

Abstract

The purpose of this thesis is to undertake a thorough analysis of Sam Shepard's approach to the character in a selection of his plays from the 1970s. Instead of approaching characters as compact entities with fixed character features the thesis focuses on their instability and changeability and attempts to ascribe characters' transformations to dynamic non-subjective forces and to identify ego-loss as a partially liberating process that nonetheless confronts the characters with the unknown and is accompanied by fear of self-loss. From the theoretical vantage point of the collaborative writings of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, the thesis equates the transformations of Shepard's characters and their inability to locate the "self" with the schizophrenic experience.

As a musical genre based on variability, jazz, as well as its inherent form of expression, improvisation, are utilized as points of departure in the analysis of characters' instability in plays *Suicide in Bb* and *Angel City*. Furthermore, in *Angel City*, the phenomenon of film in the USA and the desire for success and fame intensified by it are perceived as instruments of manipulation and illusion, which characters easily succumb to and which severely alter their sense of reality. Moreover, the environment of filmmaking is introduced as a microcosm of human relations, which in their functioning resemble an assemblage of separate machines possessing enormous power residing in capitalism's unlimited adaptability.

Similarly, the music industry in *Melodrama Play*, *Cowboy Mouth* and *The Tooth of Crime* appears to be permeated by musicians' predatory instincts and by their unquenchable desire for fame and success. This desire for fame and success nevertheless forces the characters to step out of their self selves and to continually reinvent their personae, making them descend into states of permanent indeterminacy and instability.

Two plays cowritten by Shepard and Joseph Chaikin, *Tongues* and *Savage/Love*, represent perhaps the most radical diversion from the conventional approach to character as it is practised in realist drama. Instead of relying on characters with identifiable features and aspirations, the authors resort to the use of voices which penetrate each other and enter into various interactions with the world around them, thus intensifying the fluidity and impermanence of speakers' mental states. Due to the authors' focus on the authenticity of the evoked moment and the genuineness of the speeches, the characters' subjectivity is relegated to the background and its place is assumed by the voices, which permeate the speakers and compel them to act.