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The Dystopian World of Lanford Wilson's Angles Fall: A Foucualdian Reading

Basaad Maher Mhayyal[1] , **Sana Lazim Hasan**[2]

Department of Biology, College of Science for Women, University of Baghdad, Iraq[1]
Department of English, College of Education for Women, University of Baghdad, Iraq[2]

basaadmm@csw.uobaghdad.edu.iq[1]
sanalazim@coart.uobaghdad.edu.iq[2]

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Abstract

This paper examines Lanford Wilson's *Angels Fall* as a dystopian society that highlights the marginalized status of indigenous people, specifically Native Americans living near nuclear mines. The authorities demonstrate a disregard for their lives and health due to a perceived sense of superiority over these Native individuals. Wilson aims to depict a political, technological, and ecological dystopia that anticipates a future where the impending threat of a nuclear catastrophe looms over humanity. The study examines *Angels Fall* through the lens of Foucauldian notions such as heterotopia, power vs. resistance, and madness, as reflected by Lanford Wilson. In this play, the power struggle is depicted by Wilson, especially through the characters of Father Doherty and Don Tabah to support Foucault's theory that emphasizes the fact that where there is power, there will be resistance of some kind, which is investigated through this research.

Keywords: Angels Fall, Dystopian World, Heterotopia, Power vs. Resistance, Hold-up play, Nuclear Age

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العالم البائس لمسرحية "سقوط الملائكة" للانفورد ويلسون: قراءة من وجهة نظر ميشيل فوكو

بسعاد ماهر محيل[١] ، سناء لازم حسن[٢]

قسم علوم الحياة، كلية العلوم للبنات، جامعة بغداد، العراق [١]
قسم اللغة الإنكليزية، كلية التربية للبنات، جامعة بغداد، العراق[٢]

[١]basaadmm@csw.uobaghdad.edu.iq
[٢]sanalazim@coart.uobaghdad.edu.iq

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المستخلص :

تبحث هذه الدراسة في مسرحية لانفورد ويلسون "سقوط الملائكة" وتصورها كمجتمع بائس، فيه يسلط ويلسون الضوء على الوضع المهمش للسكان الأصليين، وخاصة الأمريكيين الأصليين الذين يعيشون بالقرب من المناجم النووية. تُظهر السلطات تجاهلًا لحياتهم وصحتهم بسبب شعورهم بالفوقية على هؤلاء الأفراد الأصليين. يهدف ويلسون إلى تصوير الواقع المرير السياسي والتكنولوجي والبيئي الذي يتوقع مستقبلًا حيث يلوح التهديد الوشيك بكارثة نووية على البشرية. تبحث الدراسة في مسرحية "سقوط الملائكة" من خلال تسليط الضوء على بعض من مفاهيم ميشيل فوكو مثل اليوتوبيا المغايرة، والقوة مقابل المقاومة، والجنون، كما يعكسها لانفورد ويلسون. في هذه المسرحية يصور ويلسون الصراع على السلطة، خاصة من خلال شخصيتي الأب دوهرتي ودون تاباها، لدعم نظرية فوكو التي تؤكد أنه حيثما توجد القوة، ستكون هناك مقاومة من نوع ما، وهو ما يتم التحقيق فيه من خلال هذا البحث.

الكلمات المفتاحية: سقوط الملائكة، العالم البائس، اليوتوبيا المغايرة، القوة مقابل المقاومة، مسرحية التعطيل، العصر النووي

1- Introduction

1. Angels Fall as a Political Dystopia

Lanford Wilson's *Angels Fall* takes place in the 1980s when the Soviet Union and the United States rapidly accumulated nuclear weapons. Like his fellow theatrical peers, Wilson found inspiration in the historical and social circumstances that turned America into a global powerhouse following the Second World War. The social anxiety and occasional fear around the possibility of nuclear destruction originated from the rush to build and sustain a stockpile of nuclear weapons that was prepared for immediate use, notwithstanding the economic prosperity of the post-war period that fueled optimism in the majority of the 1950s. Matthew Roudane, in *Drama Since 1960: A Critical History*, states, "Some of our dramatists lived through many of these historical and social experiences, and their plays reflect an uneasiness with an increasingly atomized and mechanized postwar America" (Roudané, 1996, p. 10). As the military state expanded, hundreds of nuclear weapons that could strike the Soviet Union at any moment were produced. Additionally, the Cold War's conservative cultural milieu sparked the McCarthy Era, a period of anti-Communist sentiment in the 1950s marked by an effort to eradicate American Communists. For a little more than belonging to the American Communist Party, many people lost their jobs and were imprisoned. Others were wrongly charged with spying for the Soviet Union, America's arch-enemy (Roudané, 1996, pp. 11-12).

The Cold War reached its highest point during Ronald Reagan's tenure as President of the United States from 1980 to 1988. The diplomatic standoff between the United States and the Soviet Union originated during the Second World War. Nuclear missiles that can be launched at any time and are concealed throughout the nation cost billions of dollars to manufacture. Furthermore, the Reagan administration vigorously promoted funding a defensive plan called "Star Wars", which seeks to divert inbound nuclear projectiles (Adler, 1994, p. 9). All these events are reflected in *Angels Fall* since the events took place in the 1980s, which makes the play a political dystopia. Compared to many of Wilson's other plays, *Angels Fall*'s action is more overtly political, with a nuclear incident at a uranium mine compels a group of individuals to seek refuge in a Catholic mission. It can even be interpreted as a nuclear age morality tale, especially when viewed through the character of the priest, Father Doherty. The play's core experience revolves around the pervasive fear that the characters encounter, rather than the specific origin or nature of the imagined tragedy. This fear creates a dystopian atmosphere filled with tension and terror. People no longer feel safe with the existence of those recurring nuclear accidents. That is why the source of threat in this play is the risk of a nuclear war due to the

Cold War.

Wilson is addressing a well-known issue here: the catastrophe brought about by environmental degradation caused by nuclear devastation. Furthermore, the subject of American heritage being destroyed is echoed in the fatalities that follow. Although the individuals responsible remain unidentified and anonymous, the play appears to be a critique of a state policy that prioritizes the development of a nuclear program over the welfare and survival of human beings. The American government, which is responsible for the leakage and pollution resulting from uranium mining, is covertly overseeing local law enforcement. Although not physically seen, their presence is evident from outside the church. Additionally, the New Mexico State Patrol can be heard through the helicopter's loudspeakers. In this respect, *Angels Fall* might be Wilson's most overtly political dystopia, whereby people are left with feelings of unease and horror due to the leakage of uranium in the nearby nuclear mines. The Catholic mission, often serving as a spiritual retreat, has been temporarily transformed into a refuge from a chemical storm, a fabricated catastrophe that poses a threat to two residents and four guests. This compels the group to acquaint themselves with each other as they contemplate their existence and confront the prospect of an abrupt and brutal end to the planet (Barnett, 1987, p. 131).

In this play, Wilson tackles an important political issue, which is racial discrimination, whereby the Americans consider the Native people inferior and even non-human. That is the reason behind making this area, where the Native Americans live, a place for nuclear missiles. The authorities do not care about those poor people who are neglected and humiliated, unlike other American people who live on the other side of the United States. The media even portray Native Americans as 'savage' or 'uncivilized,' a matter that helped to popularize these preconceptions in American society. This is evident in the play as Doherty expresses his perspective on Tabaha when Niles inquiries about Don's father's ethnicity and whether he is Indian or not, and Doherty says, "We wonder lately if he was even human" (Wilson, 1982, p. 31).

2. Angels Fall as a Technological and an Ecological Dystopia

Since World War II, predictions of disasters have been widespread worldwide, and politics has become a mass political culture. At that time, the legend of humankind's devastation by its technology was a concern for everybody, as computers, at the beginning of the 1950s, had a significant effect on the future (Cleays, 2022, p. 59). Furthermore, ecological and nuclear disasters have put the human species in danger of extinction. That is why dystopian themes became popular in the public consciousness during

the 1950s and 1960s. The invention of the atom bombs inspired doomsday myths, and the scientists were worried about their technological accomplishments. That is why they endeavor to write serious essays to warn people against a possible nuclear war. That is what made dystopian scenarios very popular from the 1990s until now. As a result of nuclear war anxieties, dystopian narratives mirror a good directory of the growing disaster, i.e., the technocratic menace (Feenberg, 1995, pp. 41–43).

At the very beginning, nuclear-powered weapons represent "not only a great peril but a great hope", according to Oppenheimer, who is frequently referred to as the "father of the atomic bomb" (Oppenheimer qtd. in Matarazzo, 2023, p. 63). The August 1945 bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, on the other hand, destroyed Oppenheimer's utopian vision of nuclear technology; as he would later say, he "accompanied Undersecretary of State Dean Acheson to the White House and remarked that some atomic scientists felt they had blood on their hands" (Wittner, 2009, p. 30). By repeatedly speculating that "atomic bombs would 'precipitate a race in the production of these devices between the United States and Russia", Szilard was accurate. The most definitive geological evidence for the onset of the Anthropocene may be observed in the nuclear tests conducted during the competition between America and the Soviet Union to create the hydrogen bomb, which led to the global contamination of radioactive fallout. All individuals who were alive during the 1950s and early 1960s, including those residing in remote locations such as Tasmania, an island state of Australia, or Tierra del Fuego, a province in the far southern region of Argentina, "keeps a signature of the Cold War atomic weapons programs in their teeth and bones", according to McNeill and Engelke (McNeill and Engelke, 2016, p. 166). The lamentable paradox of nuclear weapons is in the increasing evidence of detrimental effects on both human beings and ecosystems, which are directly proportional to the quantity of weapons produced under the pretext of safeguarding national security.

Elizabeth DeLoughrey asserts that closely examining the small-scale effects of nuclear testing fallout played a vital role in emphasizing the importance of ecology in the period following the Second World War. The nuclear bomb and its effects on local ecosystems garnered considerable interest and became a central topic of heated political discussions. The disputes suggest that by engaging with a complex scientific field like physics, ecology has the potential to overcome its perception as a 'soft' discipline focused solely on studying butterflies. The physicists engaged in the development of the bombs, and other scientists worried about the safety of nuclear testing and the credibility of the peaceful use of atomic energy were fully cognizant of the close relationship between science and politics (DeLoughrey, 2013, p.

168). Members of the scientific community who oppose nuclear weapons raised concerns about the forthcoming for two diverse yet essentially interrelated reasons. Not only did humanity possess the ability to annihilate its ecology instantaneously, but nuclear power also played a significant role in this. Experiments conducted in the late 1940s and 1950s resulted in the dispersion of radioactive fallout throughout the earth which,

perfectly symbolized a new type of environmental danger symptomatic of the post-1945 era. It presented an invisible, deadly and artificial threat to all kinds of biota, and appeared capable of altering the fabric of life on a genetic level. Fears arose of total destruction and complete contamination (Wills, 2013, p. 51).

In the late 1940s and early 1950s, there was a global competition to create the initial thermonuclear weapons. This competition led to what DeLoughrey referred to as "nuclear colonialism", when colonial powers, particularly America, Britain, and France, conducted tests of these new weapons in areas that they had taken by force (DeLoughrey, 2013, p. 179). Like their American counterparts in the Pacific region, the British also employed colonized territory in Australia to conduct bomb testing, much like the French did in North Africa. Ecologists in this era aimed to comprehend the impacts of nuclear fallout not just on nearby plant and animal life but also on Indigenous communities that were unjustly and frequently unintentionally subjected to radioactive fallout, as is the case with Native Americans in this play. The indigenous Micronesian communities were subjected to several instances of radiation exposure during the majority of the 1950s and experienced the primary impact of this neo-colonial association. The discoveries made by ecologists in the mid-1950s significantly fueled widespread opposition to nuclear power worldwide. Donald Worster has put forth this argument (Worster, 1994, p. 340).

Nuclear testing, unfortunately, during the early 1950s, validated the concerns of early critics of the bomb. The unwavering endeavor to develop bombs with magnitudes of destruction surpassing those deployed in Hiroshima and Nagasaki had a tremendous influence on both human history and the environment. Eileen Welsome notes that the detonation of the "Bravo" bomb and the approximately 2000 subsequent nuclear tests on Earth effectively divided the world into two distinct categories: "preatomic" and "postatomic" species. The bombs generated radioactive materials dispersed in the atmosphere and deposited in water sources and soils. DeLoughrey expresses regret that although many scholars have examined the emergence of ecological thinking, only a few have investigated the strong connection between the birth of the Age of Ecology and the Atomic Age. Within this particular framework, it is expected that scholars of

dystopian literature have thoroughly examined how writings from this era, intentionally or unintentionally, convey concerns about the environment by addressing issues related to nuclear weapons and energy (DeLoughrey, 2013, p. 179).

Angels Fall is a locked-door drama that revolves around several people being detained in a mission church in New Mexico due to a nuclear accident. Wilson demonstrates how development is being made at the expense of the environment and how the effects of nuclear pollution pose a threat to Native Americans in particular. The nuclear era is depicted in this play, whereby it provides a realistic picture of both technological and environmental dystopias, with the nuclear disaster at the Chin Rock mine serving as a reminder that dangerous technologies constitute a threat to humankind. Slavoj Žižek asserts that even today, there is still a chance of nuclear war and that humanity has reached its "apocalyptic zero point" (Žižek, 2010, p. xi). Daniel Cordle states that the global nuclear war was well-established in the public's mind as a potential Cold War consequence by the start of the 1960s. Moreover, the general perception of this conflict was that of a calamity that would wipe out civilization and most likely end human existence on Earth (Cordle, 2006, p. 64). That is why William Faulkner said, "There is only one question: When will I be blown up?" during his banquet speech receiving his Nobel Prize in Literature in 1949, which is an essential reading for anybody interested in learning about the Cold War and the differences in perceptions between the general public and government officials (qtd. in Kaldor, 2012, p. 63).

In addition to works that focus on environmental issues to draw attention to them or push for change, the Eco Drama also includes works that investigate the beingness of the natural world in a way that makes us feel more connected to the world around us, more attentive, and more aware of our own ecological identities. In this play, a uranium mine disaster forces highway closures in a remote New Mexico community; the terrain imprisons outsiders. The possibility of radiation exposure gives the land a certain kind of agency, yet the lines marking human identity are suddenly porous and susceptible. As a result of shared exposure, *Angels Fall* draws attention to the effects of uranium mining on Navaho territories, including the radioactive tailings dump at Rie Puerco Community in 1979 (May, 2005, p. 95).

This play links technology to the destruction of the natural ecology and the indigenous peoples of the Southwest, many of whom are working in atomic manufacturing. References to the disaster are consistently made throughout the play, despite it not being shown on stage, to intensify the characters' feeling of imminent danger. However, of greater significance are Father

Doherty's comments, which illustrate how technology has contributed to the destruction of the natural environment and the indigenous populations of the Southwest, many of whom are employed in the nuclear industry. Referring to the regular mishaps that transpire at the different nuclear mines, apparatuses, and landfills in the place as "the Perils of Pauline" (14), Doherty laments the government's refusal to acknowledge the potential hazards linked to its policies. Wilson is reluctant to accept that technology may enhance people's quality of life, primarily through the priestly figure. Instead, Doherty obsesses over how these technologies have harmed people and ruined natural resources. Furthermore, Don Tabaha's choice to pursue genetic engineering rather than his childhood ambition of becoming a local doctor illustrates how alluring the quest for scientific knowledge can be (Hacht, 2005, pp. 6-7).

The protagonists can only be above the Chin Rock mine accident scene until the authorities have been notified. Although this news impacts each character's intended destination differently, delaying their plans allows them to interact more with people they might not have otherwise met. Thus, a group of people with different worldviews: a minister, a lecturer, a tennis player, the proprietor of an art gallery, and a researcher, are brought together. Despite the play's constant confrontation between two worldviews, there are sporadic moments of comprehension. Time can be put on hold because of the accident, which effectively cuts off the characters from the outside world, save for the phone and radio (ibid, p. 7).

In this play, Wilson intends to push the audience to live in a way that makes facing death less terrifying by alluding to the potential of an apocalyptic event due to a nuclear disaster. Father Doherty asserts this fact as he utters a quote from "Peter's Second Epistle" (3:10–11) in "the New Testament", which is a theatrical portrayal of the catastrophe in terms that powerfully propose a nuclear bang that says, ''Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness?" (95). Father Doherty encourages other characters to act kindly so that death becomes less terrifying. As a modern example, the play offers a scenario where the protagonists must deal with an environmental calamity that strongly suggests an even more dire scenario: the apocalypse resulting from a nuclear conflict. Perhaps the only thing these individuals can do is dive even further into self-awareness, but in doing so, they will stay loyal to who they are (Barnett, 1987, p. 130).

Wilson highlights his motifs of uncovering one's predetermined fate, being suspicious of technology, and going through a crisis of belief using the backdrop of a chapel in the New Mexican desert. Specifically, the church represents the desire for a haven in a world where modernity, commerce,

and militarization are dehumanizing people more and more. Thus, whereas the church offers refuge, the Chin Rock mine, its contemporary counterpart, serves as a more attractive but missing environment. The church advocates for the preservation of traditional values, while the nuclear catastrophe represents the devastation of nature. However, the desert-like location of the church makes clear how remote it is from the rest of society. The uranium mine, which, despite not ever mentioned in the play, leads to the development and maintenance of the military-industrial complex, represents the economic and political realities that the church has little influence over, even though it may influence the limited number of people it aids in the place (Adler, 1994, p. 5).

In his article, "The Artist in the Garden: Theatre Space and Place in Lanford Wilson", Thomas Adler writes that modern man has endangered the natural beauty of "an oasis ... whose inherent beauty has been threatened by contemporary man's idolization of technological progress at the expense of human values" (ibid, pp. 5, 7). Technical advancement is valued more than human values. Modern waste products surround the church in the desert, as Mark Busby in *Lanford Wilson* noted, thus illustrating a contrast between the eternal past, the natural and spiritual world, and the temporal present, industrially driven by capitalism (Busby, 1987, n.p.). The theme of the past and present at odds with one another also serves as a significant starting point for the spiritual crises Father Doherty and Niles Harris experience due to their refusal to acknowledge that truth has become relative in the modern world.

The nuclear accident that brings the characters together frames their internal struggles perfectly. Even though the accident happens some distance from the church, it is mentioned in the story and serves as a source of tension and anxiety for the individuals who do not know one another. Niles and Vita try to infer the severity of these disasters from Father Doherty's statements; despite appearing calm and nonchalant, he dismisses the episode as one of the many "minor nuclear emergencies" (73). Throughout the play, allusions to the events at the Chin Rock mine underscore the purpose behind the characters' gathering and exacerbate the inner torment that some of them are going through. For instance, two characters, young Don Tabaha, half-Navajo, and art professor Niles Harris, are deciding what to do next in their chosen fields. When Niles looked back over his life's work, he realized that "yes, of course, and exactly the opposite could be as true" (35) to every didactic, authoritative statement he had written, which caused "a crisis of faith" (34) to explode. He feels compelled to reject the task to which he has dedicated his life. Conversely, Don has to choose between becoming a doctor in his impoverished rural hometown gap and pursuing a career in

cancer research at Berkley with a renowned scientist (Piano, 2005, p. 11). Doherty thinks Don's decision to forgo medicine in favor of research is a cop-out and is furious about it. "The need here is something you can't comprehend" (101), he tells Niles late in the play, alluding to the poor quality of medical care in the area. Father Doherty sees Don's departure as a way out of a world of suffering and agony he desperately wants to forget. Don admits that "there's no time for one person in a hundred years to begin to correct a millennium of genetic neglect" (52) regarding the health issues facing the Navajo people (ibid, p. 13). Don adds that since those people "live right in the middle of the uranium mines" (52), they're experiencing different kinds of diseases like "congenital anomalies, lung cancer, tuberculosis, chromosomal aberrations, sperm morphological distortion …" (52).

On the day of the incident, a truck carrying "this yellow cake stuff" (43) sponsored up and cracked open an ampule at one of the mines some twenty miles away. Helicopters were called in to transport the workers, who were still alive, to a hospital after the wind blasted the chemicals over them. The mill refines pure uranium, which is what is known as the 'yellow cake'. Reassuringly, the radio announces that there is not much pollution and that "anybody not in the immediate area won't get sick for about twelve years" (43), as Doherty asserts (Barnett, 1987, p. 130).

It is no surprise when Father Doherty remarks about the nuclear disaster that brought the individuals together, asking how fate worked. "The only good thing that can come from these silly emergencies, these rehearsals for the end of the world, is that they make us get our act together" (94). The priest goes on, "What manner of persons ought we to be?" (94) is what this means asking ourselves. The nuclear accident is not as catastrophic as first thought; the highways are reopened, and the five travelers, fallen angels who have presumably found some redemption, are free to depart. It would be pleasant to believe that all it would take was a few therapeutic hours of coerced intimacy with strangers in the shadow of an impending disaster for them to be able to confront their uncertainties so readily (Asahina, 1983, pp. 234-5).

Wilson presents a dismal image of the dystopian West's future in *Angels Fall*, the once-promising region. The end of the world is near at hand in a remote area of New Mexico, home primarily to Native Americans, some of whom do not have access to "electricity or radios" (19), but who all live close to uranium mines. In the era of nuclear power, the authority has designated the Indian reserves as the nation's "dump", seemingly adhering to its nineteenth-century Indian policy. Father Doherty says,

They're trying to install a dump south of here. We're not going to let them

get away with that. And over west are about seven mines and mills, and east of here the Rio Puerco goes awash with some kind of waste every few months, and of course, there's the reactor at Los Alamos and the missile base down at White Sands, and all kinds of things are seeping into everyone's water (14).

In addition to working in the mines and drinking radioactive water, many Navahos and other local Indians also have one of the highest rates of congenital disabilities in the nation. Wilson portrays the American West as being on the verge of another possibly disastrous turning point with this very somber "fusion" (11) of the region's history, current state, and future. The West no longer sustains American ambitions and dreams; Father Doherty remarks that "no one finds the place unless they are lost" (11). Throughout the play, the audience knows he was "assigned" to this parish since there was nowhere else to go. Before the closure of the roadways, he was already trapped in New Mexico, just like some of the other captives who were assembled in the old adobe church. Marion Clay, the widow of a renowned local artist and the owner of the gallery, has always harbored a strong dislike for New Mexico due to her inability to comprehend its "romanticism" (45). Furthermore, Don Tabaha, a gifted Navaho physician, deceives the other Native Americans by preparing to depart the reservation for a lucrative research position at Berkeley. Professor Niles Harris, an Easterner, on the other hand, gives up academics. In addition to being the sole genuine **bystander with his spouse, he also serves as a cliché in the Western holdup drama as an estranged intellectual from the East traveling West (Erben, 1989, pp. 318–9).**

3. The Foucauldian Concepts of Heterotopia, Power vs. Resistance, and Madness in *Angels Fall*

In his introduction to the printed edition of the play, Wilson describes *Angels Fall* as a "situation play". He also declares that he intended it to be written in a private space. The experience of being imprisoned alters people, whether they want to or not. That is the reason why he referred to it as "a locked door play" (Wilson, 1998, p. 192).

As per Foucault's perspective, space holds significant importance as it constitutes the foundation of our philosophy, worldview, and interests. Foucault argues that heterotopia represents a combination of mythical and tangible resistance to our physical environment. The church in this play exemplifies a heterotopia because it is located in a closed space with an entry but no departure. The people find themselves stuck inside due to a nuclear incident occurring offstage. After entering, individuals are either compelled to remain or voluntarily decide to remain. Though they may fail for a reason

or be unwilling enough to go, some characters may attempt to leave. In his article "The Hazard and Pains Plaguing an Actor's Life", Walter Kerr classifies the play as a "snowbound play", where:

a group of strangers, constituting something of a social cross-section, is forced by natural or unnatural means to remain where it is until the weather or the gunsmoke clears, by which time some or all members of the imprisoned party will have undergone character transformations" (Qtd. in Alghamdi, 2020, p. 174).

The play's events occur in a modest northwest New Mexican adobe Catholic mission. The church is situated next to a crossroads in the country, with simple wooden benches and a bare altar as its furnishings. The only way to communicate with the outside world is via a pay phone outside the church. The events happened in a region of New Mexico that is heavily involved in nuclear-powered testing. The visible surroundings of the area create a sense of timelessness through its architecture and the religious significance of the structure. However, the broader context of the setting strongly reminds both the characters and the audience of the era of advanced technology. Father Doherty tells Professor Niles that the authorities devised a "dump site" (14) towards the south, uranium mines, and processing mills towards the west, waste disposal into the Rio Puerco River towards the east, the atomic reactor located at Los Alamos, and the missile base situated at White Sands towards the south, and "all kinds of things are seeping into everyone's water" (14).

In his preliminary drama, Wilson emphasizes the physical remoteness of the outside world in this kind of location. The remote church's environment, in this instance, nevertheless goes outside that simple notion. The protagonists are obliged or allowable to view their realities objectively; this can be achieved by removing themselves from their social environment, severing ties with partners who share their identity, or confronting their actual circumstances via the experiences of others. The serenity and prosperity they experience outside of themselves force them to confront the reality of their isolation. The setting is symbolic, which is more significant. It symbolizes the emotions of those confined in a terrifying environment in the modern world (Alghamdi, 2020, p. 174).

Father Doherty talks explicitly about the possible environmental risks surrounding his community. In addition to the apparatus at Los Alamos and the projectile station at White Sands, "west are about seven mines and mills, and east of here the Rio Puerco goes awash with some kind of waste …, and of course, there's the reactor at Los Alamos and the missile base at White Sands" (14). His rage and mistrust of the nuclear-powered sector serve as a moral compass for a country fixated on its scientific might. An underlying

theme of the play is that Americans have forgotten what is essential because it is set in the early 1980s, during Ronald Reagan's administration and a period of increased nuclear missile buildup. Therefore, the location of a church in an era when the end of the world is imminent denotes replacing traditional and spiritual values with technological gods and ideas of progress. When the helicopter announces that the route is now clear, Father Doherty conveys this by yelling at it: "The road is not clear! You're sick as cats! You've made the bomb your God and you're praying for the bomb to call in the number" (99). The play offers a somber but realistic perspective on the place of technology in American culture at a time when superpowers control the possibility that the world will end (Hacht, 2005, p. 9).

Concerning power relations, Foucault believes that power is "a mode of action upon the action of others" (Foucault, 2000, p. 221). Therefore, it is necessary to examine power in terms of intersubjective interactions; the action taken against the other creates the "subject." Foucault states that

This form of power applies itself to immediate everyday life, which categorizes the individual, marks him by his individuality, attaches him to his own identity, and imposes a law of truth on him that he must recognize and that others must recognize in him. It is a form of power that makes individuals subjects (ibid, 210).

Consequently, with the subject being produced by power, the less powerful person either becomes "subject to someone else by control and dependence" or "tied to his own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge." In both cases, there is "a form of power which subjugates and makes subject to" (ibid, p. 340). According to Foucault, power relationships are "intentional and not subjective." This intentionality is the source of their understanding. "They are imbued, through and through, with the calculation: there is no power that is exercised without a series of aims and objectives" (Foucault, 1978, p. 95).

Two essential concepts, i.e., power vs. resistance, have long been common in dystopian literature, and Foucault is more interested in the resistance to power than repression. His power from the bottom-up framework focuses on how power dynamics permeate every interaction inside a culture. This ability enables an inquiry that relies on people as active agents rather than apathetic dupes. Power is frequently defined as the capability of a solid authority to manipulate helpless people and persuade them to take unpleasant actions (Mills, 2003, p. 34). In his book *Power/Knowledge*, Foucault theorizes about power in the following lines:

Power must be analyzed as something that circulates, or as something which only functions in the form of a chain … Power is employed and exercised

through a netlike organization … Individuals are the vehicles of Power, not its points of application (Foucault, 1980, p. 98).

Power is seen by Foucault as a system of relationships, not between the oppressor and the oppressed, but the active role of the individuals in this system, whether they are subject to repression or have an active role in resisting that power (Mills, 2003, p. 36). Foucault believes power "is not something that is acquired, seized, or shared, something that one holds on to or allows to slip away; power is exercised, rather than possessed" (Foucault, 1978, p. 94). It is "neither given, nor exchanged, nor recovered, but rather exercised, and it only exists in action." He insists that power is not repressive but "productive" (Foucault, 1980, p. 89).

Foucault believes that power does not just reside in political institutions but also acts in a "directly productive role," "it comes from below," and operates in multiple directions while rising from the ground up. Political technologies cannot be linked to specific institutions, but it is precisely when these technologies localize within these institutions (such as schools, hospitals, and jails) and invest in them that biopower starts to off. Discipline-specific technology is genuinely successful when connections are made between these institutional environments. In this sense, power is productive, according to Foucault, because it does not exist outside of other kinds of relationships. According to Foucault, power is a generalized matrix of force relations at a specific time in a specific take society. For instance, in a jail, both the guards and the inmates are situated inside the same precise processes of control and observation, within the physical confines of the prison's design. All of these groups in the jail, according to Foucault, are engaged in power relations, no matter how unequal or hierarchical they may be (Dreyfus, 1983, pp. 185-6). According to Foucault, the 'smallest elements' of the social body, like the family, sexual interactions, residential relations, neighborhoods, etc. are where all power originates. As far as the social network is concerned, power is always something that flows through it, does something, and has an impact. Then, power operates from the bottom up (Wickham, 2010, p. 152).

A clear example of power and resistance in the play is when Father Doherty tries to control Don Tabaha in different ways because he feels responsible for determining Tabaha's future as his foster son. Tabaha wants to abandon his career as a doctor and go on to join a cancer research center. However, Doherty tries to prevent him because he feels he and his people, Native Americans, are inferior to the Americans and should obey their masters. Doherty believes that he has the right to impose his instructions on Don in the sense that he even tries to change his name, but Don refuses in an act of resistance to that conduct. He has always been so devoted to the Indian name

that he will not take Doherty addressing him by what seems to be a translation of his name. This is clear in the following conversation:

DOHERTY: Don "by-the-River."

DON: Tabaha

DOHERTY: No no, "By-the-River." Don "By-the-River." Like the song. "Don-by-the-riverside" (109).

It is noteworthy that Doherty is attempting to alter the name of Don's family. It is all part of Doherty's strategy to strip Don of his identity and sense of community so that he will be easily controlled. With his hateful and racist remarks, Doherty is demeaning Don as a 'Native American.' He is determined to associate Don with negative preconceptions related to Indian culture, as the media portrays them as 'savage' or 'uncivilized,' a matter that helped to popularize these preconceptions in American society. Another example that clarifies Doherty's opinion about Don and the Native Americans is after Niles queries him if Don's father is Native American and he says, "We wonder lately if he was even human" (31).

Foucault proposed that one individual or group may dominate another and that the state can dominate society. Foucault defines power as the capacity of a person or organization to exercise control. In another incident in the play, Doherty tells Don, "I think he wanted to be reassured that you wouldn't scalp your co-workers" (81), referring to the person in charge of the cancer research center. Simultaneously, he continues to accuse Don of being self-centered, of deserting his people in favor of assimilating into the white community, and of having "clean surroundings, intellectual problems, no patients, no pain, no filth, no ugliness. Only success. Even the rabbits and the mice are white" (83). Don does not identify by way of a doctor; instead, he calls himself a Native American. He rejects the notion that he should suppress his needs and feelings to justify or explain his origins. To impose his power over Don, Doherty ridicules Don's desire to pursue his wish, saying he should treat other people's jobs as "calls" (96). He criticizes the concept of cancer research as a whole and casts doubt on Don's credentials, arguing that "drafting a woman and Indian. It's a wonder he didn't grab a Black and a Chinese. Oh, they are probably already there" (82). Don's admission to the university is a clear manifestation of the institution's commitment to promoting diversity and embracing others. Doherty constantly criticizes Don's life path. Due to his strong emotional bond with Doherty as a dad and his attachment to his people, Don struggles to communicate or reconnect with Dohert effectively.

The struggle between Don and Doherty is over Don's desire to be accessible

to make his own decisions and take ownership of his life. It represents Don's desire for self-rule and his strong dislike for any efforts by authoritarian figures to place him in a position that goes against his true identity; within, Don retorts fiercely, "I am not under your wing, Father" (75), in response to Doherty's assertion that Doctor Alice, another intern, is not "under my wing" (75). Don declares at the conclusion to persuade Doherty one last time., "I discovered I have a very special talent for research. If that's hearing a call, then I've been called" (102), whether he was called to forsake his people. This is an example of an act of resistance against the power Doherty tries to impose on him. Then, Doherty starts pestering Don about his choice to abandon the local indigenous population, who receive very little medical treatment. At this moment, with greater aggression, Niles steps in again, calling attention to the minister's incapacity to recognize Don's choice for what it is: his own. Don's choice is based on what he thinks of as "a very special talent for research" (102). Niles tells the priest, "You cannot hold power over another man, even for his own good" (103). After a brief break in the dispute, the priest realizes that he has been denying Don the ability to make his own decisions.

The government presented in the play is trying to control its people and enslave them, who should obey the instructions to block roads due to nuclear accidents. They use helicopters to instruct people not to move outside their places, which makes people complain about being imprisoned in a church in a remote area. An example is when Father Doherty complains, "1-Forty. Used to be Route Sixty-six. I think they do that deliberately. Don't want us to get too attached to anything" (68). Living near nuclear weapons and testing not only leads to bodily injury, but also gives rise to social, cultural, and psychological consequences. John Hersey, a photojournalist, used the term "war-affected people" to describe the survivors of the nuclear strikes on Japan, as depicted in his groundbreaking work *Hiroshima*, which was the first to reveal the harrowing realities of the attacks to American audiences. Mary Kaldor contends that the concept of war-affected individuals can be expanded to encompass entire civilizations during the Cold War. According to Kaldor's descriptions, these societies were subject to various forms of organization and control typically associated with war and experienced a constant state of war-related anxiety. Kaldor's concerns, such as surveillance, military danger, and political oppression, significantly influenced social and cultural behavior" (Kaldor, 2012, p. 32).

According to Doherty, the pursuit of nuclear weapons has driven people to reject God in the modern world. Located in New Mexico, the state that saw the world's first nuclear bomb explode is home to the church. Irrespective of the capacity for devastation, the combination of owning a nuclear weapon

and a uranium mine would result in the extinction of the human race. He says, "These shows of power. They've always wanted a big, terrible God of the Old Testament and now they have him. They want to see the fiery cloud" (99). That quest has resulted in the nuclear accident merely as a byproduct. For many within the church, it is terrifying, but not as terrifying as the thought of possessing a weapon capable of bringing the world to an end in the blink of an eye. According to Doherty, the good thing about these events is that they can unite people in facing the end of the world as "rehearsals for the end of the world" (94). Niles suggests that Peter's demise was an inverted crucifixion, having heeded the summons of both Jesus and God. Wilson upholds the belief in redemption symbolized by Niles (Alghamdi, 2020, pp. 179-80).

According to Foucault, the goal is not "to liberate the individuals from the state and from the state's institutions, but to liberate us both from the state and from the type of individualization linked to the state" (Foucault, p. 2000, p. 330). Strategies possess tactics that are used to alter dynamics in favor of the opposing forces during the conflict. In "The Subject and Power", Foucault contends that a state of confrontation reaches its ultimate moment and the triumph of one of the two opponents when stable mechanisms supplant the unrestricted interplay of hostile responses. In his investigation of struggles and power relations, Foucault concludes with a disturbing revelation that any confrontational approach will transform into a new power dynamic if it succeeds in securing victory in its designated arena. He portrays a somber and monotonous cycle of dominance and conflict with no optimistic outcome. One may inquire about the function of individuals in this cycle. Foucault initiated his narrative of resistance and conflict by pledging the emancipation of individuals (Foucault, 2000, p. 334).

As resistance is strongly related to power in the sense that where there is power, there should be resistance, according to Foucault, Wilson gives an example of resistance against authority in this play when Doherty grows infuriated by the government and local law enforcement's deceitful statements, such as falsely asserting that the roads are closed due to a bridge collapse, while in reality, there is no bridge at all. He insists that "there is no bridge out" (11). He hurls projectiles at the helicopters that pass over the mission while simultaneously emitting high-volume sound amplification devices.

As for the concept of madness in the play, it is reflected in the character of Professor Niles Harris, who has been subject to a trauma inside his class where he tore his three books in front of his students after discovering that all his ideas in the books are wrong and they wrongly brainwashed his students' minds. That is why he came to this area to be committed to a

sanatorium to see a renowned psychologist in Phoenix, the board of his college has moved him to an opulent funny farm in the Southwest because of his mental health problems, which he delicately describes as "a disturbance in my willful suspension of disbelief" (34).

Foucault dealt with insane people. He was indignant about a definition of crazy that denies any viable alternatives to normative standards and disapproves of any behavior that deviates from them. "Madness" looks at Foucault's theories of insanity and how society has come to define insanity. According to Foucault, madness is morally condemned since it is conceptually and physically excluded. His history of madness supports this idea. Madness is associated with a bold decision to reject humanity and the human community in favor of animality, which is why there is a moral failure. Even with the voice of lunacy muffled, Foucault remained intrigued, especially by the notion that truths might be discovered by pushing the boundaries of reason (Gutting, 2005, p. 47). According to Foucault, madness is subject to conceptual and physical exclusion, representing a moral judgment. His work, *History of Madness*, supports the argument. The moral culpability arises from the fact that lunacy entails a fundamental decision to renounce humanity and human society in favor of embracing animality. Foucault believes that "Madness exists only in society. It does not exist outside the forms of sensibility that isolate it, and the form of repulsion that expels it or captures it" (Foucault, 2006, p. 345).

Once, during a lecture, Dr. Niles experienced a frenzy in front of his students. He was exposed to a state of hysteria that led him to tear his three books in front of his students because he claimed that he no longer believed in any words written there. In his book *Madness and Civilization*, Foucault spoke about hysteria. This condition revolves around the notion of a mental illness that affects the mind and is managed by medical professionals who are trained to identify symptoms. Dr. Niles was referred to psychiatry for treatment because of this. In essence, hysteria is a convulsion, overexcitation, and spasm illness. The old explanation of hysteria is where the concept of movement in the space of the body originates. The assumption behind the body's invasion by different spirits was that it was open from the inside out. Through compassion, the sense of movement and space gives way to the idea of moral judgment. Empathy implies a specific level of nervous system sensitivity. An extreme reaction could happen if the emotions and nerves are overstimulated. According to Foucault, hysteria is a disease that results from a way of life. This ailment needed to be classified as a mental illness because it had an apparent external origin. However, it was also a form of insanity. Too much experience blinded those who were hysterical. Madness was able to flourish because of this blindness (Foucault,

1965, p. 136).

Hysteria provides a means for medicine to morally evaluate insanity. The first step was the formulation of some theories on the connection between lifestyle factors and mental illness. Medicine may not approve of a lifestyle because it is the source of the condition. Madness might be viewed as something to be disapproved of when that condition is linked to it. With the advent of morality, lunacy has lost its status as a penalty for leading a "bad" lifestyle. Because it was connected to medicine and ideas about the body, this differs from the morality of labor that contributed to the creation of confinement. Psychiatry, which Foucault regards with some skepticism, is based on the notion that madness can be moralized (Foucault, 1965, p. 138).

The academic couple, Niles Harris and his wife Vita, is Wilson's most significant accomplishment in this drama. Prof. Niles had a breakdown because he did not feel his work or profession had any meaning. His career ended abruptly when he collapsed in the middle of a lecture. He is a volatile mix of disillusionment, last-minute self-doubt, and residual intellectual arrogance. He is left with the only opinion that "teaching is harmful" (94) after giving up his academic endeavors and the Ivory Tower that supported them. Mr. Weaver's portrayal of him, complete with a sunken insomniac face, a cracked patrician voice, and floppy hands, appears to capture all the joys and tragedies of being an academic. To recover from "a traumatic nervous breakthrough" (34), Lecturer Niles Harris and his wife, Vita, are relocating from their residence in Rhode Island, where he has been instructing art history, to a medical facility in Arizona. His stunning wife is a model of fortitude and self-control; she was once his student and became his keeper, but not to the point where she does not crack, however gently, at the first sign of panic when her husband tries to push her into his abyss (Rich, 1982). When Niles reached that moment of self-realization, he tore his books up in front of his class angrily, declaring that the entire teaching process was pointless. Subsequently, he collided his vehicle with the entrance of the college, resulting in termination from his job, and subsequently commemorated the event with a beverage. Niles seems relieved that he can publicly voice his thoughts to the world. However, it is evident that both before and after that incident, he was experiencing a great deal of tension and anxiety. Niles describes the crisis that brought him to the breaking point:

NILES: I used to be a professor, and I used to be an author. But fortunately, I experienced what you might call a crisis of faith, a disturbance in my willful suspension of disbelief that allowed me to see what I had done for what it was. You see, while framing the schema of my new book, I made the tactical error of rereading my other books (34).

At some point, Niles realizes that his thirty years of experience do not reflect his identity. It appears an unidentified force guided his life and caused him to go in that direction.

The Harrises are traveling to Phoenix to attend what Don calls "a dude ranch psychiatric hospital" (56), where his college's board of governors has assigned him with "tuition paid" (34). This forced vacation resulted from a "nervous breakthrough" (34), where he had a "crisis of faith or a disturbance in my willful suspension of disbelief" (34) one day in class. This came about partly due to his rereading all three of his books, an experience that left him feeling so demoralized that he tore them up in front of his class and asserted that he no longer held any belief in the content he had previously written. Niles is a man currently experiencing a temporary loss of his honesty (Barnett, 1987, p. 129).

4. Conclusion

Lanford Wilson's *Angels Fall* is a dystopian play that takes place in Mexico City in the twentieth century. It delves into the anxieties of contemporary humans who are living in an era dominated by nuclear power. The drama illuminates the apathy of governments towards individuals, specifically indigenous communities, whom they perceive as inferior and less than human. As a result, they built nuclear mines within their borders. This imbues the drama with political undertones. It is a dystopia characterized by the use of technology by authorities to deliberately destroy the modern world and its ecology. Within this dystopian setting, Wilson warns modern people against the potential consequences that may arise if they fail to prioritize the well-being and vitality of each person. Nuclear weapons offer significant hazards, and nations must refrain from employing them except strictly for peaceful objectives. The play endeavors to portray the existence of persons in isolated regions and their affliction with illness and destitution, thereby expressing Foucault's notions of heterotopia, power dynamics, resistance, and madness. Due to nuclear disasters, contemporary individuals experience a power struggle, and some of them endure hysteria that makes them unable to carry on with their lives or professions.

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