**Self-ostracism in *Suicide in-B Flat* by Sam Shepard**

خود-گۆشه‌گیری له‌ *خۆكوشتن له‌ باڵه‌خانه‌ی ب* ی سام سیپارد

النبذ الذاتي في المسرحية *انتحار في شقة ب* بقلم سام شیبرد

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**Abstract**

Sam Shepard is regarded as one of the most prominent writers in the second half of the twentieth century postmodern American theater. His plays expose characters with deep psychological conflicts and issues. In *Suicide in B-Flat*, Shepherd highlights the figures of the ostracized characters that form a new model of characterization in the American plays, in a way that they are ostracized within and without themselves. This play is a real channel to project the American multicultural society with its socio-transmission, self-searching and ostracism that map an interesting and refreshing flavor to the reading of the American theater.

*Suicide in B-Flat* exhibits some characters who don’t fully wish to continue as a part of their surrounding whilst don’t wish to get away from it either. They are caught up in an everlasting struggle within themselves and with the outside world that they never fully finalize no matter how much they try. They keep changing positions, posts, places, and personalities, but the struggle keeps going. In this paper, the researchers made some academic effort to investigate and elaborate the meaning of self-ostracism to the play in whole and the main characters in particular with the purpose of seeking the reasons behind ostracizing themselves from their society that they live in.

**Key** **words**: Self-ostracism, psychoanalysis, self-struggles in *Suicide B-Flat*,

**پوخته‌**

سام شیپارد به‌ یه‌كێك له‌ دیارترین نوسه‌ره‌كانی نیوه‌ی دووه‌می سه‌ده‌ی بیسته‌م هه‌ژمار ده‌كرێت له‌ شانۆی پۆستمۆدێرنی ئه‌مه‌ریكی دا. شانۆكانی كاره‌كته‌ری ئه‌مه‌ریكی نیشان ده‌دات كه‌ ناكۆكی و كێشه‌ی قوڵی ده‌روونیان هه‌یه‌**. له‌ *خۆكوشتن له‌ باڵه‌خانه‌ی ب***، شێوه‌ی ئه‌و كاره‌كته‌رانه‌ نیشان ده‌دات كه‌ خۆیان گۆشه‌گیر كردووه‌ كه‌ جۆرێكی نوێ له‌ دروستكردنی كاره‌كته‌كان نیشان ده‌ده‌ن له‌ شانۆی ئه‌مه‌ریكی دا، به‌ شێوه‌یه‌ك كه‌ خۆیان گۆشه‌گیر ده‌كه‌ن له‌ ناوخۆی خۆیان و له‌گه‌ڵ چوار ده‌وریان. شانۆكه‌ رێگه‌یه‌كی باشه‌ بۆ نیشاندانی كۆمه‌ڵگه‌ی فره‌كه‌لتوری ئه‌مه‌ریكی به‌ گۆرینی كه‌مه‌ڵایه‌تی، گه‌ڕان به‌ دوای خود دا و گۆشه‌گیری كه‌ نه‌خشه‌ ڕێیه‌كی سه‌ره‌نج ڕاكێش و چێژێكی تازه‌كراوه‌ ده‌دات به‌ شانۆی ئه‌مه‌ریكی.

**له‌ *خۆكوشتن له‌ باڵه‌خانه‌ی ب***، ئه‌و كاره‌كتانه‌ نیشان ده‌دات كه‌ ناخوازن چیتر به‌رده‌وام بن وه‌ك به‌شێك له‌ چوارده‌وریان له‌ كاتێك دا نایانه‌وێت لێی دوور بكه‌ونه‌وه‌. كه‌وتوونه‌ته‌ ناو كێشه‌یه‌كی به‌رده‌وام له‌ ناو خودی خۆیان و هه‌روه‌ها له‌گه‌ڵ چوارده‌وریان له‌به‌ر ئه‌وه‌ی هه‌رگیز ناتوانن كۆتایی پێبێنن هه‌رچه‌ند هه‌وڵ بده‌ن. به‌رده‌وامن له‌ گۆرینی پۆست، شوێن، شوێن و كه‌سایه‌تی به‌ڵام كێشه‌كه‌یان به‌رده‌وام ده‌بێت. له‌م توێژینه‌وه‌یه‌دا، توێژه‌ران هه‌وڵ ده‌ده‌ن به‌ شێوه‌یه‌كی ئه‌كادیمی به‌ دواداچوون بكه‌ن و مانای خود گۆشه‌گیری روون بكه‌نه‌وه‌ به‌ گشتی و بۆ كاره‌كته‌ سه‌ره‌كییه‌كان به‌ تایبه‌تی به‌ ئامانجی دۆزینه‌وه‌ی ئه‌و هۆكارانه‌ی وایان له‌ كاره‌كته‌كان كردووه‌ خۆیان گۆشه‌گیر بكه‌ن له‌ ئه‌و كۆمه‌ڵگه‌یه‌ی تێیدا ده‌ژین.

**الملخص:**

يعتبر سام شيبرد أحد أبرز الكتاب في النصف الثاني من المسرح الأمريكي ما بعد الحداثي في القرن العشرين. تعرض مسرحياته الشخصيات التي تعاني من صراعات وقضايا نفسية عميقة. **في** المسرحية **انتحار في شقة ب**، يسلط شيبرد الضوء على شخصيات الشخصيات المنبوذة التي تشكل نموذجًا جديدًا للتوصيف في المسرحيات الأمريكية ، بطريقة تجعلهم منبوذين داخل وخارج أنفسهم. هذه المسرحية هي قناة حقيقية لإبراز المجتمع الأمريكي متعدد الثقافات من خلال انتقاله الاجتماعي والبحث الذاتي والنبذ الذي يرسم نكهة ممتعة ومنعشة لقراءة المسرح الأمريكي. يعرض **في کتاب=انتحار في شقة ب ،**بعض الشخصيات التي لا ترغب تمامًا في الاستمرار كجزء من محيطها بينما لا ترغب في الابتعاد عنها أيضًا. إنهم عالقون في صراع دائم داخل أنفسهم ومع العالم الخارجي لا يكملون نهايته أبدًا مهما حاولوا. يستمرون في تغيير المواقف والمنشورات والأماكن والشخصيات ، لكن الصراع يستمر. في هذه البحث، بذل الباحثون بعض الجهد الأكاديمي للتحقيق في معنى النبذ الذاتي وتفصيله في المسرحية ككل والشخصيات الرئيسية على وجه الخصوص بهدف البحث عن الأسباب الكامنة وراء نبذ أنفسهم من مجتمعهم الذي يعيشون فيه.

**الكلمات** **الأساسية**: النبذ الذاتي ، التحليل النفسي ، النضال الذاتي في المسرحية **انتحار في شقة ب** .

**Introduction:**

*Suicide in B Flat* is first premiered in 1976 and later on published in 1979. It is the story of a jazz musician, Niles, who has faked his own suicide for some mysterious reasons and motives. Two detectives, Pablo and Louis, arrive on the scene early to investigate all the possibilities and imagine the actual scenario. However, the two of them are disturbed by Niles’ colleagues Peterson, with his silent saxophone, and Laureen, with her double bass. Near the end of the story, Niles, accompanied by Paulette who is an unknown model but looks more like a cold-blooded killer, appears and is later on captured by both detectives. There is also the pianist who sometimes plays to reaffirm his existence on the stage but never fully communicates with the other actors. (Britannica, 2023)

The play might look simple on the outside but it “is not readily accessible to logical explanation” (Turina 83). There are certain incidents that can’t be simply explained or one can’t simply reach a conclusion about them. As Petrone puts it, “[t]here’s [sic] more disguises here I guess. More ways of covering it up”( Shepard, 2006, p. 201). The characters appear on the stage not only as characters playing their roles but also as individuals running away from the external and internal factors that affect their very existence and mental facilities. Their existence on the stage is because of their willing absence from somewhere and/or some people or things somewhere else. They all seem to have a need to exclude themselves from certain people and things using certain means and things.

There are certain basic questions that rise while watching or reading this play. For instance, why does Niles fake his suicide and why does he re-appear later in the play if he is so fed with everyone and everything he has done so far. These and so many other questions can’t be explained simply within the fields of theater and/or literature. One must go further into the more psychoanalytic fields and approaches to further investigate the psyche of these characters and find logical or convincing explanations for these actions and analyze the roots and study the outcomes of these actions.

**Self-ostracism in *Suicide in B Flat***

Ostracism is “being ignored and excluded—causes psychological pain and threatens fundamental psychological needs''(Ren Et al, 2021, p. 426). However, self-ostracism is more or less about excluding oneself from its surroundings with the same consequences of ostracism itself. Psychoanalytically speaking, one may sometimes resort to self-ostracism as a means of getting away from the context or the identity that he or she is known for. In *Suicide in B Flat*, Niles might have suffered from the lack of space from the very beginning. It is “made obvious that it’s a flat” and there are few “objects onstage [in the flat]” (Shepard, 2006, p. 193). However, he has a small group of awkward jazz musicians who visit him in the flat but don’t seem to know how to play their instruments. There are the pianists to begin with and then the saxophonist and finally the double bass player. These actors seem to have occupied all the space inside the flat and left nothing for Niles himself that’s why he decides to ostracize himself as a “response to this stressful event with one of the two behavioral patterns: antisocial behaviors or prosocial behaviors” (Ren et al, 2021, p. 426). At a time, Niles has made his own small flat a place for the other jazz musicians to gather around and socialize while practicing their jazz hobbies. At another time, he disappeared and faked his suicide to get rid of them all. Niles’ unstable psyche has an important role in complicating the story and making it more ambiguous.

Niles, supposedly, might have suffered from “circumstances beyond his control. He got in over his head”. The events “that spiraled him toward his eventual downfall” (Shepard, 2006, p. 203). Niles might have always had the urge to belong to somehow or something but he never fully belonged anywhere. He was more like a roamer shifting from one place to another just to go back to his own first place. He ostracizes himself because of his “unsatisfied belonging need” (Twenge et al, 2003, n.p.) because

ostracized individuals are temporarily socially disconnected; by choosing to move further away from the social world, they deny themselves any potential opportunities to reestablish connections. This self-perpetuating behavior of ostracized individuals suggests the possibility that an ostracism episode may trigger a downward spiral into loneliness and social isolation. (Williams, 2009, p. 41)

Pablo, in the play, affirms this idea that Niles might have suffered from certain matters that’s why he chose to ostracize himself from his surroundings. He says “[w]hy disappear when things are going so good. It’s crazy” ( Shepard, 2006, p. 198). Thus, things beyond the economical, material, etc. were good for Niles or at least he felt that things, on a psychological level, were not good and ultimately decided to exclude himself and disappear as an attempt to retain balance and peace within himself.

Niles might have moved “away from social situations as a coping strategy” (Ren et al. 2021, p. 427) but apparently, the strategy wasn’t very successful. Niles wonders “what if it turns out to be harder playing dead than it was playing alive?” (Shepard, 2006, p. 210). He hints at his troubled psyche and how ostracizing himself from his surroundings didn’t help him fix his mental conflicts. Niles, despite everything, is still troubled by “the voices coming at” him from “all sides' ' that are not yet over. (Shepard, 2006, p. 210). There is not any evidence to prove that the voices are realistic and external. It is later affirmed by Paulette that there is, referring to the voice, nothing in the place where they are. These voices are echoing from his psychological imbalance and mental problems. What’s more, Niles might have wanted to get rid of the other two musicians because their instruments and the way they were playing them reminded Niles and even promoted the voices that were ringing in his head. The two jazz musicians are apparently driving people insane with their mute and random performances as Louis later says:

You’re all so twisted around that you even have sane people thinking they’re crazy. You’ve driven me and my partner to utter distraction! Look at my partner on the floor there! Once he was a proud man…now he’s groveling around on the floor!( Shepard, 2006, pp. 213-214)

Niles might have ostracized himself to liberate himself from his already built identity. He might have sought “a liberty that is intimately related to the embracing of new possibilities” (Turina, 2008, p.70). Niles might have felt that the only possible way of becoming more than who he is or what he is. He faked his own death and got away to make a fresh beginning with a new name or identity and with a renewed energy. However, he fails to do that and comes back to his own place with his own known identity.

Louis, unlike other characters, is aware of the urge that pushes the characters to ostracize themselves from others. He says very frankly that he is “wasting away” (Shepard, 2006, p. 199) referring to his internal struggle and how it is almost controlled by the inner conflicts. He is, unlike Niles, conscious about himself and others. He is also aware how his colleague is breaking down mentally and is about to totally go away from everything he once worked for or believed in.

As Louis is aware of his psychological conflict, from the very beginning of the play he says that they are there on the crime scene “so soon” (Shepard, 2006, p. 196). He may suggest that they use their work (being investigators) to get away from other people probably at their offices or houses. If one pays more attention, he would see that they are not really cooperating together as investigators. In fact, “Pablo and Louis’s ability to solve the crime, it should be noted, is in doubt from the very outset: they are incompetents” (Bottoms, 1998, p.130) Each one is working for himself and thinks in a different way. The crime scene provides a good opportunity to be alone at last.

Louis, from the very beginning, suspects that Niles is still alive and he has faked his own suicide. He, since is suffering from the same urge to get away, knows why Niles has done all that to hide away. He philosophizes the birth of the artist and how he was introduced to different types of noises including music. He also says how he got famous through introducing new types of noises and then gradually got tired and decide to “stay low” and “fool them all” by faking his own suicide (Shepard, 2006, pp. 196-197).

Louis also claims to have heard a noise, just like Niles, which might be the same noise or voice that Niles hears now and then in the play. He says to Pablo that he hears a voice similar to “a woman screaming. A terrible scream. Like a woman being tortured” but Pablo says “It’s your ears, Louis! Your ears are telling you stories” (ibid 199). This shows very clearly that both Louis and Niles are suffering from the same mental and/or psychological problem.

Pablo is somewhat the same as Louis but he doesn’t know or he is not aware of it at the beginning. He is unconsciously ostracizing himself from other people. His sheer focus on his work is not only because he wants to do his job well but also to control the inconsistent uncontrolled urges that come over him at times.

Louis tells Pablo that he is “totally ignorant of what’s going on ... [and he is] blinded by his career” (Shepard 199). Pablo tries his best to analyze and to get some facts but he fails because he doesn’t know what to look for or where to look for. He, later on, collapses into the chair saying to Petrone that he is “having a nervous breakdown as a matter of fact” (Shepard, 2006, p. 200).

The presence of other characters in this play is also important because it indirectly pushes the characters to move away from each other with any means possible. After spending some time with the other three musicians, Pablo and Louis get desperate to get away. Pablo brings a butcher knife for enacting a possible suicide scenario but later on, Louis picks the knife and struggles with himself with it. It is not obvious whether he prevents himself from committing suicide or pushes himself to do so. Louis “starts to struggle with one hand against the hand that’s holding the knife against his neck”. He struggles unnoticed for a while and then he “falls to the floor, exhausted from the struggle. The knife falls from his hand” (Shepard, 2006, p. 204). The reason behind his attempt to commit suicide is not mentioned and is not clear but one may simply suggest that he wanted to get rid of the other characters simply by killing himself.

The three musicians are also unusual characters because they don’t play their instruments to please people and socialize. It is rather a means of ostracizing themselves from other people. They are not really good at what they are doing yet they do it and come to the quiet of Niles’ flat away from all people.

It seems that almost all the characters “appear less as sympathetic colleagues than as potential threats” to each other (Roudane, 2002, p. 93). This could be true especially for Niles as he tries to avoid the “social threatening situations” by moving away “as a coping strategy” (qtd. in Ren et al, 2021, p.427) because he simply sees them as threats on his own and his originality as an artist by faking his own suicide.

Niles and other characters keep appearing and disappearing to subdue their mental conflicts because ostracized individuals temporarily disconnect themselves from their society and people around them just to reappear later on. Each time, they are close to establishing a social or any other type of connection; they deny themselves from doing it by moving away (Williams, 2009, p. 41). This might be the only explanation why he disappears and later reappears on the stage. If his disappearance was out of a wisely made decision, he would never reappear or get back into his own lifestyle and surroundings. It seems that he doesn’t really know what he is doing. The same thing could be true for other characters like Louis, Pablo, and the three supposedly musicians.

**Conclusion**

In the conclusion it can be shown that in *Suicide in B-Flat* by Sam Shepard, the characters indulge themselves looking for something to keep them distracted from some inner unknown and unexpressed psychological problems. Niles and others are doomed to complete the cycle of going away and coming back every now and then. Niles, as an example, fakes his own suicide simply to cut all his social connections with his fellow musicians for some anonymous reasons but after sometime he comes back to the same place and starts doing the same routine. This strange self-ostracism is rooted in his own perception of himself and people around him. He often takes people and things around himself as threats and thus gets away for a while only to reappear later and repeat the same thing over again.

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