

This work analyses the American family in context of society and its demands. It focuses on the canonical works of the Modern American drama, namely plays of Tennessee Williams, Arthur Miller, Edward Albee, Sam Shepard and David Mamet.

The playwrights are analysed in two distinctive groups according to similar themes they share. Tennessee Williams and Arthur Miller depict the family under increasing pressure from the outside as well from the inside. The unit disintegrates, members of the family escape and thus the unit loses its functions. The pressure is imposed by the tenets of the American mythology that governs the society, which, in turn, influences the family. The common theme of the first group of playwrights is the feeling of loss. This comprises of two dimensions – spatial and temporal.

The second group of playwrights share the same theme of loss with its spatial and temporal implications. They are characteristic by their distinctive use of language that depicts the prevalent sense of doom, apocalypse, futility and sterility. The search for identity is also implied by the restlessness of characters. The detrimental effect of harsh business environment on the family is explored with regards to masculinity.

The work shows the family in the context of the 1950s, an era when the family was elevated to sacred institution and which were, allegedly, the best times for the unit well-being. The family plays an important role in the national politics and ideology. On the surface the ideal picture suffers a fracture in reality, and under the happiness is contrasted with sadness and loss. The discrepancy between the official representation and actual reality is highlighted. Later playwrights continue in depiction of the family disintegration that still continues.

The family is challenged as the very cornerstone of the American life. The myths around the American dream are the main reasons for disintegration. The enormous pressure, the excessive demands that are imposed by the society result in continuous crumbling and eventual disappearing of the family per se. It is replaced by surrogate families, composed of temporary interest groups and coteries.