Chapter Three

Emancipation from Social Shackles

Arthur Lee Kopit is a virulent social critic, imbued with the rare capacity to criticize the multifarious evils prevalent in the present day society. Kopit’s sharp insight into the faults and foibles fostered by the society find vent in his dramatic oeuvres. The human society seems to stagger and struggle endlessly with the restrictive shackles it has inextricably entangled itself in.

Kopit presents the character of Madame Rosepettle in Oh Dad, Poor Dad ingeniously. As the play opens Madame Rosepettle occupies an expensive suite in a luxurious hotel in Port Royal in the Caribbean Islands. She is on tour with an extensive luggage which includes the stuffed corpse of her dead husband, a Piranha fish and Venus-flytraps along with her mentally retarded son, Jonathan.

The stuffed corpse of Edward Rosepettle is taken to the master bedroom and put next to her bed. She orders her bedroom and the window panes to be draped with black velvet to keep the rays of the sun away. She does not want any light to invade into the mournful gloom of her privacy.

MADAME ROSEPETTLE. ... 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. (8)
Kopit's irony is very subtle in that Madame Rosepettle cannot wear her black dress in the tropics for reasons of her health. But she desires the world to know that she is in mourning. She would not allow even a single speck of sunlight to brighten the 'mournful gloom' of her heart while she is in her bedroom. Madame Rosepettle declares to the society that she is in mourning for her dead husband Edward Rosepettle by covering the master bedroom of the suite in the hotel with black curtains. But she enjoys herself visiting exotic tourist destinations. She sneaks out on the beaches in the middle of the night to surprise couples making love under blankets and to kick sea sand on their faces — her favourite hobby. Kopit's dexterous depiction of her depravity is stupendous and it subtly lays bare her dark intentions and manoeuvres to evade the prying eyes of the society.

Kopit presents the rich widow, Madame Rosepettle as a tourist to the holiday resorts in the Caribbean Islands. Her social background is laid bare by her extensive luggage. She asserts her social position by the power of her wealth and goes about ordering and commanding the Bellboys and even threatens to fire the staff of the hotel. The Head Bellboy resents at her impudence:

HEAD BELLBOY. I said this must end! I am not a common bellboy, madame — I'm a lieutenant. (Notice the stripes if you will.) I am a lieutenant, madame. And being a lieutenant am in charge of other
bellboys and therefore entitled, I think, to a little more respect from you.

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. (7)

She is proud as well as extremely conscious of her riches and thinks that she can purchase anything with her money. Madame Rosepettle is quite keen on establishing her social identity wherever she goes. She sights the fabulous pink yacht which is one hundred and eighty seven feet long, anchored in the harbour. When she finds the Head Bellboy recognise her attraction to the length of the yacht, she subtly rebukes him:

HEAD BELLBOY. Madame realizes, of course, it’s the 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 Islands yet. I thought I’d leave them till last. But I doubt if I’ll find a larger one there. I take great pleasure, you see, in measuring yachts. My hobby, you might say. (14)
Madame Rosepettle’s affinity to high society is amply evident as she singles out the pink yacht in the harbour. She gathers the name of the owner of the yacht, ‘a pretty sloop’ and she is informed that the owner is Commodore Roseabove. She is fascinated by the name Roseabove and she mumbles his name over and over again and expresses her liking for the name. She snubs the head Bellboy for being inquisitive about her interests and decides to dispose them at the earliest.

Commodore Roseabove is enamoured of the bewitching beauty and elegant demeanour of Madame Rosepettle. He takes her on his pink yacht and they spend a night in the yacht. Commodore Roseabove is extremely excited to be in the company of Madame Rosepettle and tells her that it would be wonderful to be together in a more private situation. Madame Rosepettle in return invites him to come to her room in the hotel in Port Royal. Commodore Roseabove considers the invitation as a gesture and readily accepts the invitation.

Madame Rosepettle and Commodore Roseabove dance to a Viennese waltz, The Dance of Lovers. And as they dance Commodore Roseabove holds Madame Rosepettle in a tight embrace to express his longing for her. He even suggests to her that he is ready for romance and love. He offers to kiss her and says:

THE COMMODORE. (Suavely.) Madame, may I kiss you?

MADAME ROSEPETTLE. Why?
THE COMMODORE. (After recovering from the abruptness of the question. With forced suaveness) Your lips ... are a thing of beauty.

MADAME ROSEPETTLE. My lips, Commodore, are the color of blood. (She smiles at him. He stares blankly ahead. They dance on.) I must say, you dance exceptionally well, Commodore — for a man your age. (31)

Commodore Roseabove is excited that he is alone with Madame Rosepettle at last after their nights together on the yacht and offers to kiss her lips. Madame. Rosepettle deftly dissuades him and makes him spin about under her arm and with the wide smile of ecstasy kisses him in the dizziest moment of the spin. She tries out her expertise in unravelling the hidden thoughts of man:

MADAME ROSEPETTLE.... Tell me about yourself.

THE COMMODORE. My heart is speaking, madame. Doesn’t it tell you enough?

MADAME ROSEPETTLE. Your heart, monsieur, is growing old. It speaks with a murmur. Its words are too weak to understand.

THE COMMODORE. But the feeling, madame, is still strong.

MADAME ROSEPETTLE. Feelings are for animals, monsieur Words are the speciality of man. Tell me what your heart has to say.

THE COMMODORE. My heart says it loves you.
MADAME ROSEPETTLE. And how many others, monsieur, has your heart said this to? (35)

Madame Rosepettle tells Commodore Roseabove that her conjugal relationship with her husband Edward Rosepettle did not lost beyond her nuptial night. She conceives Jonathan on the very first night of their union in marriage and the next day morning she picked up her bedding and moved to another room. She did not have physical contacts with him any further. She kept watching him very closely when he slept in her efforts to read his mind. She allowed Rosalinda to come between her and her husband and to sleep with him. Edward Rosepettle died in his bed and Rosalinda slept with the dead Edward Rosepettle for six hours without knowing that he was dead. Madame Rosepettle in her desperate attempt to understand the real intention of her husband in marrying her, loses him ultimately. She is liberated completely from her conjugal ties with her husband. She is emancipated from the social bondage of marriage.

Commodore Roseabove climbs up in his chair, crawls over his armrest and walks quickly towards the door and falls to the ground as the door knob comes off.

Madame Rosepettle tells Commodore Roseabove that she possesses her son completely and he is saved from the vicious world waiting to devour those who trust in it. She is proud of herself and she asserts that the mind of her son is pure. She has saved him from the world, the world of Commodore Roseabove
and Edward Rosepettle. Once again she is completely emancipated from the shackles of the social system called marriage.

Kopit’s portrayal of the character of Jonathan is unique. Jonathan is depicted as a seventeen year old but he looks and acts like a stammering ten year old. Jonathan always accompanies his possessive mother who constantly keeps him under captivity. He is regularly locked up in the hotel suite in order to be protected from the contaminating world around him. His mother promises him international eminence in the future and he is always found in the company of his collection of books, coins and stamps.

Madame Rosepettle completely segregates Jonathan from the society. He is constantly denied the opportunity to mingle with people around him. His personal handicap of stuttering is yet another impediment for social discourse. However, in spite of all the restrictions imposed upon him by his suppressive mother, Jonathan seeks chances to probe into the world around him. He is always fascinated by the airplane with people sitting near the windows and wonders how they would look. In his earnest endeavour to study life all by himself, he improvises the telescope with the lenses his mother had brought from her hunting expedition to Zanzibar. He happens to watch Rosalie through the telescope. Madame Rosepettle allows Rosalie to come into her hotel suite so that her son could meet her.
Jonathan informs Rosalie that he has been watching her a lot through the telescope. He has seen her in her penthouse garden playing blind man’s buff with ten little children.

ROSALIE. (With annoyance.) There’s nothing out there to see.

JONATHAN. (Sadly.) I know. That’s the trouble. You take the time to build a telescope that can sa-see for miles, then there’s nothing out there to see. Ma-Mother says it’s a Lesson in Life. (Pause.) But I’m not sorry I built my telescope. And you know why? Because I saw you. Even if I didn’t see anything else, I did see you. And — and I’m — very glad. (20)

The telescope is an effective tool for Jonathan to escape from the boredom of confinement in his room. But there is nothing out there to see and his mother says, “It’s a Lesson in Life” (20). Yet Jonathan is happy that he could see Rosalie through the telescope. Jonathan describes his desire to see the airplane flying with hundreds of people sitting near the windows.

JONATHAN. ... Well — (He Whispers) One day, when Mother wasn’t looking — that is, when she was out, I heard an airplane flying. An airplane — somewhere — far away. It wasn’t very loud, but still I heard it. An airplane. Flying — somewhere, far away. And I ran outside to the porch so that I might see what it looked like. The airplane. With hundreds of people inside it. Hundreds and
hundreds and hundreds of people. And I thought to myself, if I could just see — if I could just see what they looked like, the people, sitting at their windows, looking out— and flying. If I could see— just once— If I could see just once what they looked like— then I might — know what I — what I ... (Slight pause.) So I — built a telescope in case the plane ever came back again. (19, 20)

Kopit uses the airplane as the symbol for flight, freedom and liberty.

In her strenuous effort to seduce Jonathan and possess him ultimately for herself Rosalie makes awkward advances to Jonathan. Madame Rosepettle tells Rosalie that she does not let Jonathan out of his room because he is susceptible:

MADAME ROSEPETTLE. ... I don't tell him out because he is susceptible. That's why. Because he is susceptible. Susceptible to trees and to sluts and to sun-stroke.

ROSALIE. Then why did you come and get me?

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. (26)
Both Madame Rosepettle and Rosalie vie with each other to possess and stifle Jonathan.

But the moment Madame Rosepettle leaves the hotel for the beach with a huge flash light when the CHURCH BELL chimes thirteen times, Jonathan springs into action. He snatches the fire axe and hacks the Venus-flytraps and smashes the fish bowl and strikes the fish dead. The silver Piranha fish of Madame Rosepettle which was fed only with Siamese kittens and Venus-flytraps are symbols that denote the oppressive authority of his domineering mother. Jonathan's onslaught of anger and murderous rage mark his retaliation and conspicuous effort to break loose from his mother completely. He tries to establish his identity. He tells Rosalie that he thought he would never see her or talk to her again and confides with Rosalie saying:

JONATHAN. She — she hates me.

ROSALIE. What?

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. She doesn't. (49)

Jonathan liberates himself from the repressive clutches of his domineering mother.
Rosalie entices Jonathan sexually and seeks to make use of the delicate situation as an opportunist. She not only manages to enter his mother’s bedroom but also makes Jonathan sit on his mother’s bed for the first time in his life:

**ROSALIE.** Don’t be afraid, Jonathan. Come. Lie down. Everything will be wonderful. *(She takes her socks off and lies down in her slip. She drops a strap over one shoulder and smiles)*

**JONATHAN.** Get off my mother’s bed!

**ROSALIE.** I want you, Jonathan, all for my own. Come. The bed is soft. Lie here by my side. *(56)*

Rosalie coaxes Jonathan to lie with her as she wants him for her husband and have children with him. The corpse of his father falling out of the closet on both Rosalie and Jonathan arouses Jonathan’s desire for complete freedom from the devouring female and he asphyxiates Rosalie with her own crumpled skirt. Jonathan is completely free now and he picks up his telescope and goes over to the balcony. Madame Rosepettle arrives on the scene and asks Jonathan “*What is the meaning of this?*” but he stands there not bothering to answer her obstinate questions. He keeps looking at the airplane in the horizon through his telescope. The airplane flies over him and begins to circle about. Jonathan waves his arms to the plane widely and desperately. The airplane flies away. The new found liberty is short lived and Kopit suggests the inescapable bondage of Jonathan by his mother.
Rosalie is portrayed as a babysitter when the play begins. She works for the people who own the penthouse. When Jonathan tells her that he has never seen them around, Rosalie replies that she too has never seen them but she admires them very much:

ROSALIE. They must love children very much, to have so many, I mean. What a remarkable woman she must be. (Pause.) There’s going to be another one, too! Another child is coming! I got a night later last night. (21)

Kopit makes it very clear that Rosalie has special love for the children like the people who own the penthouse. The new child to arrive is Cynthia and Jonathan is amazed that Rosalie is capable of taking care of eleven children. Jonathan’s mother wants him to meet Rosalie so that he may know what Rosalie really is like. But Rosalie tries to make capital out of the situation and tries to lure Jonathan outside his room. Jonathan is neither prepared to go out of the room himself nor is he ready to admit to her that he has been imprisoned and kept under lock and key by his mother. Her suspicions about Jonathan’s imprisonment by his mother are confirmed when Jonathan informs her that his mother locks the front door. However, Jonathan is unwilling to betray his mother. Kyle Bostian states:

... Jonathan has been kept utterly isolated from the world. He is not allowed to go outside ... As a result of his isolation and
maternal domination, Jonathan’s identity – when the play begins, at least – has never had a chance to mature. (44)

Jonathan is completely under the custody of his mother and his mind is not matured enough to question her actions. Thus Rosalie’s efforts to take Jonathan out of his room and to make him visit her in the penthouse when she is alone become futile.

Rosalie is persistently tactful in her manoeuvres to seduce Jonathan and possess him ultimately. She does not give up easily and she is tenacious in her pursuit. Madame Rosepettle’s cuckoo clock strikes four times but Jonathan is unable to get her out of his room. Rosalie is curious to know what is just behind the door of the master bedroom and as she moves toward the master bedroom, Jonathan throws his arms about her legs and collapses at her feet sobbing

JONATHAN. (Sobbing uncontrollably.) I love you.

(Rosalie stops dead in her tracks and stares down at Jonathan,)

ROSALIE. What did you say?

JONATHAN. I-I-I llllllove you, I love you, I love you, I —

MADAME ROSEPETTLE. ... Too late. 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?

(24, 25)
Jonathan's words 'I love you' arrests Rosalie's movements and she stares down at Jonathan. It is indeed true love that Rosalie has been longing for. She has never been satisfied in life and she longs for a real fulfilment in conjugal love. Her life spent so far with other people and the children especially the red-headed fifteen year old had been thoroughly dissatisfying. She has realised that she can find real satisfaction only in conjugal relationship with someone who would love her with his whole heart. She has found Jonathan to be the one who would love her sincerely for she thinks that she has sufficient proof to believe in it.

Rosalie has been watched closely not only by Jonathan but also by his rapacious mother. Madame Rosepettle has evaluated Rosalie as a harlot, slut, scum and sleazy prostitute.

**MADAME ROSEPETTLE.** I'm talking to my son, harlot!

**ROSALIE.** What did you say!

**MADAME ROSEPETTLE,** Harlot, I called you! Slut, scum, sleazy prostitute catching and caressing children and men. Stroking their hearts. I've seen you.

**ROSALIE.** What are you talking about?

**MADAME ROSEPETTLE.** Blind man's buff with the children in the garden. The redheaded 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.

ROSALE. That’s a lie! (25)

Madame Rosepettle’s allegations arouse Rosalie to ask back “What are you talking about?” Madame Rosepettle graphically describes what she has seen with her own eyes – Rosalie being found with the red-headed fifteen year old behind the bushes while the others covered their eyes. Rosalie retorts, “That’s a lie” and Madame Rosepettle begins to philosophize on the falsity of life itself. Madame Rosepettle launches her next onslaught having seen her dance in the ballroom and Rosalie protests again. Madame Rosepettle graphically tells her how she allowed the men to do too much when she danced with them and orders her to leave immediately. But Rosalie is undaunted by the damaging diction of Madame Rosepettle and she asks her why she does not allow Jonathan to come out of his room. Madame Rosepettle says, “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 disposed of by Madame Rosepettle for her vulgarity of tastes and lowly social position.

But Rosalie enters Jonathan’s room in her pink party dress with a key she has made just when Jonathan hacks the Venus- flytraps of his mother with the fire axe. On seeing Rosalie, he proudly tells her that he has killed it. Rosalie wonders whether it is his mother that he has killed. Jonathan declares that he has not
killed his mother but her plants. Jonathan also kills his mother’s Piranha fish. Jonathan complains about his mother saying that she would never let Rosalie visit him again. He also informs her that he has heard everything his mother said. Jonathan confides his emotions to Rosalie and hugs her closely. Rosalie seizes the opportunity and asks Jonathan to runaway with her:

ROSALIE. Come with me.

JONATHAN. What?

ROSALIE. Leave and come with me.

JONATHAN. *(Fearfully.)* Where?

ROSALIE. Anywhere.

JONATHAN. Wha’—wha’—what do you mean?


JONATHAN. You— mean, leave? *(50, 51)*

The lack of mental preparedness on the part of Jonathan to elope with Rosalie without plan and preparation is evident in his fearful poise and Rosalie continues to cajole him to runaway with her saying, “Give me your hand and come with me. Just through the door. Then we’re safe. Then we can run far away, somewhere where she’ll never find us” *(51).* But Jonathan at this critical juncture when the opportunity is given to him suggests that Rosalie can take others with
her. Rosalie's smart retort, 'But I don't love them' is indeed an open declaration of her sincere yearning to possess Jonathan as her husband.

Rosalie has entered the room of Jonathan after taking all the precautions necessary. She has schemed things very well in advance to meet Jonathan in his mother's absence. She makes sure from inquiring with Jonathan that his mother will not be back for a while and that she has gone to the beach as usual. She does not pay heed to the protests of Jonathan when she tries to enter his mother's bedroom. Having entered the master bedroom, she pulls the black drapes from off the windows. Rosalie sits and bounces on the bed saying, "what soft, fluffy pillows. I think, I'll take a nap" (53). Jonathan's pleadings to Rosalie to get off his mother's bed and to come out end up in vain. Rosalie invites Jonathan to come in and try his mother's bed. As Jonathan cautions her that his mother will be back soon, Rosalie suggests that Jonathan should give his room to her. She insists that she will come out only if he comes in. Jonathan offers to carry his stamps, his coins and also his books to show them all to Rosalie.

Jonathan has entered his mother's bedroom for the first time in his life. Fear grips him and he looks about in panic. Rosalie assures him that there is nothing to be afraid of. She tells Jonathan that they can look at the stamps later and offers to show something to Jonathan first if he would sit down on the bed. Her calculating craftiness is hinted at very subtly by Kopit when she says:

JONATHAN. We've got to get out of here. Mother might come.
Rosalie seems to be relentless in her scheme to wrench Jonathan from the tenacious grips of his powerfully possessive mother.

Rosalie urges the trembling Jonathan to leave with her. Jonathan foresees something terrible to happen if they do not leave his mother's bedroom. Rosalie is insistent in her demand to own Jonathan all for herself.

Rosalie. Then leave with me.

Jonathan. The bedroom?

Rosalie. The hotel. The island. Your mother. Leave with me, Jonathan. Leave with me now, before it's too late.

Jonathan. I — I — I —

Rosalie. 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. (55)

Rosalie's declaration of her love for Jonathan is expressed in very powerful words. Jonathan staggers for a moment at his awkward onslaught on him. He loses his balance for a moment and becomes speechless for a while. But Rosalie's
moves are highly premeditated and in her seductive plan, she holds the hand of
the unwilling Jonathan and makes him sit on his mother’s bed. Kopit makes the
corpse of Edward Rosepettle tumble from the closet on Rosalie and Jonathan.
Rosalie is undaunted by this premonition of providence. She pushes the corpse
back in the closet and shuts the door. She offers to take off the clothes of
Jonathan. The Closet door swings open again and the CORPSE falls on the bed.
Jonathan almost swoons and his mouth is wide open in terror. Rosalie once again
blatantly proposes her pure love for Jonathan:

ROSALIE.... 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. Stop looking at him! He’s dead! Listen to me. I’m alive. I
want you for my husband! (57)

Rosalie wants Jonathan all for herself and not to own him in partnership with his
mother in possessing Jonathan. She wants him to be her husband and to live with
her forever.

Jonathan having sensed Rosalie’s lewd intentions fully well decides to
challenge Rosalie’s morality in line with his mother. He tells her that his mother
was right in her moral assessment of Rosalie. But Rosalie doesn’t flag a whit and
she continues in the same tone:

**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. (58)

Rosalie does not hesitate to look squarely at the raw facts of life – how women trade their flesh for money. But she declares that it is only Jonathan that she loves.

Jonathan also does not slacken in his argument and he goes on to call her dirty. Once again Rosalie turns the tables on Jonathan by saying:

**Rosalie.** ... Love is so beautiful, Jonathan. Come and let me love you; tonight and forever. Come and let me keep you mine. Mine to love when I want, mine to kiss when I want, mine to have when I want. Mine. All mine. So come, Jonathan. Come and close your eyes. (58)

Rosalie promises Jonathan love, womanly feelings, children and a happy family and tells him,
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)

In her frantic desire to seduce and finally possess Jonathan under the false promise of a happy married life with Jonathan, Rosalie aspires to emancipate herself from being a mere baby sitter. She is tired of playing blind man’s buff with children behind the bushes conspicuous to the prying eyes of people who constantly watch her. Her secret inner desire to climb higher in the social ladder by marrying the son of a fabulously rich widow, Madame Rosepettle, is in fact Rosalie’s moral tussle to break the shackles society has endowed on her.

Emily Stilson in Arthur Lee Kopit’s Wings is a composite character incorporating different characteristic traits of many persons. In order to make the speech pattern quite varied and interesting, Kopit chooses the stroke patient in Burke Rehabilitation Centre in her late twenties who speaks English fluently but is unable to make any sense at all. Margot Anne Kelley writes about the “disability plays” of the late seventies which:

... attempt to offer models for retaining personal freedom despite the confining strictures of social authority. Like them, Kopit stresses the need for communication to alleviate the pain that isolation cerates for patients. (383)
Emily Stilson, the former aviatrix meets with an accident and suffers a major stroke which renders her incapable of meaningful speech. Kopit’s personal experience in nursing his father as a stroke patient makes him realise that in spite of the aphasia there was not any change in his father. Kopit becomes curious to know whether his father was aware of what happens to him and also how his father felt within himself being unable to communicate with the other people around him.

The stroke renders Emily Stilson aphasic and she is unable to comprehend as well as communicate with others meaningfully. In ‘Catastrophe’ the memory of her past hidden in her subconscious surfaces as images occur to her affected mind. Kopit’s supply of images and voices outside herself corresponds with her mental condition. The dramatist picturesquely portrays the haemorrhaged brain of Emily Stilson through her disjointed speech.

**MRS. STILSON’S VOICE**

(Voice live or on tape, altered or unadorned.)

Oh my God oh my God oh my god —

trees clouds houses

mostly planes flashing past, images without words, utter disarray disbelief, never seen this kind of thing before!
Where am I? How’d I get here?

....

Doors! Too many doors! (32)

Kopit presents Emily Stilson alone on the stage. Various images and sounds flit across her mind and her words and utterances are bereft of any logical sequence or continuity. Emily Stilson feels completely isolated from everyone around her. She has a distantly faint idea of her plane crash-landing in a foreign territory. Emily Stilson soliloquises to herself and says:

**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)

Kopit brings about the sense of total isolation by the sound of an airplane coming closer and thundering overhead and then zooming off into silence along with other random noises on the stage for which Emily Stilson’s responses are varied and her speech utterly disconnected. She feels alienated from all her own people. She desperately needs help and thinks that she doesn’t get any. In her mind she is like a person wandering through space, completely lost and talks to herself:
What's my name? I don't know my name!

Where's my arm? I don't have an arm!

What's an arm? (36)

The Doctors and Nurses who attend on Emily Stilson in the hospital seen to be strangers, their actions senseless and their words meaningless. She tests her ability for language and feels that she will be alright and says:

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)

Kopit unfolds Emily Stilson in Wings as a stroke victim talking to herself without any logical progression of thought or interconnectedness of utterances. James Hurt sharply observes:

Kopit’s distinction between fact and speculation suggests the twin achievements of the play: the tough realism of its unflinching representation of the devastation caused by a serious stroke and the
creation of a language of the stage to convey the inner experience of the stroke victim. (77)

Emily Stilson pronounces words intermittently in accordance with the unintelligible sounds she hears from outside and the random images that occur to her mind. Her perception of images is pathetically fragmented and evidently her world has been shattered. She thinks that she is totally cut off from the rest of humanity. The sense of utter isolation torments her being. Her damaged capacity for language and speech causes her to make incoherent utterances which do not render any meaningful communication. Emily Stilson processes information at a different level than normal human beings. Her deranged mind reveals her helpless inanity in communication. Kopit dexterously depicts the absurdity of existence characterised by Emily Stilson’s incapacity for cohesive utterance and meaning.

The Doctor calls her name again and again but Emily Stilson does not respond. One of the Doctors says that she may possibly hear but be unable to respond. The Doctors and Nurses decide to leave Emily Stilson as she continues to remain silent. Emily Stilson ceases to be a social human being. She not only does not respond but also does not seem to understand. When they finally leave, Emily Stilson says:

MRS. STILSON. Still... sun moon too or ... three times happened maybe globbidged rubbidged uff and firded-forded me to nothing
where try again *(We hear a window being raised somewhere behind her.)* window! Up and heard *(Sounds of birds.)* known them
know I know them once upon a birds that’s it better getting better
soon be out of this *(Pause.)* Out of ... what? *(Pause.)* Dark ... space vast of ... in I am or so it seems feels no real clues to speak of. (39)

Emily Stilson's monologue is clearly a tell-tale depiction of her speech impediment. Her complete incapacity for effective communication has ultimately ostracized her. She is even incapacitated to organise her thoughts and begins to question her own words. Kopit pointedly hints at the multifarious stimuli which assault the human consciousness. Emily Stilson’s mind probably is preoccupied with the numerous ideas which crowd her mind all the time. She is unable to process information and respond meaningfully. Kopit depicts her incapacity for social interaction and thereby deftly dramatises the absurdity of the human predicament. Kopit excels in sharply contrasting Emily Stilson’s earlier life bristling with stunning activities like flying the Curtis Jenny airplane and walking on its wings with her present aphasic condition after the cerebral stroke. The agility and the freedom she has felt in her youthful body and mind has been violently ripped off from her. Her freedom has now been curtailed to her mere existence in the wheel chair of the rehabilitation centre. But her human will power does not bend and she doesn’t want to give up. She adds:
MRS. STILSON .... yes, then there I thank you crawling sands and knees still can feel it hear the wind all alone somehow wasn’t scared why a mystery, vast dark track of space, we’ve all got to die that I know, anyhow then day came light came with it so with this you’d think you’d hope just hold on they will find me I am ... still intact. (40)

Emily Stilson is aware of the hard reality of life that all the mortals should die. But she does not lose hope even in her desperate situation. She uses optimistic words like day, light and hope to defy the basic absurdity of existence.

The stroke has benumbed the perceptive power of Emily Stilson. Yet she fights desperately to grapple with her powers to correlate what she sees and hears around her. She senses the imminence of something odd happening to her. The articulation of her thoughts fail to convey any meaning whatsoever.

MRS. STILSON. (Breathless with excitement.) Stop old 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 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!

(42)

The primary thought hidden in her subconscious is challenged by what she perceives around her. The memories of her past vibrant life as an aviatrix and wing-walker remain submerged in her subconscious. She makes desperate attempts to relate the perception of her present situation with her subconscious memories. The fear of the inevitable grips her and she looks horrified and shouts, ‘THEY’VE GOT ME!’

The Doctors and Nurses surround Emily Stilson with the hospital equipments and they try to communicate with her.

NURSE. (Talking to the person Upstage we cannot see.) Mrs. Stilson, can you open up your eyes? (Pause.)

MRS. STILSON. (Separated from her questioners by great distance.) Don’t know how.

DOCTOR. Mrs. Stilson, you just opened up your eyes. We saw you. Can you open them again? (No response.) Mrs. Stilson ...?

MRS. STILSON. (Proudly, triumphantly.) My name then — Mrs. Stilson!

VOICE ON P.A. SYSTEM. Mrs. Howard, call on three! Mrs. Howard ...!

MRS. STILSON. My name then — Mrs. Howard? (42)
Emily Stilson feels herself completely alienated from the people around her. She is separated by a great distance from the hospital staff. She does not relate herself to the doctors and Nurses and shuts herself from them. Her inability to establish her identity after the stroke and her mental incapability to process the available information impairs her contact with humanity. The momentary recognition of her name is only temporary. She is totally confused when she hears the name Mrs Howard in the public address system of the hospital and wonders whether her name is Mrs. Howard. The dramatist hits at the meaninglessness of names in a world where nomenclature is given undue importance whereas human existence tends to be absurd. Emily Stilson fails completely in her attempt to communicate meaningfully with the Doctors. On the contrary, her arduous attempt to articulate herself to establish her identity seems to have failed her in the labyrinthine maze of her disconnected perceptions.

The Doctors and Nurses are relentless in their effort to assess Emily Stilsons's powers to hear and respond. Kopit supplies another instance of communication fiasco:

FIRST DOCTOR. Mrs. Stilson, CAN YOU HEAR ME!

MRS. STILSON. Don’t believe this — I’ve been put in with the deaf!

SECOND DOCTOR. Mrs. Stilson, if you can hear us, nod your head.

MRS. STILSON. All right, fine, that’s how you want to play it — there! (She nods. The DOCTORS exchange glances.)
FIRST DOCTOR. Mrs. Stilson, you can hear us, NOD YOUR HEAD!

MRS. STILSON. Oh my God, this is grotesque! (43)

Kopit dramatises the Doctors’ suspicion of Emily Stilson’s ability to hear and respond meaningfully. Emily Stilson’s responses to the commands of the Doctors is only miscommunication and Emily Stilson finally calls the Doctors ‘deaf’. The audience is presented with this utterly absurd situation. Meaningful communication between human brings seems to have dwindled into a distant dream in this absurd world and perhaps Emily Stilson’s statement, ‘Oh my God, this is grotesque!’ (43) is the fitting answer.

Emily Stilson is not only isolated from others but also from herself. She is unable to put her thoughts together to make meaning out of the situation. Her confusion is worst confounded and in her desperate loneliness 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 is unable to figure out the inner working of her mind. She pathetically fails in her endeavour to find the proper expression of her sentiments.
The effects of the stroke and the consequent aphasic clinical condition deter her from meaningful dialogue with her fellow human beings. In all her efforts to verbalise her thoughts, she fails miserably. She becomes completely silent and stares into space. Her silence is perhaps more meaningful compared with her miserable language. Yet even in her desperation, she musters courage and shows enormous fortitude in her unstinting quest for articulation.

Two Doctors try to communicate with Emily Stilson from the distance like ‘outsiders’. There is a chasm between her inside world and her outside world. When the Doctors question her from behind her, Emily Stilson is able to answer their question promptly. But the Doctors are not convinced of her ability to hear properly. The Doctors emerge from the shadows behind her and face her directly. When Emily Stilson is confronted by the hospital staff, her inner and outer worlds begin to coalesce but communication becomes impossible:

FIRST DOCTOR. Mrs. Stilson, who was the first President of the United States?
MRS. STILSON. Washington. (Pause.)
SECOND DOCTOR. (speaking more slowly than the First Doctor did; perhaps she simply didn’t hear the question.) Mrs. Stilson, who was the first President of the United States?
MRS. STILSON. Washington!
SECOND DOCTOR. (To first.) I don’t think she hears herself.
FIRST DOCTOR. No, I don’t think she hears herself.(44)
The conversation of the two Doctors and the dialogue with Emily Stilson end up in total non-communication. Emily Stilson’s mind is completely preoccupied with the notion that her plane has crashed over a foreign territory and that she has been captured and imprisoned for interrogation. The language of the Doctors sound Rumanian to her as her mind is oriented to a foreign atmosphere. Her mind is jammed with preconceived notions. Her mental preoccupation deters her from reacting normally to the present situation. She is unable to communicate sensibly. She thinks that she has been imprisoned behind the walls.

A Nurse carries a dazzling bouquet of flowers sent to Emily Stilson by one of her admirers. She is enthralled by the striking colour of the flowers. Her experience of real colours overwhelms her mind as the bouquet of flowers has captivated her in their thrall. Her mental circuitry is overloaded and her sensory input is too much for her to handle. If her attention is not diverted, Emily Stilson might probably faint or even suffer a seizure.

**NURSE.** May I get you something?

**MRS. STILSON.** (Abstracted, eyes remaining on the flowers.) Yes, a sweater.

**NURSE.** Yes, of course. Think we have one here. (*The Nurse opens a drawer, takes out a pillow, hands the pillow to Mrs. Stilson.*) Here.
(Mrs. Stilson accepts the pillow unquestioningly, eyes never leaving the flowers...)

MRS. STILSON. (Shaken.) This is not a hospital of course, and I know it! What it is a farmhouse made up to look like a hospital. Why? I’ll come back to that. (Enter another Nurse.) (46, 47)

The colourful bouquet of flowers incidentally has captivated the entire attention of Emily Stilson. She involuntarily responds to the Nurse. In all probability Emily Stilson has not meant a sweater but only a pillow instead. When the Nurse gives her a pillow, Emily Stilson accepts it without any protest. She lays the pillow on her lap as if she wanted only the pillow and not the sweater. Emily Stilson apparently does not need either a sweater or pillow. Kopit hints at the impudence of the Nurse in asking whether she could get anything for Emily Stilson. It is only an assault on the privacy of her mental abstraction. Emily Stilson recourses to language and articulation just to escape from the Nurse. She uses language as a weapon for self-protection to escape from any communication with fellow human beings. Kopit’s venture to demonstrate the use of language to keep fellow human beings away from one’s mental abstraction is indeed a dramatic ingenuity.

Emily Stilson has preconceived notions in her mind to be under the assumption that she has been captured and held captive in a foreign land. She is convinced that the building she has been kept is not a hospital and she asserts that she knows it. She boldly proclaims that it is a farmhouse made to look like a
hospital. The misconception of facts makes her very nervous and wary against the people who really want to help her out of her pathetic plight as a stroke victim. Her mental condition has become a shackle on her. She is unable to avail the medical attention and care offered to her in the hospital. Instead she decides not to cooperate with them and even resists them thinking that they are her enemies. One of the Nurses uses very endearing terms to establish a relationship with Emily Stilson. Emily Stilson does not show any sign of recognition of her kindness. She turns down the Nurse’s offer to get her some pudding. The Nurse is quite persistent in spite of Emily Stilson’s protests to procure some pudding for her and she in her monologue says:

MRS.STILSON. Yes no question they have got me I’ve been what that word was captured is it?

....

Plane! See it thanks, okay, onto back we were and here it is. Slow down easy now. ... captured after crashing by the enemy and brought here to this farm masquerading as a hospital. Why? For I would say offhand information. ... Nonetheless, I would say must be certain information I possess that they want well I won’t give it I’ll escape! Strange things happen to me that they do! Good thing I’m all right! Must be in Rumania. (47, 48)
Emily Stilson is unable to avail the best help offered her in her pathetic condition. The love, affection and concern of the hospital staff are turned away blatantly under a fear psychosis. Kopit succeeds theatrically in disclosing the injured mind of Emily Stilson explicitly. Various stimuli and preconceptions crowd her incapacitated mind. Her utterances lack cohesion intelligibility and meaning. Kopit makes Emily Stilson articulate words clearly when her mind is free from mental abstractions. Yet the predominant image which preoccupies her mind governs her speech. As she slows down the pace of her thought progression, the misconception of her mind is revealed and she says that she has been brought to a farmhouse masquerading as a hospital. The impressions already registered in her mind hinder her perception of reality in the proper perspective. Her articulation loses meaning and intelligibility. She believes that her plane has crashed in Rumania and that she has been captured. In her mental domain she is in a foreign country where her language is totally useless for communication. Kopit successfully impresses upon the audience the bondages and restrictions imposed on human beings by meaningless communication which is indeed a social bondage that needs to be broken.

Emily Stilson does not recognize the Doctor and Nurse who enter her room. The Doctor tells her that she has met with an accident not in an airplane but in her home. He also explains to her the damage caused to her brain tissues and that he cannot give her the exact prognosis of her clinical condition. He assures her that she is progressing well. As the Doctor explains her condition to
her, Emily Stilson does not listen patiently to the Doctor and begins to talk in a
loud voice which overpowers the Doctor’s speech and she says:

**MRS. STILSON.** (Her words overpowering his.)
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)

Kopit carefully construes the loss of freedom of Emily Stilson when he makes her
say, ‘Like a wall between me and others’ (51). Kopit invariably hints at her
separation from the rest of humanity because of her damaged brain and her
aphasic language. Emily Stilson complains that no one understands her properly
though she tells them the right things. Both the speaker and the listeners think
they are right in their own way. But sadly enough, the outcome is only
misunderstanding and total miscommunication. Emily Stilson bursts out saying:

**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! (52)

Emily Stilson thinks that she is effective in her communication with others around her. She secretly infers that all of them pretend that they do not understand and believes they should be mad. Very quickly she shifts her position from, 'I am doing well of course!' to 'I am mad' (52). She realises the breach in communication between herself and others and that her speech is wronged.

Emily Stilson's consciousness is awakened and she seems to understand the reason why she is imprisoned. She suspects that they want information from her. She even ignores the Doctor's diagnosis of her physical condition and contemplates escape saying that she must inform others about her whereabouts. She tries to escape the reality of human existence by the preconceived notion that has been in her subconscious mind. She exhibits her enormous power of comprehension and understanding in a moment of great agitation. This realisation augurs for the remarkable improvement in her aphasic condition.

When the Nurse brings her food, Emily Stilson screams and swings her arm at her violently and begins to speak coherently. The tray of food is shattered all over and the Nurse is awe struck and calls it a miracle. Emily Stilson has articulated words very clearly to express her fretfulness to get out of the place. But Kopit suggests that Emily Stilson cannot use the same words again even if she wanted to use them. Immediately afterwards Emily Stilson's language
crumbles into jargon and she is administered a hypodermic inoculation to silence her excitement.

Amy, the therapist covers Emily Stilson with a shawl and takes her out into the open where the sound of birds is heard. Emily Stilson is indifferent to the change of atmosphere and the freedom of the outdoors. Amy instructs Emily Stilson to listen to what she is saying. Amy’s efforts to assist Emily Stilson complete her statement ends up in a fiasco in spite of proper inducement. Emily Stilson lingers in her own world where time makes no impression on her thinking. As her mind is totally preoccupied with her own world which is vastly separated by time and space, Amy’s queries fall on ears that do not hear. Amy is unable to establish a meaningful conversation with Emily Stilson which indicates the barrier in communication.

Emily Stilson is completely alienated from this despicable world because of her affected mind and her aphasia. She is unable to commune both with herself as well as others. The words she utters do not have any bearing on her inner self. Communication dwindles down to a mere reflex action of the power of articulation with which mankind is gifted. Emily Stilson’s articulation ends up only in miscommunication. Kopit highlights the breach in communication with herself when he makes Emily Stilson say:
EMILY STILSON. ... The words, they go in sometimes then out they go, I can't stop them here inside or make maybe globbidge to the tuberway or —

AMY. Emily. Emily!

MRS. STILSON. (Shaken out herself.) ... What?

AMY. Did you hear what you just said?

MRS. STILSON .... Why?

AMY. (Speaking slowly.) You must listen to what you're saying.

MRS. STILSON. Did I ... do ... (54)

Emily Stilson acknowledges the fact that she is unable to articulate as she used to. She has been deprived of her ability for communication. Kopit contrasts her youthful freedom marked with vibrant activity and audacious deeds such as walking on the wings of an airplane with her present pitiable condition where she has no control over her inner self. Her thoughts and words do not merge and she is unable to speak coherently. Kopit's piercing insight into the inner self of Emily Stilson deciphers the eternal human struggle for communication which is a basic requirement for emancipation.

Having been tutored by Amy to listen to her own speech, Emily Stilson strives to explain how her speech organs do not keep rapport with her busy mind.

MRS. STILSON. (Slower.) The thing is ... doing all this busy in here gets, you know with the talking it's like ... sometimes when I hear
here (she touches her head.) ... but when I start to ... kind more what kind of voice should ... it's like pfft! (she makes a gesture with her hand of something flying away.)

AMY. (Smiling.) Yes, I know. It's hard to find the words for what you're thinking of.

MRS. STILSON. Well yes. (Long pause.) (54, 55)

Emily Stilson begins to substitute gestures for words. Words which correspond with her thought somehow defy her grasp and she resorts to gestures. Amy's categorical analysis of the lack of correlation between thoughts and words is generously affirmed by Emily Stilson. Kopit endeavours to give the final touch to the language disability of Emily Stilson by making use of long pauses to indicate the immensity or paucity of thoughts effectively.

AMY. (Smiling.) Yes, I know. It's hard to find the words for what you're thinking of.

MRS. STILSON. ... And then these people, they keep waiting ... And I see they're smiling and ... they keep ... waiting ... (Faint smile, helpless gesture. She stares off. Long silence.) (55)

Amy, in keeping with her sound knowledge of speech impediment in stroke patients reinforced by her own personal experience of being aphasic once in life, patiently waits for Emily Stilson to talk out whatever she would in order to avoid confrontation or an eventual nervous breakdown.
In the final section of the play "Exploration" Emily Stilson is seen struggling to emancipate herself from the baffling bondages of aphasia. Amy and the doctors try to help Emily Stilson out of her despicable condition but to no avail. Emily Stilson is exhilarated by the change when she is taken out of her room into the open. This new found freedom eases her mental constrictions and she pours out her heart freely and says:

AMY. (Emerging from the shadows.) Do you like this new place better?

MRS. STILSON. Oh well oh well yes, much, all ... nice flowers here, people seem ... more like me. Thank you. (AMY moves back toward the shadows.) And then I see it happen once again ... (AMY gone from sight.) Amy kisses me. Puts her — what thing is it, arm! Yes, arm,. Put her arm around my ... (Pause.) shoulder, turns her head away so I can’t ... (Pause.) (61)

Emily Stilson’s speech marked by unnecessary pauses indicates its utter meaninglessness. She is only communing with herself and hence her speech sounds absurd to Amy. But Kopit is desperately delineating the inner struggle of Emily Stilson to liberate herself from the bondage which segregates her from her fellow human beings.
Kopit supplies varied information from sixteen different blocks which cause exhilarating and disorienting effects on Emily Stilson. The crux of the play is summed up by the playwright:

BLOCK 13. The controversy, of course, is that some feel it’s language without thought, and others, thought without language ...

BLOCK 14. What it is, of course, is the symbol system. Their symbol system’s shot. They can’t make analogies.

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 a drift..

BLOCK 16. Ah, now you’re really flying blind there! (64)

Emily Stilson is completely disoriented and she says, “As I see it now, the plane was flying BACKWARDS!” (64) In her fight to regain her lost abilities for meaningful communication, she ends up soliloquising and her words betray the inner working of the past memory. She invariably gives vent to her tortured and torn mind to escape a probable seizure.

Emily Stilson is seen alone on the stage and she opens up her mind. Her mind presently is preoccupied with the ‘death thing’:

MRS. STILSON .... Sometimes ... how can ... well it’s just I think these death things, end it, stuff like sort of may be better mot to
Evidently, Emily Stilson is ruminating on the thoughts about death which indicates her realisation of the inevitable end of life. Her time spent at the therapy room with Billy, Mrs Timmins and Mrs. Brownstein has endorsed a fresh awareness in her. She listens to the recording of the Doctor explaining the damage caused to the brain by the stroke. Emily Stilson rewinds the cassette and tries to listen again. When the Doctor is about to repeat that the damaged part of the stroke victim’s brain ‘can no longer get oxygen... And subsequently dies.’ (69), she shuts off the recorder and stares emptily into space. Gradually Emily Stilson is able to visualise the damage inflicted by the cerebral infarction.

Kopit portrays Amy, the therapist’s effort to rake up the memory of Emily Stilson. Amy encourages Emily Stilson to talk about Rhinebeck. Mrs. Emily Stilson haltingly recounts her outing with her son to see the planes which she
used to fly and walk out on the wings. Emily Stilson recollects her youthful life from her memory filled with daring deeds and says:

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.

....

MRS. STILSON. (With effort.) yeah. (Long pause) And then all at once — it remembered everything! (Long Pause.) but now it doesn’t. (Silence.) (70, 71)

Amy assists Emily Stilson to remember words like ‘planes’ and ‘flying’. Emily Stilson vividly remembers her youthful freedom and stunning ability to perform uncommon feats. Kopit sharply contrasts Emily Stilson’s youthful freedom with her present social strictures resulting from non-communication.

As Amy and Emily Stilson stroll through a park, Amy helps Stilson to identify the season and also snow. Emily Stilson scoops the snow off the bench and she confesses to Amy “I didn’t have to pick it up to know ... what it was” (72) hinting at her loss of perceptive powers. Emily Stilson goes on and narrates her dream to Amy. In her dream, Emily Stilson sees a person come into her room and she knows not whether it was a man or woman. The person does
not seem to walk either but just comes over to her bed and smiles at her. The
person is happy that Emily Stilson has changed her mind and then goes away.
Amy wonders whether it is the Doctor or one of the hospital staff. Emily Stilson
replies that she just knows what it is and after a pause continues to tell her how
she begins to float like a bird near the ceiling.

Emily Stilson has narrated to Amy a supernatural experience which
invariably suggests Emily Stilson’s impending release from this world into
eternity. Emily Stilson’s struggle to liberate herself sociologically by regaining
her ability to articulate properly for meaningful communication is overtaken by
her emancipation into eternity.

Kopit’s suggestion of music, hint of bells, lights fading to black and
silence imply Emily Stilson’s smooth passage from the struggles of this world to
the eternity beyond. Kopit subtly hints at the total emancipation of Emily Stilson
from the barriers of language and communication. Emily Stilson is on ‘wings’
again, the wings of total freedom and liberation from all earthly, sociological
fetters.

In the final scene of Indians, Colonel Forsyth brags about his victory the
previous day and says that he had wiped all the Indians out for killing Custer at
Little Big Horn. The colonel is unabashed even when the second reporter tells
him that Custer was killed fifteen years ago. The first reporter comments that
Colonel Forsyth’s victory has been referred to as a massacre and Colonel Forsyth says:

**COLONEL:** One can always find someone who’ll call an overwhelming victory a massacre. I suppose they’d prefer it if we’d let more of our own boys get shot! (101)

**FIRST REPORTER:** Then you don’t think the step you took was harsh?

The callous reply of Colonel Forsyth implies the heartless cruelty of the Settlers in wiping out the native Indians from their land. He harps on the idea of the manifestation of powers shown against a helpless lot of people and he adds:

**COLONEL:** Of course it was harsh. And I don’t like it any more than you. But had we shirked our responsibility, skirmishes would have gone on for years, costing our country millions, as well as untold lives. Of course innocent people have been killed. In war they always are. And of course our hearts go out to the innocent victims of his. But war is not a game. It’s tough. And demands tough decisions. In the long run I believe what happened here at this reservation yesterday will be justified. (101)

Kopit openly hits hard against the inhuman atrocities done in Vietnam. Sitting Bull tells Buffalo Bill: “As you see, the death can be buried, but not so easily
gotten rid of” (102) and Sitting Bull adds further:

We had land. ... You wanted it; you took it. That ... I understand perfectly. What I cannot understand ... is why you did all this, and at the same time ... professed your love.

(Pause.) (102, 103)

The invasion of the American Settlers on the hapless Native Indians to displace them from their land with unfulfilled promises is the social stricture wrought upon the Indians by the Settlers. Buffalo Bill accuses Sitting Bull of being very unrealistic as they believe that the buffaloes would return magically. Even Buffalo Bill and the Government did not realise that the buffaloes multiplied very slowly. Sitting Bull summarises the Indians' pathetic plight in their struggle for social liberation in the face of the white man's supremacy to power and religion.

In Kopit's The Day the Whores Came Out to Play Tennis, Cherry Valley Country Club is run by elderly men of the older generation who are the proprietors as well as long time members of the executive committee. The affluent middle class society is characterised by their vulgarity. The younger generation members are known for their stupidity and self-conceit.

The executive committee members of the Cherry Valley Country Club are the descendents of the European immigrants. They have founded this social organisation and the President of the club, Franklin Delano Kuvl says:
Kuvi. ... So! My father founded this place. He and old Mr. Gayve. It was a large yellow swamp and they bought it cheap. And filed it in. Then planted some trees. Some grass. Planted some flowers ...

*Built this house ... they had a dream, they said.* (139, 140)

The older generation of the committee members adhere blindly to their old traditions. They guard the club from the outsiders and do not allow others to enter its premises. But that awful day at six thirty in the morning two Rolls Royces roll into the club with eighteen women dressed elegantly. Herbert gives a graphic description of how elegantly they were dressed when Rudolph asks him:

Rudolph. Why? Weren’t they wearing what they’re wearing now?
Herbert. Oh, no! When I first saw them they were *elegant*. The most elegant women I’d ever seen. They wore long black satin dresses that swept the ground when they walked. And all over their dresses were diamonds as large as eggs. In their hair were egret feathers. And on their shoulders, chinchilla capes hanging like wings. Well, naturally I figured they were members so I let them in. (116)

They were so elegantly dressed and the fact that they arrived in two Rolls Royces made Herbert think that they were members of the Club. But Herbert is shocked to see them carry tennis racquets because women who are dressed like that do not just carry tennis racquets into the clubhouse. He quickly realises his mistake and
he goes after them. They were already waiting at the tennis courts and Herbert observes:

Herbert. ... 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. Well! Of course! As soon as I saw all this vulgarity I knew they weren’t members. (117)

The women show utter disrespect to the accepted rules of the Club and begin to play tennis utterly unmindful of the protestations made by Herbert. All the executive members are immediately called in for an urgent meeting and they gather in the Nursery because it is the “best place to watch” (117).

The members of the executive committee are unable to accommodate the young women into the cherished Club with all its pretensions and adherence to their class. Herbert calls them a group of common whores by their appearances and demeanour. As no one is ready to be bold enough to ask them to leave the Club, they seek the help of Rudolf, the Chairman of the Sports Committee and a ‘ladies man’ to tell the women to leave the club immediately. Rudolf thinks that the women are mere whores and pinches one of them expecting her to respond.
But instead, all of them join together and hit Rudolf in his head with their tennis racquets and Rudolf comes back in a dishevelled state and explains:

Rudolph. I figured they were whores, you know? So ... the first one I came to, I pinched on the ass. It was just a friendly gesture. Well, I guess she didn’t see it that way. Neither did her friends. So. Guess they aren’t whores. [He groans and clutches his head.] It’s not easy getting hit over the head by eighteen tennis rackets. [He laughs weakly] (136)

Kopit comes hard against the urban middle class society in its tall claims to class. The Country Club is a symbol of the aspirations of the social climber. The club has so far prevented the common people from availing themselves of the facilities of their club. The membership of the club is uncommonly rich and the club is very prosperous. Kopit makes Rudolf identify that the women are not mere whores. This untraditional women have risen against the established Country Club.

All the eighteen young women have stormed the Cherry Valley Country Club in two Rolls Royces with their tennis racquets. They enter the tennis courts with unconventional outfits to play tennis and have broken the traditional codes of the tennis game easily. When Rudolph is sent to get them out of the club he is quickly dealt with by the women. They have even secured the help of the English valet of the Club, Duncan, who is ill-treated by the executive committee members
always. They have taken all the precautionary measures including severing of the telephone cables to prevent the intervention of the police. They show utter disrespect and contempt to the executive committee of the Club and they slam the tennis balls on the window shutters of the Nursery and they watch the Nursery collapse on the executive committee members. The young untraditional women have achieved their social liberation as the elegant symbol of class – the Country Club – is reduced to shambles.

Kopit elegantly portrays the bondages wrought on man by the society. The undaunted courage and fortitude of the human will in its continuous battle against the shackles of the society to find emancipation has been depicted ingeniously by Arthur Lee Kopit. Emancipation from social shackles evidently results in emancipation from psychological bondages which forms the nucleus of the next chapter.