Chapter Two

Emancipation from Physical Fetters

Kopit is a meticulous craftsman gifted with a discerning eye to perceive the anxieties and struggles of humanity in this chaotic world. His genuine concern for the society and the individual has enabled him to portray the despicable human predicament of being bound in fetters from which man relentlessly endeavours to extricate himself.

Suzanne Burgoyne Dieckman and Richard Brayshaw rightly aver, “Kopit creates a theatrical world in which the characters are imprisoned” (195). Kopit’s characters are often conceived with physical bondages either inflicted by others on them or self-imposed. Kopit strives to depict the eternal human struggle for emancipation latent in his characters.

Kopit’s sophomore exercise, Oh Dad Poor Dad is indeed an exploration into the absurdity of human existence. The play, Oh Dad, Poor Dad, Mamma’s Hung You in the Closet and I’m Feelin’ So Sad : A Tragifarce in a Bastard French Tradition opens with Madame Rosepettle and her son Jonathan in a lavish hotel suite in the Caribbean with the stuffed dead body of her husband as part of her extensive luggage. Madame Rosepettle is a fabulously rich widow who wields control over everything in the hotel in Port Royal. She retorts quickly
to the Head Bellboy even over minute details. When the Head Bellboy asks her where she wants the dictaphone to be placed she snaps him quickly and says:

HEAD BELLBOY. The dictaphone, madame.

MADAME ROSEPETTLE. Ah, splendid.

HEAD BELLBOY. Where would madame like it to be placed?

MADAME ROSEPETTLE. Oh, great gods, are you all the same?
The center table, naturally. One never dictates one's memoirs from anywhere but the center of a room. Any nincompoop knows that.

(7)

As the Bellboy seeks to impress upon her that he is a lieutenant who is in charge of other Bellboys and hence entitled to respect, she snubs him again and says:

MADAME ROSEPETTLE. Well — you may consider yourself a lieutenant, lieutenant, but I consider you a bore! If you're going to insist upon pulling rank, however, I'll have you know that I am a Tourist. (Notice the money if you will.) I am a Tourist, my boy.— And being a Tourist am in charge of you. Remember that and I'll mail you another stripe when I leave. As for "respect," we'll have no time for that around here. We've got too many important things to do. Right, Albert?

Jonanthan. Ra-ra-ra-rrrright. (7)
Kopit unravels the very nature of the decayed mind of Madame Rosepettle in her own words as she arranges her master bedroom in Port Royal. Madam Rosepettle lays bare her social status to the Bellboy who informs her that there are no Siamese cats in Port Royal.

MADAME ROSEPETTLE. Then you should have flown to Buenos Aires. I would have paid the way. …

Bellboy Two. Madame please. I have a wife.

Madame Rosepettle. And I have a fish. I dare say there are half a million men in Port Royale with wives. But show me one person with a silver piranha fish and then you’ll be showing me something. Your marital status does not impress me, sir. You are common, do you hear? (13)

Her money power, she thinks, can get her anything and that she is above everybody else because she owns things which common people do not possess. The Bellboy’s marital status does not impress her and she is superior to everyone else and that she can have a lifestyle completely different from others. She fails to realise that she is only a bonded slave to the situations that she has purposefully placed herself in. But she is keen on asserting her authority and is determined to get tender Siamese kitten for her Piranha fish.

The very fact that she requires the room to be draped in black to ward off sunlight completely in order to keep her ‘mournful gloom’ shows that she is
enslaved to her circumstances. The coffin of her dead husband carried by the Bellboys on her command to the master bedroom is placed next to her bed. She is annoyed as the room is well lit and she says:

MADAME ROSPETTLE. Now, to begin: you may pick up the drapes which were so ingeniously dropped in a lump on my table, carry them into the master bedroom and tack them over my window panes. I don’t wear black in the tropics for my health, my boy. I’m in mourning. And while I’m here in Port Royal, no single speck of sunlight shall enter and brighten the mournful gloom of my heart – at least, not while I’m in my bedroom. Well, go on lieutenant, go on. Forward to the field of battle, head high. Track the drapes across my windows and when my room is black, call me in. (8)

Madam Rosepettle’s ties with her dead husband do not seem to break even after his death. She is physically bound to her husband as Kopit portrays her carrying the stuffed corpse of her husband even to tourist destinations. She puts the stuffed corpse of her dead husband in the closet. She also arranges for the proper atmosphere for the corpse by draping the bedroom with black velvet to keep away sunlight. Kopit seems to imply that both the corpse as well as Madame Rosepettle hold each other in bondage.
MADAME ROSEPETTLE. ... People have no respect for coffins nowadays. They think nothing of the dead. (Short pause.) I wonder what the dead think of them? (Short pause.) Agh! The world is growing dismal. (6)

Madame Rosepettle goes on a tour to the Caribbean with her stuttering son Jonathan along with her silver Piranha fish that feeds on Siamese kittens and her rare Venus-flytraps. Madame Rosepettle is enslaved to her belongings and her extravagant luggage is inextricably attached to her person from which she has no escape. Paul J. Hurley comments on the stuffed corpse of her husband and her Venus-flytraps as well as the silver Piranha fish and calls it as: “... the viciousness inherent in Mme. Rosepettle’s desire to dominate men” (63). Her mentally retarded son Jonathan is always and will be ever with her more as a heavy luggage than as a human being.

In Port Royal in the Caribbean Islands, Madame Rosepettle comes into contact with Commodore Roseabove, a colonel who owns the largest pink yacht in the island. However the pink yacht, one hundred and eighty seven feet long anchored in the harbour, attracts her attention and she enquires with the Head Bellboy:

MADAME ROSEPETTLE. ... A question before you go. That yacht in the harbour.

HEAD BELLBOY. Which yacht in the harbour?
Madame Rosepettle. The pink one, of course – 187 feet long, I’d judge. Who owns it?

Head Bellboy. Why Commodore Roseabove, Madame. It’s a pretty sloop.

MADAME Rosepettle. (Distantly.) Roseabove. Roseabove — I like that name. (14)

The name Roseabove is fascinating for her and she is unconsciously attracted by the yacht as well as its owner, Commodore Roseabove. However, she is not ready to allow anyone so common like the Bellboys to subscribe to her opinions and she retorts:

HEAD BELLBOY. Madame realizes, of course, it’s that largest yacht at the island.

Madame Rosepettle. It’s also the largest yacht in Haiti, Puerto Rico, Bermuda, the Dominican Republic and West Palm Beach. I haven’t checked the Virgin Island yet. I thought I’d leave them till last. But I doubt if I’ll find a larger one there. (14)

Rosalie, the baby sitter comes in to give Jonathan company when his mother is away. Jonathan has watched her from the porch through his telescope. Rosalie requests Jonathan to visit her in her lonely hours. Jonathan does not want her to know that his mother keeps him in the house and locks the front door whenever she ventures out. Jonathan confesses to Rosalie:
JONATHAN. I-I don’t — know. I don’t know why. I mean. I’ve —
nnnnnnever really thought — about going out. I — guess it’s —
just natural for me to — stay inside. ... Besides, Mother locks the
front door.
Rosalie. I thought so.

JONATHAN. No! You - don’t understand. It’s not what you think.
She doesn’t lock the door to ka-ka-keep me in, which would be
malicious. She — locks the door so I can’t get out, which is for my
own good and there beneficent. (22, 23)

As Rosalie lingers with Jonathan longer than she should even after the
cuckoo clock from the master bedroom strikes the third waning signal, Madame
Rosepettle enters. She addresses Jonathan in an authoritative tone and shouts at
Rosalie and says,

MADAME ROSEPETTLE. Two warnings are enough for any man.
Three are enough for any woman. The cuckoo struck three times
and then a fourth and still she’s here. May I ask why?
Rosalie. You’ve been listening at the keyhole, haven’t you!
Madame Rosepettle. I’m talking to my son, harlot!
Rosalie. What did you say!

Rosalie asks Madame Rosepettle why she will not allow Jonathan and go out of his room. Madame Rosepettle replies,

MADAME ROSEPETTLE. I don’t let him out because he is my son. I don’t let him out because his skin is as white as fresh snow and he would burn if the sun struck him. I don’t let him out because outside there are trees with birds sitting on their branches waiting for him to walk beneath. I don’t let him out because you’re there, waiting behind the bushes with your skirt up. I don’t let him out because he is susceptible. That’s why. Because he is susceptible. Susceptible to trees and to sluts and to sun stroke. (26)

Rosalie is inquisitive to know why Madame Rosepettle invited her to come and visit her son Jonathan and Madame Rosepettle tells her:

MADAME ROSEPETTLE. Because, my dear, my stupid son has been watching you through that stupid telescope he made. Because, in short, he wanted to meet you and I, in short, wanted him to know what you were really like. Now that he’s seen, you may go.

ROSALIE. And if I choose to stay? (26)
Rosalie is interested in Jonathan so much that she wants him to go out with her and even visit her in her lonely hours. She wants to possess Jonathan and wrench him completely from his mother’s clutches. In her attempt to emancipate Jonathan and posses him for herself, she entices Jonathan to have physical contact with her. Rosalie seems to be tired of playing the blind man’s buff with ten little children. She is bent on having a physical relationship with Jonathan.

Madame Rosepettle has keenly observed Rosalie playing blind man’s buff with the children in the penthouse and she describes Rosalie very pungently and says:

**MADAME ROSEPETTLE.** Blind man’s buff with the children in the garden. The redhead one –fifteen, I think. Behind the bush while the others cover their eyes. Up with the skirt, one-two-three and it’s done. Don’t try to deny it. I’ve seen you in action. I know your kind. (25)

Rosalie, the seductress is very keen on seducing Jonathan. She is dressed in a childish pink party dress and looks very sexually enticing. She makes very disgusting sexual advances to Jonathan shamelessly. She tries to take Jonathan away with her before his mother Madame Rosepettle arrives. But Jonathan cannot leave the room and go after Rosalie for “there’s nothing out there to see” (20).
Kopit portrays the character of Jonathan in a stupendous manner. Though Jonathan is seventeen years old, he is dressed as a ten year old and he is always confined indoors. He has been promised by his mother that one day he would become someone very great in life. He thinks that he has to obey the dictates of his mother always. He is confined to the room in Port Royal when his mother ventures out to the beach. He has his collection of stamps, coins and books to amuse himself. He improvises a telescope to look at the airplane that flies away. Jonathan has little use of the telescope besides scanning the horizon to look for airplanes. Hence, he incidentally uses it to spy on Rosalie as she plays with the children of the penthouse.

Jonathan is fascinated by the airplane. He uses his telescope to see the airplane that flies with hundreds of people sitting by the windows and looking out. The playwright makes Jonathan scan the horizon to see the airplane which flies overhead which indicates the inherent desire in Jonathan to liberate himself. But the airplane flies away. However, Jonathan is happy because he could see Rosalie with his telescope. He tells her that he saw her playing blind man’s buff with the children in the garden of the penthouse. Rosalie tells him that there is nothing out there to see.

Madame Rosepettle has entrusted Jonathan with the responsibility of feeding the Venus-flytraps which she brought from the rain forests of Venezuela
and her silver Piranha fish in order to keep him more under her authority and bondage.

Rosalie insists that Jonathan should visit her at the penthouse because she feels quite lonely when all the children go to sleep and no body is around. Instead, Jonathan invites her to come over to his place as it is not natural for him to go out. He does not want to openly confess that his mother would not allow him to go out. Jonathan admits that his mother has locked him up in his room, but he is not ready to implicate his mother easily. He tells Rosalie:

JONATHAN. ... I've — I've ggggggot so many things to do I — just couldn't possibly get anything done if I ever — went — outside. (There is a silence. JONATHAN stares at ROSALIE as if he were hoping that might answer her question sufficiently. She stares back at him as if she knows there is more.) Besides, mother locks the front door.

ROSALIE. I thought so.

JONATHAN. No! You-you don’t understand. It is not what you think. She doesn’t lock the door to ka-ka-keep me in, which would be malicious. She — locks the door so I can’t get out, which is for my own good and therefore — beneficent. (23)

Jonathan confides to Rosalie how he spends his time and says, “SometimeswhenI'montheporchIdootherthings” (17). He tells her that he spends
his time watching her from the porch. He opens up further and tells her that he watches her a great deal everyday through the telescope. Jonathan tries to philosophize that everyone watches Rosalie through a telescope but accepts the fact of his voyeuristic tendencies like his mother.

Much the same way as Madame Rosepettle has stuffed the dead corpse of her husband Edward Albert Rosepettle III, she has enslaved and kept Jonathan under lock and key. She masters complete control over her son and would not even post the letters he writes though trivial as they might be. She governs every move of Jonathan and guards his mind. The very fact that she allows Rosalie to visit him in their hotel room is to make Jonathan understand the futilities and purposelessness of even love. She has observed Rosalie in the garden from her hotel playing blind man’s buff with the children. She tells Rosalie that life is a lie in all its ugliness and says:

MADAME ROSEPETTLE: ...It builds green trees that tease your eyes and draw you under them. Then when you’re there in the shade and you breathe in and say, “Oh God, how beautiful,” that’s when the bird on the branch lets go his droppings and hits you on the head. Life, my sweet, beware. It isn’t what it seems. I’ve seen what it can do. I’ve watched you dance. (25)

She declares to Rosalie that she has seen her dance the previous night and tells her blatantly to her face what she has seen with her own eyes.
MADAME Rosepettle. Last night in the ballroom. I’ve watched you closely and I know what I see. You danced too near those men and you let them do too much. Don’t try to deny it. Words will only make it worse. (25)

Madame Rosepettle harps on the idea of the susceptible nature of her son Jonathan. She does not want him to be entangled with the lies of this life. A seductress like Rosalie would find Jonathan an easy prey to her vile and wicked ways. Her son’s skin is white like fresh snow and if he ever went out, he would be burnt by sunstroke. Moreover, the coquettish whore, Rosalie is lying in wait behind the bushes to trap men.

Jonathan’s mind is after Rosalie and he watches her everyday with his telescope. His only amusement is to watch Rosalie in the garden playing with the children at the penthouse. His adolescent mind longs to be in company with Rosalie even as he is physically imprisoned by his mother. Being confined and kept under lock and key by his mother, his mind takes to wings and wanders out to explore the delightful things of this world. His imagination is kindled when he sees the airplane far away with hundreds of people sitting by the windows and he wants to see how they look like so that he may know what he might become in life. He uses his improvised telescope to look far into the world and as he does not see airplanes during the day, he has used the telescope to spy on the movements of Rosalie from his room.
Jonathan's mother leaves him locked up alone in his room with his stamps and coins and books. She goes out of the room with the keys in her hand after her own pursuit of pleasure. Jonathan is practically left behind with nothing much to do except to feed the Piranha fish and the Venus-flytraps. The only manner in which he can spend his time is to peep into the world outside and enjoy life as best as he could leave alone taking part in it. His mind longs to take on wings and fly away from this physical bondage that has been inflicted upon him by his domineering mother who thinks that she has escaped the ties of this life. The verve of life that keeps flowing in Jonathan's heart eddies for a vent and he seeks the earliest opportunity to break loose and be emancipated.

Madame Rosepettle takes Commodore Roseabove to her room to his amazement. She allows him do dance with her and hold her. Yet when he makes advances of love she chooses to keep him at bay. She begins to narrate to him the life she has led with her dead husband and tells him:

MADAME ROSEPETTLE. ... For you see, Commodore, we are, in a way, united. We share something in common - you and I. We share desire. For you desire me, with love in your heart. While I, my dear Commodore – desire your heart. (39)

She tells him how Albert came along and offered to marry her when she was twenty eight years of age. She was still a virgin and she enumerates to him how she conceived Jonathan on their first nuptial night. She took her mattress and
moved over to another room the next morning. Jonathan was born to her twelve months later and was already teething as he was overdue and she continues to tell him:

MADAME Rosepettle. ... I took him home and put him in a cage in the darkest corner of my room. But still I —

THE COMMODORE. Was it a large cage?

MADAME Rosepettle. What?

THE COMMODORE. Was his cage large? I hope it was. Otherwise it wouldn't be very comfortable.

MADAME Rosepettle. I'm sorry. Did I say cage? I meant crib. I put him in a crib and set the crib in a corner of my room where my husband would not see him. (43).

Madame Rosepettle tells Commodore that she put Jonathan in a 'cage' carelessly and not a crib. She also informs him that she hid him in a corner away from her husband until she knew why Albert married her. Conspicuously Jonathan is another creature like the Piranha fish and Venus-flytraps to be kept in its proper place – a curio, a thing that nobody else possesses.

Jonathan has overheard his mother's conversation with Commodore Roseabove. The Piranha fish growls at him and he escapes the Venus-flytraps as they try to get at him. Suddenly he awakens to his strong manly feelings within and goes and smashes the glass case that covers the fire axe and hacks the Venus-
flytraps apart. He then begins to breathe more freely. He does not hear the three knocks at the door and the closing of the doors. Rosalie enters the room and closes the doors on the Bellboys.

Jonathan turns to face Rosalie and tells her, “I killed it” (47). Rosalie is inquisitive to know where he had put his mother’s body. Jonathan replies that he has not killed his mother, but her plants. He sees the Piranha fish giggling and smashes the bowl and strikes the fish again to death and asks her, “Do you think it can live without water?” (48). Jonathan is careful to see that the fish should not live anymore. He has finally overcome the shackles of timidity that has been laid on him.

Jonathan begins to confess to Rosalie how his mother said that she would never allow him to see, talk or meet Rosalie again. There is a new awareness in Jonathan about his mother and he states, “She – She hates me” (49). Jonathan is now matured enough to know the real implication of his mother’s hold on him. He desperately wishes to be freed from her control. He is hysterical about the fetters that his mother has put on him.

JONATHAN. She doesn’t let me do anything. She doesn’t let me listen to the radio. She took the tube out of the television set. She doesn’t let me use her phone. She makes me show her all my letters before I seal them. (49)
Now Rosalie tries to stake her claim to possess Jonathan. Jonathan begins to ponder why his mother told everything to Commodore Rose above having known that he was there. This revelation of her callousness about his existence releases him further to emancipate himself from the physical bondage that he has been kept under since childhood and he asserts his individuality by hugging Rosalie intimately.

Rosalie, the seductress tries to take advantage of Jonathan’s bold effort to free himself from his mother, and tells him insistently, “I mean, let’s leave. Let’s run away. Far away. Tonight. Both of us, together. Let’s run and run. Far, far away” (51). Rosalie tries to seize the earliest opportunity to take Jonathan away from his mother into a world of freedom to love, to enjoy life and also have children.

The absence of Jonathan’s mother is perhaps the most opportune time to make good their escape. Rosalie feels assured in her mind that her scheming has worked quickly. But Jonathan is not prepared to leave with her immediately and he is completely perplexed. He does not seem to be prepared to abandon his mother and elope with Rosalie as he has never gone out on his own all by himself. Jonathan almost feels like a bird that has been caged too long that even when the door is opened the bird is unwilling to fly away. But Rosalie insists:
Rosalie's persistence in coercing Jonathan to elope with her fails. Jonathan is not mentally prepared to go away with Rosalie. He suggests that she could take some one else with her. Rosalie unwaveringly insists that it is Jonathan whom she loves and that she wants him alone to be her husband.

Jonathan is completely confused as he is torn between his emotions to run away with Rosalie and to stay with his mother. He thinks that he is incapable of taking decisions and he begins to sob.

Rosalie is very tactful in her manoeuvres and she quickly asks Jonathan where his mother has gone and Jonathan replies "the usual place ... the beach" (52). Rosalie very tactfully discovers from Jonathan that Madame Rosepettle will not be home for a while and she decides to capitalize on the situation. Rosalie moves into the master bedroom of his mother and Jonathan is puzzled. He cries out, "WHAT ARE YOU DOING!? Stop!! Stop!!! (52).

Quite undaunted by Jonathan's cries, Rosalie elegantly enters into his mother's bedroom and removes the drapes from off the windows of the darkened room. Kopit graphically describes:
Weird COLOURED LIGHTS stream in and Illuminate the bedroom in wild, distorted, nightmarish shadows and lights. They blink on and off, on and off. It's all like some strange, macabre fun house in an insane amusement park. (52, 53)

Jonathan does not dare to venture into his mother's bedroom and hence he tries to lure Rosalie into the living room again by offering to show his collection of stamps to her. But Rosalie offers to come out only if Jonathan comes into his mother's bedroom with his collection of stamps. Jonathan yields to her proposition and enters his mother's bedroom the first time ever in his life with not only his collection of stamps but also his coins and books.

Fear grips Jonathan as he sets his belongings next to his mother's bed and he blurs out, "I've never been in here before" (54). Rosalie makes him feel comfortable and assures him saying, "there is nothing to be afraid of" (54). Jonathan now offers to show her his stamp collection but Rosalie is deft in her manoeuvre as she seems to have mastered the art of seduction and she says "let me show you something first" (54). Jonathan's curiosity is kindled and as he becomes very inquisitive Rosalie asks him to sit down in his mother's bed next to her. She tells him that she knows that Madam Rosepettle will not come back very soon because she has checked with the beach and has found the beach filled with lovers. She urges him to leave the hotel, the Island and his mother before it is too late and says:
ROSAIE. I love you, Jonathan, and I won’t give you up. I want you ... all for myself. Not to share with your mother, but for me, alone — to love, to live with, to have children by. I want you, Jonathan. You, whose skin is softer and whiter than anyone’s I’ve ever known. Whose voice is quiet and whose love is in every look of his eye. I want you, Jonathan, and I won’t give you up. (55)

For a moment Jonathan is unable to handle the liberation he has achieved from the shackles of his oppressively controlling mother and he begins to stutter again and becomes speechless for a while. Rosalie goads him on to further action and tries to possess Jonathan physically all for herself and says:

ROSAIE. Forget about your mother. Pretend she never existed and look at me. Look at my eyes, Jonathan; my mouth, my hands, my skirt, my legs. Look at me, Jonathan. Are you still afraid?

JONATHAN. I’m not afraid. (56)

The question “Are you still afraid?” (56) stings Jonathan’s manliness hitherto dormant in him and he asserts “I am not afraid” (56). There is a wicked smile in Rosalie’s face as she starts to unbutton her dress and declares that she is stronger than his mother. She now stands in a slip and crinolines and does not stop her sexual advances as she is determined to lie with Jonathan in his mother’s bed.
Stupefied by Rosalie's shameless offer of cheap sexual pleasure as she tries to reach for his hands, Jonathan meekly sits down on the edge of his mother's bed. At this opportune moment, just like a bolt from the blue, the closet door swings open and out falls the CORPSE of Albert Edward Robinson Rosepettle III on both of them. Jonathan is almost in a state of collapse and Rosalie is shocked and she says "Who the hell is this!?" (57) and she comments that it is a stupid place to keep a corpse. She pushes it back into the closet and shuts the door. Jonathan says that it is his father. Rosalie does not pay heed to his words but asks him to take off his clothes and says:

ROSALIE. Oh, for God's sake. (She pushes him off the bed and onto the floor.) Jonathan...? LISTEN TO ME, JONATHAN! STOP LOOKING AT HIM AND LOOK AT ME! (He looks away from his father, fearfully, his mouth open in terror.) I love you, Jonathan, and I want you now. Not later and not as partner with your mother but now and by myself. I want you, Jonathan, as my husband. I want you to lie with me, to sleep with me, to be with me, to kiss me and touch me to live with me, forever. (57)

Rosalie wants him to touch her because she wants him forever. Jonathan is not carried away by what Rosalie says and does. He suddenly begins to display great mental balance and maturity of thought:
JONATHAN. Ma—mother was right! You do let men do anything they want to you.

ROSALIE. Of course she was right! Did you really think I was that sweet and pure? Everything she said was right. *(She laughs.)* Behind the bushes and it’s done. One-two-three and it’s done. Here’s the money. Thanks. Come again. Hah-hah! Come again! *(Short pause.)* So what!? It’s only you I love. They make no difference.

JONATHAN. You’re dirty! *(58)*

Yet Rosalie is relentless in her attempt to possess Jonathan completely for herself and she adds:

ROSALIE. No, I’m not dirty. I’m full of love and womanly feelings. I want children. Tons of them. I want a husband. Is that dirty? Take off your clothes.

JONATHAN. NO!! *(58)*

Jonathan has obtained complete mental maturity and he decides to cut himself off not only from his possessive mother but also from the child seductress, Rosalie. He springs into action and smothers her to death by her dishevelled skirt on his mother’s bed. Madame Rosepettle has just then come in and is alarmed to see her room in disarray with her plants and the fish dead. Jonathan is liberated completely and he waves his arm to the airplane wildly and
desperately from the porch hardly realizing that his emancipation is only short-lived.

Arthur Lee Kopit's *Wings* is an excellent portrayal of the struggle of a female stroke victim to overcome aphasia and her efforts to free herself from the bondages of non-communication. Kopit was commissioned to write an original audio play for Earplay by National Public radio in the fall of 1976 and *Wings* was the outcome. The play is the protagonist's battle to reacquire language skills. The play has been acclaimed by the reviewers for its profoundly moving effect and has been a success since its very inception. The play has since been expanded and improved to accommodate visual components of Emily Stilson's clinical condition for the stage.

Richard Eder describes the complete play as a brilliant work which is complex at first glance and yet utterly lucid. Doris Auerbach comments on the real themes of *Wings* and says:

... the exploration of the nature and structure of language as the particularly human way of experiencing the world, and the stroke victim as metaphoric for the human courage which can overcome essential human isolation. (108)

Kopit explores the nature of language and its essential implication in ascertaining the freedom of humanity in verbal expression of one's thought.
The conception of the character of Emily Stilson by Kopit is quite unique. Kopit's father, George Kopit suffered a devastating stroke in 1976 and Kopit was with him to nurse him and thereby he gained a first-hand knowledge and understanding of a stroke victim's world. Kopit focused his attention on three other individuals whom he met at the Burke Rehabilitation centre in White Plains, New York — two stroke patients and a speech therapist. In order to be objective, Kopit chose to avoid the case of his father which was too severe and too grim. Instead he chose Emily Stilson a former aviatrix and wing-walker and Kopit in his preface to Wings says:

She seemed to understand something of my project ... Gradually, an image of a remarkable and quite vivid interior landscape began to form in my mind, frightening and awesome in its details, its blatant gaps, its implications. (Preface, 14)

Amy, the speech therapist, who once suffered the same condition temporarily supplies Kopit with a better understanding of the inner world of an aphasic. Kopit designs the structure of the play on the therapist's process of recovery through the consciousness of the stroke victim. The lack of factual evidence about the inner reality of the person makes Kopit strive for "emotional truth, informed by facts" (16). Kopit conceives Wings for the audience to observe the mental realm of Emily Stilson through her consciousness.

Kopit's father suffered a major stroke which rendered him incapable of speech. The stroke impaired his senses and his power of comprehension was
affected. The effects of isolation on him were intolerable. However he had not lost all power of comprehension as terror could be read in his eyes. Kopit was curious to understand how much his father comprehended and felt within himself. As Kopit nursed him, he found that in spite of his aphasia, there was not any change in the person. Meanwhile he was signalling in flashes like a flicker of a lamp perceptible only to the watchful eyes of Kopit. Hence Kopit began to ruminate on how his father was aware of what had happened to him and also how his father felt inside though unable to communicate with the people around him.

Kopit met two women stroke victims at Burke Rehabilitation Centre in White Plains, New York, where his father had been transferred after he was discharged from the hospital. One of the patients was in her seventies and the other in her late twenties. The older woman was Emily Stilson, a former aviatrix and a wing-walker. In a speech therapy session on a summer afternoon which Kopit attended, he was stunned to see the effort Emily Stilson took to find the right word that corresponded with the then current season. With very great difficulty she managed to utter the word ‘winter’. She then shook her head in dismay and laughed at her innate capacity to perceive and appreciate adventure. Emily Stilson was one of the bravest and most extraordinary persons in her youth.

Emily Stilson of Wings is a composite character incorporating characteristic features of many persons. But as her speech pattern was not as varied and interesting as in other patients, Kopit chose the other patient in her late
twenties who spoke English fluently but could not make any sense at all by her words.

The principal model for the linguistic richness of Wings is the woman in her late twenties. She continuously fights all tendencies to self-pity and despair and endeavours laboriously to reassemble her shattered world cheerfully. She is left-handed and possesses a rare ability to recognize and articulate her patterns of thought.

The speech therapist, Mrs. Jacqueline Doolittle’s knowledge of aphasia is Kopit’s touchstone for Wings. Her understanding of aphasia exceeded clinical limits for she herself had been aphasiac once. She had met with an accident and had suffered a head injury. After her recovery, the recapitulations of this period are like visions of sojourn in another world. All that she could remember and describe was a world of fragments, a world without dimensions, a world where time meant nothing constant from which there was no escape. Much of her experience of aphasia is conceived into the character of Emily Stilson.

Hence Emily Stilson is a composite of many persons and is also a unique product of Kopit’s imagination. The emotional validity of Mrs. Jacqueline Doolittle’s experience forms the basis for Emily Stilson’s character to which Kopit has not added symptoms either unlikely or impossible. The conception of Emily Stilson’s character with a clinical problem of aphasia to be the heroine of Wings to illustrate the mental anguish of a human being in a world deprived of
any meaning and sense whatsoever is indeed a stupendous accomplishment. Kopit excels in his treatment of brain damage on the stage with dramatic success.

Wings comprises four sections namely ‘Prelude’, ‘Catastrophe’, ‘Awakening’ and ‘Explorations’. As the play opens Emily Stilson is enjoying her book and the pleasant evening. Suddenly when she looks up, the lamp disappears into the darkness. But she turns back to her book and resumes reading as if nothing odd has happened. The clock skips a beat but Emily Stilson is oblivious of it. She looks up after a while when the clock resumed its normal rhythm as if the skipped beat has only just then registered and she appears to be concerned. Then the clock stops again and the book slips out of Emily Stilson’s hands and she stares out in terror:

MRS. STILSON. ...The moment of a stroke, even a relatively minor one, and its immediate aftermath, are an experience in chaos. Nothing at all makes sense. Nothing except perhaps this overwhelming disorientation will be remembered by the victim.

The stroke usually happens suddenly. It is a catastrophe. (26)

Emily Stilson has fragmented vision of images which are dazzling and blinding. Every aspect of the world has been shattered for her. She hears sounds outside herself of an airplane coming closer, thundering overhead and zooming off into silence but feels completely isolated.
Mrs. Stilson’s Voice

Must have... fallen

cannot ... move at all

sky ... (Gliding!) dark

cannot ... talk (Feel as if
I’m gliding!).

....

My Plane! What has

happened to my plane!

Help ... (34)

Emily Stilson is unable to correlate the sounds she hears and she says:

Where’s my arm? I don’t

have an arm!

What’s an arm?

AB-ABC- ABC123DE4512

12 what? 123 — 1234567897

2357 better yes no problem

I’m okay soon be out soon

be over storm ... Will

pass I’m sure. Always has. (36)
Emily Stilson feels completely isolated as she is unable to decode the various sounds she hears around her. She is unable to process information as her own thoughts and words do not seem to merge together to make appropriate meaning. She suffers from an unidentified fear within herself of being closely watched and monitored by strange people where language is foreign and unintelligible to her. She has a mental perception that her plane has crash-landed in a strange country, presumably Rumania. Her speech is completely meaningless both for herself and for others as her ideas and words do not co-relate. Her speech lacks coherence. Carol Harley sums up Emily Stilson's aphasic condition as:

... her speech is gravely impaired. When she can learn from verbal sounds her words are largely gibberish. When others speak intelligibly to her, she often hears what hey say as meaningless mambo – jumbo. (48)

She is utterly incapable of digesting and understanding the meaning of words she hears as well as unable to utter intelligible words and expressions to others.

The Doctors and Nurses attending on Emily Stilson try to attract her attention by calling out her name. Emily Stilson does not respond to the Doctors. One of the Doctors says, “It’s possible she may hear us but be unable to respond” (39) and Emily Stilson goes on:
MRS. STILSON. (Breathless with excitement.) Stop hold cut stop wait stop come-out-break-out light can see it ready heart can yes can feel it pounding something underway here light is getting brighter lids I think the word is that's it lifting of their own but slowly knew I should be patient should be what? wait hold on steady now it's spreading no question something underway here spreading brighter rising lifting light almost yes can almost there a little more now yes can almost see this ... place I'm ... in and ... (look of horror.) Oh my God! Now I understand! THEY'VE GOT ME! (40,42)

The Doctors are very suspicious of Emily Stilson's sense of hearing and she turns tables at them calling then deaf. Emily Stilson's response to the Doctors does not communicate anything and Kopit dexterously dramatizes the absurdity of the meaningless communication which is indeed a gross impediment to meaningful relationship with fellow human beings. Emily Stilson's statement “Oh my God this is grotesque!” (43) is perhaps the fitting answer to the human predicament.

Emily Stilson has no idea about her present condition. She still has vague memories of flying her plane and crash landing in an unknown country. She is completely unable to associate with ideas and the things around her have lost their original meaning.
MRS. STILSON. My name then – Mrs. Howard?

The room that I am in is large, square. What does large mean?

(Pause.) The way I’m turned I can see a window. When I’m on my back the window isn’t there. (43)

In order to evolve meaning out of meaninglessness, the different activities that go on around her make her confusion worst confounded. In a desperate mood of total isolation she soliloquizes:

MRS. STILSON. (Trying hard to keep smiling.) Yes, all in all I’d say while things could be better could be worse, far worse, how? Not quite sure. Just a sense I have. The sort of sense that only great experience can mallees or rake, plake I mean, flake... Drake!

That’s it. (She stares into space. Silence.) (44)

Emily Stilson gropes frantically to figure out the inner working of her mind and she pathetically fails in her attempt to find the proper expression for her sentiments. She gives up finally and becomes silent for a while and stares into the void. Emily Stilson is completely isolated from everyone around her and also from herself. Kopit vividly portrays her inner struggles to put her varied streams of thoughts together. In the section ‘Awakening’, the Doctors and Nurses are trying to analyse her powers of hearing and speech in order to ascertain her clinical condition. She is being directly confronted by the hospital staff and her inner and outer worlds are beginning to come together. Kopit dramatizes her
inner tension and struggle to comprehend and overcome her powers of understanding:

FIRST DOCTOR. Mrs. Stilson, makey your naming powers?

MRS. STILSON. What?

SECOND DOCTOR. Canju Spokeme?

MRS. STILSON. Can I what?

FIRST DOCTOR. Can do peeperear?

MRS. STILSON. Don't believe what's going on!

SECOND DOCTOR. Ahwill.

FIRST DOCTOR. Pollycadjis.

SECOND DOCTOR. Sewyladda?

FIRST DOCTOR. (With a nod.) Hm-hm. (Exit DOCTORS.)

MRS. STILSON (Alone again.) how it came to pass that I was captured! (45)

When one of the nurses brings in a dazzling bouquet of flowers, Emily Stilson's eyes are drawn to the flowers and she is unable to shift her gaze. The bright colours of the flowers get her in their thrall. Kopit describes her mind and says:

"... And the experience is so overwhelming, both physiologically and psychologically, that her brain cannot process all the information. Her circuitry is overloaded. It is too much sensory
input for her to handle. An explosion is imminent. If something does not intervene to divert her attention, Mrs. Stilson will very likely faint, perhaps ever suffer a seizure. (46)

Emily Stilson’s mental prowess lacks the capacity to react to the dazzling colours of the bright flowers appropriately. In all probability, she looks she might swoon.

Another Nurse comes in and greets Emily Stilson but Emily Stilson shows no sign of visible recognition. The Nurse adds that Emily Stilson did not touch her dinner and she offers her some pudding and Emily Stilson replies:

Mrs. Stilson. Yes no question they have got me I’ve been what that word was captured is it? No it’s — Yes, it’s captured how? Near as it can figure. I was in my prane and crashed, not unusual, still in all not too common. Neither is it very grub. Plexit rather or I’d say propopic. Well that’s that, jungdaball! (47)

Emily Stilson’s language is unintelligible and all her words are just cacophonous sounds which make no meaning or sense. There is a yawning gap between signifiers and the signified. Her capacity for language and speech only brings out incoherent utterances which lack any meaningful communication. Images and sounds keep recurring in her brain but her utterances are without any logical sequence or continuity.
Emily Stilson is enslaved to the memory of her past which is hidden in her subconscious mind. She is constantly conscious of her past memory as images keep occurring to her mind. The author supplies images and voices outside herself on the stage to correspond with her mental condition. There is total lack of cohesion in her utterances and her speech does not communicate anything. Emily Stilson processes information in a different level quite unlike the normal human beings. Her injured mind unravels her helpless physical condition of being unable to communicate with others meaningfully. She is frantically trying to keep pace with the situation around her and to respond to fellow human beings freely by her communication. The stroke has affected her brain cells and rendered her incapable of any freedom of thought and speech as well. Physically she is in fetters as any meaningful dialogue with fellow human beings is absolutely impossible to her.

The stroke has made Emily Stilson completely forget her present surrounding and she only remembers certain things which flit across her mind every now and then. She keeps skipping subjects and babbles words and illogical sentences which are seldom coherent. Her past memories of vibrant youthful activity as an aviatrix is critically contrasted with the insipid inertia of the present.

Margot Anne Kelley observes that the ‘disability plays’ published in the late 1970s are:
... works that attempt to offer models for retaining personal freedom despite the confining strictures of social authority ... focusing overtly upon illness, death and dying ... Kopit stresses the need for communication to alleviate the pain that isolation creates for patients. (Margot 383)

The inanity of language makes Emily Stilson feel not only isolated but ostracized by the society in being unacceptable. Her inability for meaningful communication is an obstacle to enjoy the freedom of life.

Margot Anne Kelly rightly avers:

*Wings*, however, records the experiences of a stroke victim, making the disability more than simply an effective state for exploring the alienation of the patient. Instead, the world of the stroke victim, as it is represented in the language and staging becomes itself signifying system for a state of alienation and dissociation, a system in which all correspondences between word and object, self and world have been rendered incomprehensible. (383)

Emily Stilson has a preconceived notion in her mind that her plane had crashed into Rumania and that she has been captured by the enemy and bought to a farm disguised as a hospital. She decides to escape without imparting any
information to the enemy. Just then a Nurse guides Emily Stilson to a Doctor. The Doctor wants to ask her some questions, some easy and some hard.

DOCTOR. Mrs. Stilson, If you don’t mind, I’d like to ask you some questions. Some will be easy, some will be hard. Is that all right?

MRS. STILSON. Oh yes I’d say oh well yes that’s the twither of it.

DOCTOR. Good. Okay. Where were you born?

MRS. STILSON. Never. Not at all. Here the match wundles up you know and drats flames fires I keep careful always —

DOCTOR. Right ... (speaking very slowly, precise enunciation.)

Where were you born?

MRS. STILSON. Well now well now that’s a good thing knowing yushof course wouldn’t call it such as I did andinjurations or aplovia could it? No I wouldn’t think so. Nest? (Pause.) (48)

In spite of the fact that the Doctor articulates very slowly and clearly with precise enunciation, Emily Stilson is unable to answer the Doctor’s questions.

Emily Stilson appears to be suffering from ‘sensory aphasia’ which indicates the loss of power to recognize the written or spoken word. Words have lost their import and ultimately their meaning and the very existence of a human being is challenged in a world which seems to elude meaning. Life goes on in the midst of everything and Emily Stilson affirms an optimistic assertion of life even when hopes and recognition seem dark and bleak.
Even when the Doctors desperately try to help Emily Stilson, she miserably fails in her verbal communication with them. On the contrary, she is only articulating to herself in an arduous attempt to search out her identity lost in the labyrinthine maze of a disconnected perception. Morgot Anne Kelley rightly observes:

Kopit establishes strong parallels between Emily's world – both internal and external – and our own that prompt us to question how the difficulties with communication and information acquisition and dissemination inherent to our society and literature might be related to illness, personal autonomy and external restraints. (385)

Kopit effectively paints the physical condition of the stroke victim. Her earlier life is sharply contrasted with the present despicable situation. Her life has shifted from being an aviatrix and a wing-walker to being confined to a wheel chair in a hospital for stroke patients and then being removed to Burke Rehabilitation Centre for recuperation. However, Emily Stilson does not give up very easily but she frantically struggles to articulate herself and overcome her aphasic condition. The Doctor tries to explain to her that she met with an accident not in an airplane but in her home and that the tissues of her brain have been destroyed. The Doctor is helpless to provide any sort of exact prognosis but Emily Stilson shows enormous fortitude and she struggles to liberate herself from the predicament into
which she has fallen. Her words overpower the Doctor’s speech. Emily Stilson says:

I don’t trust him, don’t trust anyone. Must get word out, send a message where I am. Like a wall between me and others. No one ever gets it right even though I tell them right. They are playing tricks on me, two sides, both not my friends, goes in goes out too fast too fast hurts do the busy I’m all right I talk right why acting all these others like I don’t, what’s he marking, what’s he writing?

(51)

Emily Stilson suddenly finds that her genuine efforts at effective communication have ended up in utter failure. In her frenzy, she calls others mad but very soon admits that she herself is mad. Emily Stilson exhibits undaunted courage as she accepts her incapability to attain freedom and she says:

MRS. STILSON. I am doing well of course! (Pause. Secretive tone.) They still pretend they do not understand me. I believe they may be mad. (Pause.) No they’re not mad, I am mad. Today I heard it. Everything I speak is wronged. SOMETHING HAS BEEN DONE TO ME!

DOCTOR. (Barely visible in the distance.) Mrs. Stilson, can you repeat this phrase: “we live across the street from the school.” (She ponders.)
Emily Stilson suddenly reverses her position from calling others mad. She boldly and almost instantaneously accepts that she herself is mad. This realization augurs for the remarkable improvement from her aphasic condition. In her moment of great agitation she has regained the power of comprehension and communication at least for a short while.

In the final section of *Wings* titled 'Explorations’, Kopit endeavours to delineate how Emily Stilson emancipates herself from the shattered world of a stroke patient. Gary Edgerton aptly points out:

In the final section, “Explorations”, Mrs. Stilson begins to even further emerge from her “inner world” and soon starts to discover nature and other people again. The play ends with Emily having accomplished modest but heroic gains. (152)

She surmounts her physical disabilities and she starts identifying things around her in real life and says:

*MRS. STILSON.* May be ... if somehow I could — (She searches for the words that match her concept.) — get inside ... (Pause. Sounds of the rec room pulse louder. She fights against it. The rec room sounds diminish.) Prob’ly ... Very dark inside ... (She
ponders; tries to picture what she’s thinking.) Yes ... twisting kind of place I bet ... (Ponders more.) With lots of ... (She searches for the proper word; finds it.) passageways that ... lead to ... (Again, she searches for the word. The outside world rushes in.)

PATIENT IN A WHEELCHAIR. (Only barely audible.) My foot feels sour. (An attendant puts a lap rug over the patient’s limbs. Then the rec room, once again, fades away.)

MRS. STILSON. (Fighting on.) ... lead to ... something ... Door! Yes ... closed off now I ... guess possibly for good I mean ... forever, what does that mean? (She ponders.) (60, 61)

Kopit allows Emily Stilson to use images like ‘door’, ‘airplane’ and ‘snow’ to suggest a total liberation from her physical existence. The final blocks of sounds are heard and Emily responds ecstatically:

BLOCK 15. You see, it’s all so unpredictable. There are no fixed posts, no clear boundaries. The victim, you could say, has been cut adrift...

BLOCK 16. Ah, how you’re really flying blind there!

(MRS. STILSON emerges from the maze of corridors. Sound perhaps of wind, or bells. Lights blue, sense again of weightlessness, airiness.)
MRS. STILSON. (In awe and ecstasy.) As I see it now, the plane was flying Backwards! Really, wind that strong, didn’t know it could be! Yet the sky was clear, not a cloud, crystal blue, gorgeous, angles could’ve lived in sky like that … I think the cyclone must’ve blow in on the Andes from the sea… (64)

Kopit suggests Emily Stilson’s gradual escape into timelessness and eternity by her expression ‘flying backwards’.

Emily Stilson is taken into the Speech Therapy Room along with Mr. Billy, Mr. Brownstein and Mrs. Timmins by Amy. Emily Stilson is made to listen to a cassette recorder. She listens the second time:

DOCTOR’S VOICE. All right, essentially, a stroke occurs when ther’s a stoppage …. When blood flow ceases in one part of the brain … And that brain can no long — (She shuts it off. Stares into space. Silence.) (70)

Emily Stilson after shutting off the recorder sits silently staring into space. Amy helps her dig into her memory and asks her to tell about Rhinebeck.

MRS. STILSON. On ... Saturday ... (She ponders.) On .... Sunday my ... son ... (Ponders again.) on Saturday my son ... took me to see the out at Rhinebeck.

AMY. See what?
MRS. STILSON. What I used to ... fly in.

AMY. Can you think of the word?

MRS. STILSON.... What word?

AMY. For what you used to fly in. (*Long pause.*)

MRS. STILSON. Planes!

AMY. Very good!

MRS.STILSON. Old ... planes.

AMY. That is very good. Really!

MRS. STILSON. I sat ...inside one of them. He said it was like the kind I used to. ... fly in and walk ... out on wings in. I couldn’t believe I could have ever done this. *(70)*

Emily Stilson is now able to associate ideas and render them into proper words. Kopit subtly makes Emily Stilson use words like plane and flying to denote her physical liberation from the fetters of stroke and aphasia. Amy and Emily Stilson begin to stroll leisurely through a park and it is all white with snow. Emily Stilson is able to identify the season as winter, the bench in the park and also snow with some difficulty. She then begins to narrate her dream to Amy.

MRS. STILSON. Oh yes! Well, this ... person ... came into my room. I couldn’t tell if it was a man or woman or ... young or old. I was in my bed and it came. Didn’t seem to have to walk just ... came over to my ... bed and ... Smiled at where I was. *(Pause.*)
And then it said … (In a whisper.) “Emily … were glad you changed your mind.” (Pause.) And then … It turned and left.

....

MRS. STILSON. I just know. (Pause.) Then… I left my body. (73, 74)

Emily Stilson narrates her encounter with the person in her dream and discloses a supernatural experience:

MRS. STILSON. Yes, up there at the — (She searches for the word; finds it.) ceiling, and I looked down and I was still there in my bed! Wasn’t even scared, which you’d think I would be …. And I thought, wow! This is the life isn’t it? (74)

Emily Stilson wonders at the mystery of life and continues her interior monologue:

Amy is still beside me but I am somewhere else. I’m not scared. It has taken me, and it’s clear again. Something is about to happen. (Pause. Amy now completely gone. MRS. STILSON in a narrow spot of light, darkness all around.) I am in a plane, a Curtiss Jenny, and it’s night. Winter. Snow is falling. Feel the tremble of the wings! How I used to walk out on them! Could I have really done — Yes.
... I could feel the wind! Shut my eyes, all alone — FEEL THE SOARING! (74)

Emily Stilson hints at being liberated from her body. She feels the winds again and she soars up high into the skies. She says, “Actually, odd thing, once I did, broke free got into the dark, found I wan’t even scared … Or was I? (Slight laugh.)” (75).

The words ‘broke free’ is ample indication of Emily Stilson’s liberty from all earthly tangles. She is not even sure whether it is scary or not. But she knows that it is wonderful and she is ecstatic about it. Emily Stilson says: “Oh my, yes, and here it goes then out … there I think on … wings? Yes … (Pause. Softly, faint smile.) Thank you.” (76). Kopit adds the stage directions like the ‘sound of bells’, the ‘lights going out’ and ‘silence’ to announce her smooth passing away into eternity.

Kopit’s play, The Day the Whores Came out to Play Tennis, satirically portrays the overthrow of the old social order. The Country Club is a symbol of the social climbers’ aspiration as Carol Harley observes. The urban middle class members are complacent because of their success. Kopit makes their self-contained world collapse.

Old Gayve, the secretary of the club is playing a game of cards with his friend Alexander Ratscin, the treasurer of the club in the Nursery of the Cherry
Valley Country Club. He is in his pajamas and is wearing an oversized, buttoned-wrong sweater and a wool cap. He remembers a very funny incident and recapitulates what happened in the Nursery years ago when his son was four or five years of age. His wife, who is now dead and gone, had brought their son to the Nursery to play with other children. Old Gayve enumerates:

*Old Gayve.* ... And amongst the other children playing was this one little girl playing by herself in a crib. Well, his mother, may she rest in peace, left him with the others and went away. *When she came back!* ... his head and shoulders were stuck between the bars of the crib. They had to saw the bars off to get him free. We never figured out just why it was he got himself into this strange predicament. But in any case he was very upset by it and his mother never brought him here again. (99)

Old Gayve remembers the incident because he had to come into the Nursery to help his son out of trouble. His son had stuck his head and shoulders between the bars of the crib of a little girl. They could never know why he got himself into such a strange predicament. Old Gayve adds that his son was very upset by the incident and his mother never brought him into the Nursery again. Ratscin having heard the funny incident being narrated by Old Gayve makes an observation on the character of Old Gayve’s son, Rudolph and says, “Knowing your son, he was probably trying to rape the girl” (99).
Evidently, Ratscin is exposing the lecherous ways of Rudolph. Franklin Delano Kuvl endorses the view of Ratscin about Rudolph. He calls up his wife Sylvia on the telephone in the morning and tells her to wake up Rudolph and tell him to come over to the club immediately. Kuvl’s suggestion to Sylvia unravels the traits in the character of Rudolph:

[Into the phone.] Now. Here’s what I’d like you to do. I’d like you to run next door, wake up that bastard Rudolph and tell him to get the hell over here. His Phone’s off the hook. ... The Club! Yes, I’m at the Club. ... Sylvia! Tell him we’ll be waiting in the Nursery. [He hangs up.] Wonderful thing about Sylvia. Anyone else would say, “What the hell’re you doing in the Nursery?” Sylvia? No. All she’s wondering is: will Rudolph, after all these years, finally rape her. [Pause.] Oh, God, how I wish he would. (103, 104)

The morality of the middle class human society is laid bare here very smartly by Kopit. Herbert informs Rudolph how the young women who had come in their Rolls Royces changed over to their tennis clothes and started to play tennis:

_Herbert._ Well. Anyway. Soon as I realized this, I went in after them. Sure enough, they were out back, waiting on the courts. They’d uh, changed into their tennis clothes. [He tries to laugh. Can’t.] I’m afraid they weren’t quite as elegant as before. For one, instead of tennis sneakers they had on basketball shoes. Instead of
tennis whites they had on plaids and chartreuse and lavender. And when they bent over, it turns out they didn't have on any underpants at all. (117)

The young women continue to play tennis unmindful of what Herbert would tell them. Herbert immediately calls all the executive committee members to come and assess the situation to make a decision. Ratscin admits that they came into the Nursery as it was the best place to watch the whores play. Rudolph looks at them and enjoys seeing them himself and says:

*Rudolph.* Oh, it's beautiful: eighteen bare-assed broads and they know how to play — it's just beautiful. I mean it's the greatest thing that's ever happened to the game of tennis, to say nothing of the goddamned Club. Oh, my God, what a fantastic day this is turning out to be. I mean, the place has come to life! (118)

Rudolph is excited about what he has witnessed and further informs them very interestingly that the members of the Happy Valley Country club who are expected to visit by noon that day also would enjoy the sight of the whores playing tennis.

Kopit pointedly criticises the middle class for its laxity in morals. The older generation of men who own the Cherry Valley Country Club are the long term members of the executive committee which runs the club. The younger
members are extremely stupid, self-conceited and vulgar and they do not have any respect or regard for their elders. All of them young and old huddle themselves in the Nursery to have a closer look at the whores, who have come out to play tennis, eighteen of them in two Rolls Royces. Some of them even rode in the trunk of the cars. The men are unable to confront the women on the tennis courts and they keep looking at them through the window shutters. The whores do not speak to the men at all. Instead they keep banging the Nursery till the building comes down crashing on the proprietors.

In Indians, Geronimo, the Apache Chief, the most ferocious Indian, surrenders and is imprisoned in a cage. Two COWBOY ROUSTABOUTs with muscles bulging against their gaudy clothing prod Geronimo along. Geronimo paces about the cage testing the bars with his hands. He thunders: I AM GERONIMO! WAR CHIEF OF THE GREAT CHIRICAHUA APACHES! (34) He brags of his exploits in his war against the white men. He is filled with hatred and anger and Kopit suggests that Geronimo yearns to be freed as he paces about the cage testing the bars with his hands. He is put in bondages by the white man so that he will not be a threat to him again. But the struggle in him to be freed from the restrictions of the white man is always unabated. John Bush Jones observes:

Forcing the Indians to impersonate their former greatness and supposed barbarity in such theatrical extravaganzas as Buffalo
Bill's Wild West Show is the ultimate humiliation and denial of authenticity, since it serves to point up even more sharply their defeat and present lack of freedom. (445)

The re-enactment of the Wild West Show by Buffalo Bill only aggravates the sentiments of the native Indians as it further reminds them of their physically bound condition in which freedom of life is restricted. Michael C. O’Neill rightly hints at the effect the show creates and adds: "... the audience is gradually implicated in the crimes committed by a nation anxious to perpetuate the myth of the West" (500).

Ned Buntline, the author of "Scouts of the Plains" has written a play for the Ol' Time President and the first lady to be staged in the White House Ballroom. Cody, Buntline and Hickok perform the melodrama. This scene within a scene portrays the rescue of a virgin Indian maiden named Teskanjavila by the Western heroes from "torture, sacrifice and certain violations" (47) by an evil Indian chief. The play is based on the basic idea that American Settlers could make the best use of the virgin land. The villainous Indian Uncas, the evil Pawnee chief rises from the dead and rationalises his own death rhetorically:

Uncas (German accent): I am Uncas, Chief of the Pawnee Indians, recently killed for my lustful ways. Yet, before the white men came and did me in, I had this vision: the white man kills a red man, we must forgive him, for God intended man to be as great as
possible, and by eliminating the inferior, the great man carries on God's work. Thus, the Indian is in no way wronged by being murdered. Indeed, quite the opposite: being murdered is his purpose in life. This was my recent vision. Which has brought light to the darkness of my otherwise useless soul, ... and now, I die again. (52)

The Indian maiden Teskanjavila is tied to a totem poll and the frenzied Indians' dance arouses her. Hickok eyes the girl lustfully:

OL' TIME PRESIDENT: I'm watching the girl, Note her legs. How white they are. For an Indian. One can almost see the soft inner flesh of her thighs.

FIRST LADY: this play excites me!

OL' TIME PRESIDENT: We really should have more things like this at the White House. (51)

The Ol' Time President suggests that the native woman can be sexualised only if they are similar to their own. Buntline, Cody and Hickok invade the Indian camp and gunshots are heard. The Indians scream and fall dead.

And immediately Teskanjavila says:

TESKANJAVILA: (Italian accent.)Saved! A maiden's prayers are answered! And may I say, not a bit too soon! Already, my soft
thighs had been pried open; my budding breasts pricked by the hot tip of an Indian spear. Yet, through it all, my maiden head stayed secure. Here. In this pouch. Kept in this secret pocket. Where no one thought to look. Thus is innocence preserved! May Nazuma, God of Thunder, grant me happiness! (51, 52)

Teskanjavila’s speech implies that her virginity has been preserved. It is indeed an open declaration that the land is still virgin and is ready for the new Settlers. Through all that has happened, “through it all”, the land has stayed secure. Hickok turns his attention to Teskanjavila,

**HICKOK* (Striking a pose.):*

Hail, sweet cookie, tart of tempting flavours,

Why’ve I been denied your spicy favors?

TESKANJAVILA: Ah! *What’re you doing? HELP! (HICKOK unties her from the pole, at the same time unhooking his gun belt. He works rapidly.)*

Buffalo bill lets Buntline’s limp arm drop. He stares back at the stage, stunned.)

**FRIST LADY: Ooooh, look what he’s doing now!**

*(The first Family climb on the stage, the Negro USHERS bringing their chairs for them so they can have a more comfortable view)*

Really, we must invite this theatre crowd more often. (56-57)
Hickok prepares to rape the Indian maiden in front of the audience as well as the dignitaries assembled. He describes himself as:

HICKOK: hickok, fastest shooter in the West, 'cept for Billy the kid, who ain't as accurate; Hickok, deadliest shooter in the West, 'cept for Doc Holliday, who wields a sawed-off shotgun, which ain't fair; Hickok, shootinest shooter in the west, 'cept for Jesse James, who's absolutely indiscriminate; this Hickok, strong as an eagle tall as mountain, swift as the wind, fierce as a rattlesnake — a legend in his own time, or any other. (57)

Kickok's speech indicates that the Indian maiden is a very easy prey for him and that she can never escape. He is full of lust for Teskanjavila and she protests:

TESKANJAVILA: I'm not an Indian and I'm not a maiden!

HICKOK: Who's not an Indian and not a maiden, but looks pretty good anyhow — an' asks those o' you watchin' t' note carefully the basic goodness of his very generous intentions, since otherwise...

(He starts to finger her clothing.)

... they might be mistaken for ...

(he rips open her buckskin dress.)

...LUST!

(She is left in a frilly Merry widow Corset.)
TESKANJAVILA: Eh, bambino. If you don' mind, I'd like a little privacy.

(To the First Family). (57-58)

The Indian maiden now willingly surrenders herself to the lustful Hickok. She welcomes him to enjoy her. All that she requires is a little privacy. Her helplessness in the hands of the lustful Indian Pawnee Chief, Uncas is replaced by the lustful assault of Hickok. Whether it is Uncas or Hickok it is not a matter of concern. The virgin, Indian maiden voluntarily surrenders herself to Hickok. The Native American soil is still virgin and can be ploughed and farmed for cultivation and productivity. The native American soil hitherto carelessly used only for grazing cattle can now be used for cultivation.

Kopit’s rare talent of his perceptive power to discern life critically enables him to scrutinize the pathetic plight of humanity in this callous world. His characters battle against life with their physical bondages. Kopit excels in the portrayal of the eternal human struggle for emancipation and universalises it effectively.

The critically satirical vision of the playwright is evident in its perception of the shackles of humanity. Apart from physical disabilities and imprisonment, humanity staggers from other forms of bondages as well. Gautam Dasgupta brilliantly avers that Kopit is, “a playwright with ideas, a dramatist with a vision” (248). Kopit pointedly portrays the shackles society has laid on the individual
human being. Kopit intensely visualises the various arresting forces which
constantly deter humanity from being emancipated. The following chapter strives
to analyse the social bondages humanity desperately battles against in its quest
for liberation.