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Machine as a Destructive Replacement in Elmer Rice's The Adding Machine

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Everyday life comprises technology and in modern world, technology reaches a new level of advancements and spreads everywhere. It becomes an absolute need that no one can escape from since of its great role in most aspects of life. Because of technical development, modern world sees many radical changes along with the deterioration of social values. Many reformer writers concentrate on improving man's situation in modern world through revealing the social economic problems. They believe in the notion of human community based on the principles of reality, integrity and justice.

Dramatists of the 1930's are acutely concerned with the economic changes that caused the great depression. In their writings, they shed light on the widespread of injustice and unemployment which increase man's psychological suffering that definitely affects his life.

It is obvious that great depression is considered as a special cause for man's instability and disturbance therefore, the writers' aim is to reflect the feelings

and conditions of their time in a realistic way. They believe that the machine's destructive power overwhelmed man who does not have any resistance. For them, any social change must have effects on man's soul and psych. They are not against technology or using machine but against negligence of man and the complete dependence of machine which considered as a destructive replacement.

Key words: machine, technology, dehumanization, suffering, replacement, destructive, society, psychological effect.

Introduction

1. Introduction:

In modern world the technical developments create many fundamental changes especially the economic one that affects society and man's life, behavior and thinking as well. Because of that, many dramatists concentrate on exposing the social economic problems that people suffer from it. They believe that man's society should be based on justice, authenticity and honesty (Bigsby,1983: 3).

The expressionistic dramatists like O' Neill, Elmer Rice, Clifford Odets, e Williams and others write about Rogers, Arthur Miller, Tennessee-Hall technology and its good roles in developing man's life and society. But at the same time, they show the bad effect of its dominance upon every field in ology society as it dehumanizes man. They believe that the progress in techn .(١٢ :١٩٧٢)creates dramatic changes in man's life as Mardi Valgema remarks

Expressionism as a creative technique depends on the subjective experience showing the distorted world due the psychological state of man. In addition, as a literary movement, expressionism is knotted to the oppression of man by the machine and focuses on revealing man's emotions, feelings and

desires, represented them subjectively. Thus, expressionist plays are drawn towards vehemence and disorder. Julia A. Walker remarks that the changing of circumstances and technology leads to the development of American expressionism (2005: 4).

The main means of the expressionist dramatists is their use of inferior characters in order to expose the horrible reality of common man condition and his suffering from the injustice of American industry domination. They see that man's violent act is a product of the awful machine that dominates everything in the world. The sense of being a victim pushes man to act cruelly that not only harms others but himself as well. Such a man psychologically becomes unstable and he lost all ability to control his behavior as Walker avers (6-7).

2- Psychological and Behavioral Theory:

The issue of man's violent act is regarded as a main matter within the discipline of psychology. Psychologists concentrate on how man recognizes his social environment and how to solve his problems. They like bio- socialists focus on how individual physiognomies can interrelate with the social environment to create a violent act. In other words, how mental processes can affect man's inclinations for violence. John B. Watson, the father of behaviorism said that there is a link between knowledge, intellect, and characters with the violent behavior (1913:158).

On the other hand, behaviorists believe that man is not born with a violent nature. Rather, he learns to think and act violently due to his day experiences in society (Bandura, 1977: 25). This means that man's bad, miserable or

injustice situation creates inner conflict that affects his psychic, feeling and thinking. It might push him to act violently or even commit a crime.

Behaviorism is a systematic approach to comprehend the behavior of man. It assumes that behavior is either "a [reflex](#) evoked by the pairing of certain [antecedent stimuli](#) in the environment, or a consequence of that individual's history"(Hull, 1943: 10). Behaviorism theory combines features of philosophy, methodology, and psychological theory.

[Watson](#) established the behaviorist movement (1913) which concentrates on the role of environmental elements in disturbing behavior; therefore, its main concern is the actual behavior and not thinking or feeling. Hence, behaviorism refers to a " [psychological approach](#) that is only concerned with observable stimulus-response behaviors, and states all behaviors are learned through interaction with the environment" (Watson:158). Watson seeks to understand man's behavior through measuring visible behaviors and events.

There are two types of behaviorism:

1- Methodological Behaviorism:

According to methodological behaviorism, the behaviorists view psychology as "objective experimental branch of natural science. Its theoretical goal is to predict and control the behavior" (McLeod, 2017:5). For them, there is no dividing line between man and his violent act because man's behavior with all of its development and difficulty forms only a part of the behaviorist's structure of testing.

2- Radical Behaviorism:

Radical behaviorism accepts the theory of methodological behaviorism concerning the aim of psychology that should expect and control man's behavior as B. F. Skinner observes (1976:6) This means that, the thoughts and feelings should be taken into consideration like the apparent behavior (Skinner: 11).

Both Watson and Skinner acknowledge the role of inner mental events that should be clarified in the analysis of behavior. It is very important to consider psychology as a science and behaviorism as a behavior psychology which is a "theory of learning based on the idea that all behaviors are acquired through conditioning which occurs through interaction with the environment" (Skinner: 14). The behaviorists believe that man's response or reaction to environmental motivation forms his act (Skinner: 18). Hence, behavior is the result of motivation–reaction that is determined by environment.

3. The Bad Effect of Machine's Domination

Elmer Rice (١٨٩٢- 1967) an American playwright is the confidently expressionistic. His play *The Adding Machine* (1923) is considered as ridicule about the increasing control of life in the machine age as it reveals the life, death and afterlife of a gloomy bookkeeper, Mr. Zero. As a simple part in the corporate machine, Mr. Zero discovers that he is to be replaced by an adding machine (Durham, 1970: 14).

Although, technology or machine is a good thing and comforts life, it has bad effects as well. The main effect is the complete dependence on machine and the negligence of man who invents and develops it. It is clear that single machine can replace many workers and performs task for long time without stopping, this makes many workers lost their job and eventually increases

unemployment. The sense of feeling jobless or useless affects man's life and especially his mental disorder. The feeling of depression, humiliation and degradation are increased due to the sense of rejection, loss of dignity and self-worth. The accumulation of those feelings pushes man to commit an awful action just in the case of Mr. Zero who killed his boss because he is fired and replaced by a machine.

According to Rice, the domination of technology leads to the absence of good principles which in result affects man's life and his behaviour. Most of Rice's plays show the "experimentation in technique, protest, realistic detail, Marxism. He had ideas, and he possessed both a good mind and a sensible nature" (Gassner: 1963:127).

In *The Adding Machine*, Rice portrays the oppression and brutality effect of technology upon man in order to attack them. He protests against the injustice of society that dehumanizes man and turns him to be a murderer. Therefore, this play is concerned with the experiences of the protagonist Mr. Zero whose job is an accountant in a large company, adding columns of sales figures for 25 years. Mr. Zero, a hard-working, oppressed, wage-slave, expects promotion of loyal service as a book-keeper but he gets nothing (Rice, 1965: 5).

After a long time of working at the same job, Mr. Zero is easily replaced by an adding machine. Instead of rewarding, the boss, a strict manager fired him. In a moment of disappointing, pain and rage, Mr. Zero killed his boss and is sentenced to death. By entering the next life, he meets the same problem that to be nominal use in heaven and is sent back again to earth for reusing. Brooks Atkinson states that this play is "the most original and brilliant play any American had written up to that time ... the harshest and most illuminating play

about modern society"(1970:10) . Through Mr. Zero's journey, his trial, execution and going into the afterlife, Rice reveals man's needs and desires in modern society that is justice.

When Mr. Zero wakes up in a heaven-like setting known as the 'Elysian Fields', he begins to operate an adding machine until Lieutenant Charles, the boss of the Elysian Fields, tells him that he is a waste of space and his soul is going to be sent back to the earth again for being reused. In 'Elysian Fields' Mr. Zero meets his ex-friend on earth, Daisy. She is his assistant bookkeeper, a very unhappy woman for loving Mr. Zero who does not pay any attention to her love. After his death, she has committed a suicide for not having the ability to continue her work at the company. Their meeting makes her a happy woman and she finds that he works as operating an adding machine (Rice:45).

The longtime of working does not protect Mr. Zero from being replaced by a machine. The boss's justification is that machine can end the work in the half time in comparison to man's time "they do the work in half the time and a high-school girl can operate them" (Rice: 15). Though the boss claims that he is "sorry to lose an old and faithful employee" (Rice:18), Mr. Zero feels that the word sorry has of no meaning as he is being fired from his work without any appreciation for his truthfulness. Being a jobless man irritates him and pushes him to commit a crime and kill the boss. His firing to be replaced by a more proficient machine, leads him to commit this violence act as the unjustifiable procedure affects him greatly.

Despite of his faithfulness, personal dedication, competence and hardworking, his boss used to tell him "you're a failure, Zero, a failure. A waste product. A slave to a contraption of steel and iron"(Rice:22). From this speech,

we notice the violent replacement of man by a machine and his exclusion in the new world. All his good characteristics do not alleviate his awkwardly circumstances.

As a matter of fact, the workers spend much of their time like devices in a machine, trying to perfect their mind process. The mechanization of man's body at the impulses of capitalism is very clear as it shows the relationship between man and his company is completely abusive and unfair, just like with Mr. Zero. This kind of relationship turns man into a mindless machine that achieves small, direct and computational works. This dehumanized man can be replaced with lower cost of adding machine (Watson, 1913: 13).

The Adding Machine is written after the American postwar at the time of great depression. During this time American industry productions increase rapidly due to the new notion of the welfare state (Murphy, 1987:164-6). Rice recognizes the new trend of multinational corporations at the cost of common man and workers. Hence, through the character of Mr. Zero who is considered as embodiment of the working class, Rice sheds light on this social trend that makes man conquered by this work. William E. Taylor avers that "Mr. Zero is clearly a victim of a mechanized, industrial society that has robbed him of his humanity and made a cipher of him" (1968: 9).

The boss in this play represents the aspect of the controlling businessman saying "I'm sorry--no other alternative--greatly regret--old employee--efficiency--economy--business--business—business " (Rice: 14). This shows that the factory' owners do not care about the welfare and comfort of the workers; the main concerns are only their benefits. Hence, they think to use machine instead of man for increasing their money as machine works faster

and takes less time than man. This replacement affects man negatively and makes him feel less human.

Mr. Zero's acts refer to the expressionistic influence of Rice's effort to create both "a type and an individual" on the stage (Valgema, 1972: 63). Zero and all his friends whose names are also numbers, like One, Two, Three, Four, Five and so on wear same clothing and possess the same steady manner in order to reflect the feeling that all American workers are lost in conformity and uniformity, meaning that their identity are completely conquered.

The long period of adding figures for his company makes Mr.

Zero suffers not only physically but psychologically as well even when he goes to heaven. Valgema states that Zero's:

sole responsibility [in heaven] in operating a 'super-hyper-adding machine' consists of releasing a lever with the great toe of his right foot... Rice castigates modern industrial procedures that atrophy man's soul by demanding from him only the mechanical use of his limbs. (67).

For Mr. Zero, the word 'mechanical' implies lack of personality. His character as a mechanical being is confirmed by his new job in heaven. Moreover, this word designates as a hint to the American industry that consumes the workers. By using mechanical word, Rice concentrates on Zero's deterioration as he becomes a slave of bookkeeping having no ability to stop figuring numbers:

I want you [the jury] to get that right-- all of you. One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten, eleven, twelve. Twelve of you. Six and six. That makes twelve. I figured it up often enough. Six and six makes twelve. And five is seventeen. And eight is twenty-five. And three is twenty-eight. Eight and carry two. Aw, cut it out! Them damn figgers! I can't forget 'em. Twenty-five years, see? (Rice :21).

This shows that Mr. Zero cannot escape the slavery and the oppression of his work even after his death, the numeral calculations becomes like death song for him. Hence, the play describes the progress of man as a slave in the machine age and also in the after-life, the world becomes mechanized.

Rice criticizes the unusual economic order and the American work principle" Zero does not grow; he repeats his failures in a social metaphor for the never-ending beating down of the working class as Frederick J. Hoffmann observes (1955: 123). In modern society, man struggles against the machine, but his devotion ruins him just like Mr. Zero. Man is subjugated by capitalism and giant business. Factory or company' owners can replace man by machine so easily without any care, passion, justice or grace.

Mr. Zero has no chance to develop himself as society in which he lived does not allow him. His life is locked preventing any kind of development to change his situation for betterment. In the machine age, the machine dominates the life of man. In fact, man invents machine to make the life and society better, but the reality life becomes worse. The domination of machine turns man to be nothing and of no importance for carrying most of the works.

Capitalists exploit poor people, increase poverty and unemployment as Mrs. Zero said:

If I'd 'a' had any sense, I'd 'a' known what you were from the start . I wish I had it to do over again, I hope to tell you. You was goin' to do wonders, you was! You wasn't goin' to be a book keeper long- oh, no, not you. Wait till you got started-you was goin' to show 'em. (Rice: 51).

Moreover, the boss repeats several times that installing the machine is very simple and even a high school girl can operate it. This confirms man's marginalization in modern society that causes his psychological suffering.

This replacement is completely unfair as it increases man's pain, suffering and anger. In addition, it might turn man to be a killer just what happened to Mr. Zero whose dehumanized atmosphere turned him to be a criminal. Rice aims to present a terrifying image of society's future in case machine dominates every fields in life, man will become superseded:

Zero (looking up): Hey! Hey! Can't you slow up? What do you think I am – machine?

Daisy (looking up): Say, what do you want, anyhow? First it's too slow an' then it's too fast. I guess you don't know what you want.

Zero: Go ahead. You can't make me mad. (Rice:73)

The relationship between the boss and the worker based not on respect and gratitude but on vested interests since the factories' owners aim is how to increase their benefits regardless the pain and suffering caused to the workers. Through the boss' speech, Rice gives us a clear picture of Mr. Zero's character and condition:

The Boss: You're a failure, Zero, a failure. A waste product. A slave to contraption of steel and iron. The animal's instincts, but not is strength and skill. The animal appetites, but not his unashamed indulgence of them. True, you move and eat and digest and excrete and reproduce. But any microscopic organism can do as much. Well- time's up! Back you go- back to your sunless groove- the raw material of slums and wars- the ready prey of the first jingo or demagogue or political adventurer who takes the trouble to play upon your ignorance and

credulity and provincialism. Your poor, spineless, brainless boob- I'm sorry for you! (Rice:107).

When the boss calls for Mr. Zero, his friend Daisy thinks that he will be rewarded for his accurate and honest working:

Daisy: An' you make me sicker (Rice:70).

Zero: You're a valuable man, Zero, ' he'll say,' and I want you right up here with me in the front office. You're done addin' riggers. Monday mornin' you move up here (Rice:74).

This is a natural feeling for a man devoted his life working seriously and serving his company. Instead of being rewarded, he is fired and replaced by an adding machine. Here, Rice attacks the evils of American capitalism which exploits man's life and youth without any rewards. In a mechanized society, man suffers a lot for living in a helpless environment; therefore, man becomes a slave to his work and a victim of the abuse system (Gassner: 127).

Mr. Zero as a repressed man in modern society, his name expresses nothing as it refers to nobody. He lives an empty, futile and meaningless life, being a victim of a strict economic system. The mechanical life has killed his soul. The machine time turns man to be a machine like Mr. Zero who adds number blindly. In his death, Mr. Zero said:

I thought he was going to give me a raise...Do I look like a murderer? Do I? I never did any harm to anybody... I never got into trouble...Twenty -five years in one job an' I never missed a day. Fifty-two weeks in a year... He canned me after twenty five years, see? I .. It gives me headache. And I can't get the figures outta my head,

neither...But he kepttalkin' an talkin... Suppose you was me, now May be you'd 'a done the same thing (Rice:25).

Before his execution he cries "Don't take me away! Don't kill me! Gimme a chance! Gimme another chance... I don't want to die! I don't want to die! I want to live! "(Rice: 27). From above speeches, we find that Mr. Zero is a victim. He spends most of his life working in a company and with a manger who do not appreciate his loyalty. The price Mr. Zero paid is his youth, age and might be his health but get nothing. Living all his life as a victim and at the end he becomes a murderer. He understands nothing from his life due to the severe economic system that easily replaces man with a machine. It is really a destructive replacement. His psychological suffering even affects his friend, Daisy who tells him that "I didn't want to go on livin'. What for? ... I didn't have nothin' to go on livin' for" (Rice: 34). It is obvious that man's life in mechanized age is of no meaning.

After knowing that he will be return to earth once again, Mr. Zero refused in order not to be dehumanized once again, saying " I 'm through! I had enough! Let 'em find somebody else to do the dirty work. ...why cant they stop pickin' on me? I 'm satisfied here-doin' my day's work"(Rice: 51). But he is obliged to return to earth as a wretched adding machine operator. Again he has to do the same job of accounting to which he is bonded with the adding machine. This reveals that "Not only is he tied to the machine, he has become a machine himself in his response to love, life and beauty" as Thomas Adler remarks (1994:12). The domination of machine distorts and destroys man's life. Moreover, it reduces individuality to numbers. Here, Rice raises a

question about the importance of man's life and his existence in such society. His answer will be of nothingness; it is a futile life.

In modern society, machine dominates everything and dehumanizes the workers; therefore, man feels loses his self-respect. This creates conflict between the owner and the worker. Man is replaced easily by machine and he becomes almost unnecessary for any work. Rice looks upon development in technology as something that would be man's complete undoing. Mechanization supports progression in searching of more income and less workers. Man no longer has the capacity to bear pain and suffer awkwardness (Bigsby,1983: 40).

Frank Durham remarks "Thus the machine of justice rolls over the lesser machine that is man."(1970:45). The selfishness of the owner and the feeling of being jobless definitely destroy man and might change him to be a hurtful person. Hence, Rice's main aim is to expose the dehumanization of the worker in a mechanized society. He shows that Mr. Zero's mind is totally devoted to numbers; "Zero does, in fact, think of himself as a machine, in that he values himself only for his ability to work" as Dennis G. Jerz states (2003:23).

The play ends with Mr. Zero following a very attractive girl named Hope who may not actually exist to give hope for man that one day the bad condition might be changed and justice might be achieved.

Conclusion

By focusing on the domination of technology and machine, Rice sees that man in modern world is completely unprotected and swallowed up by machine. Unlike man, the machine has no emotions or feeling of being oppressed and

hence works indefatigably. Therefore, the injustice and exploitation cause man's psychological suffering, depression and wretchedness. The feeling of being jobless and of no value might destroy man and turn him to be a murderer like Mr. Zero in *The Adding Machine*.

In this play, Rice wants to say that despite machine makes life easy, simple and comfortable at the same time full depending on it has bad effect on man as it makes him physically and mentally sluggish. In addition to that, man becomes emotionally dead as it kills his vitality.

It is very important to refer that Rice is not against technology or progress but against the full dependence on machine and complete negligence of man's existence that caused his psychological destruction and leads him to be a killer. Any replacement should be for man's benefit since he is the one who creates and develops things. But the horrible fact is that the private interest is more important than man and his psychological situation.

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