

“Negative Power” and the Quest for Equality in Horton Foote’s “*Dividing The Estate*”

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Abstract

The present study attempts to explore the negative use of power and its inevitable repercussions on the lives of the concerned characters in Horton Foote’s (1916-2009) *Dividing The Estate* (2008) in the light of Lynda Ann Ewen’s conception of ‘power’ in her book *Social Stratification and Power in America: A View From Below*. Ewen classifies power into “positive power” and “negative power”. Whereas “positive power” characterizes the relationship between equals, “negative power” creates what Ewen calls “social pain” by which she means that “someone in that relationship is being hurt by the exercise of that power. The person, or group, causing the hurt may or may not realize or understand the social pain being caused. But the fact that they don’t know, don’t understand, or deny the pain does not make the pain go away for the person who is suffering” (11). After displaying the negative use of power in Foote’s *Dividing The Estate*, the present study deals with the quest for equality on the part of the characters that experience feelings of oppression and degradation. Moreover, the paper investigates Foote’s insinuations as regards ways of getting out of the dilemma of the exercise of negative power, and of realizing equality and democracy. The study also attempts to point out that “the estate” can be considered as an epitome of the larger society in which the citizens should have equal access to the resources of the country in order to develop their different potentials on the basis of democracy and equality. Finally, the paper sheds light on the role of the theatre in exhibiting current individual and social issues; consequently, it explores how far the play transcends its regionalism to reach global implications.

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القوة السلبية و البحث عن المساواة في مسرحية هورتون فوت "تقسيم الملكية"

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ملخص

يتناول هذا البحث القوة السلبية و آثارها الحتمية على الشخصيات المعنية في مسرحية هورتون فوت "تقسيم الملكية" في ضوء تصور "لندا أن إون" لمفهوم القوة في كتابها "الطبقات الاجتماعية و القوة في أمريكا: نظرة من أدنى". تُصنف " إون" القوة إلى "قوة إيجابية" و "قوة سلبية" و تؤكد أن القوة الإيجابية لا تُميز بين الناس في المساواة أما القوة السلبية فهي تعنى أن فرداً أو جماعة تمارس التمييز ضد الآخرين و تسبب لهم ألماً اجتماعياً نتيجة لعدم المساواة. و على ذلك فالبحث يتناول تجربة الشخصيات المتضررة في المسرحية في بحثها عن المساواة بينها و بين باقى الشخصيات. يكشف البحث أيضا عن تلميحات " هورتون فوت" لطرق الخلاص من القوة السلبية و تحقيق العدالة الاجتماعية. و من ناحية أخرى يشير البحث الى أن عنوان المسرحية "تقسيم الملكية" و مضمونها يمكن أن يُعتبر صورةً مصغرةً للمجتمع الذى لا بد أن يساوى بين كل أبنائه لكي يحققوا طموحاتهم من خلال التقسيم العادل و الديمقراطية لموارد الدولة. أخيرا يلقي البحث الضوء على أهمية دور المسرح في عرض الأمور الفردية و المجتمعية الجارية و بالتالى فهو يكشف عن مدى تجاوز مسرحية "تقسيم الملكية" للمحلية و بلوغها معانٍ عالمية.

In her book *Social Stratification and Power in America: A View From Below*, Lynda Ann Ewen defines power as a source that affects human beings in their relationships. Ewen classifies power into "positive power" and "negative power". She states that positive power "occurs when individuals in social relationships enable each other to realize their individual potentials fully;" (12) adding that "under conditions of equality, individuals and groups have access to the resources to develop their different potentials" (12). Hence, "positive power" characterizes the relationship between equals. On the other hand, "negative power" creates what Ewen calls "social pain" by which she means that "someone in that relationship is being hurt by the exercise of that power. The person, or group, causing the hurt may or may not realize or understand the social pain being caused. But the fact that they don't know, don't understand, or deny the pain does not make the pain go away for the person who is suffering" (11). Accordingly, social equality will be lacking in a kind of relationship in which negative power that causes social pain is exercised. Ewen points out that oppression and degradation are among the most general negative power relations. She contends that oppression occurs when "the oppressed group has *less* power, that is, less access to resources and control over the things they need" (13). As for degradation, Ewen states that it is "the negative use of power as it affects the self-esteem and self-concept of the individual" (14). In sum, "if power is used to benefit one group but hurt another group, it is power causing social pain---or negative power" (Ewen, 19).

The present study attempts to explore the negative use of power and its inevitable repercussions on the lives of the concerned characters in Horton Foote's (1916-2009) *Dividing The Estate* (2008) in the light of Lynda Ann Ewen's conception of 'power'. Simultaneously, the study displays the quest for equality on the part of the characters that experience feelings of oppression and degradation. Moreover, the paper investigates Foote's insinuations as regards ways of getting out of the dilemma of the exercise of negative power on others, and of realizing equality and democracy. Moving on from the specific and the temporal to the wider and general, "the estate" can be considered as an epitome of the larger

society in which the citizens should have equal access to the resources to develop their different potentials-- (as Ewen suggests)-- on the basis of democracy and equality. Finally, the paper attempts to shed light on the role of the theatre in exhibiting current individual and social issues and, in this respect, to explore how far the play transcends its regionalism to reach global implications.

Horton Foote's *Dividing The Estate* presents matriarch Stella Gordon as determined never to divide her hundred-year-old Texas estate, despite her family's declining wealth and looming financial crisis. Two of Stella's children, Lewis and Mary Jo insist on dividing the estate; but her third child Lucille together with her son-(who is also called Son in the play) - are against this idea. Lucille and Son live with Stella in the big house and take salaries for looking after the affairs of the estate and the homestead. For her part, Mary Jo feels that her mother does not treat her and her family the way she treats Lucille and Son. Hence, the study points out to the characters that stand for negative power in the play, namely, matriarch Stella Gordon, and Son. Both characters cause social pain to other members in the family. Stella does not treat her three children on equal terms, and Son adopts his Grandmother's approach of negative power. Unequal treatment within the Gordon family makes Mary Jo and Lewis experience feelings of oppression and degradation. Therefore, they look forward to dividing the estate and having their share of the money. Unfortunately, however, their hopes are thwarted as Stella passes away without dividing the estate. This hilariously dysfunctional family will have to wait for a year or more so that the financial matters get settled. Meanwhile a solution to the family's declining financial status has to be found out--though sibling rivalries surface.

From ancient times, Greek philosophers were aware of the consequences of inequality within the family, the nucleus of society. In *Sociology of Social Stratification*, Dipali Saha remarks that in the *Republic*, Plato suggests that the family is the key support of inequality. Consequently, inequality has become institutionalized in every society. Saha states:

Plato, in the *Republic*, discussed the conditions for a genuine

egalitarian communist society and suggested that the family is the key support of inequality---that is, of social stratification. His argument, which is still followed by many contemporary sociologists, was that individuals are motivated to secure for other family members, for whom they feel affection, any privileges that they themselves enjoy. Hence, in every society there is a built-in pressure to institutionalize inequality by making it hereditary. (21-22)

The responsibility of the family in laying down the foundation of inequality that paves the way to stratification within it goes far back to Greek philosophy, and also extends to the present times. Harry Brighthouse and Adam Swift argue that the "the family is a problem for any theory of social justice", and that "children born into different families face very unequal prospects" (139).

The setting of *Dividing The Estate* is Texas in the year 1987. It is significant that the family affairs of the Gordons are interspersed with the current societal issues, the most prevalent among which is the economic crisis of Texas in 1987. Bob, Mary Jo's husband, declares that he must have counted twenty-five empty stores on his way to the Gordons. He states that he knows people whose income was between seventy-five and a hundred thousand dollars and have lost everything due to the economic crisis. Bob's following dialogue with Stella is illustrative:

Bob: [...] I know more people in Houston whose income was between seventy-five and a hundred thousand dollars...

Stella: How much?

Bob: Between seventy-five and a hundred thousand---paying off homes of a hundred or a hundred fifty thousand dollars, with two kids in college, two cars, and suddenly the husband loses his job, and they lose everything, house, cars---now, this isn't just happening to one or two men, but hundreds in the city of Houston.

(Act I, ii, 27)

When asked by Brendan Lemon about the relevance of *Dividing The Estate* to the current cultural climate in 2008, Michael Wilson, the director of the play at Lincoln Center Theater, argues that Horton's

play is urgent:

BL: How does *Dividing the Estate* sit in the current cultural climate?

MW: In a weird way, with the great economic crisis going on, and the millions of homes being foreclosed, this play has really met its urgent moment. I think that audiences are really going to relate to this story at this time.

Moreover, the following quotation clarifies the reasons for the economic crisis of 2008: “The Economic Crisis of 2008 is believed to have occurred because of global inflation, increased unemployment, high oil and food prices, a declining dollar value, a horrible housing market, and a subprime mortgage crisis” ([Economic Crisis 2008](#) and 2009).

Evidently, the negative effects of the economic crisis of Texas in 1987 would occur at any time there is an economic crisis.

Act I, scene i, opens in an old -fashioned but comfortable living room. Through an arch, three black servants are setting the table for dinner in the dinning room. The description of the living room as “old -fashioned”, and the fact that the Gordon family has three black servants, namely: Doug, Mildred, and Cathleen, denote that Stella strongly adheres to traditional ways and upholds old concepts and ideas. Stella’s following remark on the ‘only one way’ to economize is illustrative:

Stella: There is only one way to economize, and that’s to have a garden and grow your own vegetables. (*Doug, an old black man, comes into the dinning room.*) Kill your own hogs, have a cow and calves and chickens. There is no reason why this place can’t be self-sufficient again.

Lucille: My God, Mama---be sensible. We’re living in the middle of the town on a highway. You can’t keep pigs and chickens and cows here now.

(Act I, i, 9)

Stella’s conservative outlook is also shown in her depreciation of Pauline, Son’s fiancée; she considers her “very modern”:

Stella: Miss Pauline’s very modern, I think. She’s always giving lectures....she thinks she knows the answer to

everything—why we no longer find it profitable to grow cotton here, why the chemical plants are poisoning our environment here on the Coast, why the Mexicans are coming in droves from Mexico, why...

(Act I, i, 10)

Stella plainly declares that she does not care for "overeducated women" (Act I, i, 11). Her conservative and traditional approach in life is hinted at from the beginning of the play, and contrasted to the 'modern' way of thinking. Christopher Soden points out that "Pauline is a key to Horton Foote's strategy, because she has an awareness of the big, changing world outside, that so far, the Gordons have managed to avoid".

Shortly then, Lewis enters and, as he is drunk, Stella notifies him that she does not allow liquor in the house. Lewis then bluntly announces that he is for dividing the estate, and for having his share in it:

Lewis: I want to go on record as saying I am for immediately dividing the estate.

Stella: Why?

Lewis: Because...

Stella: You would run through your share in a day...

Lewis: Then I'll run through it.

(Act I, i, 12)

Stella is against dividing the estate under the pretext that Lewis will run through his share in a day. Emphatically, then, Lewis puts his reason for dividing the estate:

Lewis: I am sick and tired of having to go to my nephew for the least thing. Son, I need ten dollars or fifteen or twenty. Why? Because I spent my allowance too soon this month. Why? Because it is none of your goddamned business is why.

(Act I, i, 13)

Son always inquires about the reason that makes his Uncle in need of money, and Lewis always evades giving an answer. The following dialogue is relevant:

Lewis: I need some money---
Son: For what?
Lewis: Never mind. I just need money—
Son: Uncle, I've already given you two advances, you know.
Lewis: It's not your money.
Son: I'm sure of that.
Lewis: Then just give it to me and shut up.
Son: How much do you want?
Lewis: A large sum.
Son: How much?
Lewis: You can detect it from my share of the estate.
Son: How much, Uncle Lewis?
Lewis: Ten thousand dollars.
Son: Ten thousand dollars! My God, Uncle Lewis, the estate can't afford shelling out money like that.
Lewis: You're not giving me anything---I said to take it off my share of the estate.

(Act I, i, 14)

This confrontation scene has reached its peak when Lewis, infuriated, threatens that he will go to a lawyer to have the accounts examined, as he does not trust Son any more.

Son's insistence on not giving Lewis the sum of money that he needs can be considered an exercise of negative power on him. Lewis keeps on arguing that it is his money and that he is taking from his own share of the estate, but Son is of another opinion. He believes that he cannot give Lewis the sum of money that he desires at the present moment. According to Ewen's theory of negative power, it can be argued that Lewis is oppressed and degraded; oppressed because he approximately has no control over the thing he needs-- (his share of the money of the estate) -- and degraded as his self-esteem is affected by the negative power exercised on him. Unfortunately, Son is unaware of the social pain that he is causing his Uncle.

With the introduction of Mary Jo and her family, inequality within this family is made clearer. On one hand, Stella is conservative and traditional, leaving to Son the complete management of the money of the estate so long as he adheres to her ways and judgments; and, on the other hand, Mary Jo and Lewis feel

degraded, as if they are not part of the family. Similar to Lewis, Mary Jo is for dividing the estate. Yet, Stella insists on her refusal. She believes that Mary Jo is a spendthrift and will not have "a dime left after two months", for she will squander her share "on trips to Europe and cars and expensive clothes" (Act I, ii, 26). Stella is aware that her daughter has borrowed three hundred thousand dollars. However, like Lewis, Mary Jo argues that she has borrowed from her own share of the money of the estate. Mary Jo wishes that she and Bob, her husband, as well as her two daughters, Sissie and Emily, would have the same good luck of Lucille and Son who live with Stella and are not charged for board and room. The following conversation between Mary Jo and her mother is **relevant**:

Mary Jo: What about them living here and eating here? I think they should be charged for that.

Stella: Son works here, you know. Son takes care of all of this so you can borrow. If it weren't for Son...

Mary Jo: Listen, I know all about Son---you don't have to tell me about Son. I appreciate Son just as you do. But do you mean to tell me that if Bob and Sissie and Emily and I come here to live that you wouldn't charge us for board and room?

Stella: Certainly not. Not if you worked.

Mary Jo: Well, I think we'll just move in this week. It would save us all a lot of money.

(Act I, ii, 27)

These unsavory conditions prompt Mary Jo to ask her sister about the sum of money that she monthly takes from the estate:

Mary Jo: And you get four hundred dollars a month, Lucille?

Lucille: Yes, same as you and Lewis.

Mary Jo: My four hundred dollars is deducted from my share of the estate. Is yours, Lewis?

Lewis: Yes.

Mary Jo: Is yours, Lucille?

Lucille: No. I'm on salary.
Mary Jo: So that makes a thousand dollars a month being paid to you and Son by the estate, plus room and board.
Lucille: Yes.
Mary Jo: And we get nothing unless we have to borrow it, and we have to beg to do that.
(Act I, ii, 30-31)

The conversation elucidates that sibling rivalry has begun to surface. Comparing herself with Lucille, Mary Jo finds out that she is below the ladder of stratification in her family. In considering sibling rivalry, Bert N. Adams points out that "when brothers and sisters leave home such rivalry does not end, but is transformed into *comparison* or *identification*" (86).

It is obvious that Mary Jo begins to feel oppressed and degraded just like Lewis has felt. She completely rejects Stella's suggestion of borrowing money:

Stella: What do you want, Mary Jo? Just tell me, what in the name of God you want? Do you want to borrow money?
Mary Jo: No, I do not want to borrow money---I am sick of borrowing money---I want the estate divided, so that me and my precious girls can have some peace for a change. Bob is too proud to tell you this, but I'm not. He's at his wit's end. He has not sold any real estate in the city of Houston for four months. He has not earned a red cent in four months.
Stella: Well, why didn't you say so? The estate will loan you money.
Mary Jo: I don't want the estate to loan me anything. I want us to divide the estate, so I can have a little dignity in my life.
(Act I, ii, 31)

The negative power that Stella exercises on Mary Jo motivates the latter to clearly declare that she desires "a little dignity" in her life. Mary Jo and her family would like to experience social mobility. Robert E. Weir contends that "those who experience social mobility in America are most likely to fall in the category of horizontal

mobility, a lateral rather than vertical move" (794). Moreover, S. M. Dubey points out that:

Social mobility is the part of the broader sense of 'social change'. Society as a process may be understood in terms of continuity and dynamism....Forces of stability preserve order and maintain social solidarity, whereas, the forces of mobility bring about social change and speed up the dynamism of society. (2)

It can be argued, however, that there are two ways of social continuity that are contrasted to each other in the play, namely, the old way embodied in matriarch Stella, and a modern dynamic way embodied in Mary Jo's yearn for social mobility that can only be attained by equal chances.

However, to Lucille, Mary Jo's family lives "way beyond their means", and so the estate should not be divided. The following dialogue between Lucille and Son reveals that Lucille is only concerned about her self-interest and the interest of Son:

Lucille: I don't think the estate should be divided just because they need money. They always need money. They live way, way beyond their means.

Son: Mama...

Lucille: Now do not be foolish and filled with false pride. You must not give up your position here. You must not abandon all you've worked for.

(Act II, i, 39-40)

Son observes that they have to work out a plan to avoid unreasonable inheritance taxes when his Grandmother dies:

Son: Maybe it is wisdom, Mother to work out some plan now to avoid unreasonable inheritance taxes. Some day it will have to be divided—the day Grandmother dies. Every year the income from the estate gets less and less—the taxes increase. Every year it gets more difficult to make any kind of profit.

(Act II, i, 40)

Obviously, each member in the family seeks the material gain whether in the life span of Stella, or after her death. In an earlier

scene, Bob has also explained that they have to go to a tax expert for advice before Stella passes away:

Bob: Now, the best and most sensible thing, in my opinion, is to go right away to a tax expert for advice. Now, I'm sure he will tell you the way to avoid all of this is to start each year giving a part of the estate to each of your children, so that in a given number of years you can legally give them their inheritance tax-free, or practically tax-free.

(Act I, ii, 34)

In consideration of the giving away of inheritance to each of the children before the deaths of the elders, Jacqueline L. Angel states that "when family wealth depended on inheritance of land by children, the extended life span provides opportunities to transfer assets before parents' deaths to those entitled to succeed" (18). It is significant, however, that the tax-system as a higher stratification of power is criticized at this point. Ewen states that "power is never a possession of an individual or group in itself," and that it "always comes because that person or group is in a certain relationship over or above some other person or group. If that relationship changes, then power relationships can change" (9). Accordingly, it can be said that Foote might be arguing for a revision of the laws of the tax-system that impel elders to transfer assets to their children during their life span.

However, Son proposes that the only hope to bring money to the Gordons is to get an oil lease; though he does not put much hope in this prospect. The following dialogue between him and his mother is relevant:

Son: [...] There is only one thing that can finally save us and that is to get an oil or gas lease.

Lucille: Well, we never have in all these years...

Son: I know, and I don't really think we will now, but there is interest in land out that way now. I have been called on twice about a prospective lease.

(Act II, i, 40)

New technology can save the Gordon family at a time of economic crisis if oil is found in their land because, "as 1987 went, fuel prices

began to rebound, which led to optimism in the oil industry" (Lincoln Center Theater: A Resource Guide). Nevertheless, Stella is absolutely against having an oil lease on her estate:

Stella: What oil lease?

Mary Jo: An oil lease on the estate. Hasn't Son told you?

Stella: No. Not on my estate. I want no oil wells or no gas wells cluttering up my land. They poison the land. Ruin it forever.

Mary Jo: That is so foolish, Mama.

(Act II, i, 46)

Although Mary Jo feels oppressed and degraded by her mother's negative power, she does not give up her hopes for a better future, and finally succeeds in convincing Stella to have an oil lease on the estate. Stella's condition is never again hear any mention of dividing the estate. The following dialogue between daughter and mother is illustrative:

Mary Jo: Mama, will you please let Son call about that oil lease?

Stella: All right. God help me, I will. If you swear to me that you will never again mention about dividing the estate.

(Act II, i, 47)

Unfortunately, Stella dies leaving the estate to her children who grapple with each other as well as with the estate-tax. It can be argued that Stella's death implies the death of an old social order, and the rise of a new one that seeks equality and social mobility.

Sibling rivalry reaches a very high point after the death of matriarch Stella Gordon. Mary Jo and Lucille quarrel over their mother's diamond brooch and their Grandmother's diamond bar pin, each desiring to possess them. The following dialogue between Lucille and Mary Jo is relevant:

Lucille: All right. I would like Mama's diamond brooch and Grandmother's diamond bar pin. Lewis would like...

Mary Jo: Mama's diamond brooch and Grandmother's diamond bar pin?

Lucille: Yes.

Mary Jo: I want them, too.

Lucille: Well, if I know you, I'm sure you're going to want everything. You always have.

Mary Jo: I want everything---what about you?

(Act II, ii, 52-53)

It can be said that Mary Jo who has long suffered from feelings of inferiority as a result of her mother's exercise of negative power on her and her family is the most avaricious among the siblings. She bargains that she can leave the big house for Son to live in only if the heirs agree to cancel her three hundred thousand- dollar debt. Then, she turns to Lewis and asks him to include her daughters in his will:

Mary Jo: I hope, Lewis, you'll remember the girls in your will and not leave everything to Son and Lucille. I don't care about myself, but they are your nieces, you know.

(Act II, ii, 54)

To this provoking demand, Lewis replies:

Lewis: I know, but I don't plan on dying just yet. (*Lewis goes upstairs.*)

(Act II, ii, 54)

In *Society and Culture: Introduction to Sociology and Anthropology*, Isabel S. Panopio and Realidad Santico Rolda remark that the selfishness and greed of human beings are characteristics true to all societies and that "the family, as a social institution, becomes responsible for instilling the values that either overcome or perpetuate such traits" (184). Mary Jo's long-established sense of inequality in her family has instilled in her the characteristics of selfishness and greed more than any of the siblings.

However, the siblings' hopes for inheriting large sums of money are thwarted when Bob informs them-- after an encounter with the lawyer-- that they could end up with as little as sixty thousand after they pay off what they owe the estate. The following

quotation elucidates what is meant by “an estate tax”:

What is an estate tax? Whenever money and property is passed from someone who has died to their heirs in the United States, the federal government takes a percentage of the value as tax. Some states, including Texas, take a percentage as well. This is called an estate tax, or an inheritance tax. In the past decade or so, many people have begun to refer to the estate tax as a ‘death tax,’ to rally opposition to it. (Lincoln Center Theater: A Resource Guide)

The Gordons are in fact put in a very tight position. The following statements elaborate the problem that Stella’s heirs are facing:

The problem faced by Stella’s heirs in *Dividing the Estate* is that she happens to have died at a moment in which the resale value of her land has just taken a tumble. The government bases the tax on the recent value of the land. Because land prices have fallen, the family could not get enough money by selling the land to cover their costs. (Lincoln Center Theater: A Resource Guide)

At this point, Son suggests that it would be better if they do not divide the estate, but borrow to pay off the taxes and the lawyer. They can live together in the house and tighten their belts until they pay off the bank loan:

Son: [...] So what I suggest is this: Let’s not divide the estate, let’s keep it intact and borrow what we have to pay off the taxes and the lawyer. We can all live here together, form a corporation, tighten our belts until we pay off the bank loan.

(Act II, ii, 58)

Mary Jo strongly objects to this suggestion claiming that she “will never , never, never come back here to live” (Act II, ii, 58). She asks Bob to go back home, but unfortunately, and to her great distress, Bob informs her that their house in Houston is foreclosed. Mary Jo and Bob could not meet their mortgage payments, and like many other Houston residents in 1987, Bob lost his job and his home. All of a sudden people find themselves unemployed and homeless.

In the middle of all of this turmoil, Mary Jo finds no other

way except to comply with the present condition and live with her family in her mother's house. Stella's heirs are now forced to find an oil lease to rescue them from the tight position they are put in. Martin Lipset and Reinhard Bendix remark in their book, *Social Mobility in Industrial Society*, that "though it never had a 'blooded' aristocracy, America's old business families provided the basis for an elite group—but a group that was never strong enough to exclude the new class of financial magnates and large corporation managers" (3-4).

However, living together is the only possible solution to the Gordons. Lucille and Mary Jo will have to make up a schedule to work at home when Mildred and Cathleen leave the house:

Lucille: Maybe we should make out a schedule.

Mary Jo: For what?

Lucille: For when Mildred and Cathleen leave.

Mary Jo: When will they leave?

Lucille: As soon as they find other jobs. We just can't turn them out.

Mary Jo: No.

Lucille: I thought one week you would cook and I would clean the house, and the next week, I'd cook and you'd clean.

(Act II, ii, 61-62)

Lucille's words denote 'division of labor'. On the social level, Philip Green contends that "the democratic division of labor" differs from "the capitalist division of labor". The capitalist division of labor can perhaps be defined as "the new class of financial magnates and large corporation managers"; as Lipset and Bendix remark. According to Green, "the spirit of democracy" is antithetical to "the spirit of capitalism". He maintains:

Overall, the spirit of capitalism is to produce commodities and the more commodities the better. The spirit of democracy, contrarily, is to generate capable citizens....That is the deep sense in which democracy and capitalism are antithetical. (80)

Hence, it can be argued that Foote's exhibition of the division of labor within the family implies his appreciation of the prevalence

of "the spirit of democracy" in society. Another fundamental thing that both sisters will have to do is to find jobs, something that they have never thought of before. Son tells them:

Son: You'll have to try and get jobs too until the bank loan is paid off.

(Act II, ii, 64)

To this proposal, Mary Jo sarcastically remarks that they will all end up working at Whataburger with Lewis's girlfriend:

Mary Jo: [...] maybe we could get a job at Whataburger with Brother's girlfriend. I can just see the four of us; Lucille, Sissie, Emily, and me all working at Whataburger with Brother's girlfriend.

Sissie: Don't be funny, Mama. Pauline: That's what they say America is becoming, you know, a service economy.

(Act II, ii, 64)

It might be argued that at this point, Foote is drawing the attention to what America's economy is becoming, namely, a service economy. Defining service economy, Stephanie Schwartz Driver states that it is "economy in which the majority of employment and business revenues are generated by services" (220). The following statement explains that "Since the 1970s the American economy has moved away from producing goods to providing services, and the service-producing sector has accounted for an increasing proportion of workers" (The American Workplace - The Shift To A Service Economy). Thus, Foote is rethinking the economic status in America. However, the play ends by Mary Jo's supplication that the oil lease will strike oil on their estate so that they can pay off the bank loan and divide the estate.

It can be argued that Horton Foote is against the use of negative power that leads to negative consequences such as the feelings of inequality, oppression, degradation, and the surfacing of rivalries within the family. At the same time, the play makes it clear that the search for equality necessitates change, individual change

that would ultimately result in social change. Ewen states:

While we are struggling to organize the structure of our society, we must also struggle to change ourselves and our children....Only when we begin to see ourselves in harmony with each other and value our differences---will we be able to achieve the democratic dream. (356)

The play ends with the Gordons living together. This implies, on one hand, that there will be no more negative power exercised on them, and, on the other hand, accepting 'the other' with his/her different point of view and perspective. Lee McDonald believes that "life is a series of transitions, one which invites us either to work together or to seek dominance or separation to achieve our own interests". Hence, it is hard to accept Dwight Garner's remark that the play is "a bit too easygoing and familiar. It feels that something we've heard before." Similarly, Alexandra Bonifield's comment on Horton's plays--- (including *Dividing The Estate*) --- that they are "less inspired or inspirational" and that "they lack the poetry, depth of passion or memorable characterization of truly great text" is put in question. It is plausible to agree to Charles Isherwood's statement that "Mr. Foote well knows that the ills of society generally have their roots in the flaws of individual human hearts." Accordingly, in order to mend the flaws of individual human hearts, change is required, and positive actions are needed. It is not enough for Mary Jo to pray for change, but she has to take a positive action. She, as well as Lucille, has got to find work and that is something new to them. The death of matriarch Stella implies that there will be no more negative power exercised on anybody in the family, no more feelings of degradation and oppression. The play bears on race as well. The following quotation clarifies the social change that is rushing in:

The subservient role of Doug, Mildred and Cathleen is true to the time and place. A wealthy land holding family such as the Gordons was likely to have African-American servants. These servants might be extremely close to the family in many ways, but would not have been seen as equals. But by 1987, these traditional

master-servant relationships were changing. (Lincoln Center Theater: A Resource Guide)

The death of Doug implies an end to serving the wealthy white people. For her part, Cathleen, the young African-American, has a different prospect of her future. She goes to junior college, thereby trying to change her lot in life.

Horton Foote's *Dividing The Estate* can be seen as an epitome of any society where a sect, or group of citizens searches for having equal share of the society's resources, equal opportunities, an end to negative power that incurs degradation, oppression, and the exploitation of groups. It is significant that the action of the play takes place at the time of the economic crisis of Texas in 1987. R. Baird Shuman argues that, "broken lives symbolize for him [Foote] a breakdown in society" (546). It can be said that a major reason for a breakdown in society can be the exercise of negative power. The family crisis of Bob and Mary Jo can be seen as an epitome of a societal condition if people suffer from a similar economic crisis. Actually, an economic crisis reappeared in 2008. Even in March 2011, John Garcia comments on the play by saying that "discussions of bank foreclosures, devalued real estate and a family who must shift their prior materialistic ways to adjust to the downed economy sound like something from the daily newscast in our present day." Commenting on this global crisis, Anup Shah observes that "the problem could have been avoided, if ideologues supporting the current economic models weren't so vocal, influential and inconsiderate of others' viewpoints and concerns." However, the strategy for creating a better society is clearly stated in Ewen's following words:

The answers for a better society must be generated out of a process of debate and dialogue. That process must be governed by egalitarian norms---the answers must provide equal opportunities for all and an end to the degradation, oppression, and exploitation of any groups....It will be up to ordinary people like us to create our future. (357)

Ewen views debate and dialogue as fundamental assets for the

generation of a better society. It might be argued that one of the effects of Ewen's call for 'debate and dialogue' can be the avoidance of crises and troubles that can occur at any time in human history and that ultimately result in revolutions. In fact, revolutions break out when people *feel* oppressed and degraded. Therefore, debate and dialogue must necessarily replace the exercise of negative power.

It is worth noting that the role of the theatre in exhibiting current individual and social issues becomes fundamental in establishing "new forms of global civil society"; as Dan Rebellato suggests in *Theatre and Globalization*. Rebellato argues that "globalization requires a theatrical response that is different in kind from political topics of earlier generations. Globalization's power is so immense and its scale so far outstrips our current governmental structures that we have to create new forms of international association, new forms of governance, new forms of global civil society that will give shape and force to our humanity and our responsibility" (85).

The present paper has thus attempted to explore the negative use of power and its inevitable consequences on the lives of the concerned characters in Horton Foote's *Dividing The Estate* in the light of Lynda Ann Ewen's conception of 'power'. Simultaneously, it has displayed that the quest of these characters for equality is greatly desired and vehemently sought. The play has dealt with urgent issues such the tax system, homelessness, and unemployment; issues that directly bear on ways of living and on the social and economic stability. The answers to the elimination of the exercise of negative power and the abolition of the obstacles to equality and democracy are seen to be in the need for change since positive actions would result in individual change that undoubtedly lead to social change. The democratic dream would begin within the family when people change their ways of living and of rearing up their children, then it would move on to societies at large. Hence, far-reaching global implications can be reached. It is only when people live in harmony with each other, accept one another and value their differences, that the extension of democracy can be global.

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