

The drawer boy essay



Written By: Presented to: Course Code: Date: The Art of Violence: Healey's Character Representation in The Drawer Boy Reviewed by Word Press critic Michael Dykstra, the Canadian play *The Drawer Boy*, by Michael Healey, has been suggested to be a play containing “no violence” (Dykstra); however, this conclusion deserves further analysis. In the play, the author uses violence as a way to create an identity for Angus, a main character, as well as a method to develop Angus's character.

Through this play, Healey creates a personality for Angus that, although innocent at first, evolves through his exposure to violence and establishes within him an aggressive disposition. In the first two scenes of the play, Healey portrays Angus as being easily distracted, or as Marlene Moser writes, “childlike and simple” (Moser 232); however, the author later hints that there is more to Angus than meets the eye. As a result of Angus' violent accident in the Second World War, Healey is able to guide his audience in seeing what type of person Angus really is.

The author subtly lays out an identity for Angus by revealing certain behaviours that have remained logged in his subconscious even with his terrible memory loss. For instance, the act of Angus getting Morgan a spoonful of water when he is hurt by the tractor, tells a bit about the type of person Angus is. When Angus first “shoves the spoon in Morgan's mouth” (Healey 538) it seems odd, but the motion is later related to the repeated action of his lover Sally feeding him a spoonful of medicine when he was injured. Once Angus realizes Morgan is hurt, his reaction is to give him ‘medicine’ so that he may get better.

A second action Angus repeats is that of making a sandwich. The significance of this activity, is that more than once does Healey create a pattern where “ Morgan takes the sandwich” (535) and then “ Angus starts to make another sandwich” (535). Angus continues to make sandwiches throughout the play as long as someone needs or wants one. When Morgan is hungry, his friend reacts by making him a sandwich which is a way of providing for another. A third reoccurring behaviour Angus retains from his violent accident is baking bread. Throughout several occasions within the play, Healey shows Angus in a situation where he is baking bread.

At one point, Morgan says to Miles about Angus that “ He’s ruined more bread...” (548), inferring that Angus baking bread is not a one time thing. All of these habits that Angus remembers even after his mishap are significant in the sense that they are all related to the same of idea of nurturing. Of everything he could have remembered Angus retains these caring habits that are motivated by the goal of taking care of another. One could infer that Angus’ memory has been able to hold to these types of actions because they are a part of whom he is, and that a horrible incident has helped reveal his true self.

If it was not for Angus having a piece of shaft go through his head during the war, the play’s audience might assume his kindness is just an act. However, the fact that his violent accident had an effect on his memory and not those specific qualities most definitely plays in favour of the idea that it is because those genuine qualities are a part of his nature. Healey uses the Angus’ tragic incident as a way to create violence within that play that enables the revealing of Angus’ true identity. Healey’s exposure of Angus’ repetitive

actions is not the only method he uses as a way to reflect who Angus' character really is.

The author also creates for his audience situations where Angus is being subjected to violence related topics that present the opportunity for his true self to surface. For instance, when Miles is telling Angus about the Shakespearian tragedy of Hamlet, he is exposing him to a violent topic. In Miles' retelling of the story, he mentions the horrifying act of Hamlet killing his stepfather. In response to what he has heard, Angus does not appear to be unsure about if what Hamlet has done is right or wrong, but instead says, " But Miles! What if the voice in your head is just some voice?

You can't go killing people because of that" (556). The fact that Angus knows immediately that Hamlet killing his stepfather is wrong, infers that he already has the knowledge of what's right and wrong ; therefore, has morals and a conscience. Angus' exposure to the violent play enables the resurfacing of a moral self that is proven through this setting to have already been a part of Angus' identity. No matter all of the positive that Healey allows his audience to unravel about Angus' character, he also informs the reader of a trace of negative that lies within.

It cannot be ignored that the drawer boy's character chose to go to war; therefore, he put himself in a violent situation. Morgan even reminds Angus that " You were about to go to university..." (570), meaning that he had other options than to go with his friend into an environment where one's trained to shoot a gun. Although Healey gives no evidence that Angus killed anyone and mostly mentions him and Morgan mostly goofing off during the

war, they both joined the army where it goes without saying that they will be trained to defend and kill.

It is safe for the audience to assume that Angus knows what war is and that it involves taking lives; nonetheless, he still made the decision to join in the army. The fact that Angus chose to enter such a destructive environment can very well be evidence of the existence of an element of violence within his character. What started as a possibility of a mere trace of violence within Angus' character develops as the play continues. Angus' identity become more complex as Healey no longer describes Angus as a victim of violence, but moreover as a source of violence.

Towards the end of the first act of the play, Miles and Morgan are having a conversation about the government raising prices on grocery products. During the conversation, Miles makes the suggestion for a common farm where everyone contributes and profits. Angus, in directly apart of the conversation, raises his opinion on the matter through a single repeated comment of “ Goddamn communist” (547). As the conversation continues, Angus has but the same comment only his tone of voice becomes more forceful until he's shouting “ GOD. DAMN. COMMUNITSTS” (547).

As Andrew Preston discusses in article he wrote in the Globe and Mail, “ communism seemed to be the wave of the future” at the time of the Second World War (Preston). Although the article makes it seem as though many were for communism, Angus appears to have a different opinion on the matter. A common farm would mean change for Angus. Now it could be just that Angus' has a strong opinion on communism and needed to express it in

a forceful manner, but there could also be the possibility of him shouting out in anger towards the idea of communism. Morgan and Angus have been just the two of them for some time now working on their farm.

A common farm would change the way things worked on the farm and this might anger or maybe even scare Angus. When told by Morgan that he was shouting, Angus replies “ Was I” (Healey 547) as if having no recollection of doing so. Now although this could be argued that Angus is merely forgetful, when considering what he has ‘ forgotten’ can be seen as violent, a question of self-control is put up for debate. Having no memory of something such as yelling suggests the possibility of no control. According to Webster’s dictionary violent people can become, “ excited or disordered to the point of loss of control” (“ Violent” 1297).

This possible loss of control for Angus can be related to the reasoning of him being violent. Verbal violence arises again, but this time purposely as Angus insists on going to see Sally. When Morgan refuses to bring Angus, he shouts “ I WANT TO GO NOW! ” (Healey 560) to “ SEE MY SALLY” (561). Looking carefully at what Angus says prior to his outburst demonstrates a plausible trigger for his anger. For example, Morgan makes the comment that Angus was the drawer boy and Angus corrects him by saying “ I am” (560) suggesting that in Angus’ mind nothing has changed and he is still what he was.

Comments such as “ I’ ll get the truck” (560) and “ The girls are waiting” (562) show that Angus still believes himself to be in his past. In his mind, at that moment, it is the night of his birthday where he and Morgan are

preparing to go get the girls. What appears to set Angus off is Morgan denying him support of his 'flash back.' In making remarks such as "Make me a sandwich" (561) and telling him he was the drawer boy, Morgan is pulling Angus away from the past and directing him towards the present.

Personal coach Tristan Loo explains a motivator for anger as he states, "People have a certain perception and expectation of the world that they live in and when that reality does not meet their expectation of it, then they become angry" (Loo). This can be related to Angus' situation where in that moment Angus perceives his world with him and Morgan being back at the night of his birthday; however, by Morgan trying to bring him back to a reality that does not match his expectations Angus becomes angry and violent.

After Angus has calmed down a little, he indirectly gives his own reasoning for his tantrum in claiming, "There's a picture of the place in my head- the tallest spot- I want to go match it. Now" (Healey 560). What first would be described as an angry Angus because of his yelling can now be described as a worried Angus. A reason for why the drawer boy may be so insistent on seeing his lovers grave for himself, could be because he's afraid of the possibility of it being true, Sally being dead and him being in the present situation he is in. Writer Catherine Pratt confirms that "Anger is often caused by fear.

You fear losing control, looking selfish, being in trouble, forgetting or maybe even getting hurt" (Pratt). In Angus' situation, fear of change seems to be triggering his anger. A final moment, in which Angus' character appears

angry, is when he finds out that Morgan has yet to tell him the truthful version of ' their story. ' At this point in a that possibility of change of what he knows being an issue because he fears it Angus asks Morgan and Miles to tell him the real story twice before admitting “ I'm scared” (Healey 569). Still refusing him, Angus finally shouts “ BOTH OF YOU. Please. So I can match them. Find me in them” (569).

Treatment expert Jan Heering asserts that “ fear of change is in most cases accompanied by feelings of lostness and insecurity” (Heering), which explains why Angus may feel, as he mentions, scared and needing to find himself. When Angus becomes violent by shouting, he does so because as he previously admits, he is afraid. All of the sudden, there is this new story, a changed story with different details. Being told this story, changes everything Angus knows now to be the truth. In all three instances discussed above where Healey creates for Angus what is seen to be a violent disposition, fear of change is the trigger behind the violence.

It is as though anything regarding change renders him violent, whether it be a political change, time change or a story change. Healey's feeds the description of Angus' character as being violent by having Morgan reveal a horrible truth about his friend. “ Sally was cooking, baking bread, and you came up to her, and without saying a thing, you hit her” (Healey 571). Through this quote Healey creates a visible tie between Angus and violence by demonstrating how his aggressiveness has evolved from verbal to physical.

Compared to how Healey describes the other characters, Angus is presented as being the most violent. However, Sally has been there taking care of Angus for some time now, so why one day out of nowhere does he hit her? A motivator of this unexpected act of violence can be tied to the actions that have happened before he has hit Sally. He, Sally, Morgan and Frances had plans to get married, live in a house together and start a family, but because Angus was hurt in the war plans changed. Sally wanted to wait until Angus was better to get married, and from that point on all of their plans were put on hold.

With time passing and Angus not getting any better, the future once laid out for the two farmers started to become out of reach. Morgan reveals to Angus that “ There was no double wedding”(570) and “ The house you designed was never started”(571). Morgan then tells Angus that they put away all of the intended plans, as if knowing they were no longer realities but unattainable wishes. Angus himself watched Morgan put away the plans that represented the future they had once drawn out. Angus might have memory problems, but memory loss does not deprive him of the capability of making connections.

Seeing his entire future plans be put away could have very well been an indicator to Angus that future was now a part of his past. This theory is fortified when after all their plans were put away and after he'd had hit Sally, he had to ask Morgan “ who that girl crying was” (571). In seeing his drawings put away, and either subconsciously or consciously realizing that that future was now his past, he looked at Sally no longer seeing who she was. At first Sally was his lover, the girl he was going to make his wife and

start a family with, but now she has become a part of this past intended life that he can no longer attain.

When he once looked at her and saw a wife and mother, he can now look at her and have no identity for her. With the change of no longer knowing her as his Sally, The memory of who she was now forgotten and likely fear of what she represents to him now, he hit her. In the way Healey describes Angus' character as aggressively yelling at and physically hitting another character in the play; it would be easy see Angus as a source of violence. However, when further analysing the context in which Angus is presented as a violent character, a more complex reasoning for why he may labeled as violent becomes clear.

A connection between Angus' aggressiveness and his fear of change can be made at every occasion that he becomes violent. Angus appears, in every one of those instances, comfortable and secure in the way he knows his present life to be; however, when there is the possibility of change, anger, proven through analysis to be caused by fear, comes out. At a first glance because of Healey's description, Angus can be classified as violent, but after discovering fear of change as the motivator for his actions the validity of the reality of his violence is put into question.

The Drawer Boy lays out a journey for the discovery of who Angus really is, and who he becomes as his character develops. The use of violence in the play creates the possibility of his character being misunderstood depending on how the reader chooses to see what the author has given him or her.

Layne Coleman says in an interview with David Burgess about the play that “

It reminded us all who we were. Both the public and the artists” (Burgess 24). Just as it reminds the actors who perform the play of who they are, it also enables the characters within the play to have their true identities revealed.

Title: The Writer Boy and the Director Boy Canadian Theatre Review # 108 pp. 24- 28, 2001 Fall Interview by david burgess , interviewing Layne Coleman LOOK AT 10 TIPS Works Cited Burgess, David. “ The Writer and the Director Boy. ” Canadian Theatre Review 108 (2001): 24-28. Print. Dykstra, Michael. “ The Drawer Boy: The Power of Art. ” Word Press. 11 May. 2010. Web. 1 Dec. 2011. Healey, Michael. “ The Drawer Boy. ” Literature and the writing process (year): 535-573. Print. Heering, Jan. “ Phobia Fear Release: Do You Suffer from Fear Of Change? Morpheus Institute. 20 Nov. 2011. Web. 2 Dec. 2011. Loo, Tristan. “ What Causes Anger. ” Ezine Articles. 9 Aug. 2005. Web. 2 Dec. 2011. Moser, Marlene. “ Ideology as Behaviour: Identity and Realism in The Drawer Boy. ” Modern Drama 45. 2 (2002): 231-245. Print. Pratt, Catherine. “ Why Am I So Angry All The Time. ” Life with Confidence. 2005. Web. 2 Dec. 2011. Preston, Andrew. “ How the 1970s Sank Communism. ” Globe and Mail. 13 Nov. 2009. Web. 1 Dec. 2011. “ Violent. ” Webster’s New Collegiate Dictionary. 1st ed. 1998. Print.