

PLACE, SPACE AND IDENTITY IN MODERN DRAMA: ANALYSIS OF FOUR SELECTED PLAYS

LUGAR, ESPACIO E IDENTIDAD EN EL DRAMA MODERNO: ANÁLISIS DE UNA SELECCIÓN DE CUATRO OBRAS

Mohd Ahmad Rawashdah
Yarmouk University / Jordan

rawashdah@yu.edu.jo

Abstract

Individual's identity has always been expressed by abstract terms like culture, beliefs, religion, values etc. In this paper, I argue that modern playwrights show that the generations of the modern era tend to identify more with place, a concrete entity, than they do with the traditional constitutive elements of identity since these abstractions started to lose their glamour and value in an age marked by tremendous advancement in technology and materialism. With the modern generations increasingly associating themselves with place, an identity crisis has emerged since place is contingent to economic and social factors i.e. is not as stable as culture or religion. The vulnerability of modern identity turns it into a notion in flux, with no fixed or clear-cut boundaries. Thus, modern age people may live with multilayered identity or swing between two or more identities. Place, with whatever experience is practiced in it, remains the hinge on which modern identity revolves. To show that the phenomenon is a global one, the paper studies four plays representing different cultures and spheres—Anton Chekov's *The Cherry Orchard*, Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*, William Saroyan's *The Time of Your Life*, and Wakako Yamuchi's *And the Soul Shall Dance*.

Keywords: modern drama; identity crisis; Chekov; Miller; Saroyan; Yamuchi.

Resumen

La identidad individual ha sido tradicionalmente descrita mediante términos abstractos como cultura, creencias, religión, valores, etc. En este artículo demostramos cómo los dramaturgos modernos muestran que la generación de la era moderna tiende a identificarse más con lugares o entidades concretas que con los elementos tradicionalmente constitutivos de la identidad, puesto que estas abstracciones comenzaron a perder su glamour y su valor en una época marcada por el tremendo avance de la tecnología y el materialismo. Esta identificación creciente con lugares concretos ha originado una crisis de identidad, puesto que

estos lugares están sujetos a factores económicos y sociales que no son tan estables como, por ejemplo, la cultura y la religión. La vulnerabilidad de la identidad moderna la configura como una noción que fluye más allá de límites claramente fijados. En consecuencia, la edad moderna presenta identidades multicapa o fluctuaciones entre dos o más identidades. El lugar, con independencia de cómo se experimente, articula la identidad moderna. Para demostrar la globalidad de este fenómeno, el presente artículo estudia cuatro obras que representan culturas y esferas diferentes—Anton Chekov’s *The Cherry Orchard*, Arthur Miller’s *Death of a Salesman*, William Saroyan’s *The Time of Your Life*, and Wakako Yamuchi’s *And the Soul Shall Dance*.

Palabras clave: drama moderno; crisis de identidad; Chekov; Miller; Saroyan; Yamuchi.

1. Introduction

The concept of identity is a remarkably fertile one, attracting the attention of scholars, particularly sociologists and philosophers, who approach it from differing aspects—individual, group, and national identities and their myriad markers. While some scholars focus on identity at the cultural, societal and individual levels, most of them concentrate their research on the abstract side of identity. The different definitions of identity hinge on abstract terms such as “beliefs”, “religion”, “ideals”, “values”, “statements”, etc., (Mol 2). Some, like Eli Hirsch, talk about the existence of concrete aspects of identity, trying to analyze what they call “bodily identity”, studying the subject in relation to “a succession of body-stages” (Hirsch 181). As such, identity can be associated with other physical entities, one of which is ‘place’, where we perform different activities, creating what we call ‘space’.

Until the mid-twentieth century, the term ‘space’ conveyed a strictly geometrical meaning and “the idea it evoked was simply that of an empty area” (Lefebvre 1). This geometrical notion of space, according to Lefebvre, had its roots in the works of Euclid (300 B.C.)—a Greek mathematician and author of a basic work on geometry—which had ever since defined Western thought. In 1967, Michel Foucault gave a lecture to architects under the title “Of Other Spaces, Heterotopias”. Commenting on the traditional notion of space, he said that space was perceived as “the dead, the fixed, the undialectical, the immobile” (qtd. in Soja 10). However, the latter half of the twentieth century witnessed a shift in preference “for the spatial rather than the historical analyses and analogies influential in certain kinds of critical writing” (West-Pavlov 19).

As a manifestation of this shift in the perception of space and what it offers to individuals and groups equally, critics as well as philosophers started to theorize about it. Some of the notable works in the wave of theorizing (phenomenon) about space include the French philosophers Gaston Bachelard's *The Poetics of Space* (1958) and Henri Lefebvre's *The Production of Space* (1991). Thus, this emerging perception of space opens new horizons in different disciplines, especially the domain of literary criticism. Since human existence cannot be conceived independently from place and space, individual identity must surely be tightly bound with these two elements. A convenient starting point is to make the distinction between 'place' and 'space'. The French Jesuit scholar Michel de Certeau, in *The Practice of Everyday Life*, remarks that place is "the order in accord with which elements are distributed in relationships of coexistence" while "space is a practiced place" (117). In place, two things, for instance, may coexist but not simultaneously in the same location; but their coexistence creates the notion of space where we have experience.

In his article "The Prompter's Box: Toward a Close Reading of Modern Drama", Alan Ackerman asks a question pertinent to our times: "What ... is the value of modern drama for life?" and states his intention of using his journal to "address" the question "in the coming years" (3). One significant value of modern drama, I believe, is its salient interest in one of the most intricate issues that concerns generations of the modern era, namely that of identity. Undoubtedly, identity with its ramifications is deeply invested in modern drama. In this paper, I attempt to show that we can find in modern drama a clear delineation of places and spaces as important constituents of individual identity. I argue that place reinforces individual identity to a varying extent depending on the type of experience (space) practiced in that place. This notion, I believe, is in harmony with other modern and global streams of thought like "self, autonomy, ownership, and property" (Lee 623). To delineate that this phenomenon is a global one, not limited to a certain region or culture, I have chosen plays representative of different cultures. Anton Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard* (1903), Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* (1949), William Saroyan's *The Time of Your Life* (1939), and Wakaku Yamauchi's *And the Soul Shall Dance* (1974) are salient exemplary plays of how individual's identity, in the upheaval of 20th century globalization, is depicted in modern drama as a notion in flux, with no fixed or definite markers.

2. Anton Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard*

In his article "Polemic as Parting Advice: The 'Argument' of *The Cherry Orchard*", John Reid rightly observes that "in the political climate of the time, *The Cherry Orchard* was bound to be received as a political play" (36), in the sense that it marks the end of a specific stratum and the rise of a new one. A series of

socio-economic reforms begun by Peter the Great and continued under Alexander II saw the old system of serfdom swept aside to make way for a new modernized Russia. During Chekhov's childhood, it was not unknown for landowners to find themselves in dire straits like the major character of the play *Madame Ranevskaya* and her family. Those who survived the upheaval inevitably questioned their identity within the social class system. On the grand scale, the play looks at the identity crisis faced by the aristocrats, as former land-owners looked back to the old Russia and saw an idyllic scene, as represented by *Ranevskaya*. The wealth and property that had been the concrete markers of their identity had been lost to the emerging capitalists, some of whom rose from the very peasant class that had once been owned by the aristocracy. Russians from the lower social classes, the former serfs and their descendants, harbored bitter memories and were pleased to embrace the new identity offered to them, symbolized in the play by the character of *Lopahin*.

I aim to discuss Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard* (1903) with regard to 'place' and 'space' and the extent to which they can influence an individual's identity. As the title would suggest, the orchard and the house, and the multitude of past experiences acted out there, are the focal point of the family's memories, and seem therefore the inseparable embodiment of their identity. *Madame Ranevskaya*, her brother, and her children were born and grew up in the same house and share similar childhood memories, reminiscing about the joys of growing up, happy and privileged, in the large house and the beloved cherry orchard. For *Ranevskaya*, to lose the orchard is to lose her real identity, that of her girlhood. On the day when the estate is to be put up for auction, while she awaits the news of her fate, she passionately asserts,

I was born here. My father and mother lived here and my grandfather. I love this house. I can't imagine my life without that cherry orchard and if it necessary to sell it, then *sell me along with it!* (III, 208-09; emphasis added)

Her daughter, *Anya*, gives us an insight regarding the circumstances that pushed *Ranevskaya* into a monumental change of identity, saying,

Six years ago our father died, a month later our brother *Grisha* was drowned in the river. Such a pretty little boy, just seven. *Mama* couldn't bear it, she went away, went away without ever looking back. (I, 198)

Having faced the hardship of losing her husband and son in quick succession, she abandoned her respectable, aristocratic identity. Moving to a new place (*Mentone*), she took on a new shabby identity, leading a disreputable life as a mistress, an identity which she carried with her to Paris. Her own brother describes her as having been credulous 'wanton' and 'loose' woman': "sister married a

lawyer not a nobleman ... and behaved herself ... not very virtuously ... you must admit she's a depraved woman" (I, 201). The shifting identity of Ranevskaya echoes the change in Russia as serfs were given their freedom and the aristocracy had to learn to live with the consequent socio-economic changes. Russia took on a new identity which the playwright portrays through some of his characters as low and undignified. The new identity is not fortuitous for Ranevskaya, who discovers that the man she loves and spends her money on is a ruthless person, or for the Russian landowners, who suffered great losses under the country's new identity. Her lover takes advantage of her and, as she says, robs her of "everything" (II, 204). Apparently, the new identity satisfies the physical appetite of the mother, but strips her of self-respect and any remaining money. After being forsaken by her lover for another woman, Ranevskaya is eventually forced to go back to her estate in Russia. Once there, she yearns to regain her original, true identity, the one that is thoroughly invested in this place, her family estate.

Ranevskaya returns to her 'home' in the early morning of a bright day in May. It is remarked, before her arrival, that "the cherries [are] all in bloom" despite the fact that "there is a morning frost" (I, 197). Thus we are told that the owner is coming back to her estate when the orchard is in its full glory, but the frost denotes that there are still hardships to be faced. Her happiness upon her arrival, after five years of absence, is plain as she cries "like a child" and kisses her "dear little bookcase" and her "little table" (I, 197). It is significant that the homecoming is played out before the audience in the nursery, the place where Ranevskaya and her brother spent their formative years, living the experiences that shaped their identity. Sadly, those experiences left them ill-equipped to deal with the financial hardship that now threatens their identity as wealthy landowners. It is worth noting that the only character within the family circle to be realistic about their current situation and to show any common sense in cutting expenses is Varya, Ranevskaya's adopted daughter who is not a blood relation. As for the others, they claim that their identities are so tied up with this place and its history that they cannot detach themselves to make sensible decisions on how to extract themselves from their predicament.

Madame Ranevskaya's inability to live in the present and her longing to return to her former identity is evident as she looks out of the nursery window at the orchard and says:

All, all white! Oh, my orchard! After a dark, rainy autumn and cold winter, you are young again and full of happiness. The heavenly angels have not deserted you—If I only could lift the weight from my breast, from my shoulders, if I could only forget my past! (I, 201)

Madame Ranevskaya is ashamed of her new identity and regrets the loss of her innocence, wistfully wishing that it could be regained and that she, too, could be pure once again like her cherry orchard, dressed in its white blossom. In his book *The Concept of Identity*, Eli Hirsch draws a “connection between bodily identity and various conditions which might be satisfied by a succession of body stages” (181). We can say that Ranevskaya’s identity as a mother and owner of the estate at this stage of her life is organically linked to her identity as a child, adolescent, and young woman since these previous stages of her life were marked by satisfaction and what Hirsch calls “sortal-covered continuity” (182). The house and the orchard, as two places where experience was practiced, create the space where identity was formed. Hirsch includes the continuity of place just as well in this process of identity formation when he says that “[t]he kinds of continuities that have been generally stressed are spatio-temporal and qualitative” (181).

We have seen that the new socio-economic order poses a serious threat to the family’s identity, but unlike Barbara, they are incapable of acting decisively in the face of inevitable change. The family friend and businessman Lopahin adds to the burden when he warns that the consequence of failing to repay their debts is the loss of the estate, saying “[a]s you already know, your cherry orchard is to be sold to pay your debts, and the sale is fixed for August 22” (I, 199). This seems like a huge blow to her because, according to her, the loss of her orchard means living without identity, even though it does not have an economic value in itself; the trees are old, grown too big, and only produce a harvest “once every two years”. Even then, it is hard to market, as Lopahin observes, because people are not interested in buying cherries anymore. That said, there is no denying the emotional value of the estate to Madame Ranevskaya and her family. She is still convinced that the situation remains as in the old days, stating that if there’s anything valuable in the whole district, it’s their cherry orchard. Her heart urges her to fight for the house with its rooms and for the orchard with its birds, well, and trees. Her problem is that her privileged upbringing has left her ill-equipped for the fight and, to use Cardullo’s expression, she is “battling without a real villain insight” (584).

Lopahin’s plan to save the estate is rejected because it entails cutting down the cherry trees, tearing down the house and out-buildings and replacing them with summer cottages to be leased to holiday-makers. “The Promethean rhetoric” of the emerging capitalist, in John Reid’s terms, “is checked ... by Ranevsky’s bluntly prosaic put down” (40). Lopahin here represents the new Russia, the Russia of the 20th century. When he prides himself of his long working hours and the abundance of his money, she says to him “You feel the need for giants—They are good only in fairytales; anywhere else they only frighten us” (II, 205). Capitalism is the giant that Ranevskaya fears to encounter in real life and refuses to accept as reality.

Ranevskaya and her brother Gayeff equally hold happy memories—when they both slept in the nursery as little children. It is obvious the importance he attaches to the place when, trying to reassure his two nieces that they will not lose their estate, he foolishly swears on his “honor ... that the estate will not be sold” (I, 202), asking them to call him “a worthless, dishonorable man” (I, 202) if he allows that to happen. He fails to comprehend that he lacks the means to save the estate but depends on his sister and her influence on Lopahin, the former peasant, who ironically does possess enough money to pay their mortgage interest. But neither Gayeff nor any member of the family can predict that “the estate [is] being taken over by the carpetbagger the family never paid attention to” (Als 6), perhaps because they still consider Lopahin as a lowly peasant, despite his newly-earned wealth. He, too, has undertaken a monumental shift of identity.

The daughter Anya is as happy as her mother to return to the house, showing that the place is also dominant as a constituent of her identity. Overcoming her fatigue after the long exhausting trip, she “tenderly” expresses her affection for everything: “My room, my windows ... I’m home! Tomorrow morning I’ll get up, I’ll run into the orchard” (I, 197). While talking to her sister Varya, the singing birds in the orchard attract her attention. She has been absent for only a few months, but she shares her mother’s deep joy at returning to the place where her identity is so deeply rooted. However, this joy is marred by worry about the fate of the estate; she is unable to sleep but feels relieved when her uncle Gayeff assures her they will be able to get a loan to pay the interest. She, like her mother before her, was raised in the house in a state of privilege and cannot fathom that the loss of the place that anchors her identity is imminent.

Hilton Als, in his article “The Cherry Orchard” in the Theater section of the *The New Yorker*, asserts that “*The Cherry Orchard* aches with Chekhov’s fascination with fashion and snobbism, and how the limits of each can *define us* [emphasis added], and make life tragic” (6). I suggest here that Als makes this interpretation solely from the standpoint of the hard-working Lopahin which leads him to dismiss Ranevskaya’s apparent intimate attachment to the place as “careless and infantile absorption in the past” (6). This is to hint that the estate and the orchard are not really inextricably tied up with the identity of the family members.

It is only when selling the estate at auction becomes inevitable that Ranevskaya and Anya start to see the alternatives. Trofimoff’s eloquence increasingly attracts Anya to him and as her interest in him grows her attachment to the estate lessens. She wonders what Trofimoff has done to her because she feels that she does “not love the cherry orchard the way [she] used to” (II, 206). Her hope of assuming a new identity as Trofimoff’s wife eases the impending loss of her former one. Her mother’s alternative comes in the shape of her “wild man”

who has been sending her a telegram “every day”, asking forgiveness and begging her to return to him in Paris to care for him because he has fallen ill. At first, these telegrams carried no weight and she would tear them to pieces. Now, however, when the estate is lost, they bring hope of an identity, even though a much less desirable one. She answers to Trofimoff’s apparent disapproval of her intention by saying “what am I to do, he is ill, he is alone, unhappy and who will look after him there, who will keep him from doing the wrong thing, who will give him his medicine on time?” (III, 209). Her argument is not a sensible one, since this man robbed her of everything, including her respectability. Yet, it seems, any identity is better than none.

Finally, the family members all leave the house, each taking an individual path and trying to cope with the available alternatives. Without the orchard, they now have new individual identities even though they lose their identity as a united family. Their very old faithful servant, Fiers, is accidentally locked in the nursery and left behind, which symbolizes the leaving behind of the former Russian system of serfdom, an institution that Fiers refers to fondly during the play, and plunging into the stratum with its ebbs and tides. As the family departs, the sound of “dull” axes cutting down the trees can be heard, a further symbol of vanishing identity. Chekhov uses *The Cherry Orchard* to illuminate, in a realistic way, the human capability to adapt to new socio-economic orders through the plight of the Ranevskaya family. In her book *Identity Politics in Deconstruction*, Carolyn D’Cruz states that “[i]dentity politics cannot function without the underlying assumption that it very much matters who I am, who you are, and what possibilities are open, or closed for us, in order to form a ‘we’” (11).

3. Arthur Miller’s *Death of a Salesman*

Identity is at the very core of Arthur Miller’s *Death of a Salesman* (1949). Willy Loman has spent his whole life creating his identity as a supposedly successful salesman. He talks much about the places he has been to and the things that he has done in his role as salesman, never in any other capacity. In addition, he has created an imaginary identity for his son, Biff, who we are told was a ‘big shot’ back in his high school days. Now a grown man, however, Biff “tramps around” (I, 1021) from one place to another, trying different jobs. His mother, in his defense, asserts to his disappointed father, “He’s finding himself” (I, 1022). We understand that Biff, as a teenager, idolized his father, fully buying into the persona that Willy created for himself until he got a glimpse of his father’s real identity when he discovered he was having an affair. In that moment, both father and son lost their identity, in Biff’s eyes. His confidence rocked, Biff got stuck in time, unable to grow out of his teenage identity into his adult one. Now, whenever despair takes over his spirits, he “comes running home” (1023), as he reveals to

his brother Happy. Fred Ribkoff attributes Biff's failure in "finding himself" to his feeling of "guilt" and "shame", adding that these feelings stem from "his father's wrong, a shameful act of adultery, coupled with Biff's failure to pass math and go to university to become a football star" (187). The consequences are of course destructive, for this feeling of guilt and shame "shatters Biff's ... sense of identity" (187). Thus, Biff, as an adult, does not have defined or clear criterion to create a full-fledged identity.

Having understood Biff's loss, we must ask why he quickly returns home when he fails to find himself. Home as both place and space is an identity marker of Biff the young man, but not Biff the adult. The identity of Biff the young has a concrete manifestation; the house with its memories or space are still there for him. This is what Eli Hirsch calls "a conceptual connection between bodily identity and various conditions which might be satisfied by a succession of body-stages" (181). Biff has no problem with his past (the athletic, self-confident youth); it is stable and well-defined. His problem lies in not having an identity as a grown up. Biff the adult, in Happy's terms, is "not settled ... still up in the air" (I, 1023), a statement that is so expressive of his identity as it is of his career. So when he despairs of finding his adult identity and thereupon experiences the horror of feeling "lost", he returns to seek refuge in the fortress of his older one, the one associated with the place and space wherein he shaped his identity as a young man. His return home has nothing to do with hunger, or the need for home per se; rather, he returns to recharge his identity as a young man. Being in the place of his secured old identity again with his brother Happy, he feels himself again. As Terry W. Thompson observes, they use "their boyhood nicknames" (281) when they address each other just like they used to do as teenagers. His former identity is reactivated and his feeling of loss evaporates, at least temporarily. Once he is at home with his brother, the old memories are automatically triggered. All their joyful talk is about the past; "the talk that went across those two beds" more than fifteen years earlier, the "dreams and the plans" (I, 1023). They talk about their flirtations with girls and, in Thompson's words, of "those sun-kissed days of yore when Willy's athletic and charismatic boys were in their teens" (277-78).

Biff's resort to his older identity enhances his sense of self-worth to the extent that it goes beyond reminiscing. In the restaurant, Biff is given the opportunity to relive the "football star" persona that he once possessed at high school; Happy introduces him to a girl, Forsythe, as a football player, not at high school, but as a player "with the New York Giants" (II, 1044) and Biff does not remonstrate. In this situation, both are "as immature as they were in their teens when they were cheating on exams, telling lies at every opportunity" (Thompson 281). Happy actually instigates his conversation with the girl with a lie when he pretends that he is a champagne salesman and asks Stanley, the waiter, to bring

her champagne to “try [his] brand” (II, 1044). Forsythe returns with her friend Letta, and Biff, enjoying reliving his high school reputation as a womanizer, ignores the tenuous condition he has just put his father in and turns to Letta and offers to buy her a drink: “What do you drink?” (II, 1047). We can see that returning home, the place and space where he built his identity, brings Biff back to his high school self, young, confident and attractive to girls, unhampered by any feelings of shame or guilt, as if the game-changing incident of catching his father with his lover had never occurred.

Ironically, just as Willy Loman was the one to undermine Biff’s identity, it was he who originally bolstered the ‘star’ persona. Just because Biff was athletically-built, Willy assumed that he would inevitably succeed, even though we understand that he possessed some natural athletic ability, but exerted no extraordinary effort either in academic or sports activities. Willy instilled in both his sons a belief that physical appearance is the key to success:

That’s why I thank Almighty God you’re both built like Adonises. Because the man who makes an appearance in the business world, the man who creates personal interest, is the man who gets ahead. Beliked and you will never want. (I, 1026)

It is not surprising, then, that Biff cannot consolidate his identity as an adult, because his teenage identity was built on a false premise. He has, perhaps, made more progress than his father. He does at least realize what he does not want to be. The American Dream, so highly prized by Willy, does not appeal to Biff.

Biff is reconciled to the fact that he is “a dime a dozen” (II, 1052), and during their final confrontation, Biff finally manages to shake off Willy’s unrealistic expectations for him and sees that he would be content to lead a simple life, without the trappings of success. Ironically, Willy’s demise at the end of the play heralds the beginning of Biff’s awakening to his true identity, a sad illustration of the fact that humans so often attach their own identity to that of another individual, whether it be a parent, spouse, sibling, etc. and that person overshadows or dominates their identity to the point where it becomes distorted and uncomfortable. This is an inevitable part of life, as our social interactions demand that we mingle our own identity with that of the people closest to us.

4. William Saroyan’s *The Time of Your Life*

Identity in Saroyan’s *The Time of Your Life* (1939) takes a different dimension. Saroyan, himself the son of Armenian immigrants to the United States, tackles the question of identity loss due to a physical move from the place that has nourished and preserved that identity. Saroyan said of his own works that each was “a play,

a dream, a poem, a travesty, a fable, a symphony, a parable, a comedy, a tragedy, a farce, a vaudeville, a song and dance, a statement on money, a report on life, an essay on art and religion, a theatrical entertainment, a circus, anything you like, whatever you please” (qtd. in Landau 17). In short, each play possesses numerous identities. Some critics express the view that this play centers mainly on existential issues, a concern of modern literature in general and modern drama in particular. With its cyclical plot without a definite end, the play stresses character, the individual in the wake of globalization.

Nick’s Pacific Street Saloon, a self-styled “restaurant and entertainment palace” (671), attracts a mixed bag of customers from various social and ethnic backgrounds. For varying reasons, the patrons of Nick’s all appear to be social misfits who have one thing in common, they lack a clear identity. They are alienated and marginalized individuals, each in search of fulfillment and meaning. Although their presence in the bar does not add to their sense of identity, it does appear to provide an intimate space where they are comfortable enough to reminisce about their lost identities. Moreover, it provides them, according to Doreen Massey, with “a sense of place” (151) which is essential for fixity and security. Functionally, it discloses their sense of dislocation and fragmentation.

The link between identity on one side and space and place on the other is a very crucial one in the study of this band of characters, which includes “immigrants, particular ethnic groups, prostitutes, young people ...” (Benwell and Stokoe 214). This diversity in characters, who are expected to have variable spaces and to be functioning in remarkably varied places, is reconciled through Nick’s Pacific Street Saloon which serves as a ‘catalyst’ for them all.

We have seen in earlier discussion that place is central to the construction of an individual’s identity and it is of particular importance to the character of Kitty Duval. Of Polish origin, her parents moved to the United States seeking a better life, but after a sequence of harrowing circumstances, she has found herself alone and working as a prostitute in San Francisco. She is dreadfully ashamed of what she has become, a “street walker”, “a two-dollar whore” (I, 674) as Nick puts it. She lives in a state of denial and is obviously offended when someone even thinks of her as a prostitute. “You be careful what you think about me” (I, 763), she warns Joe at first meeting. Her shame leads her to deny her current identity and claim another more satisfactory one, insisting that she was an actress who “played the burlesque circuit from coast to coast” (I, 674). She has gone so far as to pad out this assumed identity with details, asserting that she had dinners with wealthy young men, and received flowers from members of European royal families.

Her identity confusion started after her family lost their home. In spite of the troubles and hardships she and the family, as a whole, faced on their Ohio farm,

her reminiscences indicate that she led a comparatively happy life there. Surrounded by her family members, her identity was secure in the place where she was raised: "I always dream about it as if I could go back and Papa would be there and Mamma and Louie and my little brother Stephen and my sister Mary" (I, 676). However, her father died and the remaining family members had to move to Chicago to be able to survive. At that point, Kitty's identity crisis began, because she not only lost the place in which she had her own space and joint experience with her parents and siblings, but she also lost her support system when the mother died, the elder brother got killed, and the younger one ran away.

Kitty is vulnerable and therefore looks for a place to give her the minimal amount of security. Nick's bar offers Kitty both emotional and material shelter, but it is by no means a place to identify with. On the contrary, she refuses to be associated with it as a space. The bar to her is like a Salvation Army shelter to a homeless person, a place in which she can feel relatively secure but not to be identified with. Nick admits that his bar is the "lousiest dive in Frisco" (I, 676) and wonders why people come there. His final conjecture is the more probable one: "Maybe they can't feel home anywhere else" (I, 676). The internal strife caused by remembering her old identity while having to live with her current one comes to the surface in Kitty's constant crying. She longs to live life as a respectable young woman. She has a truly "noble" character, a character that aspires for a decent life. She reveals her longing to Joe:

I like champagne, and everything that goes with it. Big houses with big porches, and big rooms with big windows, and big lawns, and big trees, and flowers growing everywhere, and big shepherd dogs sleeping in the shade ... I'd walk out of the house, and stand on the porch, and look at the trees, and smell the flowers, and run across the lawn, and lie down under a tree, and read a book ... A book of poems, maybe. (I, 674-75)

However, in the present she is tormented by her identity as a street walker. A drunken young sailor, yelling her name while looking for her room in the hotel, makes her "terribly frightened" (IV, 688). She is not cut out for life as a prostitute, even though the two dollars she earns from men like the young sailor are crucial for her survival. The material gains are not worth the humiliation she feels when she must face the reality of this way of life. Her noble dream of having a house, a husband, and children to take care of is shattered when the sailor starts hollering her name and brings her back to reality; his voice falls on her like an electric shock that brings her back from her 'trance'.

A further danger to Kitty is Blick, the determined vice cop. Still asserting her imaginary identity, she tells Blick that she has come to Nick's place seeking a job as a singer and dancer, not hunting for customers as he thinks. Blick asks for proof

of her pretended identity and she does try to comply but it becomes evident that she is lying, just as it becomes evident that he intends to exploit the situation and sexually abuse her. Blick's intention to merge the two identities revives her feelings of humiliation and self-contempt. These feelings are demonstrated when she bursts out crying upon Joe's intervention to save her from the demeaning experience. For Kitty, the loss of her home and family robbed her of her identity, a relationship of which she is painfully aware. When asked by Joe, "What's the dream?" her answer is simply: "I dream of home ... I've no place" (I, 676). Joe is kind to her, however, seeing only her innate good nature, embodying Saroyan's heartfelt sentiment expressed in the preface to the play: "Discover in all things that which shines and is beyond corruption" (n.p.).

Another customer to be found in Nick's bar is an eastern gentleman, described as "a lean old man with a rather ferocious old-country moustache" (I, 671) and simply known as the Arab. He left his country, just like Kitty's family, in search of a better life. Nick, who demonstrates throughout the play a great tolerance for his eccentric clientele, describes the Arab as the "nicest guy in the world" (IV, 690). But Arab, like Kitty, has suffered the loss of his identity as a result of leaving his home country. We know that he was once a practicing Muslim, for his hand bears a "Mohammedan tattoo" (I, 671) showing that he once performed the pilgrimage to Mecca. At this point, however, he is a regular customer at Nick's bar, drinking liquor, unable to identify as neither Muslim nor Christian. Arab feels lost, with no identity, and drinks at Nick's bar apparently to forget the pain his loss of identity causes him. Again like Kitty, he has been looking for a place to identify with, passing through many places. He mentions having been in "New York. Pittsburgh. Detroit. Chicago. Imperial Valley. San Francisco" (IV, 690), but seems not to have yet found that place, although he works hard and does not "beg" (IV, 690). Moving on in age, Arab realizes that he has been working for "nothing" (IV, 690). We learn that in his home country he has a wife and three boys, although he does not know what happened to his family in the last twenty years, whether his boys are "lost" or "dead" (IV, 690). Where he once held identity as a father and husband, he now finds that long years of absence and hard work in different places away from his country, according to him, have left him with "nothing" (IV, 690). Ironically, he is worried that his boys could have been "lost" and he himself is lost. For him, the whole world is lost and knows not where it is heading. As such, he keeps reiterating "No foundation. No foundation ... Whole world ... All the way down the line" (II, 684), using these words to comment on whatever he sees, probably projecting what he feels about his surroundings and the whole world as well. His habit of going for a walk and looking at the sky is also indicative of his loss and search for a way out, or rather an identity to stick to.

5. Wakako Yamuchi's *And the Soul Shall Dance*

The notion that place and space are active constituents of one's identity is clearly at the very heart of Wakako Yamuchi's *And the Soul Shall Dance* (1977). Yamuchi is a Nisei (second generation) Japanese-American and draws on the experiences of her grandparents' generation who came to the western United States as part of a surge of Japanese immigration that reached its height in the first quarter of the 20th century. Set in Imperial Valley, California, the play "depicts the nostalgia of immigrants who yearned to return home to Japan" (Holliday 17). The plot revolves around two Japanese families trying to survive in the US during the Great Depression, a time of grinding poverty for many Americans. The Muratas and the Okas face the additional challenge of being unwelcome newcomers trying to work on inhospitable land and get to grips with a culture which seemed very much at odds with that of their home country. The story focuses on the struggle of each family, particularly the female members, as to how far they should shift their Japanese identity to fit the space and place they now occupy. There are clear similarities between the two families, in that they share a culture and the yearning for their homeland. As Japanese farmers, they suffer the injustice of the 1913 Alien Land Law that deprived immigrants the right to own property in the United States. Where they differ is in their ability to adapt to the new life. While the Muratas are realistic about the 'inscriptions' of their identity and unite to make the best of what they have in this inhospitable place, the Okas become doubly injured as they fight against any semblance of assimilation, fight among themselves, and consequently suffer an identity crisis. The Muratas make their cultural identity the more important form of commitment and meaning.

Oka identifies himself as a Japanese farmer in California, tied strongly to the farm that not only provides him with shelter and provision, but also keeps his Japanese identity safely intact so long as he doesn't venture further afield. Economic problems mean that the place ceases to sustain either his bodily needs or his identity. Striving to adapt to the new life, but overwhelmed by consecutive misfortunes, he finds himself forced to sell his horse, a disaster to a farmer. His neighbor points out that the horse, "is as important as his wife" (I, 837), if he is to be able to fulfill his financial obligations. From another perspective, losing his horse symbolizes the beginning of the end of his identity as a Japanese farmer. Aware that he will not be able to buy another one, he also knows that he cannot go back to Japan, for he has already sent for his only daughter Kiyoko to join him. Finding himself between a rock and a hard place, Oka plans to depart from the inscriptions of his cultural identity even though prior to this he, like other Japanese immigrants refused "to assimilate into American culture because they never intended to stay" (Holliday 11). His first act of assimilation is to buy Kiyoko "some American clothes" (II, 846) on the same day she arrives in the US, even

before they get to their farmhouse. Moreover, Oka realizes that language is of major importance as an identity marker so he asks his neighbor's daughter, Masako, to teach his daughter English and "the ways of Americans" (II, 847).

Yamuchi uses curly hair as a symbol for the acceptance of all things American. The two families address this issue in different ways. Discouraging Masako from curling her hair like American girls, Hana rather commends her straight, black hair to foster in her the love for this Japanese distinctive feature: "Your hair is so black and straight ... nice" (II, 854). On the other hand, Oka, out of a desire to accelerate the assimilation process rather than a fondness for American culture, allows his daughter to have curly hair like American girls. The bigger place and space he moves in make his life even harder; he acutely feels the hostility of white Americans toward Japanese immigrants and sees the best option for survival is to adopt facets of the 'American' identity. Relating to his neighbor the shoddy treatment encountered in a restaurant and the resulting humiliation, he says "[t]ook them a long time to wait on us. Dumb waitress practically threw the food at us" (II, 847). Here, the playwright comments on the hatred that was rampant among the general population, fanned by salacious reports in the English-language press that painted the Japanese as a danger to the safety of white women, enemies coming to steal American jobs, and a generally corrupting influence in American society. Interestingly, all of these same accusations had been slanted at Chinese immigrants in the decades before.

Most bitterly affected by the challenge to her identity is Oka's second wife, Emiko. She was sent to the US to marry Oka after her sister Shizue, Oka's first wife died. The audience is made aware that she was in disgrace back in Japan, where there was a controversial movement underway to change the social position of women. The traditional, submissive role of Japanese women was under attack from new, liberal viewpoints and undoubtedly this caused conflict in some parts of society. Whatever her personal history, Emiko clings to her Japanese identity and her inability to accept her new reality inevitably creates strife between her and her husband. Physically, she lives in the US the place but psychologically rejects any identification with the space, living in social isolation in the belief that she knows that she will "be going back one day" (I, 841) to Japan. Hana, her neighbor, complains that for three years she has been their neighbor but never been "hospitable" (I, 839). Shawn Holliday maintains that "Emiko's realization that she will never return home causes her to disengage from life around her" (17). Her way of dealing with the feeling of identity loss is to imprison herself in the house listening to Japanese music and songs, and crying. "The records are very nice. Makes me remember Japan" (I, 842) she tells the Muratas with eyes full of tears. As Hana puts it, "she can't adjust to this life. She can't get over the good times she had in Japan" (I, 843) and lives on "memories" she has carried with her from

the place that shaped her identity, to which she maintains such a strong attachment that she secretly saves money with the aim of one day returning, to be reunited with her true identity and her memories in the place she calls “my real home” (I, 841). Upon her discovery that Oka has taken this money to cover expenses and debts, she makes the difficult decision to part with her traditional kimonos to make some money to return to Japan. Unable to sell the gowns, Emiko loses hope of ever returning home, and decides to die with her Japanese identity on display. She commits suicide dressed in one of her beautiful kimonos, dancing and singing to her favorite Japanese song. The play opens with the fire burning down the Murata’s bathhouse, serving to foreshadow Emiko’s tragic end.

The Muratas, perhaps more wisely, try to combine the two identities, the Japanese and the American. Among their fellow Japanese immigrants, the parents maintain their Japanese identity. For instance, Hana states that it is “not good manners to go empty-handed” (I, 839) when you visit a neighbor, more a Japanese custom than one innate among the white Americans. When obliged to step outside their Japanese community, they try to protect themselves from mistreatment and humiliation by keeping their interaction with Americans to a minimum. Murata tells Oka that they “always pack a lunch when we go on trips” (II, 847) to avoid being discriminated against in American restaurants. Japanese traditional roles are also strictly adhered to inside the home where Murata is recognized as the master; his wife waits on him and his neighbor, serving the drinks and carrying out her husband’s commands, even scrubbing his back when he takes a bath. However, hints of the American culture are not totally absent, shown when Hana, the typical Japanese respectful and obedient wife, reveals her displeasure with her husband’s comment about a wife and a horse being equal in terms of importance. She may possibly have been influenced by the American women’s rights movement which demanded the right for a woman to be recognized as her spouse’s partner, not a commodity on his property. Masako accidentally burns down the bathhouse, a mistake that her mother attributes to carelessness, but feeling secure as an American-born citizen she boldly defends herself before her angry mother and confidently goes to read on her bed.

Realizing that it is in their daughter’s best interests to assume parts of American identity, Masako’s parents encourage her to learn English and be aware of American traditions. However, they do not desire a full assimilation, preferring her to preserve the core of her Japanese identity particularly regarding moral codes. Raised by her parents to see having a boyfriend contrary to Japanese morality, Masako’s response to Emiko’s assertion of “You’ll have a boyfriend one day”, comes without hesitation: “Not me” (II, 847). Despite being born in America, young Masako shows a readiness to commit to the culture of her parents.

Starting a new life in the US was a difficult prospect for all Japanese immigrants, but it was particularly challenging for women. Those who married farmers and laborers and settled in rural areas in California had to work in the fields and adjust to life in primitive agricultural settings, while those who settled in urban areas often worked as domestic servants for American families or as waitresses in Japanese restaurants. Coming from a culture where women didn't work outside the home, this in itself was a huge shift. At the same time, they had to maintain their roles as passive females within the home. Little wonder that some suffered crises of identity.

6. Conclusion

By examining four examples of modern drama, this study has tried to highlight the relationship between place and space and how far they reinforce or contribute to individual identity. At the same time, it has demonstrated that identity is not a static condition or an absolute state, but rather in flux, liable to alter in response to changing circumstances, which may be brought about by new surroundings or events. Harold W. Noonan and some other philosophers, like P. T. Geach, have stated that identity is "relative" (2). While it is true that identity has its 'markers' or 'predicates', it is also true that these criteria are subject to change. Critics agree that "one of the principal creators and well-springs of the whole modern movement in drama [is] the problem of *Being*, the nature of the self, with the questions of what an individual means when he uses the pronoun *I*. How can the self be defined?" (qtd. in Errol Durbach 396). We recognize that there are conspicuous and important points of overlap to be found when examining the modern dramatists' employment of the notion of identity, but more importantly, there are also points of divergence. I believe that these stem from each writer's own identity and what that contributes to his/her artistic output. Surely the place of origin, the social background and life experiences, (the place and space) of each dramatist must manifest itself in the way they present their characters' identities and how they bend and sway, sometimes breaking, under the strains of the plot. If we are to believe that art reflects life, modern dramatists are compelled to write their characters in a continual state of changing identity, with those shifts coming due to alterations in place and space, just as every individual faces challenges to his/her identity throughout life. As Shakespeare told us in *As You Like It*, "one man in his time plays many parts" (II, 224).

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