Curious incident of the Dog at Night-Time" presents a unique viewpoint on mental illness via the character of Christopher Boone, who has autism spectrum disorder. The play addresses Christopher's social challenges, cognitive impairments, and sensory sensitivity issues, emphasising the connection between mental and cognitive disability. By presenting Christopher's experiences, the play debunks misconceptions and advances understanding of the variety of cognitive capacities possessed by those with mental illnesses.

Both plays show how important it is to acknowledge the humanity and efficacy of those who suffer from mental illnesses and also urge society to adopt a more welcoming and compassionate stance, asking us to take into account the challenges and stigmas that those with mental illnesses face. By featuring characters with mental disabilities, these plays challenge readers to think critically about disability theory and advance a society that values all people's rights, dignity, and well-being, regardless of their mental capacities.

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