The Natural Man Versus the Metaphysical Man: Back to Naturalism in Simon Stephens' *Motortown* (2006)

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Abstract

This research paper critically claims that contemporary British writer Simon Stephens has successfully brought naturalistic drama back into focus after decades of its decline through his play about the Iraq War, Motortown (2006). Instead of focusing on the war's causes, events, and aftermath, Stephens presents an intense portrayal of the impact of war on soldiers returning to their former societies. The protagonist Danny, a former soldier, comes back from Iraq, showing utter failure to adapt to his British society, which results in deep conflicts with himself and others around him. Through the episodic structure of the play, the different characters' behaviour is shown as determined by their internal predispositions and external surroundings; Danny's conduct, for example, is utterly determined by the war environment and his genetic inclination to violence, whereas others are prey to their contemporary materialistic British setting.

Drawing on Emile Zola's The Experimental Novel, which is the main theoretical cornerstone of naturalism in literature, the paper sets a theoretical framework to critically analyze Motortown from a naturalistic perspective. This framework effectively contributes to understanding characters' behavior as an immediate result of their surroundings and genes rather than of their free will. Against this theoretical background, the characters in the play, with specific regard to the protagonist, can be seen as typically naturalistic figures that best embody Zola's concept of the "natural man" in contrast to the "metaphysical man" of the literature of the previous ages. In other words, the play makes a radical shift from the romanticized, ideal depiction of characters endowed with freedom of choice and full command over their lives to the genuine portrayal of characters bound to absolute determinism by their biological disposition and external circumstances. By situating Motortown within the framework of naturalism, the research aims to unravel the complexities of the characters' behaviors, presenting them as victims rather than victimizers and probing into the underlying reasons for their conflicts despite their shared experiences of victimization. Overall, this research contributes to a better understanding of Motortown, shedding light on the enduring relevance of naturalistic principles in contemporary dramatic literature.

Key Words:

"الإنسان الطبيعي" في مقابل "الإنسان الميتافيزيقي": العودة للمذهب الطبيعي في الأدب كما في مسرحية "Motortown" للكاتب سيمون ستيفنز

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ينطلق هذا البحث من فرضية أن الكاتب البريطاني المعاصر سيمون ستيفنز قد نجح من خلال مسرحيته عن حرب العراق "Motortown" (2006) في إعادة الدراما الطبيعية إلى صدر المشهد الدرامي من جديد بعد عقود من أفول نجمها، فبدلاً من التركيز على أسباب الحرب وأحداثها وعواقبها يسلط ستيفنز الضوء على سلوك الجنود عقب عودتهم الى مجتمعاتهم ما قبل الحرب، حيث يرى الكاتب أن أولئك الجنود يفشلون فشلا ذريعاً في التعايش من جديد مع مجتمعاتهم التي خرجوا منها في الأساس أو التأقلم مع من حولهم وهو الحاصل مع بطل المسرحية داني الذي يعود من فترة خدمته في العراق ليجد نفسه عاجزا تماما عن التكيف مع مجتمعه البريطاني السابق بكل ما يحمله من قيم مادية رأسمالية تستند الى النزعة الفردية وتجنح الى تحقيق المنفعة الخاصة على حساب ما عاداها ، مما يجنح بالبطل الى الدخول في صراعات مع من حوله تؤدي به الى الانزلاق في دائرة العنف والقتل.

وتحاول هذه الورقة البحثية الإجابة عن سؤال رئيس يطرح نفسه وهو: ما السبب وراء فشل البطل في التأقلم مع مجتمعه السابق والميل للعنف والسلوك العدواني مع من حوله؟ وتُشكل الإجابة على هذا السؤال جوهر البحث وفرضيته الرئيسية التي يسعى الباحث لإثباتها نقدياً، حيث يرى الباحث أن المسرحية تقع في دائرة الأدب الطبيعي الذي يرى الحتمية الطبيعية المصدر الرئيس وراء سلوكيات البشر، بمعنى أن سلوك الإنسان يحكمه عاملان لا ثالث لهما هما الوراثة والبيئة، فلا مجال للإرادة الحرة ولا الاختيار الحر، بل إن سلوك الانسان هو انعكاس حتمي لتكوينه الجيني وعوامل البيئة من حوله، فسلوك البطل في مسرحية "Motortown" على سبيل المثال هو نتاج حتمي لبيئة الحرب التي عاشها في العراق وميله الوراثي إلى العدوانية الذي أذكته بيئة الحرب لاحقاً، بينما الآخرون ضحايا لبيئتهم البريطانية المادية المعاصرة، ومن هنا ينشأ الصراع ويتولد العنف. ويستند البحث في إطاره النظري على المذهب الطبيعي في الأدب ومصطلحاته الرئيسية كما نظر لها وأرسى دعائمها الكاتب الفرنسي الأشهر إيميلي زولا الذي تُعد كتاباته النقدية والإبداعية حجر الزاوية للمذهب الطبيعي في الأدب، وعلى هذه الخلفية النظرية يمكن النظر إلى الشخصيات في المسرحية باعتبارها تجسيداً مباشراً لمفهوم زولا عن "الإنسان الطبيعي" في مقابل "الإنسان الميتافيزيقي" كما في أدب العصور السابقة، فالمسرحية تحيد عن تقديم شخصيات رومانسية مثالية تتمتع بحرية الاختيار والسيطرة الكاملة على مقاديرها إلى تقديم شخصيات حقيقية يرتبط سلوكها بالحتمية المطلقة من خلال ميولها البيولوجية وظروفها الخارجية، ويساعد استخدام المذهب الطبيعي وآلياته كمدخل للدراسة في فهم تعقيدات الشخصية الإنسانية في المسرحية ومنطلق سلوكها كما يسهم في فهم طبيعة الصراع في المسرحية كصراع بين ضحايا يوحدهم مصيرهم الحتمي وتفرقهم بيئاتهم المختلفة.

The Natural Man Versus the Metaphysical Man: Back to Naturalism in Simon Stephens' *Motortown* (2006)

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"*Motortown* is like being run over by a 10-tonne truck that doesn't bother to stop to check that you are still breathing," as such Lyn Gardner expresses his reading experience of Simon Stephen's *Motortown* in his review of the play in *The Guardian*. In a similar way, Sue Gough stresses the exceptional nature of the play as one of the most disturbing pieces of literature that presents a true, yet painful, naturalistic picture of man: "This is not a play for the faint-hearted or the prudish." In *Motortown*, the protagonist, Danny, comes back to England after years of being a squaddie in Basra, Iraq on a mission in the so-called war on terror just to discover that England is no longer the one he left behind years ago. In eight successive episodes, rather than traditional acts, Danny, frustrated and disappointed, finds himself entangled in psychological and social conflicts with various representatives of his older societal strata, including former friends, anti-war demonstrators, and middle-class swingers. The journey, however, ends with the protagonist turning his disappointment and inability to adapt to his new environment into atrocities similar to what he has witnessed in Iraq and directing his rage to a wrong target by inflicting physical harm and finally killing an innocent young girl. Throughout the episodic structure of the play, the playwright succeeds in presenting an angry, bleak, yet honest and true, portrayal of the victims of war environment and psychological odds.

Despite the fact that many critics tend to read *Motortown* as a mere theatrical exposition of the repercussions of the Iraq War, the current research attempts to undertake a comprehensive examination of the play through the lens of naturalistic approach. Instead of debating the pros and cons of the Iraq invasion or examining its events, Stephens presents an intense portrayal of the impact of war on soldiers returning to their older societies and how their conduct is largely determined by the nature of the war milieu. Returning from Iraq, Danny feels out of place like a fish out of water (Bendict). He acts embarrassingly and gets in severe conflict with all around him till he commits a murder towards the end of the play. *Motortown*, therefore, presents a typically naturalistic protagonist that best embodies Emily Zola's concept of the "natural man" in contrast to the "metaphysical man" of the literature of the previous ages. Literary works before naturalism presented man as a metaphysical, gelatinous being endowed with ideal qualities rarely found in real-life individuals. These works exaggerated both the physical and moral

attributes of the human, aligning with the unrealistic romantic perspective. They irrationally departed from the real man with their naturalistic, realistic characteristics. This is the direction that naturalism in literature took afterwards, presenting genuine characters that deviate from artificial idealism and approach the realm of reality. These characters are marked by human frailty and genetic imperfections. In the context of literary naturalism, man is regarded as an integral part of nature, subject to the diverse influences of the environment in which he grows and resides. Factors such as climate, geographical location, and even the physical space hold significant control over one's behaviour and speech. Writers no longer, then, separate their characters from the living conditions that circumscribe them. The writer's task, then, is to simply observe and record the material circumstances that surround his characters at each moment, recognizing their crucial role in shaping the unfolding events (Zola 151-152).

The trajectory of Danny's actions throughout the play is shaped by a combination of his inherent psychopathic tendencies and the war environment he experienced in Basra. This wartime milieu has served to aggravate his preexisting inclination towards violence and aggression. It is crucial to note here that Danny's inclination to violence is not a conscious choice, but rather a manifestation of the interplay between his biological predisposition and the external circumstances he encounters. Upon his return to his birthplace, Danny proves unable to modify or adapt his aggressive behavioral patterns to align with the materialistic and pragmatic milieu of London. As a result, he embarks on a series of dreadful acts that will ultimately lead him to either death or imprisonment. This research paper aims to critically prove that Simon Stephens has successfully brought naturalistic drama back into focus. Despite the decline of this style over the decades, Stephens has created a play with a typical natural hero whose actions are shaped by both his genes and the war context in which he finds himself.

Building upon this thesis, the present paper raises and attempts to critically answer the following questions: What is Naturalism as a literary movement? What is naturalistic drama? What is meant by the concepts of the "natural man" and the "metaphysical man" in Zola's philosophy? Why is *Motortown* considered a naturalistic drama? How are the naturalistic features represented in the play on the levels of characters, setting, plot, etc.? How does Danny function as a typical naturalistic hero in Stephens' *Motortown*? Why does Danny turn into a sadistic, psychopathic character on his return from Iraq? Why cannot Danny adapt

to his new milieu once he is back to Britain? Why is Danny doomed from the start? Why do Danny and the other characters find themselves in confrontation throughout the play? How are all characters in the drama victims of their genes and living conditions simultaneously?

For answering the above-raised questions and critically analyzing *Motortown* as a naturalistic drama that portrays natural characters rather than ideal, metaphysical ones, the researcher uses as a theoretical background the writings of the canons of Naturalism philosophy with specific regard to Emile Zola's *The Experimental Novel*. Zola's concepts of experimentalism, the natural man, the ideal man, naturalistic setting, etc. function as a theoretical framework against which Stephens' drama is read, analyzed, and interpreted. The rationale behind reading *Motortown* from a naturalistic perspective is that Naturalism, as both a philosophical and literary movement, offers a comprehensive understanding of the behavior of all characters in the play, including the protagonist himself. It contextualizes their different patterns of behavior, explores why they are portrayed as victims rather than victimizers, and delves into the underlying reasons for their conflicts despite their shared experiences of victimization

Another significant justification for applying the naturalistic theory to the analysis of *Motortown* is that, to the best of my knowledge, most of the existing studies that have critically examined the play have approached it from rather different critical perspectives. Therefore, adopting a naturalistic lens offers a fresh and distinct viewpoint that has not been extensively explored in the existing scholarship. This allows for a more comprehensive and well-rounded understanding of the play, shedding new light on its themes, characters, and conflicts. By examining *Motortown* within a naturalistic framework, the researcher can contribute to the existing body of knowledge by offering a unique analysis that adds depth and richness to the understanding of the play.

Naturalism is a literary movement that originated in the late 19th century and came to an end at the beginning of the 20th century. The naturalist movement derived its name from its scientific approach, which sought to explain human phenomena based on direct natural causes rather than relying on vague metaphysical, religious, or spiritual explanations. This scientific attitude aimed to ground human behavior, experiences, and events in observable and tangible factors, such as biological, environmental, and societal influences. By prioritizing empirical evidence and rejecting supernatural or mystical interpretations, Naturalism aimed to provide a more objective and rational understanding of human existence. Like many other movements of the age, Naturalism emerged as

a direct response to Romanticism and its inclination towards the ideal and metaphysical. Naturalism sought to present a more scientific and impartial portrayal of reality, surpassing even the objectivity of Realism. Within the framework of Naturalism, the individual is examined in terms of their internal thoughts and emotions as well as the external factors that shape them. Darwin's theory of evolution had a significant impact on Naturalism as it viewed individuals as products of their genes and surroundings. Consequently, Naturalism rejects the existence of an internal essence or timeless traits separate from one's genetic and social circumstances. Abrams refers to Naturalism as a post-Darwinian theory, as it perceives humans as purely natural beings without any essence, soul, metaphysical, or religious existence beyond the realm of nature. Thus, any attempt to seek an internal essence or timeless traits apart from one's genes and social milieu is futile as it is based on something that does not really exist (261).

Encyclopedia Britannica defines naturalism as an attempt "to apply scientific principles of objectivity and detachment to its study of human beings." In *Oxford Concise Dictionary of Literary Terms*, Baldick Chris relates this definition to literature; he views naturalism, thus, as "a more deliberate kind of realism in novels, stories, and plays, usually involving a view of human beings as passive victims of natural forces and social environment" (167). In his *The Experimental Novel and Other Essays*, Emily Zola, the godfather of the naturalistic movement in literature, pinpoints that naturalism is a "return to nature and to man, direct observation, exact anatomy, the acceptance and depicting of what is" (114). In this regard, the main objective of naturalism is to provide answers to why people behave the way they do by examining their internal motives and social, economic, and cultural milieus. Zola was not the first to call for a scientific dissection of human life and behaviour; he was preceded in this regard by a bunch of well-known theorists including the famous Frensh historian and critic, Hippolyte Adolphe Taine whose writings formed a cornerstone for all naturalists to come. In his *A history of English Literature*, Taine viewed man as a "beast" whose bahvioural patterns are governed strictly by the cause-and-effect principle: "There is a cause for ambition, for courage, for truth, as there is for digestion, for muscular movement, for animal heat. Vice and Virtue are products, like vitriol and sugar; and every complex phenomenon arises from other more simple phenomena on which it hangs" (11).

The perspective of humans in relation to their natural environment and internal makeup gave rise to a form of determinism characterized by

absolute certainty, where individuals are subject to the determining influences of both heredity and environment. "There is an absolute determinism for all human phenomena," Zola asserts (18). The role of writers has, therefore, transformed into identifying the immediate cause underlying a particular phenomenon, often comprising the material and natural conditions that enclose it. Novelists and dramatists are to dissect human phenomena, be they behavioral patterns or psychological manifestations, in a manner akin to how chemists or physicists analyze natural phenomena because "determinism dominates everything" (18). Comprehending any aspect of human conduct, intellectual pursuit, sentimental response, and so forth necessitates the exploration of the internal and external factors that underpin the existence of these phenomena and facilitate their manifestations.

For the above reasons, the concept of the literary character completely changed with the advent of naturalism. Since all human beings are, in Zola's own term, "thinking beasts", the image of the man studied in literature should become that of the "natural man" not "the metaphysical" one. Since naturalistic literature adopts the pure scientific approach and leans heavily on the branches of physiology and chemistry, "it [should] substitute for the study of the abstract and metaphysical man the study of the natural man, governed by physical and chemical law, and modified by the influence of his surroundings" (Zola 23). Literature, in this way, came to represent the scientific soul of the age in which all the romantic, metaphysical, and ideal concepts about man were replaced by a true and sincere scientific image of man. No lies, then, or absolute ideas about what should be are there in literature; only truth about natural characters and their everyday experiences and lives are to be explored. "Instead of an abstract man," Zola argues, "I would make a natural man, put him in his proper surroundings, and analyze all the physical and social causes which make him what he is" (151). In this regard, naturalism is distinct from both realism and idealism. Realism, as a literary technique, endeavors to faithfully portray reality, yet it accommodates human reasoning and free will as fundamental determinants of human behavior. On the other hand, idealism presents stereotypical depictions of human phenomena, characterized by idealization and abstraction of human behavior, aligning with the tenets of romanticism. Naturalism, in contrast, diverges from both realism and idealism by originating from a philosophical standpoint that rejects the idealization of mankind and negates the existence of free will. Instead, it perceives humans as natural beings whose nature and actions are dictated by internal tendencies and external circumstances. To put it succinctly, human beings ought to be

regarded as mere "products to be studied impartially without moralizing about their nature" (Campbell).

In *Motortown*, Simon Stephen, seemingly influenced by Zola's theories on the role of the naturalistic dramatist, portrays Danny as a natural protagonist, driven by the influences of his environment and his innate genetic predispositions. Danny's engagement in acts of physical harm and murder stems from his immersion in a milieu where such violent behavior is a daily occurrence. In this way, Stephens, as a naturalist writer, endeavors to purge his theatrical work of artificiality not only of setting and props, but also of false content and unreal characters (Styan 9). As such, the narrative structure of *Motortown* emphasizes the deterministic influence of environment and internal forces on characters. Danny's inescapable descent into darkness, hence, mirrors the naturalistic idea that he is shaped and determined by his own circumstances, inner and outer.

Typical to a naturalistic drama, the setting of *Motortown* is the real Dagenham district of London, the historical home of the Ford Motor Company and the resident suburb of the London working class. There lives a large sector of forgotten people that have nothing to do but thinking of joining the army in the same way Danny does. The immediate setting of the play in which the characters live and to which Danny returns plays a crucial role in shaping their behavior. In this bare setting, what seems small and insignificant for the audience can be exceptionally influential for the characters themselves. Here lies a main difference between the naturalistic stage and the romantic one; in the former, a true picture of life is presented through real settings, genuine dialogue, and authentic characters influenced by their surroundings, whereas the latter primarily seeks to entertain by constructing idealized settings inhabited by imaginary characters. Naturalists are keen on writing about real life "with its shiver, its breath, and its strength," life as it is, not life as ideally imagined to be (Zola 156). In the stage directions, Stephens emphasizes the absence of elaborate decor, stating that "the play should be performed as far as possible without decor" (Stephens 192). This minimalist approach to setting serves to direct the audience's attention towards the characters and events rather than the luxury of the stage itself. By creating a lifelike time and place on the stage, the production encourages costumes and dialogue that are equally authentic as well (Styan 10). The simplicity of setting and decor stands in contrast to the complexities and formalities of the well-crafted plots and idealized characters prevalent in previous

eras (Austin), or what J.A. Cuddon encapsulates as the aim of naturalistic drama: "to mirror life with the utmost fidelity" (538).

In *Motortown*, the characters are depicted as being "at the mercy of larger social forces, which represent a cruel, overmastering fate" (Mikics 200). On his return from Basra, Danny attempts hard to adjust to daily life in Britain, only to discover that the process of acclimatization is far more challenging than anticipated. Coming from a military context that emphasizes the necessity of order at any cost, he finds himself surrounded by characters who behave according to the principles of a pragmatic, materialistic culture that prioritizes individual interest regardless of the consequences. Having experienced the chaos and senselessness of war, Danny now confronts a different kind of turmoil resulting from the difference of culture and the change of setting (Maglinis-Kathimerini). Consequently, a conflict arises between Danny, who seeks to resolve situations based on his own perspective, and his British counterparts, who see no issue in exploiting a soldier for their utmost benefit. This conflict reflects the determinism of the characters' behavior and the inevitability of their actions. Michael Patterson argues in this regard that the characters are portrayed as "human beings of solid flesh ... engaged in relationships, conflicts, and passions that arise in the everyday lives of individuals" (152). In this sense, Danny and the other characters serve as case studies in human behavior and social issues, with characterization serving as the ultimate indicator of a play's authenticity (Innes 7).

Danny is a victim of the terrifying impact of war in Iraq. Pauline Smith highlights this terrible influence on Danny and his companions as follows:

> We do not know the daily violence, pressure and acts they are required to commit in the name of peace. Little wonder then, when they come home, what they have experienced as being normal in Iraq, is far from normal here and for some a little chip goes off in the brain. This is how it is for Danny. Nobody understands what he has gone through. He is not coping and buys a gun to try and fix what he sees on the home front as decadence, people who don't deserve to live for what he was fighting for. He is also starting to live in his own world, creating in his mind what he thinks is or should be his life.

Similarly, Benedict goes further by likening Danny to a ticking bomb with the potential to explode at any moment. His unpredictable and impulsive nature is what makes him truly terrifying, as he can swiftly transition from being watchful to displaying vicious behavior in an instant. Danny's aggressiveness means that in various circumstances, "he

might — and does — do the unthinkable" (Benedict). He is haunted by his war experience both in awakening and sleep. He confides in his brother about troubling dreams he cannot fully recall, possibly due to his mind shielding him from the harsh memories of atrocities in Iraq (Stephens 193). Even during sleep, his troubled state is evident, with Lee noting, "You sleep with a frown on your face" (194). Physically, the toll of war is seen in his shaky hands, noticed by his brother but dismissed by Danny as usual to avoid psychological agony "I don't know" (200).

The war-tainted milieu pervades not only Danny's wakeful and sleeping states but also manifests in alterations to his physical attributes and fundamental character. His televised interview, while still in Iraq, elicits an unanticipated response from those familiar with him—his parents, brother, former girlfriend, etc.—all of whom failed to recognize the transformed individual before them: "It didn't look anything like you... It's like you're a completely different person" (198). This perceptible shift in countenance and identity extends beyond familial circles, resonating within the broader societal context, as evidenced by Tom's observation during a reunion, emphasizing Danny's weirdness: "You looked a bit odd" (225). This weirdness is an indication to the grave conflict that will arise later on between the "new" Danny and his older society.

Through Danny's interactions with a former romantic partner, a small-scale firearms dealer, and a middle-class couple engaged in unconventional sexual practices, Stephens crafts a critical commentary on the contemporary condition of Britain. Danny's poignant expression, "The war was all right ... I miss it. It's just you come back to ... this," encapsulates his mixed feelings about his past wartime experiences and his disillusionment with the present societal landscape in Britain (Stephens 276). Upon his return to London, he discovers a profound sense of estrangement from everything around him – people, places, and memories. For him, the town of Dagenham, where he once felt at home, has undergone a distressing transformation. Factories stand nearly shuttered and familiar streets have disappeared, replaced by what he describes as "a whole new array of drugs." He laments the profound changes, likening the current state to "a supermarket for drugs" (217). This deep sense of alienation from his old community drives him to a state of uncertainty about everything; he does not know even if he loves his hometown or not. When asked by Paul, for example, if he loves London or not, he answers indifferently that he is not sure and remarks "It's a bit big for me" (33). The phrase "It's a bit big for me" suggests that

the Danny finds London overwhelming or challenging. This could be interpreted both in a literal sense, referring to the physical size of the city, and metaphorically, indicating that the city is too complex or strange for him to fully comprehend or adapt to. His uncertainty about his feelings reflects a deeper emotional and psychological struggle that stems from a sense of disconnection or alienation, making it difficult for him to form a clear and decisive opinion about his feelings.

In the same way Danny is affected by the war-ridden environment, the other characters also grapple with the influences of their materialistic surroundings. Both groups are significantly shaped by two different living conditions—one marked by violence and the glorification of aggression and the other emphasizing individuality and the celebration of opportunism, thereby giving rise to conflicts. Upon Danny's return, the portrayed British society is overwhelmed by unbridled materialism, breeding, in its turn, selfishness, expediency, falsehoods, and deceit. On his talk about the war on terror with Danny, Paul, the sage of the narrative, highlights the pervasive deceit inherent in contemporary British culture, extending across diverse institutions such as the political system, societal structures, and religious organizations:

> The notion of a war on terror is completely ingenious. It is now possible to declare war on an abstraction. On an emotional state. … Law. Money. The Left. The Right. The Church. All of them lie in tatters. Wouldn't you be frightened? … The only thing we can do is feast ourselves on comfort foods and gobble up television images. Sport has never been more important. The family unit seems like an act of belligerence. All long-term relationships are doomed or ironic. Therefore sexuality must be detached. But detached sexuality is suicidal. So everybody goes online. (Stephens 228).

Man in modern materialistic contexts is, therefore, doomed to the status of a passive watcher with everything detached and inhumane including family and sex. To prove his perspective on how the current British society is materialistic and selfish to the bones, Paul ironically attracts Danny's attention to how society views the poor:

> You want to know the truth about the poor in this country? They're not cool. They're not soulful. They're not honest. They're not the salt of the fucking earth. They're thick. They're myopic. They're violent. They're drunk most of the time. They like shit music. They wear shit clothes. They tell shit jokes. They're racist, most of them, and homophobic the lot of them. They have tiny parameters of possibility and a minuscule spirit of enquiry or investigation. They

would be better off staying in their little holes and fucking each other. (Stephens 229)

In the above quote, Paul directs a harsh, implicit critique of the capitalist ideology to which he belongs and by whose standards his conduct is determined. It is a culture that perpetuates issues of social inequality, class divisions, and negative attitudes towards those with lower economic status. The drama of *Motortown,* thus, revolves around the juxtaposition of and ensuing conflict between two worlds: the materialistic British culture and the aggressive wartime environment. The play centers on the determined behaviour of the victims of each setting, highlighting the inevitability of avoiding conflict and struggle.

The seeds of conflict arise earlier even before the return of the Squaddie to his hometown. The appearance of Danny on a televised news broadcast while still in Iraq develops the conflict earlier enough. His physical appearance and the look in his eyes are enough to make him rejected by his relatives and friends on the claim that he is not the Danny that all of them knew before; rather, he is someone that frightens them by his looks. The first one to deny him is his autistic brother, who – despite the blood relationship that connects them and the natural love that remains till the very end of the play – refuses mentally and heartily to accept the fact that the one on TV is his brother. This rejection, whether from the brother or, even more distressingly, from the parents, highlights how the war environment was able to rapidly alter Danny's appearance, expression, and demeanor in a very short period. The grave rejection comes from Marley, the protagonist's girlfriend. Upon seeing him, she promptly denies him, experiencing fear and terror as if foreseeing what might unfold in the future upon his return to England.

The conflict between Danny and Marley is representative of the much wider struggle between victims of the war environment and those of the the materialistic one. The seeds of conflict sprout as Danny makes his first attempt to write to Marely from Iraq; his expressions, attitudes, and writing style, shaped by the war environment, disturb Marely, the typical product of a more materialistic setting. Both characters' behaviour is determined by the milieu they are immersed in. Despite being his girlfriend, she does not see any problem in forsaking him and dating somebody else as soon as he disappears from sight. This is the underlining principle of the capitalist society Marely represents: to seize the available opportunity and not to give much space for emotions. Marley affected by her materialistic milieu does not show any sympathy towards Danny's feelings. She indifferently deals with him as an object

she has used for her benefit and now it is time to dispense with, no matter what the means is. Reminded of her previous love and vows, she apathetically replies, "But I don't owe you anything. And if I ask you to leave me alone, through your brother, or through a letter, or through a text message or a note via our teacher, then I expect you to leave me alone" (Stephens 206). Marley's words are a crystal-clear embodiment of a basic rudiment of capitalism, i.e., reification. For Marley and parallelly all the victims of materialistic environments, love, faithfulness, sacrifice, and people themselves are mere objects that are meant to serve one's personal interests; once they are used to the last drop, there is no need to keep them or cherish their memories. As a result, she gets rid of Danny and his memories the same moment she feels scared of his talk or finds a more suitable partner. She even does not see wrong in dealing rudely with an autist like Lee. Reporting to his brother the whole situation, Lee expresses his deep innocent dislike of Marley because of "the way she spoke to [him]. She was really rude" (202). Like any materialist, she is only concerned about giving a justification, even if a fake one, for her behaviour. Therefore, she hangs her rudeness towards and abandonment of Danny on the idea that she was terrified by his letters sent from Iraq that bore along with them seeds of violence and aggressiveness. In defense, Danny insists that he never meant to frighten Marely or to be violent; he was inevitably determined by the environment he was living in at the moment. It was never intentional: "they were letters, that's all" (215).

Opposite to Marley, who only believes in the here and now, Danny believes in taking whatever he wants by force. On their first meeting, he attempts the hardest to keep his war-bound nature aside and cope with the materialistic surroundings by addressing the pragmatic needs of Marley: "We could get a car. Get a nice one. CD player. Seat belts. Airbags. All that … Get a couple of kids. Drive them to school. … Do all that." (Stephens 232). However, the pretense does not succeed in deceiving the opportunist Marely who has made her mind to dispense with him at any price. She rather shocks him by her tough frankness and apathy to his feelings: "You should know. I wanted to tell you. I do have a boyfriend. I've been seeing him for years. We're gonna get married, I think. We're gonna have kids. I'm gonna be a mum to his kids. All you ever do is talk and talk and talk. I can't do this any more. It does me no good." (235-236). In the meanwhile, she hints at the difference between two versions of his character, the old one of England and the present one of Iraq, "Didn't look anything like you. You look terrible, Danny. What have you been doing?" (234). Here masks are removed and Danny's true nature is

revealed. The war-determined Danny threatens to shoot whoever stands in his way to Marley whether a boyfriend or an entire family. "When I've finished with you," he angrily threatens, "I'm going to go and find every boyfriend you ever had and every friend you ever had and get them and shoot them in the face … And all your family" (234-235). When Marley shows astonishment at his intentions, he frankly pinpoints that "This is what I'm trained to do" (235). In this context, Danny explicitly acknowledges the deterministic nature of his aggression. The phrase "trained to do" reveals how the war environment has effectively taken control of Danny in the most comprehensive way possible. His deterministic aggressiveness is so unavoidable that he disavows it, apologizing for his inability to control it: "I'm sorry... It isn't me... It isn't me" (236). Aware of being trapped by his environment, he anticipates responding with violence and brutality in any situation requiring action. As a result, he advises his ex-girlfriend to distance herself, cautioning her against approaching him anymore, as he forewarns of potentially catastrophic consequences.

In *Motortown*, Danny was not depicted as only a victim of his surroundings, but of his own genes as well. As a typical naturalistic hero, his behaviour is determined not only by the external factors but also by his internal makeup. He had genes of violence deep inside his character that were augmented by the war-in-Iraq milieu. The heated confrontation between him and his ex-girlfriend divulges much about his deep inclination to violence and aggression even before his exposure to war. For example, he reminds Marely that at school she had a way of talking to other boys that "[made] him want to smash their faces in" (Stephens 209). The natural tendency to brutality was enhanced by the atmosphere of war that he came to live with afterwards. As a result, on the mere occasion he is angered or provoked, he resorts to violence immediately; when Marely impedes his attempts to get her back, for example, he "goes to her. Grabs her by arm" proceeding from the war principle that force can rectify everything (210). Other proof that Danny's determined behaviour is the result of both his genes and the environment is his troubled relationship with his family, with specific regard to his father. There is a deep lack of intimacy between Danny and his parents. On his talk to Marley, he explicitly acknowledges his hatred of his family, particularly his father. When Marely shows astonishment, he answers her, "I do a bit. My dad mainly. Drunken fucking contradictory wanker. I find him completely ridiculous. I hope I get to bury him." (234). Danny's deep hatred of his

father stems from his belief that the father bequeathed him violence through genes.

With a combination of violent tendencies encoded in his genes and a hostile environment, Danny is set free in his British society as a beast out of cage to get his own way. The episodic structure of the play unveils the catastrophic consequences of releasing such a beast without restrains, dealing with people that are determined by an utterly different culture. His encounters with his old friend Tom, the light arms dealer Paul, and the middle-class swingers uncover the disastrous manifestations of such confrontations, serving as a lens through which the divergent cultural influences that govern their behavior become evident. Implicitly, Tom hints at how one's milieu governs one's own conduct when he likens people to flowers on his talk with Danny, "I think people are more like flowers than we ever give them credit for" (Stephens 212). The simile hints at the fact that humans, like flowers, are the products of their own soil; in other words, people's conduct and beliefs spring from the different environments they live in. The choice of flowers, not trees for example, reveals much about the fragility and helplessness of people in resisting the determining forces of culture. Against this background, much of Tom's behaviour itself can be understood. A victim of a materialistic culture that is mainly centered on what is worldly and money-oriented, he does not find any mutual talk with Danny but about money and how the latter will support himself in the future. The talk is, thus, mainly focused on songs, iPods, and long-term plans despite Danny's continuous attempts to shift the course of the speech to what he is mainly into, having a real gun.

In contrast to Tom, who is deeply immersed in the materialistic culture and refrains from adopting a critical stance, Paul successfully maintains a detached position, enabling him to give a sharp critique of his own living conditions. On his initial encounter with Danny, he hints at the principles of naturalism and determinism, seemingly anticipating events that will unfold later in the play:

> To ask about the meaning of life is as philosophically interesting as asking about the meaning of wood or the meaning of grass. There is no meaning. Life is, as science has proven in the last two years, a genetic system. An arrangement of molecular structure. There is no solidity. Only a perception of solidity. There is no substance. Only the perception of substance. There is no space. Only the perception of space. This is a freeing thing, in many ways, Danny. It means I can be anywhere. At any time. I can do anything. I just need to really try. (Stephens 220-221)

Paul's speech incarnates a naturalistic and deterministic outlook, rooted in scientific reductionism and naturalist pessimism. It rejects explorations of the meaning of life and dismisses metaphysical purpose beyond it. Describing life as a genetic system emphasizes a scientific approach that reduces human behaviour to a mere reflection of the impact of both heredity and environment. Paul proceeds to critique the capitalistic culture prevalent in contemporary Britain where consumption and exploitation of others have reached their peak:

> There are too many people. There is not enough water. There is not enough oxygen. And nobody admits it. And so now we're gonna consume China. And then we're gonna consume India and then we're gonna consume Africa and we'll carry on consuming. We'll continue to eat it all up and eat it all up and eat it all up until the only thing we've got left to fucking eat, Danny, the only thing we've got left to eat is each other. (232)

Again, this speech condemns the consumerist society that prioritizes consumption without consideration of the consequences. Paul suggests that the never-ending pursuit of consuming resources, symbolized by consuming different countries, reflects a mindset of exploitation. By emphasizing the eventual consumption of each other, Paul's talk implies that this culture of consumption ultimately leads to a dehumanizing, destructive cycle. Indirectly, Paul calls for a reevaluation of the British society's values to make a shift towards a more unbiased culture that prioritizes the well-being of all living in it.

In contrast to Paul, who is able to theorize about the evils of the capitalist culture, Danny has a practical attitude acquired from his determinism by the war environment. For example, he has a tendency to judge people and decide for them even on his first encounters with them. On knowing that Jade, Paul's friend, is a student, he immediately issues value judgments about students in general and declares his attitude towards them. "Young people today! They have no idea what they're going to fucking *do* with their lives," he frankly speaks his mind, adding that "they have no clarity. No vision. No perspective. I find it very dispiriting … I hate students" (Stephens 240). The former speech portrays Danny as someone who values practicality and directness, even if it comes across as judgmental. It expresses frustration with what he perceives as a lack of direction and vision among young people today, preferring instead concrete goals and a clear path in life. As a typical product of war, he is disappointed or disheartened by what he sees as a lack of ambition or purpose in others, which leads him to conclude that he

does hate students in general. Such a rigid, narrow-minded stance in life leads him to commit heinous acts later on against Jade, the African-British student. Danny, in Paul's words, has reached the dangerous point at which he can no longer discern what is real and what is fantasy: "When you can't tell the difference anymore between what is real and what is a fantasy. That's frightening" (226). Here rises an important question: What are the realms of reality and fantasy that Danny cannot discern between? The answer to this question lies in the discrepancy between the environment by which Danny's behaviour is determined and the one to which he has returned. Reality is that he lives in a capitalist culture marked by the apathy of his beloved, the shallowness of his friend's goals, and the hypocrisy of the middle-class couple. Despite this reality, he immerses himself in the fantasy of genuine love, authentic emotions, and meaningful life principles. He cannot strike a balance between his life according to the standards of the war surroundings and his existence in the new materialistic environment of Britain. As a result, he resorts to lying to escape the anguishing sense of incongruity; he fabricates a story for Paul and Jade about a deceased former wife, attributing her death to an ex-soldier killer. This raises the question of whether he desires them to inquire about the motives that might drive a former soldier to become a killer, or if he subtly alludes to his own predetermined destiny as a killer. The resolution to this query becomes clear in his torture and killing of Jade later on.

Out of a severe disdain of everything around him in the British society, he finds himself unconsciously, driven by the war experience he has got accustomed to and determined by, reenacting his past experiences by directing his anger and fury towards the wrong target, Jade. He manipulates the young African-British student into accompanying him on a picnic in an isolated location where he proceeds to inflict physical harm upon her. The physical abuse escalates to the point that he shoots her, wraps the corpse in a piece of cloth, and puts it in the car trunk. The striking thing in this situation is the disturbing pleasure he gets from causing physical harm to her, reveling in seeing her suffering as if he were a psychopath in need of intervention. He is the prey of an aggressive milieu that comes to control his life afterwards and determine his behaviour towards others. In this sense, what Danny perpetrates against Jade is inevitable and cannot be avoided as he is merely reenacting what he witnessed multiple times in Iraq. To such a degree, that traumatic milieu has gained the upper hand over the entirety of his life, prompting him to recount tales of mistreatment, atrocities, violations, and aggression he witnessed in Iraq to Jade while subjecting her to brutality. It seems as

though he seeks sympathy from his victim rather than provoking hatred, describing actual scenes from Iraq in an attempt to elicit his victim's empathy: "Take your burka off, this is a body search. I have seen boys with their faces blown off. Skin all pussed up and melted. Eyeballs hanging out on the cartilage" (Stephens 246). Danny holds a deep desire for revenge against those who diminish his role in war or reject the concept of war altogether. However, this intense resentment takes a wrong path. Rather than directing his anger towards war protesters or those who belittle his sacrifice within a capitalist culture, he pours his resentment on 14-year-old Jade in a disturbing and unjust manner. After killing her, he launches into a verbal assault against those who do not acknowledge his sacrifice, revealing the core principle he is behaving according to. Strangely, he directs his angry speech to Jade's lifeless body:

> [T]hey march against the war and think they're being radical. They're lying. They're monkeys. They're French exchange students. They're Australians in London wrecked on cheap wine and shite beer. They're Hasidic Jews in swimming pools. They're lesbian cripples with bus passes. They're niggers, with their faces all full of their mama's jerk chicken, shooting each other in the back down Brixton high street until the lot of them have disappeared. They're little dickless Paki boys training to be doctors or to run corner shops and smuggling explosives in rucksacks onto the top decks of buses. It's not funny, Jade. I'm not joking. I fought a war for this lot. … I want to get it right. That isn't the right word. What's the right word? I want to get the right word. Don't tell me. Don't tell me. Don't tell me. *I want to get it right*. (56)

The sentence, "I want to get it right", succinctly encapsulates the central theme of the whole play. Profoundly affected by the war milieu and his genetic violent tendencies, Danny is like a fish out of water or a soldier in the clothes of civilians. Deep within him, he would like to get everything right as he imagines it. He would like to practice the rites of his military background in a materialistic society that only celebrates what is utilitarian and self-serving. The ideological conflict between the two cultures will mostly end by either the killing of the protagonist or his imprisonment as survival is for the fittest, and the fittest in this case is the one who adapts the quickest and the best to their milieu. Since Danny is unable to fit into the British capitalistic surroundings, he is the most likely loser in this game. A straightforward indicator of his inability to adapt is his lying to both Paul and Jade about being married to Marley

because he cannot accept the mere idea that someone may reject him. As a product of a military background, he believes in getting whatever he wants with no room for the possibility of loss.

The subsequent stage in Danny's struggle for survival in the unfamiliar British setting unfolds through his encounter with Justin and Helen, a pair of middle-class swingers. This confrontation marks the climax of the conflict between two sets of victims: Danny as a victim of the war culture and the middle-class couple as victims of the materialistic society. In line with their typical materialistic mindset, the couple attempts to exploit Danny's physical strength and military background for their personal benefit. In doing as such, they embody the inherent contradictions of the capitalistic culture. Despite marching against war and protesting foreign invasions, they do not miss the opportunity to exploit Danny's military nature for their own interests by inviting him for a threesome. If Danny believed he served in the war for unappreciative individuals, self-centered eccentrics, and undesirable eccentrics, his conviction is now much stronger (Waites). Faced with such self-centered motives, Danny's military background manifest itself through verbal and non-verbal acts of aggression. When the couple question his motive for his desire to have joined them in their demonstration against war, he shocks them by expressing a deep desire to kill them all: "with my sa80. sprayed the lot of yer" (Stephens 264). Shockingly, they respond to his verbal assault and aggressive tendencies with a cold smile towards each other, disregarding Danny's emotional distress and displaying a typical utilitarian attitude. For this reason, he encapsulates his suffering and the overarching theme of the play succinctly in one sentence: "I come back home. It's a completely foreign country" (264), symbolizing the clash between different milieus that permeates the entire play. To Danny, it is not Iraq but England that is foreign. "I don't blame the war. The war was all right. I miss it. It's just you come back to this," he says (264). "The 'this' is a girl who doesn't love him, and who has got herself another boyfriend," Lyn Gardner comments, "It is an England where the 'war on terror' has become a war waged using the tactics of the terrorists. It is also a place of dubious moralities, small-time arms dealers and middle-class swingers and anti-war protesters."

The only avenue for emotional contact in such an alien society takes place between Danny and his autistic brother. According to James Waites, their case offers a significant juxtaposition: Lee has inherently experienced damage from birth, while Danny, to a large extent, has been determined mainly by the war experience. Therefore, the only moments of intimacy and tenderness in the play emerge through their shared

experiences of suffering. This unique relationship highlights the different forms of human determinism, yet it offers a very subtle sense, that is, only through love and compassion man can create meaning and significance despite their determinism by their genes and environment.

In *Motortown*, language plays an important role in the development of the plot and the escalation of conflict. Since the emergence of naturalism as a literary movement, there has been a special attention to the idea of language and its use in literature, with a distinct call for authenticity. This demand rejects the notion of a stylized, lyrical stage language, advocating instead a language that mirrors that of everyday life. The aspiration has always been ever since to capture the spirit of ordinary conversation, celebrating repetitions, length of dialogue, and seemingly superfluous words. The ultimate goal is a theatrical experience that reproduces reality to the utmost extent, allowing each character's unique thoughts and genuine feelings to find expression. This commitment to authentic language extends beyond the spoken word to encompass the broader theatrical elements of decor and setting. Efforts are made to create an environment so convincingly real that it becomes an extension of the audience's own reality, aligning with the overarching naturalist objective of presenting a truthful depiction of everyday life.

This emphasis on authenticity in language, decor, and setting is exemplified in *Motortown* to the best. The play adopts a minimalist, yet dense, language that is both plain and impactful, resonating with a feeling of constant tension (Maglinis-Kathimerini). Despite potentially shocking scenes, the play is praised for its ability to immerse audiences in an authentic and compelling theatrical experience about the impact of one's surroundings on one's behavior through a deliberate commitment to minimalism in both language and staging. The language of *Motortown* is, therefore, characterized by its spontaneity, disorganization, and violence, reflecting in its largest part the aggressiveness and brutality that the protagonist is determined to by his war backdrop (Pavis 97).

Beyond all this lies a deep moralistic vision that Zola hinted at in his works. Zola's work has stressed the ethical message that literature can accomplish in society. His writings explore the endeavor to restore the moral purpose of literature despite the fact that the age is a purely scientific one. As science aims mainly to achieve human control over life and nature, its progress can be directed effectively toward moral good. Through the progress of science, humanity will gain more power, using nature and its laws to establish justice and freedom on Earth, which is a noble and grand objective in itself. In the same way science targets the

mastery of nature, literature in general works to control intellectual and personal phenomena by attempting to experimentally understand how passions operate in specific social conditions. Dramatists and novelist, thus, attempt through their works to analyze and regulate the mechanisms of passion, contributing to the practical utility and elevated morality of naturalistic literature. The writer's function according to Zola, then, is to conduct literary experiments before the public in which literary figures are put under certain living conditions to check how they would behave. The characters' ensuing conduct is then left for society to either bring forth or prevent, depending on whether the outcome is beneficial or dangerous. Writers should, therefore, content themselves with uncovering the determinism of social phenomena. The task of controlling these phenomena, either by promoting or discarding them depending on their utility, falls upon legislators and social reformers (Zola 30-31). "We are but savants, analyzers, anatomists," Zola argues, "and our works have the certainty, the solidity, and the practical applications of scientific works" (127-128).

By investigating the conduct of Danny, thus, under the influence of the war milieu, acting in a different British setting, Simon Stephens highlights a critical social phenomenon that threatens the whole society: violence of ex-soldiers. The phenomenon results mainly from the trauma of war and the inability to adapt to the new materialistic environment the protagonist finally finds himself in. The core difference between the two contexts and the ensuing determined behaviours of people in each put the characters of the play in severe conflict with each other, which is a conflict of victims rather than victimizes as each is a victim of their own surroundings. The moment the play ends, the role of legislators and reformers begin in dealing effectively with such a risky case if society's safety is to be maintained. Here lies the moral dimension of *Motortown*.

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