

The fragmented self

Sociology



The equation of personal, individual truth with universal truth... is virtually impossible today. While retaining our private experiences, we can attempt to incarnate myth, putting on its ill-fitting skin to perceive the relativity of our problems, their connection to the "roots," and the relativity of the "roots" in the light of today's experience. If the situation is brutal if we strip ourselves and touch an extraordinarily intimate layer, exposing it, the life-mask cracks and falls away. (Grotowski 67).

The heart of John Guare's *Six Degrees of Separation* can be summed up in a few sentences that Ouisa Kittredge says to the audience "I read somewhere that everybody on this planet is separated by only six other people. Six degrees of separation (21). The play grew out of a 1983 newspaper account of a confidence scheme, but Guare developed this incident into questions of existence and the problems created by the lack of understanding among people. A young man who calls himself Paul Poitier arrives at Ouisa and her husband, Flan's apartment. Paul is a charming, articulate dissembler. He is also a petty thief who invites a male prostitute into the guest room he occupies while waiting for his "father" the actor Sidney Poitier to take up residence at the Sherry-Netherland Hotel. The play opens with a painting by the artist, Kandinsky, revolving slowly above the two-sided stage. One side is geometric while the other side is quite bright and even wild. Kandinsky painting is a symbol. It symbolizes Paul's character. The appearance he puts forward at the Kittredge residence which is outwardly manifested by his clothes, his education at Harvard and his Poitier lineage is totally at odds with who he really is- a confidence trickster who has sex with male prostitutes. It is not only Paul who is estranged in this play. In Guare's New York the society that is projected is a fragmented one. Parents cannot understand

<https://assignbuster.com/the-fragmented-self/>

their children, wives find their husbands incomprehensible The blacks are distanced from the whites and the heterosexuals alienate themselves from the homosexuals. The art dealers do not emotionally respond to the objects of art that they trade. Yet these people hunger for more, for a human connection and perhaps a spiritual one. What Paul says about imagination is quite crucial to an understanding of his character. In a monologue, Paul says that imagination has become something outside ourselves.

" The imagination. It's there to sort out your nightmare, to show you the exit from the maze of your nightmare, to transform the nightmare into dreams that become your bedrock. If we do not listen to that voice, it dies, it shrivels, it vanishes. The imagination is not our escape. On the contrary, the imagination is the place we are all trying to get to."(63). There is no scope for self-examination. When the boundary line between imagination and reality fades the individual fails to establish contact with the world at large. Paul deludes his listeners also. He says " I Never Knew I was Black in that racist way till I was 16 and came back here I don't even feel black. But when he faces arrest he pleads with Ouisa to go with him to the police station. The difficulty of separating the real from the illusory becomes horrifying when Blanche in William's A Streetcar named Desire completely loses her sanity. Blanche Dubois is the older sister of Stella Kowalski who visits them in New Orleans and stays throughout the summer. She was a school teacher of English in Mississippi and presents herself as very prim, proper, and prudent. The story Blanche has created about herself is quite false, but it is what she wants to believe. She tells her sister that the school where she was working had given her leave of absence as she suffered from nerves. But Stanley soon finds out the truth. She had led a promiscuous life and the school

<https://assignbuster.com/the-fragmented-self/>

authorities had terminated her appointment when she had sexual relations with a student.

The image that Blanche tries to portray and reality have nothing in common.

The desire for acceptance induces her to create a false identity for herself.

The South, old and new, is an important theme of the play. The family mansion is called that the sisters lived in is called " Belle Reve," or Beautiful Dream. The old life may have been something beautiful, but it is gone forever. Yet Blanche clings to pretensions of the aristocracy. She is now as poor as Stanley and Stella, but she cannot help but look down on the humble Kowalski apartment.

Desire is central to the play. Blanche is unable to come to terms with the force of her own desire. Blanche is in the habit of bathing many times a day. This is a symbolic ritual. She may be trying to wash away her past, but the renewed strength that she feels is not long-lasting. While in the bath Blanche sings a song which seems to provide an insight into her mind.