

REPRESENTATIVENESS IN CONTEMPORARY BRITISH DRAMA: A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS IN JONATHAN HARVEY'S *BEAUTIFUL THING*

REPRESENTATIVIDADE NO TEATRO CONTEMPORÂNEO INGLÊS: UMA
ANÁLISE CRÍTICA DO DISCURSO EM *BEAUTIFUL THING* DE JONATHAN
HARVEY

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ABSTRACT: This research aims to analyze the contemporary British drama from the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) in the play *Beautiful Thing*, trying to describe how the characters construct their identities along the text to establish the aspect of representativeness in the play. The methodology used was the theoretical discussion and the analysis with data from the play. It is divided into three sections; the first is a historical overview on the 1990s British drama, presenting facts and changes. The second is a discussion on the theoretical background about CDA, conceptualized mainly by van Dijk (2001) and Fairclough (1992; 2003); and Identities with Castells (2010), Buckingham (2008), Hall (1997), and Verluys (2007). Afterwards, the play is analyzed from these concepts, where the linguistic instruments in the characters' discourses, responsible for the construction of their identities, are searched in the play and exemplified with fragments.

KEYWORDS: Contemporary Drama; Critical Discourse Analysis; Social Identities; Representativeness.

RESUMO: Este artigo tem por objetivo analisar o teatro contemporâneo Inglês a partir da Análise Crítica do Discurso (ACD) na peça *Beautiful Thing*, tentando descrever como os personagens constroem suas identidades ao longo do texto, para estabelecer o aspecto de representatividade na peça. A metodologia utilizada foi de discussão teórica e a análise com dados da peça. A pesquisa é dividida em três partes. A primeira é um panorama histórico do teatro Britânico no período de 1990, apresentando alguns fatos e mudanças. A segunda é uma

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discussão sobre as bases teóricas utilizadas sobre ACD, conceitualizada principalmente por Van Dijk (2001) e Fairclough (1992; 2003); e sobre Identidades com Castells (2010), Buckingham (2008), Hall (1997), e Verluys (2007). Por fim, a peça é analisada a partir desses conceitos, onde os instrumentos linguísticos presentes nos discursos dos personagens, responsáveis pela construção de suas identidades, são pesquisados na obra e exemplificados com fragmentos.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Teatro Contemporâneo; Análise Crítica do Discurso; Identidades Sociais; Representatividade.

1. INTRODUCTION

Beautiful Thing is one of the best-known plays written by the playwright Jonathan Harvey. It was first produced at the Bush Theatre in London, England, on July 28th, 1993 and subsequently produced, in the following years, in the USA. A screen adaptation was also released in 1996, under Harvey's revision. Recently, some productions were released to commemorate the twentieth anniversary of the play. It tells the story of two 15-year-old boys, Jamie and Ste and how they fall in love and experience their love together, overcoming the social resistance and prejudice. The story is set in a working class area of the South East of London, known as Thamesmead, in May 1993.

Firstly, we will do an overview of the 90's drama in Britain, discussing how the government influenced the new generation and affected the drama art, and how Harvey emerged from this period.

For considering this a relevant study, as we noted that there are no specific researches in this literary work, we intend to demonstrate the importance of this play to the contemporary British drama and to the minorities' representation through the Critical Discourse Analysis, despite the resistance against it that some discourse analysts still have. Therefore, in the second section of this paper, we will discuss the critical discourse analysis (CDA), which the conceptualizations are based on van Dijk (2001, p. 466), which defines it as a type of discourse analysis that studies the modes of abuse of power, dominance, and inequality reproduced by texts and in interactions in

social and political contexts; and Fairclough (1992), which expands the concept of text by considering language as a constitutive element of social identities; we see that both authors talk about texts and we cannot forget that a literary work brings social values and marks within its texts, especially a play work as *Beautiful Thing*, which tries to transport reality to the stage.

We continue the theoretical discussion on the identities studies. It is found a wide discussion about social identities, which can be defined as the conception that one has of him/herself as part of a social group and as the linguistic construction that adheres to one or more groups and categories (DUSZAK, 2002; KROSKRITY, 1999 apud VERSLUYS, 2007, p. 90), in other words, social identities are nothing more than another nomenclature for collective identities, and those are presented in the linguistic choices of each individual.

The last part of this paper, before the conclusion, is reserved for the analysis part. Thus, we will go back to the historical overview and to the theoretical background, discussing and exemplifying, using the excerpts from the play to sustain the concepts. Therefore, in the analysis part, we intend to demonstrate how the characters construct their identities along the text and which social groups are represented in the play. We will also discuss the deconstruction of social stereotypes that Harvey works in his play, concluding with the possible results and remarks of what was researched.

2. THE 90'S DRAMA: NEW ALTERNATIVES AND PERSPECTIVES

Since modernism, the aspects of society have been represented among the main themes in literature, such as in the contemporary drama. According to Rollyson (2003) the contemporary drama in Britain “reinforces a lengthy and strong theatrical tradition, while employing innovative strategies and themes that reflect recent developments in British society and culture”, it is notable the

presence of social aspects inside the theatre, as culture and even politics. Aragay, Monforte and Zozaya (2007, p. x-xi) discussed in the introduction of their book that “when discussing the politics of the 1990s theatre, many of the interviewees suggest that even when not explicitly dealing with big public issues the plays still refract and reflect on contemporary realities”. Working as a mirror, even though reflecting not entirely and/or clearly the society, the theatre works as an important tool to social changes.

2.1. Around the 60’s and 70’s, Thatcherism era and In-yer-face drama

Over the late of the 1960s, a new way to do theatre was arising, an alternative drama, and it offered a new perspective against the great commercial productions. The alternative styles in the new plays focused on recurrent themes not so well represented on commercial productions. Christopher (1999, p. 67) is very clear when he states that “new plays were frequently concerned with current issues and problems such as racial oppression and women’s liberation”. It did not have any barriers to deal with gender, sexuality and identity issues.

Women’s theatre was one of the most influential groups, around the 70’s many groups arose and “they were often concerned with making audiences aware of the harsh realities of many women’s everyday lives” (p. 68) and interestingly they made the way to different voices and identities, as the gay theatre movement. The academic Alan Sinfield, interviewed by Enric Monforte, states that “feminist drama in the 1970s was very formative for gay and lesbian theatre” (ARAGAY *et al.*, 2007, p. 187), which increased with the use of newspapers to recruit actors and theatre staff, helping the movement to create sufficient confidence and obtaining success in producing a play “with an openly homosexual theme” (CHRISTOPHER, 1999, p. 68).

Around the 1980s a new government arrives in Britain with different ideologies and social politics. This conservative government moment, known as *Thatcherism era*, cut a huge part of investments in arts than any other administration. Christopher (p. 70) points out the interesting fact in his book that “in 1982 the Secretary General of the Arts Council asked why artists should ‘expect public money to advocate the overthrow, not of the particular party in power, but of the whole system of parliamentary democracy’”, as a result, the political drama became more moderated and by the loss of financial support many theatre groups disappeared. Thereafter, the government exposed the theatre to the market and the critical drama subsidized by it appeared to be in its final years.

The feminist movement was particularly touched by the new government in Britain, losing its force and suppressing the women, “British feminism was weakened by the 1980s’ Thatcherite juggernaut” (CASTELLS, 2010, p. 248). Yet, a new generation emerged and soon the feminism resurged in the 1990s, not just as a cultural, but with multiple expressions. In addition, Castells (p. 243) clarifies that “after a decline in the early 1980s, largely motivated by the neo-conservative assault prompted by Thatcherism, feminist ideas, and the cause of women, permeated throughout society”. As a period of huge political changes in Britain, the Thatcherism caused in the youth of the early 90’s a necessity to produce a different new writing, a writing of resistance.

When asked by Aragay and Zozaya to comment about the renaissance in the new writing for the stage in the early 1990s, the critic Michael Billington is direct and clear in saying that:

One of the reasons was a clear reaction against the moral values of the 1980s. The writers who emerged in the 1990s had grown up in England in the period of Thatcherism, materialism, and the belief that profit was the ultimate test of anything’s worth. So we have a whole generation who were brought up in that philosophy, and who

mightily repudiated it when they came into their twenties and started writing about it. (ARAGAY *et al.*, 2007, p. 107)

Billington continues saying that despite the writers be very different, “they all share a dislike of the 1980s materialism” (p. 10), which made them walk in the same directions in writing issues. The same asked Billington was asked to the academic Dan Rebellato, who adopted a more uncertain position in his answer: “I’m not quite sure. It’s been argued that the new generation of playwrights were ‘Thatcher’s children’, that they were reacting against the context in which they were brought up.” (p. 163), he also said that the reactions against Thatcher began throughout the 1980s and that is why he does not believe this explanation is satisfactory, since the new generation of writers emerged in the beginning of the 90’s, so there is a disparity in it.

Inside the play *Beautiful Thing*, we find a reference to Thatcher in Tony’s speech, through the act one, scene two, when he and Jamie are talking on crying and sensibility:

Fragment 01

TONY. Good. You’re sensitive. [...] I’m sensitive. Sometimes I just cry. Kind of. Cry. You ever done that?

JAMIE. Yeah.

TONY. Yeah, it’s called release. Famous people cry. Gazza.

JAMIE. Anne Diamond.

TONY. Thatcher. (*Spits on floor*)

JAMIE. Princess Di. (HARVEY, 1999, p. 20) (bold emphasis added)

The stage direction in italics and parentheses in Tony’s line says he must spit on the floor, and it is not present in the mention of the other personalities, what could represent the contempt to the Thatcher figure.

The early 1990s playwrights began to produce a new moment in theatre, a moment denominated by Sierz (2001) as *in-yer-face sensibility*, the high period of a theatre which questioned the predetermined, that is, the moral codes of the society, giving opportunities to new possibilities, searching for new forms through the experimentation and strongly breaking the barriers and taboos from the past and with any artistic and ideological repression. The Thatcherism has a big influence in the emergence of this new style of drama. The academic Graham Saunders, when interviewed by Hildergard Klein, comments that “the effects of Thatcherism played a dominant role in producing the rash of ‘in-yer-face’ plays is absolutely true” (ARAGAY *et al.*, 2007, p. 174), hence the post-Thatcher period brought up the rise of in-yer-face drama, which in the mid-1990s had a strong moment.

The in-yer-face theatre is known by its experimentation and aggressive form: violent and brutal, marked by a huge and obscene sexuality, making the extreme of human degradation explicit (GARCÍA, 2008 apud GARCÍA; SANTOS, 2010, p. 106), but it all with one purpose, as presented by Sierz:

Any drama that takes the audience by the scruff of the neck and shakes it until it gets the message. It is a theatre of sensation: it jolts both actors and spectators out of conventional responses, touching nerves and provoking alarm. Often such drama employs shock tactics, or is shocking because it is new in tone or structure, or because it is bold and more experimental than what audiences are used to. Questioning moral norms, it affronts the ruling ideas of what can or should be shown on stage; it also taps into more primitive feelings, smashing taboos, mentioning the forbidden, creating discomfort. (SIERZ, 2001, p. 04)

In-yer-face is a drama which deconstruct the moral codes of society, taboos, behavioral patterns and so on, leading with themes as homosexuality, rape, drugs, sodomy, cannibalism, physical, moral and psychological violence, among others, with the real intention to shock the audience through the themes,

as the name says, which are in “society’s face” or more colloquially “right under everybody’s nose”, but until there ignored.

In a first moment, in-yer-face was judged by the points above. Although, Sierz, now here interviewed by Aragay and Zozaya (2007, p. 143-144), characterized it as a *sensibility* and not as a style used by the writers or a movement, though clarifying that “unlike the type of theatre that allows us to sit back and contemplate what we see in detachment, the best in-yer-face theatre takes us on an emotional journey, getting under our skin. [...] It is experiential, not speculative” (SIERZ, 2001, p. 04). Thus, this *sensibility* means that to be understood it needs to be felt, that is, the spectators must see more than what they are watching there, the metaphors, the implicit, and not just enjoy it as a commercial play, what makes it difficult to be understood and perhaps that is why it was enjoyable only for a selected group of people in the beginning and not for everyone, receiving many criticism and not being accepted.

2.2. Feel-good play

Despite in the 1990s the in-yer-face has succumbed, not all the 90’s productions were in-yer-face drama. *Beautiful Thing*, for example, was not, once its style does not fit very well into this *sensibility* (SIERZ, 2003, p. 55; ARAGAY, 2007, p.144) and it is confirmed by Rebellato when he was asked to comment on the politics of the representation of homosexuality in the 1990s drama by Aragay and Zozaya, pointing out that Jonathan Harvey “writes feel-good plays. You go in, you see an adorable comedy, and come out feeling warm. Which is fine; and he’s very good at that” (ARAGAY *et al.*, 2007, p. 162), and contrasting Harvey with another author, Kevin Elyot, who tended to be a little bit darker. The critic Nicholas Jongh reinforces the soft aspect of Harvey’s plays, clarifying that they “enjoys far more shock appeal” (p. 127), what is not a characteristic from the in-yer-face. Although, it was strongly important by bringing the

surface new young and unknown playwrights after Sarah Kane’s works, the pioneering of that kind of theatre, and one of them was Harvey (GARCÍA; SANTOS, 2010, p. 105). Consequently, Beautiful Thing had gained space and visibility from the in-yer-face theatre apogee.

Arguing that does not matter if the play is in-yer-face or not and what really matters is how good the play is, Sierz (2003, p. 56) points out that in-yer-face is a definition useful only to help in understanding the relationship between the play and its spectators. Thus, he presents some questions which help the spectator and researchers to analyze the play in its aspects, plot and emotions transmitted:

What did the audience think and feel? How did the play contribute to the wider culture? Did it uphold conventional morality, support complacency and encourage despair — or did it challenge conventional ideas, provoke its viewers and oppose mainstream politics? Crucially, what does the play say — and is what it says right or wrong? (p. 56).

It is notable the areas analyzed, as cultural contributions, morality, ideology, politics, thoughts, and feelings provoked in the audience, these last are especially the main ones in Beautiful Thing. As discussed before on Rebellato’s answer in politics of representation, Harvey’s plays allow the spectator to have good feelings and assumptions on the play. Consequently, as one of the major works written by the author, Beautiful Thing, besides being defined as a *feel-good*, can also be defined as a *representative* play, regardless of it being a comedy, as pointed out by Rebellato “a playwright like Jonathan Harvey writes plays which are very much about acceptance, about the view that homosexuals are just like everyone else” (ARAGAY *et al.*, 2007, p. 163), thereby, its plot helps the audience to reflect on who are the homosexual individuals and on their acceptance in society.

Hence, to reinforce this character of representativeness of the play and observe how it is reproduced in the text, we will analyze the discourse of the characters and how they construct their identity through it from the Critical Discourse Analysis, trying to describe how the social individuals are reflected in the characters.

3. DISCOURSE AND IDENTITY STUDIES

The language studies are very extensive. Since Saussure's studies, considered the initial point of a scientific study, there is a huge progress until contemporary ages, which focus on new elements, as the social aspects, realities, identities and so on. According to Wodak (2001, p. 10 apud WODAK, 2013, p. xix), "language is seen as crucial in constructing and sustaining ideologies, which, in turn, are seen as important in establishing and maintaining social identities and inequalities", hence, the discourse analysis helps in the progress of those new elements, mainly underneath the perspective of critical analysis.

3.1 Critical analysis

One of the main researchers in discourse analysis, Norman Fairclough, wrote and theorized a kind of critical analysis which involves social aspects and language, that is, social practice and discursive practice. It is known as Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). Wodak and Meyer (2001, p. 02) discuss that "the term CDA is used nowadays to refer more specifically to the critical linguistic approach of scholars who find the larger discursive unit of text to be the basic unit of communication"; moreover, it is also extended used in social science as a "type of discourse analytical research that primarily studies the way social power abuse, dominance, and inequality are enacted, reproduced, and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context" (VAN DIJK, 2001, p. 352), in other words, it investigates critically these aspects in the quote, demonstrating

how it is expressed and legitimized by the language. Habermas (1977, p. 259 apud WODAK; MEYER, 2001, p. 02) argued about this aspect of legitimations of power into the language, putting that language is a way of domination and force; so, it is ideological.

Ideologies are understood in critical view as “representations of aspects of the world which can be shown to contribute to establishing, maintaining and changing social relations of power, domination and exploitation” (FAIRCLOUGH, 2003 p. 09), but the author still argued that this concept goes against some different views, which consider ideologies as positions, beliefs, perspectives and so on, of social groups, but without necessarily involved into relations of power and dominance. However, he also suggests that “textual analysis needs to be framed in this respect in social analysis which can consider bodies of texts in terms of their effects on power relations”, in other words, the critical view of ideology is necessary to critical analysis and if ideologies are representations as it was said before, they are ratified in ways of acting socially and installed in the identities of social agents.

The focus of this research is to analyze how characters’ identities are constructed along the text, analyzing their discourses from the CDA to strength the representative aspect of the play – presenting the linguistic instruments through the text, which carry social values and demonstrate a real perception over another, and cause power relation. Fairclough (1992) opens the concept of text to consider language as a constitutive element of social identities and these “different social identities (different *whos*) may seriously conflict with one another” (GEE, 1999, p. 16), causing what van Dijk and Wodak discussed in the quotes above about power abuse, dominance, and inequality.

Those *whos* are among the text in their way of expression. Fairclough (1992, p. 45) assumes that “person's social identity will affect how they use language. [...] The identity (social provenance, gender, class, attitudes, beliefs,

and so forth) of a speaker is 'expressed' in the linguistic forms and meanings she chooses"; so, they shape their discourses according to their social identities and it is possible to analyze them within CDA. Hall (2013, p. 31) comments about it, but he interestingly uses the word "histories" in reference of identities. He also says that our histories came from the membership in social groups and our linguistic activities label our various social identities.

Hence, it is relevant to understand the way these linguistic instruments or resources in the characters' discourse work in the text to construct realities and social identities, which are closely related to social groups and ideologies, and also how the characters co-construct their identities into their relations. As well as it is interesting to point out that the individuals constitute themselves into the text through a process of changes and modifications in their social identity, as it is mutually co-constructed (GEE 1999, p. 120).

3.2. Social identities

Among identities studies, there are large discussions trying to define the concept of identity and its segments. It is assumed that identity is a very complex concept and it has been studied continuously in social science. Thus, there is not a certain concept which can be adopted as an incontestable truth. Identity is a concept which has its multiplicity and cannot be seen as static, it is constructed and deconstructed as the individual modifies and combines several kinds of identities according to what he or she is living, the whole context and needs (DUSZAK, 2002 apud VERSLUYS, 2007, p. 91). Buckingham (2008, p. 01), exemplifies it perfectly by illustrating the concept:

I am the product of my unique personal biography. Yet who I am (or who I think I am) varies according to who I am with, the social situations in which I find myself, and the motivations I may have at the time, **although I am by no means entirely free to choose how I am defined** (bold emphasis added).

Discussing this non-static aspect of identity, Kehily (2009, p. 02) clarifies that “the inter-relationship between past, present and future in the on-going work of developing an identity suggests that who we are, what we do and what we become changes over the life course”, so the identity is always changing and through life this construction is continuous and depends of many factories.

In Buckingham quote, it is possible to see that he says he is free to construct his own identities according to the variants cited. Indeed, the identity can be developed by the individual; however, he also says, in the bold emphasis, that he is not entirely free to choose how he is defined. That is, identities need to be legitimized by the others (BUCKINGHAM, 2008, p. 03) and, of course, it also needs to be internalized by the individual in order to construct meaning on it (CASTELLS, 2010, p. 07). Thus, it depends on the individual construction and conception, but it requests the others legitimization too. We can go further in this *constructing meaning* and considerate what Hall (1997, p. 03) defends, “meaning is what gives us a sense of our own identity, of who we are and with whom we 'belong'”, adding at it, language has a strong influence here, once it is the main repository of meanings and cultural values.

Through the discussion proposed by Versluys, it is found definitions of identity as the usual word for the sense people have of who they are – a personal identity; furthermore, there is also a strong focus on *social identity*, a conception someone has of him/herself as part of a social group. In other words, it is a type of *collective identity* reinforced through the elements of membership as affective and emotional factors, or the linguistic construction, by the Kroskrity's definition (DJITÉ, 2006; DUSZAK, 2012; KROSKRITY, 1999 apud VERSLUYS, 2007, p. 89, 90). Furthermore, Buckingham (2008, p. 01) adds that

Identity also implies a relationship with a broader collective or social group of some kind. When we talk about national identity, cultural identity, or gender identity, for example, we imply that our identity is partly a matter of what we share with other people.

This sense of *belonging* and *self-definition* among identity studies is reinforced when Castells (2010, p. 64) writes that “people resist the process of individualization and social atomization, and tend to cluster in community organizations that, over time, generate a feeling of belonging”; hence, identity can be understood as the sense of belonging and this sense becomes consistent when identity is seen as a product of an individualization process and self-definition of belonging to certain groups (VERSLUYS, 2007). Thereby, we will analyze which social groups are represented in the play.

4. CHARACTERS, IDENTITIES AND REPRESENTATIVENESS

The work here analyzed, despite being defined as a feel-good play, was very daring work and caused many disturbance and revolt for its plot, as Jongh in his interview tries to make us imagine: “how would middle-aged or premiddle-aged parents react to a scenario that made a drama of what might be a parental nightmare. You see two teenage youths falling in love and lust. Nothing is shirked” (ARAGAY *et al.*, 2007, p. 126). It was a very uncommon theme, it was really innovative, and touched the public by how they had overcome all the difficulties of falling in love. Jongh continues:

Traditional audiences were enraptured by these two teenagers managing to surmount the internal and external difficulties of falling in love. *Beautiful Thing* was revolutionary. It did away with a theatrical tradition in which gay men were usually depicted as middle-class, arty, adult, well-dressed and neurotic. It did away with the traditional old assumption that homosexuality starts in the aristocracy, creeps down to the middle classes and only infects and affects the working classes when they are corrupted. (p. 127).

After all, there was still a deconstruction of the gay men figure in the theatre, opening possibilities to different identifications from the audience with the play. The figure of gay man here is very different from that classic stereotype, as the Jongh's quote above discusses, what is responsible for the innovative feature in the play.

4.1 Jamie and Ste

The main characters in the play are youths. Two teenagers falling in love and experimenting their sexuality. Buckingham (2008, p. 04) states that young people are influenced by the adults, so they “become” and not “be”, that is, they are reflections of what adults are. Although, it is not entirely truth, the characters are not just *becoming*, but in a process of *being*, confronting what they found inside themselves. Jamie and Ste together discovered the love and the difficulties they will confront as homosexuals, some of these difficulties inside themselves, as the fear of the words *queer* or *gay* in the act two, scene one:

Fragment 02

JAMIE. Scared o'being called queer?

STE. *(pause)* Are you?

JAMIE. *(pause)* Dunno. Maybe. Maybe not.

STE. And are you?

JAMIE. Queer?

STE. Gay.

JAMIE. I'm very happy. *(Pause)* I'm very happy when I'm with you [...] (HARVEY, 1999, p. 40-41).

They are living a kind of identity crisis, questioning their identities and constructing the new ones. Buckingham (2008, p. 02) argues that this crisis is necessary to the individual evolution, “in order to move on, adolescents must

undergo a “crisis” in which they address key questions about their values and ideals, their future occupation or career, and their sexual identity”.

The word “queer” was used in many cases as a pejorative word, that is, used to depreciate, to insult, what might cause a fear of being called by it or even *gay*. The Cambridge Dictionary (2017) defines the word “queer” as “adjective often offensive (especially of a man): *gay*”. Jamie suffers homophobic bullying at school and probably the term *queer* is one of those terms used to offend him, as it happens with many LGBTQ+¹⁰⁰ people in school age period.

In the fragment 02, he first uses the word to ask Ste if he is scared of being identified as queer and Ste does not answer, just turning the question to Jamie. Then, Ste asks Jamie if he identifies himself as *queer* or *gay*, in this sense as someone who feels attraction for people of the same sex, “sexually attracted to people of the same sex and not to people of the opposite sex” (GAY, 2017), but Jamie answers that he is very happy when he is with Ste, assuming identification with other definition of the adjective *gay*, “old-fashioned: happy” (GAY, 2017).

Given the analysis above, it is notable how the character transits through the word’s meanings and does not assume one clear identity; they avoided to identify themselves as *queer* or *gay*. In a scene before, after their first kiss, Ste questions if Jamie defines him as queer:

Fragment 03

JAMIE. Mm. Night. (*Leans over and kisses Ste once on the lips.*)

STE. D’you think I’m queer?

JAMIE. Don’t matter what I think. [...] Can I touch you?

STE. I’m a bit sore. (HARVEY, 1999, p. 38).

¹⁰⁰ Term that refers to community of Lesbian, Gays, Bisexuals, Transgender, Transsexuals, Two-inspired, Queer, Questioning, Intersex, Asexual, Alley, Pansexual, Agender, Gender Queer, Bigender, Gender variant and Pangender.

Jamie also avoided defining Ste as queer, perhaps, for all the load of meanings. Jamie represents the teenagers confronting realities, searching for answers and afraid of other people prejudice. In fragment 08, we are going to see this fear of prejudice when they go to a place they can feel “safe”, a place labeled as a “gay pub”.

In the act two, scene four, it is clarified that Jamie was suffering bullying at school:

Fragment 04

SANDRA. I had a phone call tonight.

JAMIE. Oh, you're Lucky.

SANDRA. From your tutor.

JAMIE. Miss Ellis?

SANDRA. She's worried about ya.

JAMIE. God, coz I bunk off games does it mean I'm gay?

SANDRA. No. Coz someone hit you.

JAMIE. Everyone gets hit.

SANDRA. And called you queer. And it aint the first time. She's worried about what it's doing to ya.

JAMIE. I'm all right. (HARVEY, 1999, p. 53).

Once again the word *queer* is present. It can be considered a barrier to him, and it explains why he did not accept the term as part of his new identity in his first moments of experimentation with the other boy, and also refused to define him, Ste, as queer when he was questioned.

Yet, not just Jamie but also Ste has his problems and barriers. During a discussion with Leah, in the act two, scene one, she confronted him with the facts considered secrets by the boys, which makes him angry:

Fragment 05

STE. I don't like hitting girls.

LEAH. Hit me then, go on, hit me, you stupid queer. [...] He already knows! You know what these flats are like, walls are paper thin. Why d'you think he's twatting the face offa you, eh? He knows!

STE. There's nothing to know!

LEAH. Top to tail?

JAMIE. You know fuck all. (HARVEY, 1999, p. 46).

Ste has a confront position against Leah. Actually, we see a power relation here, once he tried to shut her up, threatening to hit her, but she went against him, using the word *stupid* followed by *queer*, it demonstrates what Gee (1999, p. 16) said about different *whos* and how they can conflict with each other. Thus, she talked about how they tried to demote her and how they identify her as less than them:

Fragment 06

LEAH. [...] You think I'm such a loser, don't ya? You think you can say what you like to me coz at the end of the day I'll still be at the bottom of the slagheap. Just coz I was kicked outa school. Just coz ... you think it's all just gonna wash over me! (HARVEY, 1999, p. 46).

Following the scene, Ste has a discussion with Jamie, where he explodes about Jamie's invitation to spend a time together, showing extremely anger:

Fragment 07

STE. Come round tonight?! Come round tonight?! How the fuck can I come round tonight?!

JAMIE. I thought you wanted to go the park?

STE. Oh, and play *Cagney and Lacey*¹⁰¹? (HARVEY, 1999, p. 47).

¹⁰¹ American television series about two police detective women.

Jamie had invited Ste to “come round” in the beginning of the scene, thus Ste returned to this talk demonstrating extremely anger. It represents a part of gay life called “acceptance”. The first barrier they need to overcome is acceptance of themselves. Ste figure demonstrate that kind of youth who does not fit exactly in the “stereotype” of gay, he enjoys sports and he is more athletic than Jamie, he also lives a strong oppression by his father and brother at home.

Indeed, in act two, scene three, they seem to have overcome the problems. Ste went find Jamie in his bedroom and apologize for what had happened between them. They talk about a place to be together far away from their parents, so they decide to go to a pub they found in a gay magazine:

Fragment 08

STE. (*Reads.*) The Gloucester Pub. King William Walk. Opposite Greenwich Park Gates.

JAMIE. One-eighty bus’ll take us right to it.

STE. So?

JAMIE. So d’you fancy it?

STE. I dunno. Someone might see us.

JAMIE. We’ll go in disguise. Wear sunglasses. (HARVEY, 1999, p. 52).

Regardless of the desire to be with Jamie, there is still a fear of being identified as gay as Ste demonstrates when he says that someone might see them, in a “gay place”, as Sandra classifies it in the next scene, a place attended by just one type of public, “SANDRA. That’s where gay people go. [...] Coz it’s got a bloody great big pink neon arse outside of it.” (HARVEY, 1999, p. 53-54), thus they internalized an identity, but it was not recognized by the others yet. They assumed who they are, but just between them. Thus, the act of go to a place where they can find people who do not judge them, people like them, and the fear to be seen, show us they tried to hide this identity. In the same talk in

Jamie's bedroom, we can point out the fact that they use the word *queer* again to refer to one another in a kind of joking well accepted,

Fragment 09

JAMIE. I've never had a hat for a present before. It's a nice hat. You gave it to me. And now, I'm gonna give you somin' to say thank you that you'll never forget.

STE. Jay?!

JAMIE. On your back!!

STE. (*lying back*) What you doin', Jamie?

JAMIE. Close your eyes. (*[...] Writes*) Dear Miss Ellis. Sorry Steven wasn't in school today, only he was feeling a little queer. Lots o'love, Ste's Dad! (*They collapse laughing. [...]*) (HARVEY, 1999, p. 52)

They play with the other definitions of the word, as these from Cambridge Dictionary (2017), "old-fashioned: strange, unusual, or not expected" and "a gay person, especially a man", and the act of *laughing* means that they overcame the fear of the pejorative sense, achieving their self-acceptance, demonstrating the non-static aspect of identity, which modified according to the context they are living. But then, it is confronted by Sandra in the next scene, the same he talked on the gay pub. She continued asking Jamie to talk with her:

Fragment 10

SANDRA. Please, Jamie. Talk to me.

JAMIE. What about?

SANDRA. (*Sitting on bed*) I'm your mother. (*Pause*)

JAMIE. Some things are hard to say.

SANDRA. I know. I know that, Jamie ...

JAMIE. (*Crying now*) I'm not weird if that's what you're thinking.

SANDRA. I know you're not love. (HARVEY, 1999, p. 54)

He said some things were hard to say, as it is hard to expose his identity and not be legitimized, or better saying, accepted by the others. It is hard to Jamie to expose who he is, the fear of the non-acceptance of his mother was strong, but it is one more barrier he needs to overcome, the family understanding. It is not new that one of the most terrifying moment for LGBTQ+ people – and, actually, to parents too – is when they need to assume their real identities to their families. Jamie anticipates what his mother could understand by it, saying he is a normal person, that he is no *weird*, which is defined as “very strange and unusual, unexpected, or not natural” (WEIRD, 2017), very similar to one of the definitions of the word *queer* quoted above.

4.2. Sandra and Tony

The first point of representativeness in the play is the fact that the main family is not patriarchal. Actually, in the contemporary age it is possible to observe the increase number of single-parent families, most of them constituted by single mothers and their children. Sandra is a single mother and lives with her only son Jamie.

Through the play there is no reference to Jamie’s father, but to other men who passed by Sandra’s life, in act one, scene two,

Fragment 11

JAMIE. You aint the first. She’s not a slag or nothin’, but you aint the first.

TONY. I’m the fourth, right? (*Chuckles, annoyed at Jamie’s choice of word.*) Slag?!” (HARVEY, 1999, p. 19).

Jamie used the word *slag*, which means “UK slang offensive: an insulting word for a woman who has had a lot of sexual partners” (SLAG, 2017), demonstrating he does not identify his mother as a *slag*, despite her partners historical, the adjective chosen caused estrangement in Tony. It is

important to remember the women in patriarchal societies were and still are judged by how they behave into their relations with men, treated often with depreciative terms and single mothers are not favorably viewed by conservative people. We can cite as an example a studied realized by Wolfram and Schilling-Estes (1998, p. 2010) on gender and language variation, they mentioned the research made by Julia P. Stanley (1997), saying that she “found only 20 items describing promiscuous men (e.g. *animal*, *letch*), some of which even carried some positive connotations” and that she “stopped counting when she reached 220 labels for promiscuous women”. There is another moment where Tony referred to those words used to describe women,

Fragment 12

TONY. Who?

LEAH. Your bird.

TONY. Sandra?

LEAH. She talks to me like I got cunt written on my forehead.

TONY. You shouldn't use words like bird. (HARVEY, 1999, p. 27).

Bird means “UK slang: a young woman” (BIRD, 2017), often used in pejorative contexts, that is why Tony advises Leah to do not use these kinds of word, and, as an advise it is understandable that he does not do it and we point again what said Fairclough (1992, p. 45), that the social identity of someone will affect the way the person uses the language.

Tony presents a behavior of a man in “deconstruction” of the moral codes and taboos of society. The involvement of a young man with an elder woman is one example, there is here the moment that Tony clarifies he is younger than Sandra and older than Jamie, although not old enough to be his father,

Fragment 13

JAMIE. She's thirty-five!

TONY. What's age? Age is just ... just a number. You know? (*pause.*)

[...]

TONY. [...] Jamie, how old are you?

JAMIE. Fifteen. How old are you?

TONY. Twenty-seven. Not old enough to be your dad, right?
(HARVEY, 1999, p. 19).

There are other examples in the play, as of how Tony reproduces feminist discourse when Leah was trying to demote Sandra, saying she has a bad famous for her historical of partners. So Tony interferes using a feminist proverb,

Fragment 14

LEAH. (*To Tony*) What did I tell you?

TONY. (*To Leah*) Hey, remember feminism, yeah? Sisters together, sisters strong!

LEAH. My sisters lives in Crayford. I aint seen her in six months.
(HARVEY, 1999, p. 28).

Sandra and Tony live a power relation inverse to patriarchal molds, that is, Tony is in a position under Sandra, not the man over the woman, and remembering van Dijk (2001, p. 352), who says that the power dominance is reproduced and legitimized by the discourse, we can observe it clearly in the quote:

Fragment 15

SANDRA. Mm, well, I got too many things to sort out in there.

(*Indicates the flat.*) You go if you want.

TONY. (*Looking over her shoulder at chart*) Sharon can do Thursday lunch. Stick Warren up there, gives you the night off.

SANDRA. Tony ...

TONY. You need a window in your diary.

SANDRA. Listen, I'm not seventeen and doing a Friday night at the Bargepole for pin money anymore. This is my living, and I'm bloody good at it.

TONY. Sure. You're right. I'll do some Hoovering. Or whatever. (HARVEY, 1999, p. 48)

She assumed a position over him and he seemed to accept it without problems. She made a reference to age, what possibly can be seen as a parallel to their difference of age. There is another interesting moment we can see this, it is right after Jamie had assumed his sexuality and she went to the walkway to be alone, Tony went after her and tried to make her understand that all that happened was not a big deal, although she refused to accept that, and he says that she is fighting against it,

Fragment 16

TONY. It's okay, I know. It's natural. (*Pause.*) You like tomatoes. I like beetroot.

SANDRA. Shut up.

[...]

TONY: You're fighting it, hon.

SANDRA. Fighting? I've been fighting all me life. Kids pickin' on 'im – I was there. Council saying bollocks to benefit, I was there. When I had three pee in me purse and an empty fridge I went robbin' for that boy. **And you talk to me about fighting? You! What have you ever had to fight for in your life?!**

TONY. Come here. (HARVEY, 1999, p. 56) (bold emphasis added).

Tony's statement was about something which was happening in that determinate moment, then Sandra got the word *fighting*, giving emphasis to her fight by repeating the word four times, and making use of it in another verbal tense, arguing that the fight was and still is continuous in her life. She illustrated it by pointing out some facts in life with Jamie and how she made everything for

him. Lastly, she confronted Tony, as in the bold emphasis, turning to him and questioning for his fights in life, and there is no answer. We face what Buckingham (2008, p. 03) and Castells (2010, p. 07) discussed about how the identity needs to be legitimized by the others and internalized by the individual in order to constructing meaning. Tony legitimized her identity with his silence and Sandra assumed a position of women's fight in society among all the men privileges.

We perceive the feminist identity reflecting in Sandra's figure, as the independent women who live in society fighting against all the prejudice, inequalities and the lack of opportunities; the single mothers, the free women, who fight for a better and decent life. As well as the gay men figure within the young, warm and adorable gay couple, presenting real, simple and normal experiences unlike any ever seen before. The characters are representing the real, the minorities which lived among us for many and many years without visibility and respect, without space and representation.

5. CONCLUSION

In this study we did a drama overview in Britain from the 1960s to the 1990s, discussing how the political context affected the thoughts and motivations to do theatre, responsible for great innovations and for bringing to the surface new identities. Our main aim was to analyze the play *Beautiful Thing* written by Jonathan Harvey, through the Critical Discourse Analysis, trying to demonstrate why it is representative, analyzing how the identities were constructed in the text. For that, we did a theoretical discussion about CDA and identities conception.

During our research, we found that there are some few academic works on this play and it was frequently mentioned only as a complement to another research, not as the main study object. Thus, it was necessary to produce a study

that could analyze it and what kind of transformation the contemporary drama was suffering and how it brought new voices. Harvey did it and through the analysis, we tried to demonstrate it.

There is a deconstruction of the stereotype gay man figure, presenting two teenage boys, Jamie and Ste, subtly discovering themselves through sensitive experiences in a working-class housing project in London, and fighting against the prejudices and barriers. It also presented the single mother figure, Sandra, the free woman who fights every day in society and the deconstructed man figure, Tony, who maintains attitudes of female empowerment in his discourse.

Hence, we are able to say that it is a representative play because we have situations and characters that are performing minorities. They are so common, simple and real, but not personified before in theatre or literary works and it reminds us that, regardless of Beautiful Thing did not fit exactly in the in-er-face drama, it follows the main feature of this way to do theatre: present the reality that people pretend to do not see. That is why it caused a disturbance for its plot, because it treated the reality without shirking.

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Recebido em 06/03/2018.

Aceito em 04/09/2018