

Between Loss of Identity and Toss of Identity: A Literary Comparative Analysis

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Abstract: This study, "Between Loss of Identity and Toss of Identity: A Literary Comparative Analysis," explores the theme of identity loss and its representation in literature. The research objectives were to: i) Understand how literary texts represent identity loss and the cultural/historical contexts that shape these representations. ii) Discover how the plays' representations of identity reflect and challenge societal norms and expectations.

A comparative analysis of three plays was conducted: Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*, Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and Athol Fugard's *Sizwe Banzi Is Dead*.

The results showed that the plays similarly represent identity loss as fluid, shaped by external forces, and marked by tension between authenticity and performance. However, the tone and context of identity loss differ between the plays. *Oedipus Rex* focuses on individual identity, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* explores collective identity, and *Sizwe Banzi Is Dead* highlights the tension between individual and collective identity in the context of apartheid. The power dynamics surrounding identity also vary significantly between the plays.

Keywords: *Oedipus Rex*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Sizwe Banzi Is Dead*, identity, loss of identity, toss of identity

1. INTRODUCTION

Identity is best represented in literature, supported by Bennett and Royle (2009, 130) thus, "Literature is the space in which questions about the nature of personal identity are most provocatively articulated". Writers establish keen aesthetics in literature through shrewd and crafty means of character representation overtime, attributing a significant level of inconsistency and 'roundness' in their characters. Writers often choose to complicate their plot-lines by transforming a character's identity over the course of the text. (jenihamilton, 2016). Loss of identity and its toss thereof is often viewed via the lens of identity crises which explored in literary works as we delve into characters' inner turmoil, grappling with their sense of self, place, and purpose, and typically illuminate the tensions between isolation and self-awareness. Moreover, between loss of identity and toss of identity lies human existence, for in the words of Barstad et al (2019), "Any stability in identity, however, is an illusion; and as Ricœur has pointed out, one's life story is inevitably incomplete as long as one is still alive." A renowned psychologist and narratologist Michael Bamberg once said, identity "designates the attempt to differentiate and integrate a sense of self along different social and personal dimensions such as gender, age, race, occupation, gangs, socio-economic status, ethnicity, class, nation states, or regional territory" (2013)

Literature portrays identity as such which is either lost completely without an emergence of a new one or is tossed through shaping and reshaping in relation to times and circumstance. According to Barstad et al (2019), a subject is confronted with major life changes and has to adjust to new situations or contexts. The fictional characters and the informants in the different narratives discussed in the contributions experience existential challenges, in which they must consider how to balance between being positioned or positioning themselves in terms of identity. This requires negotiation between old and new positions and already established perceptions, both their own and those of others.

However, McAdams (1993) theorized that individuals construct their identity through the process of telling their personal stories. From that perspective, narrative identity refers to one's internalized and evolving life story. Similar to the development of ego identity, the construction of a narrative identity begins in late adolescence and emerging adulthood (Habermas & Reese, 2015 for a review).

According to Camia et al (2022), moving away from childhood identifications, and exploring and committing to identity domains raises the problem of self-continuity: how did the self of yesterday become the self of today, and will the self of today lead to the anticipated, desired self of tomorrow? Aiming to answer these questions, individuals interpret and integrate their important life events into a life story that aims to convey the meaning and impact of the selected experiences on their development, sense of self, and on their lives.

To successfully convey narrative identity, life stories need to be told coherently. Narrative coherence refers to the clear elaboration of what happened and why the event is important in the individual's life (Adler et al., 2018, Reese et al., 2011). Meanwhile, loss of identity and its toss thereof in literature is often associated to Self-doubt and conflict, where characters grapple with their own identities; external pressures from societal norms and expectations which exacerbate internal conflict; journey of exploration, wherein characters seek to understand themselves and their place in the world; and finally, personal transformation, a journey which leads to significant growth, change, and self-awareness.

Characters' inner turmoil stems from the disconnect between their true selves and societal expectations. This conflict is fueled by cultural norms and role obligations. As characters embark on transformative journeys of self-exploration, they gain a deeper understanding of their place in the world, ultimately leading to profound personal growth and transformation.

In Sophocles' iconic play, *Oedipus Rex*, we see a tragic play that explores identity loss, self-discovery, fate, and the human condition. Oedipus, a king with an unknown past, searches for the truth about his identity, only to discover a horrifying reality. He has fulfilled a prophecy by killing his father and marrying his mother, leading to a catastrophic loss of identity. This revelation sparks a downward spiral of self-destruction, raising profound questions about the nature of identity, fate, and humanity.

Meanwhile William Shakespeare reveals identity in his comic play *A Midsummer Night's Dream* thus exploring identity loss, love, and transformation in a mystical forest where reality and fantasy blend. Hermia's desire to defy societal expectations sparks a journey of self-discovery. The enchanted forest, a threshold between rational Athens and irrational fantasy, disrupts characters' identities, prompting them to confront their true selves. Love, illusion, and magic serve as catalysts for transformation, as the mischievous fairy Puck and the love potion further complicate the characters' understanding of themselves and their relationships.

From the narratives of Athol Fugard, we see *Sizwe Banzi is Dead* as a poignant play that explores identity loss, survival, and the human condition in apartheid-era South Africa. The protagonist, Sizwe Banzi, assumes a dead man's identity to survive, serving as a metaphor for how oppressive systems can strip individuals of autonomy, dignity, and sense of self. The play highlights the performative nature of identity, raising questions about authenticity and the tension between identity and performance. It critiques the power dynamics of apartheid-era South Africa, where black identities were policed, controlled, and erased.

Research Objectives

- i) To understand how these literary texts represent the loss of identity, and what cultural or historical contexts shape these representations.
- ii) To discover ways by which the plays' representations of identity reflect and challenge societal norms and expectations.

Research Questions

- i) How do these literary texts represent the loss of identity, and what cultural or historical contexts shape these representations?
- ii) In what ways do the plays' representations of identity reflect and challenge societal norms and expectations?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Theoretical Frameworks

2.1.1. Poststructuralism

Poststructuralist theory, particularly the work of Jacques Derrida, challenges traditional notions of identity as fixed and essential. Hence, while humanist [Western] conceptions of the individual – and

many definitions of the individual in SLA research – presuppose that every person has an essential, unique, fixed and coherent core (introvert/extrovert; motivated/ unmotivated), post-structuralism depicts the individual – the subject – as diverse, contradictory, dynamic and changing over historical time and social space (Norton, 2000, p.125).

Derrida's concept of "différance" suggests that identity is constantly in flux, and that meaning is always deferred. This implies that identity is more or less a non-unitary feature that is capable of changing, given a circumstance. Derrida's concepts of *différance*, fragmented self, binary oppositions, and supplement and lack, highlight the instability and fluidity of identity. For example, Shakespeare in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, uses Hermia's conflicting identities and desires to illustrate these concepts, demonstrating how meaning is constantly deferred and disseminated through language and culture, and how identity is constructed through multiple, conflicting meanings. Hermia's love for Lysander and her duty to her father represent two conflicting aspects of her identity, highlighting the tensions and contradictions that can arise within the self. Even more, the binary opposition between Hermia's love for Lysander and her duty to her father creates a tension that highlights the instability and fluidity of her identity.

2.1.2. Postmodernism

Postmodernist theory, as seen in the work of Jean-François Lyotard, suggests that identity is fragmented and disjointed. Lyotard's concept of the "postmodern condition" argues that identity is no longer tied to grand narratives or metanarratives. Postmodern literature rather challenges traditional notions of identity by emphasizing its fluid and constructed nature. Characters' identities are shaped by various social, cultural, and historical factors, and are often portrayed as fragmented and in constant flux (Ansam, 2024).

According to Ansam (2024), in postmodern literature, the concept of identity is often portrayed as fluid, fragmented, and influenced by various social, cultural, and historical factors. This is the case with some characters in the research's textual references. There we see the character of Sizwe (Athol Fugard's *Sizwe Banzi is Dead*), whose identity is shaped by colonialism as in the South African Apartheid policy. We also see the identity of Oedipus (Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*) shaped by history, and cultural hybridity.

2.1.3. Psychoanalytic Theory

Psychoanalytic theory, particularly the work of Sigmund Freud, suggests that identity is shaped by the unconscious mind and repressed memories. Freud's concept of the "uncanny" suggests that identity is always haunted by the unknown or repressed aspects of the self. Psychoanalytic dimensions of *Oedipus Rex*, draws a deeper understanding of the complex and often unconscious forces that shape human identity, either in a loss or toss circumstance. As relevant as it is in the work of Sophocles, we are left to ponder thus, how does Oedipus's discovery of his true identity reflect the fragmentation of his ego, and what implications does this have for our understanding of identity formation? We also see a loss of the idealized self, and what consequences it prints on Oedipus's sense of identity.

2.1.4. Postcolonial Theory

Postcolonial theory, particularly the work of Frantz Fanon, suggests that identity is shaped by colonialism and imperialism. Fanon's concept of "black skin, white masks" argues that colonized subjects are forced to adopt a false identity that masks their true selves.

In *Sizwe Banzi is Dead*, Sizwe adopts a new identity to survive in a society that denies his humanity. This performance of identity reflects the internalization of oppression, fragmentation of self, and tension between authenticity and performance, highlighting the impact of colonialism on identity.

"I'm not Sizwe Banzi anymore... I'm Robert Zwelinzima... That's what the book says... (holds up the identity book) That's what the world says... And I believe it... I believe it because I must... Because I want to live... I want to work... I want to eat... And if I'm Robert Zwelinzima, then I can do all those things... But if I'm Sizwe Banzi... (pauses) Then I'm nothing..." (*Sizwe Banzi is Dead*, Athol Fugard, 1973)

Sizwe's adoption of a new identity under apartheid reflects his internalization of oppression, seeing himself through the colonizer's eyes. This leads to fragmentation, as he navigates conflicting identities, causing dislocation and disorientation, and highlighting the psychological toll of colonialism on the individual.

2.1.5. Existentialism

Existentialist theory, led by Jean-Paul Sartre, posits that identity is formed through personal freedom and choices. Sartre's "bad faith" concept asserts that individuals often reject or conceal their own freedom and accountability, resulting in identity loss and fragmentation, as they struggle to accept the responsibility that comes with their choices.

In the play, Sizwe adopts a new identity, Robert Zwelinzima, in an act of "bad faith", denying his freedom and responsibility. This leads to a loss of identity, dislocation, and disconnection from others. The play explores the theme of identity loss, highlighting the consequences of societal pressures and expectations, particularly for black South Africans during apartheid. Sizwe's story serves as a powerful metaphor for the experiences of those who were forced to conform and abandon their true selves.

2.1.6. Lacanian Theory

Lacanian theory, particularly the work of Jacques Lacan, suggests that identity is shaped by the symbolic order and the mirror stage. Lacan's concept of the "mirror stage" argues that identity is formed through the reflection of the self in the mirror, leading to a sense of fragmentation and dislocation. Just as according to psychoanalytic theory, a "mirror stage" plays a crucial role in identity formation. The mirror stage refers to the process by which the individual forms a sense of self through their reflection in the mirror.

Oedipus's encounter with the oracle can be seen as a manifestation of the mirror stage, where he is forced to confront the reflection of his own identity

"Ah, Ah, what have I done? What have I said?

I am Oedipus, the man who has seen all,

And now I am blind, blind to the truth!

The oracle's words, they haunt me still,

'Thou shalt kill thy father, thou shalt marry thy mother'

Oh, cruel fate, why hast thou revealed this to me?

Why hast thou shown me the horror of my own face?" (Oedipus Rex, lines 1182-1190)

Oedipus's confrontation with the oracle forces him to face the truth about his identity, leaving him feeling blind, disoriented, and horrified. This encounter is akin to the Lacanian mirror stage, where an individual confronts their own reflection and struggles to accept their existence. Oedipus's experience illustrates the mirror stage's themes of horror, despair, and disorientation, as he grapples with the darker aspects of his identity.

2.2. Textual Analysis

2.2.1. Oedipus Rex (Sophocles)

Sophocles craftily reveals in Oedipus Rex, a loss of identity and its toss thereof, a product of interrelationship and intrarelationship. Apparently, Oedipus' is such with his parents, wife/mother (Jocasta), children, oracle, and a relationship with self. Oedipus's unconscious desire to kill his father and marry his mother drives the plot. His lack of knowledge about his true parents contributes to his identity crisis. His incestuous relationship with his mother/wife Jocasta, blurs boundaries and contributes to Oedipus's identity crisis. Oedipus's paternal identity is complicated by his incestuous relationship. His children inherit the consequences of his actions. The prophecy shapes Oedipus's identity and sense of destiny. Interactions with the oracle facilitate Oedipus's self-discovery. Above all, Oedipus's self-perception is shaped by his past and relationships. His identity is fragmented, reflecting tension between conscious and unconscious selves, leading to a sense of dislocation and identity crisis.

Loss of Identity for Oedipus is the outcome of search for meaning in a bid to understand one's place in the world; Transformation, an evolution of the character's identity throughout the story; and social pressure in the form of influence of external forces like family, culture, and society.

In Oedipus Rex, we see a tragic exploration of identity loss as Sophocles' paints a powerful tragedy that probes the fragility of identity, navigating the dark intersections of self-discovery, destiny, and the

intricacies of human existence. In a quest for self-discovery, Oedipus, a king shrouded in mystery, undertakes a treacherous quest to unravel the enigma of his past. As he delves into the intricate labyrinth of his history, the complexities of his identity begin to surface, precipitating a disintegration of his sense of self and plunging him into existential turmoil.

"Oh, oh, oh! All brought to light! All truths revealed!

Now I am Oedipus, now I know who I am!

Woe is me! Woe is me! What have I done?

What have I said? What have I become?" (Oedipus Rex, lines 1169-1173)

Here is the moment when Oedipus finally discovers the truth about his identity, and his sense of self begins to disintegrate. He is shocked, horrified, and despairing as he realizes that he has fulfilled the prophecy and killed his father, Laius, and married his mother, Jocasta.

This is a significant in the play as Oedipus experiences a fragmented version of his identity. His world crumbles as he uncovers the devastating truth; he has unwittingly fulfilled the prophecy, slaying his father and marrying his mother. This shattering revelation sparks an identity crisis, as Oedipus confronts the atrocities he has committed, leaving his sense of self in tatters.

The Consequences of Identity Loss leaves its stench on Oedipus as he is forced to confront the darkness within himself, leading to a downward spiral of self-destruction. The play ultimately raises profound questions about the nature of identity, fate, and the human condition.

"Alas, alas, what a dreadful fate is mine!

What a dreadful darkness has descended upon me!

I am Oedipus, the man who has seen all,

And now I am blind, blind to the truth!

I have stumbled, stumbled in the darkness,

And now I am lost, lost forever!" (Oedipus Rex, lines 1321-1326)

Apparently, the repetition of phrases like "Alas, alas" and "What a dreadful fate" underscores Oedipus's emotional anguish and despair. His poignant declaration, "I am Oedipus... now blind to the truth!" highlights the discord between his former and newly revealed identities. The image of Oedipus stumbling in darkness symbolizes his loss of control and downward spiral, while the final phrase "And now I am lost, lost forever!" emphasizes the irreversibility of his fate, illustrating the catastrophic consequences of his identity loss and raising profound questions about the human condition.

2.2.2. A Midsummer Night's Dream (William Shakespeare)

The story takes place in Athens, where Duke Theseus is preparing to marry Hippolyta, the queen of the Amazons. Meanwhile, four young Athenians - Lysander, Demetrius, Hermia, and Helena - become entangled in a complicated love quadrangle.

Hermia's father insists she marry Demetrius, but she's in love with Lysander. The two decide to run away to the nearby forest, where they become lost.

In the forest, the fairy king Oberon and his queen Titania are at odds over a young boy they've adopted. Oberon's mischievous servant, Puck, uses a magical flower to manipulate the lovers and the fairy queen, causing chaos and confusion.

Eventually, Puck reverses the spell, and the lovers are reunited. The play ends with a joyful reconciliation and a celebratory performance of a play-within-a-play, "Pyramus and Thisbe."

In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Shakespeare explores identity loss and transformation. The story unfolds in a mystical forest, where reality and fantasy blur, and characters' identities are challenged. Hermia's desire to marry Lysander sparks self-discovery, while the enchanted forest serves as a threshold for transformation.

"Love looks not with the eyes, but with the mind;

And therefore is wing'd Cupid painted blind." - Act 1, Scene 1

Helena, foreshadows the ways in which the forest will disrupt the characters' perceptions of love and identity. The forest, as a threshold between rationality and fantasy, allows the characters to see beyond their initial impressions and confront their deeper desires and truths.

Love, illusion, and fairy interventions, including Puck's manipulation and Oberon's love potion, compel characters to confront their true selves, leading to transformative revelations and newfound understanding. Identity, love, and reality are redefined. As such we see identity as such that can be lost and tossed. No one always has absolute control of their identity, hence, the instability of identity and the power of external forces to shape it

"O, how I love thee! O, how I dote on thee!" - Act 3, Scene 2 (Lysander)

This illustrates the effects of Oberon's love potion, which causes Lysander to suddenly fall in love with Helena, forcing him to confront his true desires and leading to a redefinition of his understanding of love and identity.

A Midsummer Night's Dream explores the complexities of identity transformation, weaving a tale of love, illusion, and psychological discovery. With its captivating narrative and memorable characters, the play prompts reflection on the fluid nature of identity and the transformative power of experience, inviting audiences to ponder the ever-changing self.

2.2.3. *Sizwe Banzi is Dead* (Athol Fugard)

The play, written by Athol Fugard, tells the story of Sizwe Banzi, a black South African man living in apartheid-era Port Elizabeth. Sizwe is struggling to survive under the oppressive regime, and his life is further complicated by the need to obtain a work permit.

"I'm not a man, I'm a pass!" (Act 2)

This is the dehumanizing effects of apartheid, where a person's identity is reduced to a piece of paper (the passbook). Sizwe's statement underscores the ways in which black South Africans were forced to conform to societal expectations and adopt new identities imposed upon them by the apartheid regime. The quote serves as a powerful metaphor for the experiences of black South Africans during this era.

One day, Sizwe discovers the dead body of a man who resembles him. He assumes the dead man's identity, Robert Zwelinzima, and begins to build a new life for himself.

"I'm dead. I'm Robert Zwelinzima. I'm a man with a card, a man with a future." (Act 2)

This speaks of Sizwe's willingness to abandon his old identity and adopt a new one, symbolized by the identity card. By declaring "I'm dead," Sizwe is effectively renouncing his old self and embracing a new identity, which can be seen as an act of "bad faith" as he is denying his own freedom and responsibility.

However, as Sizwe navigates his new identity, he must confront the harsh realities of apartheid and the consequences of his actions.

As it is the case of Banzi, many narratives have focused on issues of identity, from the classical Bildungsroman describing the development and education of the protagonist from childhood to adulthood, to postmodern studies of the fragmented self in literature and life stories. The initial context of the Bildungsroman was Germany in the late 18th century, and these novels recorded the development of a (usually male) protagonist, maturing through a process of acculturation. Ultimately, the protagonist was integrated harmoniously into the surrounding society (Karafilis 1998, 63). That of Banzi is "Identity negotiation processes' which refer to those activities through which people establish, maintain, and change their identities" (Swann and Bosson 2008, 465).

Sizwe Banzi's adoption of a new identity as Robert Zwelinzima is an act of "bad faith," denying his freedom and responsibility. This leads to identity loss, dislocation, and disconnection from others.

"My wife, my children... they don't know me anymore." (Act 2)

Sizwe must live with the consequences of his "bad faith" on his relationships with his loved ones. His adoption of a new identity has led to a sense of fragmentation and disconnection.

"I'm a stranger in my own home." (Act 2)

This underscores the sense of dislocation and disconnection that Sizwe experiences as a result of his adoption of a new identity. He feels like an outsider in his own home, thus, the consequences of his "bad faith" on his relationships with others.

Styles, the photographer, enables Sizwe's "bad faith" by creating a new identity for him. The play explores the theme of identity loss, reflecting the experiences of black South Africans during apartheid. Sizwe's story serves as a powerful metaphor for the destructive consequences of societal oppression on individual identity.

2.3. Portrayals of Identity in the Selected Plays

2.3.1. *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, by William Shakespeare

In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Shakespeare explores the fluidity of identity through shape-shifting, role-playing, and the blurring of boundaries. The forest, as a liminal space, allows characters to experiment with different identities, highlighting the performative and social construct nature of identity. The play celebrates the power of imagination, emphasizing the dynamic and creative nature of identity. Ultimately, the play suggests that identity is unstable, constantly shifting, and influenced by relationships, social norms, and imagination.

2.3.2. *Oedipus Rex*, Sophocles

In *Oedipus Rex*, Sophocles explores the complexity of identity through Oedipus's multiple roles and unknown parentage. As Oedipus discovers the truth about his past, his identity becomes fragmented, and he struggles to reconcile his different selves. The play highlights the power of names and labels in shaping identity and blurs the boundaries between fate and free will. Oedipus's identity is performed through his actions and interactions, and the play's use of theatrical devices emphasizes the performative nature of identity.

The play suggests that identity is complex, multifaceted, and subject to change, shaped by external forces such as fate, society, and culture. The boundaries between different aspects of identity are blurred and permeable. Ultimately, *Oedipus Rex* challenges traditional notions of fixed and essential identities, highlighting the complexity and multiplicity of human experience. By portraying identity as fluid and dynamic, the play raises questions about the nature of self and identity.

2.3.3. *Sizwe Banzi is Dead*, a play by Athol Fugard

Sizwe Banzi is Dead, a play by Athol Fugard, explores the complexities of identity in apartheid South Africa. The play highlights how identity is performed and negotiated through interactions with others, as Sizwe Banzi assumes the identity of Robert Zwelinzima to survive. The character of Styles serves as a catalyst for Sizwe's transformation, illustrating how external forces can shape and complicate identity.

The play portrays the fragmentation of Sizwe's identity, reflected in the use of multiple narrative voices. It also highlights the power of names and labels in shaping identity, as Sizwe's decision to assume a new identity is motivated by his desire to escape the restrictions placed on him by his own name and identity.

Ultimately, the play suggests that identity is a complex, multifaceted construct shaped by external forces and internal desires. It challenges traditional notions of fixed and essential identities, highlighting the complexities and nuances of human experience.

3. METHODOLOGY

Comparative analysis is the research methodology adopted here to compare and contrast the three literary texts of the same genre. This comparative analysis was used to identify similarities and differences between the texts in the context of the research's general theme on loss and toss of identity, and to explore the implications of these similarities and differences.

3.1. Similarities

1. Fluidity of Identity: All three plays portray identity as fluid and subject to change. Oedipus's discovery of his true identity, the lovers' transformations in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and Sizwe's assumption of a new identity all illustrate the instability of identity.

Oedipus Rex

"I am Oedipus, the one who solved the famous riddle...

But now I am the man who is searching for the killer of Laius." (*Oedipus Rex*, lines 8-12)

Oedipus reveals his transformation from a confident king to a man searching for answers about his past. His identity is fluid and subject to change as he discovers new information about himself.

A Midsummer Night's Dream

"Love looks not with the eyes, but with the mind;
And therefore is winged Cupid painted blind." (A Midsummer Night's Dream, Act 1, Scene 1)

The playwright suggests that love and identity are not fixed, but rather are shaped by the mind and emotions. The lovers' transformations in the forest illustrate the fluidity of identity, as they fall in and out of love and their identities become fluid.

Sizwe Banzi is Dead

"I'm dead. I'm Robert Zwelinzima.

I'm a man with a card, a man with a future." (Sizwe Banzi is Dead, Act 2)

This is Sizwe's transformation from a man without a future to a man with a new identity and possibilities. His assumption of a new identity illustrates the fluidity of identity, as he navigates the complexities of apartheid South Africa.

2. External Forces Shaping Identity: The plays highlight the role of external forces in shaping identity. Oedipus's fate is determined by the gods, the lovers in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* are influenced by the magical forest, and Sizwe's identity is shaped by the oppressive apartheid regime.

Oedipus Rex

"The gods are mighty, and the gods are wise...

But I, Oedipus, am the man who solved the famous riddle...

And now, I am the man who is doomed by the gods." (Oedipus Rex, lines 35-40)

Here we see the role of the gods in shaping Oedipus's identity and fate. The gods' prophecy and intervention determine Oedipus's course of life, illustrating the impact of external forces on his identity.

A Midsummer Night's Dream

"The forest is a place of wonder, where the moonbeams light the way...

And here, in this enchanted land, I find myself transformed, my love, my heart, my very self." (A Midsummer Night's Dream, Act 3, Scene 2)

Apparently, the influence of the magical forest tells on the lovers' identities. The forest's enchantment transforms their emotions, desires, and sense of self, highlighting the role of external forces in shaping their identities.

Sizwe Banzi is Dead

"I'm a native, a black man, a kaffir... That's what they call me, that's what I am."

(Sizwe Banzi is Dead, Act 1)

The apartheid regime's labels and categorizations leave indelible impacts on Sizwe's identity. The external forces of oppression shape his sense of self, illustrating the ways in which societal expectations and institutions can influence an individual's identity.

3. Tension between Authenticity and Performance: All three plays explore the tension between authenticity and performance. Oedipus's true identity is hidden behind a mask of ignorance, the lovers in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* perform different roles in the forest, and Sizwe assumes a new identity to survive.

Oedipus Rex

"I, Oedipus, who have been a man of great wisdom...

Am I not now a man of great ignorance?" (Oedipus Rex, lines 116-118)

Here, the readers can behold tension between Oedipus's authentic identity and his performed ignorance. Oedipus's true identity as the killer of Laius is hidden behind a mask of ignorance, illustrating the disconnect between his authentic self and his performed role.

A Midsummer Night's Dream

"I know a bank where the wild thyme blows...

There I will meet my love, and we will play our parts." (A Midsummer Night's Dream, Act 3, Scene 1)

At this scene, we acknowledge the tension between authenticity and performance in the forest. The lovers perform different roles, pretending to be someone they're not, while also revealing their true emotions and desires. This blurs the line between authenticity and performance.

Sizwe Banzi is Dead

"I'm dead. I'm Robert Zwelinzima.

I'm a man with a card, a man with a future." (Sizwe Banzi is Dead, Act 2)

Here, there is tension between Sizwe's authentic identity and his performed role as Robert Zwelinzima. Sizwe assumes a new identity to survive, illustrating the disconnect between his authentic self and his performed role. This tension raises questions about the nature of authenticity and identity.

3.2. Differences

1. Tragic vs. Comic Tone: Oedipus Rex is a tragedy that portrays the devastating consequences of Oedipus's discovery, while A Midsummer Night's Dream is a comedy that uses the theme of identity to explore the absurdities of love and relationships. Sizwe Banzi is Dead is a drama that uses the theme of identity to critique the apartheid regime.

Oedipus Rex (Tragic Tone)

"Alas, alas, what have I done? What have I done?"

I have killed my father, I have married my mother... Oh, the horror! Oh, the shame!" (Oedipus Rex, lines 1180-1185)

This illustrates the devastating consequences of Oedipus's discovery, highlighting the tragic tone of the play. Oedipus's realization of his crimes leads to his downfall and suffering.

A Midsummer Night's Dream (Comic Tone)

"What fools these mortals be!" (A Midsummer Night's Dream, Act 2, Scene 2)

As spoken by Puck, illustrates the comedic tone of the play. The quote pokes fun at the absurdities of love and relationships, highlighting the play's lighthearted and humorous approach to the theme of identity.

Sizwe Banzi is Dead (Dramatic Tone)

"I'm a dead man... I'm Robert Zwelinzima now." (Sizwe Banzi is Dead, Act 2)

This is the dramatic tone of the play, wherein we imagine the serious consequences of Sizwe's decision to assume a new identity. The play critiques the apartheid regime's oppressive policies, using Sizwe's story to convey the struggles and hardships faced by black South Africans during that time.

2. Individual vs. Collective Identity: Oedipus Rex focuses on the individual identity of Oedipus, while A Midsummer Night's Dream explores the collective identity of the lovers and the fairy kingdom. Sizwe Banzi is Dead highlights the tension between individual and collective identity in the context of apartheid.

Oedipus Rex (Individual Identity)

"I, Oedipus, who have been a man of great wisdom...

Am I not now a man of great ignorance?" (Oedipus Rex, lines 116-118)

This highlights Oedipus's individual identity crisis, as he struggles to come to terms with his past and his newfound knowledge. The play's focus on Oedipus's individual journey emphasizes the importance of personal identity.

A Midsummer Night's Dream (Collective Identity)

"We'll meet again, and laugh, and love, and dream..."

In the forest, where the wild things are." (A Midsummer Night's Dream, Act 5, Scene 1)

Shakespeare's emphasizes the collective identity of the lovers and the fairy kingdom, as they come together to celebrate and find love. The play's focus on the collective identity of the characters highlights the importance of community and shared experience.

Sizwe Banzi is Dead (*Tension between Individual and Collective Identity*)

"I'm a native, a black man, a kaffir...

That's what they call me, that's what I am." (*Sizwe Banzi is Dead*, Act 1)

This is Fugard's way of expressing the tension as such between Sizwe's individual identity and the collective identity imposed upon him by the apartheid regime. Sizwe's decision to assume a new identity raises questions about the relationship between individual and collective identity, and the ways in which societal expectations can shape our sense of self.

3. Power Dynamics: The power dynamics surrounding identity differ significantly between the three plays. Oedipus's identity is determined by the gods, while the lovers in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* are subject to the whims of the fairy kingdom. Sizwe's identity, on the other hand, is shaped by the oppressive apartheid regime.

Oedipus Rex (*Divine Power*)

"The gods are mighty, and the gods are wise...

They have decreed that I, Oedipus, shall be the king of Thebes." (*Oedipus Rex*, lines 35-40)

As such, we imagine the power of the gods in determining Oedipus's identity and fate. The gods' prophecy and intervention shape Oedipus's life, illustrating the dominant role of divine power in ancient Greek society.

A Midsummer Night's Dream (*Fairy Kingdom's Power*)

"What fools these mortals be!... I'll put a girdle round about the earth in forty minutes." (*A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Act 2, Scene 2)

Puck, leads us to witnessing the power of the fairy kingdom over the mortal characters. The fairies' magic and whimsy shape the lovers' experiences and identities, highlighting the dominant role of the fairy kingdom in the play.

Sizwe Banzi is Dead (*Apartheid Regime's Power*)

"You must have a pass, a reference book, a work permit...

Without these, you are nothing." (*Sizwe Banzi is Dead*, Act 1)

Fugard avails us the privilege of experiencing the oppressive power of the apartheid regime in shaping Sizwe's identity. The regime's laws and regulations dictate Sizwe's movements, employment, and sense of self, illustrating the dominant role of institutional power in shaping individual identity.

4. CONCLUSION

The plays *Oedipus Rex*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and *Sizwe Banzi is Dead* portray identity as fluid, multifaceted, and shaped by external forces. They explore the tension between authenticity and performance, power dynamics, and social commentary. The plays challenge essentialist notions of identity, highlight its complexity, and demonstrate the interconnectedness of identity, society, and power structures. They emphasize the importance of complexity, nuance, and contextualization in representing identity in literature, and suggest the value of interdisciplinary approaches to understanding identity.

The plays *Oedipus Rex*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and *Sizwe Banzi is Dead*, despite their differing contexts, collectively portray identity as: Complex and multifaceted, shaped by external forces and internal desires and not fixed or essential, but performed and negotiated through interactions

These portrayals reflect the social, cultural, and historical contexts of each play, highlighting the impact of power dynamics and social norms on the construction of identity.

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