

The Postmodern Psychological Narrative Strain in Jon Fosse's *And We Will Never Be Parted*

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Abstract

The present paper tackles Jon Fosse's "*We'll Never Be Parted*" from a postmodern perspective, with a view to reflecting the worries and tragedy of loneliness suffered by the postmodern man, whose life has become an endless nightmare expressed through a series of internal monologues shared by nobody. Fosse's play reflects his masterly use of technique, since he chooses to employ the techniques traditionally associated with the novel, like the stream of consciousness and the external omniscient narrator to help set the scene most fitting to his attempt to allow characters voice out their internal workings. Both perspective and technical innovations have been most fitting to Fosse's attempt to create parallelism between the inside and the outside worlds, resulting in making the external action an embodiment of the internal one. The play as a whole has become a metaphor of man's torn psychology in the postmodern period.

Key Words: Fosse's Psychological narration, internal monologue, narrative strain, stream of consciousness.

The present paper is an analysis of Jon Fosse's narrative drama with a view to commenting on the technical innovations he introduces in the field of contemporary drama. As a matter of fact, he is such a daring playwright, venturing into new realms of techniques. Consequently, his daring attempts won him the Nobel Prize in novel. Here, I try to show how his novelties have been seen most fitting to express the agony of postmodern man; namely, the use of stream of consciousness narrative reminiscences, fragmentary dialogues, miscommunication, dramatization of psychology, and the use of universal type. In his article, "Voice and Narration in Postmodern Drama," Brian Richardson examines the issue of the narrative voice in written texts. He emphasizes two points: first, the use of narration in postmodern drama and the need to distinguish voice in multi-voiced texts. He even refers to the attitude in postmodern drama where a narrator can appear to set the scene and participate in action (682). Second, Brian refers to memory plays where the external scenes become an embodiment of the internal ones. I am going to apply both elements, among others, to Fosse's play *And We'll Never Be Parted* to introduce a new reading of this elusive work, where the spontaneity of stream of consciousness narrative is used to help make the reader share characters all their worries and aspirations.

To start with, Stream of Consciousness is a narrative technique used in fiction intended to render the flow of impressions and inner world of the self. Stream of Consciousness was a phrase used by William James in his *Principles of Psychology* (1890) to describe the unspoken flow of perceptions, thoughts, and feelings in the waking mind. It has since been adopted to describe a narrative method in modern fiction". (Polackova 1). In 1918 May Sinclair first applied the term stream of consciousness in literary context while discussing Dorothy Richardson's novel. This blend of terms and techniques can help us unveil the ambiguity of Fosse's present play. The reason is simple. Fosse does not write a drama in the traditional sense and structure and where the play is divided into acts and scenes; rather, he prefers to resort to presenting monologues and reminiscences to overwhelm the reader with a lot of impressions.

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The play is divided into three parts, and contains three characters. Fosse does not name the characters in the play, they are just She, He, and The Girl. He normally handles human relations in the generality. Hence, he uses generic names – the Man, the Woman, Mother, Child – seize upon the intensity of our primordial relations and are by turns bleak and comic” (Emre 1). The present play begins with stage directions which introduce the physical and psychological atmosphere. 'She' seems to be a woman who is waiting for her husband's return. This play seems to be a journey of fluctuation between believing in something and rejecting it. The character suffers hesitation as a painful reality, so she rejects it. she turns against it, rejects, or neglects it. Her consciousness regains power and accepts it, only to refuse it again. This is an example of pointlessness and misguidedness in life. The protagonist (heroine) appears to be searching for something elusive and uncatchable. It is present and absent at the same time. Fosse's play echoes the main point of conflict in *Waiting for Godot* in which conflict works on expectations. "She" in Fosse's *And W'll Never Parted* is similar to Vladimir and Estragon who reach the end of the play without meeting Godot. Similarly, "He" in Fosse's play seems to be a metaphor like Godot. Samuel Beckett's *Happy Days* also finds echoes here in Fosse's successful dramatization of the narrated psychology of the woman. Winnie's psychological dramatization resembles Fosse's She as both of them recall days long gone. Katherine Wiss confirms that "Samuel Beckett rewinds and revolves historical narratives through its repletion, fragmentation, and stage image of a woman caught in a mound – an image which is an embodiment as well as embodies histories." (42)

It is clear that 'She' uses situational irony as a mechanism intentionally expressing the endeavors to keep balance. Her words say explicitly something while, her technique betrays her intentions She seems as if she is crazy and unable to differentiate between what is real and what is imagined and beyond reality. There is a state of misconception or confusion. She looks as if she is aware of somebody's absence and decides to be strong and beautiful. She behaves according to what she hopes. One reads from her language that she gains composure and is in control. Yet, the use of repetition hammers the message home that she is off balance. She is even psychologically distorted, dismantled, and even on the verge of craziness. The following quotation is an example. "She" says:

You musn't be away so long

If you're away

So long

You can surely ring

Answer me won't you

You must say something

You must surely answer me

Answer me

Answer won't you

She sits up on the sofa and looks towards the telephone that stands on the cabinet over by the hall door. Pause. She turns again towards him who seems to sit beside her, she smiles at him. Then she looks toward him with frightened eyes

Must you go
 No don't go
 You mustn't go
 You mustn't leave me
 You must stay with your girl
 I mustn't act the fool anymore. (17)

Through the adept use of stream of consciousness, Fosse manages to present a blend of the real and imagined, between 'must and mustn't and what is hoped and what is possible. There is interchanging between the mental dialogue and the real dialogue of characters. The dialogue of feelings can be called a metaphysical one. Fosse describes the gradual stages of the collapse of the character step by step. First, the rejected sense of degradation and neglect of a person who no long feels like a human being. He chooses to be a thing, then a lonely thing, then one of the others. She is a link among others. The last step is the collapse. When she expresses herself as a one thing. She turns herself from human being to a material one, and loses her value because of depression and the loss of community, love, and emotional containment. The climax of the state of depression can turn into the opposite. Fosse tries to alert the audience to the importance of the basic needs of universal human virtues and values. Noa Live in 'Into a Night Revealed': Visions Of The Real in the Theatre of Jon Fosse presents a comprehensive analysis on Fosse's different and unique strategies in dramatizing the contradictory ideas. Fosse resorts to the use of opposites to emphasize his proposition. He sets light and dark and the visible and invisible side by side. The reader is free to choose the meaning. The richness of Fosse's text, Noa Live says "it is our responsibility to determine what, in Jon Fosse's theatre, is or is not. And it is also ours to articulate this choice according to our critical, spiritual, intellectual, ideological convictions – our own arbitration of values (4)". These words stress the fact that Fosse's drama is very rich with layers of meanings. It also has an effective role in dragging the audience to the field of literary analysis. It creates an area of disagreement among readers and audiences, as some of them may accept his ideas while others may not.

Andre Petitjean defines 'narrative theatre' as theater in which 'narration alternates with monstration (reported dialogues) and deliberation (commentaries), the listener travels continuously in time and space. At the beginning and end of the play, the speaker makes similar remarks about his situation (4). Fosse exposes many psychic defects in his play. This is especially clear when handling the socially deconstructed ties; embodied in loneliness, insecurity and schizophrenic ideas. He expresses the social chasm through depicting his characters of *The Girl and She* as a dramatization of a multi-sided psyche. This means that *She* is both speaking of and to herself at the same time. Fosse freely frees the feelings and ideas and grants them a human frame to be embodied in an individual identity. This identity can be described as a reflection of all hidden desires, needs and feelings. *She* speaks what is in the inside then the girl speaks the real. Fosse creates a character with two shapes or sides; one is inside and the other is outside. He divides the character into two parts. The mental and psychological sides are depicted as separate characters who can speak and act. This is a classical device. As in Greek drama, one can find abstract ideas act as characters in the play.

The following words refer to an example of the continuous inner dialogue between the Girl and her mind.

I don't know

What I'll do

I don't know anything

And I must eat now

I must do something

He must

Be coming now

I don't understand why

He's so late

Why doesn't he come

Why is he gone

As if were dead

Why doesn't he come (Fosse 63)

These repeated questions summarize the problem of this character who suffers both the psychological and material loneliness. This wife needs to feel that her husband is with her and shares her the aspects of life emotionally and physically. The character means that her husband is absent much of their time. He spends a great deal of their life outside their house and even when he returns, his wife doesn't feel his psychological existence. She always seeks his community emotionally. This highlights many problems that wring the psychology of his symbolic characters. In his drama, 'Fosse often leaves incomplete words or acts, creating a sense of unresolved tension . . .with his unique writing style and profound exploration of everyday situations, he has established himself as a major figure in contemporary literature and theatre'' (5). Asbjorn Aarseth, attempting a description of Fosse's dramatic strategy, he refers to Fosse's use of "stream of consciousness. Writers shares certain assumptions regarding the establishment of the technique in novel. The first of these assumptions is that the significant existence of a human is to be found in his mental-emotional processes and not in the outside world. Secondly, a human's mental-emotional life is disjointed and illogical (111). The emotional part goes to Fosse's inclination towards psychodrama, while the mental illogicality is expressive of the nature of the stream of consciousness technique that does not censor the offhanded activities in the mind. Rather, it seeks to present them as they are without any interference.

Hence, "She" is like a mirror, sometimes speaking internally and sometimes interacting externally. In other words, "She" is presented as two multi - voiced characters. Both are depicted as separate characters who can speak and act. Fosse depicts the abstract things as if they were material. The following extract explains how Fosse blends the inner or self -dialogue with the spoken or the oral speech of the character "She" who says:

She goes over to the table, picks up the wine bottle. Both he and the girl sit looking down at the table. She lifts the wine bottle, pours more wine for them both

The wine's poured now

And now the food must be

Set on the table

And then

Gradually begins to hum

He must come

With self-irony

'Cause I'm big and fine and terrific

And surely he must be coming now

Coming to his girl now

Hums

He must be coming to his girl now

Coming to his girl now

Coming to his girl

Surely he must be coming now

She puts the wine bottle down on the table. The two look at each other. they look down again at the table. She begins to walk around in the room again. Pause

He's coming soon now

And then we'll eat. (64)

Here, the inner conflict is vivid. She's mind seems to be separated from her and is given the ability to speak. So, the reader is obliged to imagine that the mind speaks with another character. In other words, she's realization of the real state is in confrontation with her desires, ambitions and needs. She is a self-contradictory person who insists to keep with her hopes of a happy life with the lover, where, the other side, she is the person who suffers and misses a lovely familial life. She waits all the time for the return of the lover to live and practice all the tradition and accustomed daily routine such as eating food. She imagines the pictures of these routines and tries to suppose that the girl (her imagined picture about her self during practicing desirable daily routine).

He in Fosse's play refers to both the absent lover or any man and the Girl stands for any woman. Thus, the play in both personal metaphor and universal and general symbol of postmodern life. Fosse indicates the idea of the first creature which stresses the need for partner; man needs woman and woman needs man. Even if, there were problems and conflicts, both of them need the other – man and woman. When the Girl decides to leave, He begins to beg her and asks her to stay with him. This is very clear from the following quotation He

Looks up from the table, at the girl

No don't go

Please

Don't go

I always miss you

Pause. Desperately

You must never leave me

And you've said

You'll never leave me (65).

On the other side, woman in the play repeats the following words in every paper. She expresses her wishes and desires. She wants to continue her life with her man. She always believes that he will return. She says "He'll probably ring soon now. But then the receiver must be down" (65). Avra Sidiropoulou considers the main features of the symbolist play as "Striking the right metaphor that can carry the action along a solid point of view is vital" (10). Sidiropoulou explains that these symbolist plays "tend to focus more on the characters' inner life and the associative powers of the human mind. As has already been suggested, elevating the action above and beyond the boundaries of the specific, geography – defined elements are often a matter of imprinting the essential features of character and situation within predominantly heightened (nonrealistic) forms of staging. Consequently, she adds that Fosse's drama can be classified as a naturalistic one. Yet she adds that "that many productions choose to ignore Fosse's naturalistic stage directions in the early plays might be telling of how, in some respects, a design that surpasses details of time and place, frees up interpretation, encouraging the audience to perceive things without the confines of a specific cultural lens". (11)

Metaphorical thought is the link which connect the elements of drama in Fosse's *We Will Never Be Parted*. She can be considered as a metaphor. If we contemplate the journey of character's thought, we will find that it is a metaphorical thought. Love is the predominant motive for every segment in her daily life thoughts and actions. She cooks because she loves her husband and wants to share food with him. She also waits for his return. She hopes many things related to successful and lovely familial life. So, tracing She's cognitive style related to desires, ambitions and mood will be clear if is examined according to the fact of considering love as the metaphorical icon in dramatizing both the psychological and mental frame of She's character. So, this technique of the dramatization of characters makes Fosse's drama tend to be a unique one. Karolina Stehlikova refers that "the genre of the play is flexible to some extent. Exaggerating slightly, it might be said that Fosse's plays could be staged as absurd drama, drama of symbolism, psychological realism or the grotesque. With this interpretation of individual characters may change, and thus their relation to each other. Even the final effect of the whole play may be altered" (90). Sarah Cameron also asserts the great position of Fosse's drama. she considers fosse at the same stance with Sarah Kane, Lars Noreen's, Bernard Marie and others who "explore form by crafting texts full of space for theatrical collaboration. Fosse takes that one step further by challenging the audience who have their own vision as well" (1).

Stage directions in this play seems to be a form of narration which -interrupts the dialogue and comments on many issues. for example, it may comment on the psychological reactions of characters. "She pours a little wine into his glass, then she pours wine into the other glass, at the empty place, she lifts that glass, drinks a bit. Then she holds the glass up in front of her, stands looking at it" Fosse prescribes every psychic motion, every mimetic gesture for his characters – little smiles, vacillation, petty nod. etc. By contrast, an emotional charge is very rarely implied. If the author specifies it, he often uses words, which may be interpreted in several ways (for example: "laughs", "chuckles", "sighs", "shakes her head", etc. (Stehlikova 72). Fosse stresses the use of physical movements. they are often indicated, but this usually concerns small movements such as moving from the center of the room to the window, looking out of window, going to another room. For example, "*She rises goes over to the cabinet, takes one of the photographs, looks at it a bit* (91)". This excessive use of movements and gestures may lead to consider Fosse's drama a form of absurd theatre. Brijesh Kumer Mena explains that

Fosse uses silence, gestures, and atmosphere to craft unique dramatic experiences. Silence in Fosse's works transcends dialogue, engaging the audience underlying emotions. Subtle gestures convey unspoken thoughts, while minimalist settings and evocative language create an immersive atmosphere. This exploration positions Fosse alongside modernist figures like Samuel Becket, highlighting his commitment to exploring human experience and redefining contemporary theatre and literature. (1)

Materialism overcomes humanity in the second part of the play. She reflects the human need for human company. This loss of the real existence and company leads to man's coexistence with material things. She is presented as a model for all those who suffer loneliness. She begins to numerate what she has done for her husband. She mentions her household duties such as preparing food and other daily routines. It seems that this She is a model for all depressed wives who lack love, respect and other familial emotions needed for the ideal maternal life. Fosse modelled this type of wives in his play in order to ring the alarm of danger in any human society. He wants to clarify the importance of familial ties and emotions. He calls for the return of humanity instead of materialism. The following words said by She are the same which can be said in the same situation in any place in the world. So, Fosse tends to direct a universal cry. He expresses the universal problem in any place and time. She is a repeated model in many societies. Always, Fosse tries to make a balance between "His dialogue is like a musical score in which he seeks a balance between the unspoken issues, so, the audience has the opportunity to determine who are those people in his drama. He explores unspoken themes such as the state of mind between life and death. *We'll Never Be Parted* ends in the following quotation which indicates the return of She's conscious. She soon realizes the true fact about the existence of her lover and admits that she is alone. The character's wise side appears to control her psyche. She announces her strength and says

No I must pull myself together

I'm alone of course

No one else has been here

And I'm quite alone

And he's gone

As if he were dead

There's just me

Gaily

Me and my things

Pause

He's not waiting any longer

Perhaps he is waiting (81)

Here, this inner speech reflects the strong side of She' consciousness. Later, the contradictory weak part will appear when she returns to her monologue about the need to his return. So far, her psyche is torn. Although she owns a very strong psyche, yet the strong effect of love results in this sense of hesitation and fluctuation between acceptance and rejection of reality. As a result, she indulges in imaginative and hesitated monologues. So, in the next part of the previous quotation She completes her words which reflect her case of awareness and consciousness mixed with insanity. She begins to speak him as if he is with her in the same place. We can understand this from the next psychological narrative extract. She speaks

But not for me

There's

Begins gradually to hum

Just me

So alone

So alone

But I'm big and strong and terrific

And I can think

And I'm a link

Hums

And I'm never alone

I can be a alone

I enjoy being alone so well

I can wait

Because life is waiting

I am waiting

She laughs a bit

I can surely be alone

She rises goes over to the cabinet, takes one of the photographs, looks at it a bit

I'm fine

I'm where everything's usual

She puts the photograph back

I and my things

She walks over to the sofa, sits down in the left corner, supported against the arm rest.
She looks at the other corner

ARE you there

Pause. A smile covers her whole face

Yes there you are

You're really there

You're sitting there now

She begins to laugh, she laughs loudly, then more softly, then loudly again. Gradually darker. Darkness. Her laughter falls silent. (81)

Fosse's work is an existential, often focusing on the interior lives. His technique in writing seems to be buzzing with narration. Yet, narrative technique seems to take different forms in Fosse's drama which is the main innovation in his drama. Those forms are Visual narrative, psychological narrative, Stage direction narrative, Repetitive narrative. Liev states that "Fosse enjoins us to have a less passive relation to what we perceive. He invites us to mentally return to an initial textual (therefore, aural) imprint, so that we can experience how random and fragmented memory is, how we cannot be faithful to words and images that once moved us, and to which we attempt to move back (4)".

Considering the untraditional points in Jon Fosse's *And We Will Never Parted* which make it listed in the category of narrative drama, one can begin with the plot. There is no action at the beginning. Richardson explains that "beginnings in drama are often abrupt, blurring the audience into the middle of the action . . . as is only to be expected given Beckett's rejection of traditional plot, beginnings and endings are similarly skewed in his work. Endgame commenter than begins; there is no action initiated and no resolvable disquiet" (147). Similarly, as in Beckett's *Not I*, Fosse's *We Will Never Parted* examines self and identity. Richardson explains that the play begins as a torrent of words reported through "pseudo third-person" narration, the audience finally realizing that "She" who seems to speak to another, is really talking in a drowsy mood to herself. This "strange communication adds to the epistemological drama of the work, as the audience, like Mouth, struggles to identify and keep distinct the various subjectivities that are invoked (688)".

To conclude, Fosse presents a very simple drama but in a unique style in writing. His drama is so mingled with narration that they seem to be novels told through the tongue of one character and divided into scenes preceded with stage directions. Thus, we have a different new genre, a new hybrid species which contains elements of both drama and novel. This paper claims that it is a sort of a psychological narrative monologue or may be called a mental drama.

That is seen most fitting to express the multiplicity and schizophrenic nature of man in postmodern world. According to the analysis and interpretation presented in this paper, Fosse offers us a new type of narrative drama preoccupied with investigating man's psychology as in his modern narrative in *We Will Never Be Parted*:

These are the main features of the world of *We'll Never Parted* dramatized by Fosse.1- Communicative breakdown resulting from miscommunication and fragmentary dialogues. You hardly see two persons talking and this dialogue manage to make sense.2- The dialogue reflects how modern life deepen man's desire of isolation. No persons agree on an issue. The dialogue takes the form of individual speculation that is never shared.3- The title stresses point that will never come true since they are already parted, even when they were together.4- The use of pronouns without a specific reference to reflect person show how the tragedy is universal.5- The modern narrative technique instead of using literary metaphors turned man into a living metaphor unfolding life before our eyes.

This paper is a modest effort in delving in a rich harvest of drama presented by the Noble prize awarded writer; John Fosse whose plays are container of universal human experiences, emotions, feelings, psychological issues, social problems and many other topics. In brief, Fosse's drama is a summary of every day man's life. Each play dramatizes a slice of life and presents a model of any person may be found in any country in the world in any age. So, Fosse's innovative daring technique highlights the fact that. We are before an experimental playwright who never feels satisfied with a traditional inherited tool. Rather, he tries to introduce other techniques of presentation so much that his present work may safely be termed a psychological narrative drama. drama needs more analysis and interpretations. This paper recommends Fosse's drama for those researchers who are interested in studying humanities and sociology and interdisciplinary studies which have the interest and related to this affiliation. Fosse's plays will offer a very fertile scope of research.

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ملخص البحث

السرد النفسي في فترة ما بعد الحداثة في مسرحية لن نفترق ابدا

للكاتب المسرحي جون فوسيه

المستخلص

يعالج هذا البحث مسرحية لن نفترق ابدا/ للكاتب جون فوسيه من المنظور السردي لمرحلة ما بعد الحداثة و التي تعكس التراجيديا التي يعيشها الإنسان في هذه المرحلة الزمنية بما تتطوي عليه من مخاوف و قلق و معاناة، وذلك في محاولة لالقاء الضوء على مدي براعة الكاتب في نقل تلك المعاناة من خلال إتقانه لفنيات السرد الأدبي الذي يستخدمه الروائيون في المقام الأول ، فلجأ ذلك الكاتب المسرحي إلي توظيف تيار الوعي ليتمكن من الولوج إلي عقل شخصياته ونقل كل ما يجول بها بكل ما يكتنفه ذلك من تردد وحذر وصراحة وإصرار وخوف، كما لجأ الى توظيف اسلوب الراوية العالم بكل شئون شخصياته وهذا ما كان واضحا في توجيهات خشة المسرح. ومن هنا فالببحث الحالي هو محاولة لتوضيح ما إذا كان جون فوسيه قد نجح في خلق تواز بين العالم الخارجي والعالم الداخلي والذي ربما جعل المسرحية قيد الدراسة استعارة عقلية تمشي على قدمين.

الكلمات المفتاحية: السرد النفسي - تقنيات تيار الوعي - الحوار الداخلي - مسرح جون فوسيه