



A REREADING OF ANTHONY NEILSON'S *THE CENSOR* IN THE LIGHT OF ZYGMUNT
BAUMAN'S MORAL SOCIOLOGY

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ABSTRACT

New writing, In-Yer-Face theatre, rising masculinity, grunge, the rave scene, and hip-hop dominated the world of music, literature, and drama in the nineties. In 1990s sexuality became a prominent subject matter not only in the political world and on television, but also on the theater stage. Anthony Neilson whose works are associated in criticism with the phenomenon variously described as In-Yer-Face theatre put *The Censor* on the stage in England in 1997. *The Censor* is not the playwright and director Anthony Neilson's first experiential play; however, it was his most sensational and taboo-breaking one thanks to its infamous pornographic scene and a theme around sexual trauma, affection, loss, and death. It is a fact that there is a limitation of studies that focus on the relationship between Anthony Neilson's dramaturgy and postmodernism. Therefore, this work aims to explore Neilson's *Censor* from a new perspective that will enable the postmodern elements and features of Neilson's work to be viewed from a moral point of view, which envisages analysing the postmodern situation through Zygmunt Bauman's views. To do this, firstly, this work limits its analysis to the discovery of the playwright's In-Yer-Face theatre via *The Censor*. Secondly, after presenting the Polish sociologist Zygmunt Bauman's views over morality, it analyses morality behind the notion of fluid in *The Censor* through the focus on ordinary postmodern man and his/her moral and ethical condition by following the postmodernist zeitgeist around Zygmunt Bauman's moral sociology.

Keywords: Anthony Neilson, Moral Sociology, Postmodernism, *The Censor*, Zygmunt Bauman

ANTHONY NEILSON'IN SANSÜRCÜ İSİMLİ OYUNUNUN ZYGMUNT BAUMAN'IN
AHLAK SOSYOLOJİSİ İŞİĞİNDA YENİ BİR OKUMASI

ÖZ

Yeni Yazın, Yüze Vurumcu Tiyatro, yükselen erkeklik, grunge, çılgın sahne ve hip-hop doksanlarda müzik, edebiyat ve tiyatro dünyasına hâkim oldu. Doksanlarda cinsellik yalnızca siyasi dünyada ve televizyonlarda değil aynı zamanda tiyatro sahnelerinde de önde gelen konulardan biri haline geldi. Eserleri eleştirel anlamda Yüze Vurumcu Tiyatro olarak tanımlanan tiyatro ile ilişkilendirilen Anthony Neilson, *Sansürcü* isimli oyununu 1997'de İngiltere'de sahneye koydu. *Sansürcü*, oyun yazarı ve yönetmen Anthony Neilson'un ilk deneyimsel oyunu değildir; ancak, kötü şöhretli pornografik sahnesi ile cinsel travma, sevgi, kayıp ve ölüm konularına odaklı teması sayesinde en sansasyonel ve tabuları yıkan eseridir. Anthony Neilson'un dramaturgisi ve Postmodernizm arasındaki ilişkiye odaklanan çalışmaların sınırlı olduğu bir gerçektir. Bu nedenle, bu çalışma, Neilson'un *Sansürcü*'sünü, Zygmunt Bauman'ın görüşleri

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aracılığıyla postmodern durumu analiz etmeyi öngören, Neilson'un çalışmasındaki postmodern unsurları ve oyunun özelliklerini ahlaki bir bakış açısıyla görülmesini sağlayacak olan yeni bir perspektiften keşfetmeyi amaçlamaktadır. Bunu yapmak için, ilk olarak analizini oyun yazarının Yüze Vurumcu Tiyatrosunu *Sansürcü* aracılığıyla keşfetmekle sınırlar. İkincisi, Polonyalı sosyolog Zygmunt Bauman'ın ahlak konusundaki görüşlerini sunduktan sonra, Zygmunt Bauman'ın ahlak sosyolojisindeki postmodern sıradan bireyi ve onun ahlaki ve etik durumunu izleyerek *Sansürcü*'deki akışkanlık kavramının arkasındaki akışkan ahlaki analiz eder.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Anthony Neilson, Ahlak Sosyolojisi, Postmodernizm, *Sansürcü*, Zygmunt Bauman

“Being able to make another person happy is more difficult but more humane than being able to make yourself happy.”

(Sabahattin Ali, *Canım Aliye, Ruhum Filiz*, 2016)

Introduction: A Brief Overview of the Nineties and *The Censor*

British theatre stage in the 1990s displayed that one could see ethical breakdowns due to sexual affairs. Anthony Neilson whose works are seen to be “closely associated in criticism with the phenomenon variously described as the 'Theatre of Blood and Sperm' (Broich, 2001), 'New Brutalism' (Nikcevic, 2005), and of course most famously, In-Yer-Face Theatre (Sierz, 2001)” (qtd. in Reid, 2017, p. 5) put *The Censor* on the stage in 1997. He is among “the most innovative and provocative Scottish artists of his generation” (Reid, 2012, p. 137) with little or no political intention on the stage – for example, *The Censor* just includes a naïve political stance against censorship. Moreover, it is a fact that Neilson differs from the realist playwrights like David Greig who always tried to show the nation to itself and reopened political debates of his time. Neilson is always regarded as a playwright who mostly produces his works out of traditional Scottish literary legacy. Ethical problems in postmodernity are among the subject matters for his stage.

The Censor is not the playwright and director Anthony Neilson's first experiential play; however, it was his most sensational and taboo-breaking one thanks to its infamous pornographic scene and a theme around sexual trauma, affection, loss, and death. Actually, it is another example of “the British Theatre which is very tightly connected to the naturalist/realist tradition which takes its share from the new theatre writing although it was not as experimental as the European Theatre” (Bozer, 2016, p. 18). In her *The Theatre of Anthony Neilson*, Reid (2017) said that “Neilson's reputation as a provocateur was cemented with *The Censor*” (p.5) which opens discussions about moral values on the stage in the Postmodern world.

The play starts with a cinematic narration of a censor who works for the Board of Classification. *The Censor* seems not content with what he does at work for six years. He thinks that he works in “The *shit hole*” (emphasis in original; Neilson, 1998b, p. 250). In this office, he watches and censors unsuitable scenes of any pornographic films before they are sent to other departments in this building. Like many others visiting the Censor, Miss Fontaine, an ordinary porn actress and a filmmaker wishes to convince him to allow her to distribute her film as she thinks that it is not a dull hardcore one but it includes an original love story. Sierz (2001) asserts that “using a mix of brash seductiveness and articulate argument, [Fontaine] tries to make him see beyond the explicit images and understand the character and subtext of her story” (p. 81). After

Miss Fontaine's relentless explanations, the Censor is partly convinced and agrees to send Miss Fontaine's film to his director. This main plot is frequently interrupted by the scenes in which Censor and his wife whose name is unknown talk about their sexual setbacks because the Censor is impotent and his wife has a boyfriend. In the end, Miss Fontaine, fortunately, heals the Censor's impotence as she discovers that his private and warm fantasy is that he must watch a woman defecate before his sexual intercourse with her. Miss Fontaine does what the Censor wants her to do before their sexual intercourse. After that, The Censor, for the first time, feels happy at home, but he tragically learns that Miss Fontaine has been killed in a hotel room in New York. While The Censor is weeping for Miss Fontaine, his wife thinks that she has made a sentimental relationship with him.

Although *The Censor* includes a provocative sexual atmosphere, it was commissioned by the Red Room and opened at the Finborough in April 1997. Afterwards, it was carried to the Royal Court at the Duke of York's in June. Neilson's play was put on the stage again by the Royal Court at the Ambassadors in September. It also obtained the Writers Guild Award for Best Fringe Play and the Time Out Live Award. For a range of Neilson's plays apart from *The Censor* which has an unusual content, David Pattie reminds that

[by means of] the staging of taboo behaviours [...] Neilson has crafted a series of performance texts that are impossible to predict [...] [his plays] aim to disrupt a simple mapping of the events staged on to contemporary debates about identity [...] The characters in his work can't be read; they do not yield up any fixed meanings; and as such this implicitly argues for an idea of identity which is radically fluid. (2018, p. 91-92)

In this context, it is better to open a broad debate around identity, postmodern morality and Anthony Neilson's drama in a postmodern line. In Eagleton's words (2003 [1996]), Postmodernity "sees the world as contingent, ungrounded, diverse, unstable, indeterminate, a set of disunified cultures or interpretations which breed a degree of scepticism about the objectivity of truth, history and norms, the givenness of natures and the coherence of identities" (p. vii). He also claims that Postmodernism "is a style of culture which reflects something of... epochal change, in a depthless, decentred, ungrounded, self-reflexive, playful, derivative, eclectic, pluralistic art which blurs the boundaries between 'high' and 'popular' culture, as well as between art and everyday experience" (2003 [1996], p. vii). Then, it will be wrong to view the 1990s without postmodern art and morality.

It is a fact that there is a limitation of studies that focus on the relationship between Anthony Neilson's dramaturgy and postmodernism on the basis of morality. Therefore, this study aims to explore Neilson's *Censor* from a new perspective that will enable the postmodern elements and features of Neilson's work to be viewed from a moral point of view, which envisages analysing the postmodern situation through Zygmunt Bauman's views. To do this, the study limits its analysis to the discovery of Anthony Neilson's drama with his moral stance. After presenting the Polish sociologist Zygmunt Bauman's views over morality, this study analyses morality behind the notion of fluid in *The Censor* through the focus on ordinary postmodern man and his/her moral and ethical condition by following the postmodernist zeitgeist around Zygmunt Bauman's moral sociology.

1. *The Censor's Connection with the In-Yer-Face Moment*

Aleks Sierz, in his famous book titled *In-Yer-Face Theatre: British Drama Today* (2001), coined the term In-Yer-Face for the plays that cover the British stage of many playwrights such as Mark Ravenhill, Sarah Kane, Jez Butterworth, Joe Penhall and Phyllis Nagy in the '90s. Though Sierz later claimed that he was not the first to use the term In-Yer-Face for the stage plays of the '90s, he is the first one who comprehensively clarifies the characteristics as follows:

The language is usually filthy, characters talk about unmentionable subjects, take their clothes off, have sex, humiliate each other, experience unpleasant emotions, become suddenly violent... Writers who provoke audiences or try to confront them are usually trying to push the boundaries of what is acceptable – often because they want to question current ideas of what is normal, what it means to be human, what is natural or what is real... The most successful plays are often those that seduce the audience with a naturalistic mood and then hit it with intense emotional material, or those where an experiment in form encourages people to question their assumptions. In such cases, what is being renegotiated is the relationship between audience and performers – shock disturbs the spectator's habitual gaze. (Sierz, 2001, p. 5)

In this regard, many critics and scholars, including Aleks Sierz, John Bull, Trish Reid, and Lyn Gardner chart Anthony Neilson among In-Yer-Face dramatists most of whom are "male writers" (Sierz, 1998, p. 324). When Sierz announces that the In-Yer-Face label might be applied to "any drama that takes the audience by the scruff of the neck and shakes until it gets the message... In other words, it is experiential, not speculative" (Sierz, 2001, p. 4) and reminds that this range of plays conceives of "In-Yer-Face as a contemporary theatrical sensibility, and a fistful of theatre techniques" (Sierz, 2008, p. 30), Neilson's drama is no exception. John Bull (2011) also puts Anthony Neilson "at the fore-front of shock-fest theatre" (p. 45). Similarly, according to Trish Reid (2017), in the 1990s, "it is repeatedly implied, Neilson specialized in the art of subversion using provocation, in a manner similar if not identical to his contemporaries Kane, Ravenhill and Ridley" (p. 13); however, Reid wants to extricate Neilson's plays written in the new millennium from that generation. Lyn Gardner (2002) from *The Guardian*, on the other hand, criticizes Neilson saying that "[He] is best known as a purveyor of strong, meaty theatre with pieces" as she thinks Neilson always abuses female characters, but she still proclaims that Neilson has the capability "to sweep the theatrical carpet from under your feet, as he did so deftly in *The Censor*. He teases you with laughter and then lets you glimpse his bloody, tender heart" (p. 1). According to Ian Brown (2007), Neilson's plays are "often associated with a new international movement of contemporary theatre, the so-called 'In-Yer-Face' school" (p. 322).

Even though Neilson's early career is also different from other In-Yer-Face playwrights' and he asserts that "As far as I can tell, In-Yer-Face was all about being horrid and writing about shit and buggery. I thought I was writing love stories" (qtd. in Sierz, 2012, p. 212), his works always have a reputation at the In-Yer-Face drama moment. "Neilson's tight focus on the emotional life of a small number of characters also supports the notion that In-Yer-Face plays tell little stories about individuals – private, personal, erotic, violent – as opposed to big stories about ideologies and

politics” (Reid, 2017, p.14). Then the best plays described as In-Yer-Face theatre are noted as the ones that “portray victims as complicit in their own oppression... obsess about the crisis of masculinity, shun clear political statements, and reject any notion of political correctness” (Urban, 2004, p. 354). Neilson’s *The Censor* (1997) is quite clearly compatible with Urban’s definition: [It] take[s] as its subject matter unusually intense and dysfunctional personal relationships involving troubled men; utilizes misogynistic language and violent and pornographic imagery; fails to make its politics explicit or manifest; and troubles progressive assumptions about gender relations. (Reid, 2017, p. 14)

Because the ‘90s was also a period characterized by an anti-feminist resistance, and the re-appearance of masculine politics, it is obvious that in this work that there have been some clues on the perpetual problems of heterosexual desire, masculinity and its discontents notably in this very masculine In-Yer-Face play. *The Censor* tells a dull and deep love story which “shift[s] between extremes of brutality and tenderness to startling effect, employing humour in the process” (Reid, 2017, p. 8-9). Although such humour does not last long as it is hard to observe a man in *The Censor* who has a high libido and misogynistic behaviour, it is a kind of criticism of the elements against manhood as Reid (2017) claims:

The idea that masculinity was in crisis was associated in the 1990s with the wider popular cultural phenomenon of 'new laddism' which itself was a product of a number of contradictory tensions: on one hand, increasing fluidity in gender roles and the cultural impact of feminist ideas and policies, and on the other, a corresponding upsurge in misogyny and masculinism (p.18)

The Censor, on the other hand, reflects a lack of libido on the stage. The play engages with the changeable behaviour and sexual desires of an ordinary man. As a male playwright, Neilson benefits from the idea that the man is not a powerful subject either biologically or sociologically before the woman. *The Censor* provides highly important clues on the condition of an ordinary oppressed man at the end of the century. Dominic Dromgoole (2002), in this context, characterizes Neilson’s drama as:

[a] sense of threat, of potential violence, sexual and otherwise, hovers over all his work. Sex is a weapon constantly wielded, often by women against men. There is no end of shocking incidents, defecation, anal rape, hand relief, the whole kit and caboodle but the word shock seems inappropriately trivial in the context of his work. Shock is a tool of manipulation, and Neilson is far too personal a writer to manipulate. (p. 215-216)

There are some other qualities in Neilson’s *The Censor* which are also common to some of the characteristics of In-Yer-Face theatre as Lane (2010) calls “aggressive and eye-catching tactics” (p.25). Similar to other In-Yer-Face plays, as an audience, one could find a chance to experience real feelings and moral values presented on the stage other than speculating about them. For In-Yer-Face plays, besides their overall authentic form, İzmir (2014) reminds that “it has been the content which attracts the attention of most critics and spectators, mainly because of the graphic violence and sexuality” (p. 45). It is mainly one of the characteristics of *The Censor* to cover such visual brutality and sexual intercourse on the stage. However, *The Censor* is a play

without “a stage language that emphasised rawness, intensity, swearing” (Sierz, 2012, p. 57-8), unlike many other In-Yer-Face plays.

More importantly, Neilson “leads the actors in the pursuit of an idea he will write as a highly theatrical story” (Lane, 2010, p. 103). It is “[a] direct relationship with performers [that] is employed – a “fluid ‘suggesting’ role” (Lane, 2010, p. 88). Such a collaborative tactic makes Neilson’s plays different from other In-Yer-Face plays since this enables the playwright to improve his drama. Besides, Neilson (1998a) says that he would be happy if someone could make his plays experiences and memories of his own” (p. x). Then it is possible to regard *The Censor* as a larger than life play.

It is also obvious that *The Censor* like many other In-Yer-Face plays aims at troubling the audience emotionally. David Edgar once commented that such plays belonging to “Ravenhill, Neilson, Grosso, and Prichard seem properly content being in spaces where the intense theatricality of their work can have maximum impact, albeit on a smaller number of people at any one time” (qtd. in Nikcevic, 2005, p. 255). An In-Yer-Face play “employs shock or is shocking because it is new in tone or structure, or because it is bolder or more experimental than what audiences are used to” (Sierz, 2001, p. 4); however, Sierz says that *The Censor* “was disturbing but not shocking” (2001, p. 83) as Neilson intended to construct it so. Sierz (2001) supports him saying:

Written with wit and economy, *The Censor* is an amusing, if rather traditional, love story, which plays intriguing games with prejudices and fantasies. Yet, because it speaks frankly about sex and longing, it also has the power to annoy. As an example of experiential drama, it doesn’t aim to develop arguments so much as trigger ideas and thoughts, mimicking the effect of real-life experiences. (p. 86)

The Scottish playwright’s work may also seem more subjective than social. In a former account of *The Censor*, Reid (2012) claims that Neilson focuses intensely on “subjective rather than social experience, and repeatedly stages a battle between inner and outer realities... in which inner realities are privileged” (p. 140) in his In-Yer-Face theatre. This does not mean that his plays never include social themes such as “the effects of capitalism and globalization on the individual and the daily life of the individual, the effects of new information technologies on individuals and society, non-communication, loneliness, and alienation, which are the themes of twentieth century” (Sayın, 2016, p. 120). It must also be emphasized that these themes are handled in *The Censor* as in another Scottish playwright, Simon Stephen’s *Pornography* (2008) which “was written within the characteristics of post-dramatic aesthetics” (Sayın, 2016, p.127). Using such themes, Neilson reflects the condition of the ordinary man through his subjective perspective by using In-Yer-Face techniques peculiar to him.

All in all, these characteristics make *The Censor* more than disturbing because, the play; raises several fascinating questions on unhappiness, grief, loyalty, infidelity, otherness, loneliness, and alienation by employing the emotions aroused around an ordinary married couple and an intruder as a charity angel within a rather simple plot. Besides that, the play becomes more gripping by including some themes, such as art, sexuality, masculinity, impotency, sexual education, power, benevolence, fantasy, subconsciousness, philosophy, censorship, bias, morality and ethics. The last two ones are precisely taken into consideration via Zygmunt Bauman’s ideas in this study.

2. Zygmunt Bauman's Moral Sociology

Zygmunt Bauman is considered one of the key conformist theorists of postmodernity and one of the most prominent social thinkers of the '80s and '90s. He transcends the limits of traditional scientific discipline coming up with new ideas covering several fields such as social and political theory and philosophy. He basically argues that the new world should be examined and explained through new sociological perspectives. According to Tester (2004), "[Bauman] encourages his readers to enter into worlds that they had not known before (for example, the worlds of ambivalence, ethics, globalisation and so forth) and thus to begin to think – and act – differently. Bauman's is a kind of sociology that points to the *possible*" (p. 15).

In the context of both Weber and Marx's views, Bauman judges that modernism – in fact, he often uses the term 'modernism' instead of 'postmodernism' – always has an ambivalent nature. According to Bauman, Postmodernity is the result of the abandonment of approaches of modernity which always tries to understand the World via reason. In his *Postmodern Ethics* (1993), he indicates that "the grand mistake of modernism is the illusion that this messiness of humanity is simply temporary until the rule of reason with its principled foundations takes precedence" (Bauman, 1993, p. 32-33), and therefore postmodernity is the result of the failure of modernity which cannot manage to complete its mission.

Queries for ethics and morality were always central to Bauman's concern. In an ethical context, Bauman is considered to follow the French philosopher Emmanuel Lévinas' doctrine. Lévinas' ethics is a complete and unconditional call to 'The Other'. It is not a demand for the responsibility that acquires interchange in any accepted procedure. As Lévinas (1981) put it:

The responsibility for the other cannot have begun in my commitment, in my decision. The unlimited responsibility in which I find myself comes from the other side of my freedom, from a 'prior to every meaning', an 'ulterior to every accomplishment', from the non-present par excellence, the non-original, the anarchical, prior to or beyond essence. (p.10)

Similarly, according to Bauman (1993), "The other must be faced as other in asymmetry. This is a total engagement to a personalistic and agapeic ethic" (p. 48, 49, 74) since "Human reality is messy and ambiguous" (p. 32).

Bauman differentiates morality from ethics. While morality concerns "the aspect of human thought, feeling and action that pertains to the distinction between 'right' and 'wrong'" (Bauman, 1993, p. 4), ethics refers to the rules constructing the universal norms and laws. Ethics is about a life that requires obedience to moral laws. Thus Bauman defines modernity as the age of ethics since the morality and practice of modernity were "animated by the belief in the possibility of a *nonambivalent, nonaporetic code*" (emphasis in original; Bauman, 1993, p. 9). On the other hand, according to him, in postmodernity, the moral life should be thought regardless of the guidance of any codes and laws. For Bauman, "such rules rather than promoting moral conduct in fact encourage us to not worry about the impact of our actions as all we need to do in order to be moral is to follow the accepted rules" (Campbell & Till, 2010, p. 173). According to him, thus, postmodernism entails the destruction of ethics.

However, this does not mean that it is the end of morality. Bauman claims that “the end of (modern) ethics opens up the possibility for (postmodern) morality” (Biesta, 2016, p. 62). That is, according to Bauman (1993), “whether the time of postmodernity will go down in history as the twilight, or the renaissance, of morality” (p. 3).

The major view in Bauman’s expression of postmodern morality is therefore, the idea of responsibility for the other, a matter of duty: “it needed to be one in which ethical behaviour was a matter of choice, not rule-bound duty” (Rattansi, 2017, p.173). In this respect, one could be uncertain about whether he does the right thing at the right time. In fact, this is literally what postmodernism reveals postmodern man: both moral choices and dilemmas are not “the temporary and rectifiable effects of human weakness, ignorance or blunders” (Bauman, 1993, p. 32). He believes that man has a powerful moral capacity to do everything for his responsibilities:

Bauman’s account thus reveals why responsibility is both possible and necessary under the postmodern “condition.” It is *possible* because postmodernity leaves behind the belief in the possibility of a universal moral code, and more specifically the codified rational ethics of modernity. It is for this very reason, however, that responsibility becomes necessary. (Biesta, 2016, p. 63)

One approach for Bauman’s concern about responsibility is to express that solely the individual could be responsible for his acts and behaviours. Bauman (1993) expresses that “‘I’ is just being seen as a singular form of the ethical ‘us’ and that within this ethical ‘we,’ ‘I’ is exchangeable with ‘s/he’, [but] I and the Other are not exchangeable, and thus cannot be ‘added up’ to form a plural ‘we’” (p. 47-50) since a moral contact is a contact of responsibility. The real responsibility is one’s responsibility for the Other and the Other’s responsibility for the one. It is then “one-sided, nonreciprocal and nonreversible” (Biesta, 2016, p. 63); it is regardless of mutual desires, demands and any established rules or laws. Bauman says that “My responsibility is the one and only form in which the other exists for me” (Bauman, 1989, p. 182). For Bauman, “‘inter-human togetherness’ is sustained by the freedom of ethical responsibility. And it is this togetherness without externally imposed ethical Law that ‘binds us’ when all the solids of modernity have melted into air” (Tester, 2004, p. 144). Whereas rules and laws could be universal, responsibility is unique to the entity, thus morality is “endemically and irredeemably *nonrational*—in the sense of not being calculable... [and] I am moral *before* I think” (emphasis in original; Bauman, 1993, p. 60-61) because he asserts that “moral responsibility—being *for* the Other before one can be *with* the Other—is the first reality of the self” (emphasis in original; Bauman 1993, 13).

Besides what responsibility means for Bauman, it is the fact that he questions to what extent responsibility is really probable in postmodern society. Similar to Lévinas, for Bauman (1993), proximity is not about physical condition, it is, however, about “suppression of distance” (p. 87). Such suppression is like a condition of ‘attention’ and ‘waiting’ which covers the proximity describing “the predicament of being in the moral situation and of being a moral self” (Biesta, 2016, p. 65). If a third person intrudes into the scene between two, “the naïve, unruly and unruly moral impulse—that both necessary and sufficient condition of the ‘moral party’—does not suffice anymore” (Bauman, 1993, p. 112). For Bauman, “the stranger’s physical proximity makes them

the direct focus of the individual's innate urge to be-for-the-Other. That is to say, the proximity of the Other stirs up our moral anxiety, which is the urge to do something to meet the Other's needs" (Davis, 2013, p. 8). Now The Other disintegrates in the society and this causes the dissolving of the otherness of the other and morality, that is "the responsibility for that otherness" (Bauman, 1993, p. 130). For Bauman, it is the socialization that is required for solving the problem arisen apart from sociality.

Bauman's conclusion is somewhat optimistic though he is sometimes criticized negatively: "For all his concern with ethics, responsibility for the Other and the suffering of the world, Bauman's discourse and framing, unfortunately, fall well short of the standards which thinking and writing about [global] issues should attain" (Rattansi, 2017, p. 179). Yet Bauman demands "to return sociology to morality, and morality to sociology and that this is [one of the] motivation informing his 'liquid sociology'" (Davis, 2013, p. 8). Bauman prefers:

a world in which the moral urge is active to one in which it is stifled. The age of 'liquid modernity' emerges from his writing in such a way as to stir our moral anxiety, pressing a sharp knife against our comfortable conceits that we live in the best of all possible worlds and leaving us somewhat more uncertain and insecure about the challenges we face individually and collectively. (Davis, 2013, p. 8-9)

He argues that "the moral conscience," [that] "ultimate prompt of moral impulse and root of moral responsibility—has only been *anaesthetized*, not amputated" (emphasis in original; 1993, p. 249). It is possible "[t]o let morality out of the stiff armor of the artificially constructed ethical codes (or abandoning the ambition to keep it there), means to re-personalize it" (Bauman, 1993, pp. 33-34, 247-48). For Bauman, "what binds us is immanent within human being and ambivalence. Without externally imposed universalities and foundations we are left alone with our consciences to make choices in the context of the presence of the Other. This is the possibility that Bauman recovers from out of the wreckage of modernity" (Tester, 2004, p. 141). Fortunately, there is always hope for postmodern morality for him. Bauman believes that "questions are hardly ever wrong; it is the answers that might be so" [and] "refraining from questioning is the worst answer of all" (qtd. in Davis, 2013, p.10). It is that without any references to ethical rules, man could live in a 'liquid modern' world of moral uncertainty and this is not related to conformity. It is "morality (contrary to the teachings of almost all modern ethical philosophers) lies not in *conforming* to binding and well-nigh universally accepted and obeyed norms, but in staunch *resistance* to them – at enormous personal cost to the resistor" (Bauman & Lyon, 2013, pp. 129-130). For Bauman, this is actually of extraordinary advantage to humankind. A long way from being a significant risk to ethical quality, vulnerability is the home ground of the ethical individual and the main soil where profound quality can grow and thrive. Sociology should help them right now, declining to be 'morally unbiased', by paying attention to the need to associate with individuals in a type of discourse open to them, and by declining to give soporific comfort in a world necessitating our steady caution.

3. *The Censor and 'Liquid Morality' on the Stage*

Some scholars deny the importance of In-Yer-Face plays whereas others regard those plays as the ones that enlighten the literacy of the new world order. For

instance, Vera Gottlieb (1999), from the University of London, once asserted that “postmodernism has virtually succeeded in relieving us of the responsibility of making value judgements... [and] we are in a period of transition in which little suggests birth or rebirth. There is the lack of major new writing which engages our contemporary realities [...] The plays of the nineties seem to have given up any attempt to engage with significant public issues” (p. 209-212). On the other hand, Ken Urban (2006), from Massachusetts Institute of Technology, in the introduction of his dissertation *Cruel Britannia: British Theatre in the 1990s*, claims to “examine a group of young, confrontational playwrights who embraced nihilism as an ethical and political worldview, as a means of critiquing what they viewed as the facile moralism of contemporary British culture, with its simplistic division between right and wrong, victim and victimizer” (p. ii) in their 90’s In-Yer-Face plays. He is right to declare that these plays are about ethics and morals of victims and victimizers, and he is right when he connects those plays with Heidegger’s *Verwindung*, Nietzschean nihilism, and even Kantian nostalgia – it is a fact that all are true for *The Censor* that there is a nihilistic scene in the end, the tragic end constructs the aesthetic of *Verwindung* and the whole story of the *Censor* is nostalgic. From a different perspective, this part of the study aims to focus on Anthony Neilson’s *The Censor* in terms of Zygmunt Bauman’s moral sociology, Neilson’s idea of self-censorship and his original moral discourse because such plays cannot be thought without social and moral discourse. However, it is the fact that as containing racy scenes that cannot be approved by any communities and religions, *The Censor* cannot be associated with Zygmunt Bauman’s moral sociology through the themes of the play such as deception, infidelity and the excesses of man. Reid (2012) thinks that *The Censor* “is best understood as a narrative of repression [...] liberation” (p. 156), besides it contains the philosophy behind the responsibility for the Other.

Since *The Censor* is “a kind of memory play” (Reid, 2017, p. 27) which consists of fourteen interwoven scenes, it launches with the informative recalls and narrations of its male victim/victimizer protagonist, the Censor, who appears making some comments on his current job. Such a start is not surprising because Neilson describes a playwright as a person who is “no more and less than a *storyteller* – a direct descendant of that person that would sit in the village square and tell fairy tales to children” (Neilson, 1998a, p. ix). The playwright feels that “The story is the route by which your subconscious finds expression in the real world... the denial of narrative is a denial of life” (1998a, p. ix-x), and thus in this narrative mode, the narrator is not only the playwright of happenings but also a character in those happenings:

It started with a pornographic film. And I swear to God it was a porn film like any of the hundreds I’d seen. No: There were differences – strange edits and inflections – but at the time I put it down to poor technique.

No: I’ll be honest with you – I put it down to the fact it was made by a woman.

The film was hard-core and unpassable as it stood but she requested a meeting with me to challenge the ruling.

I could’ve refused. To this day. I still don’t know if things would’ve turned out better if I had. But I didn’t, and she came to try to change my mind, the only way she knew how. (Neilson, 1998b, p. 245)

The narration also augments the sense of the narrator as a segregated postmodern subject who is busy with censorship that represents the old-fashioned norms of modernity. Neilson benefits from such a character design because “in liquid dramaturgies, the focalization of character shifts from an objective to a subjective viewpoint” (Grochala, 2017, p. 21). The individualized social man lives in a continual state of indeterminacy disturbed by anxiety: “forever becoming, avoiding completion, staying undefined” (Bauman, 2012, p. viii). That is, as long as the Censor gives information about his story, it is just possible to learn something from his point of view. He even hides his name and surname. The exchanging of the Censor is also subjective rather than objective. However, as he wears a tie and he is in a smart suit, he reflects a kind of bureaucratic seriousness, which makes anyone believe in what he tells. It is thought that he makes a great effort to do his job honestly and seriously. He determinedly manages to decide on which pornographic film is in good quality and he formally questions whether it is appropriate.

As long as the Censor tells his story, it is learned that the last film he has watched and rejected was directed by Miss Fontaine whom the Censor met some time ago. It is not a coincidence that the porn director’s name is a feminine word in French; *Fontaine* which is originally *fons* or *fontis* in Latin means not one thing in particular, but a set of ideas that could be exclusive etymologically: “a spring of water coming from the earth; the source from which something comes (a fountain of knowledge); an artificial stream or spray of water (as for drinking or ornament); also: the device from which such a stream or spray rises” (Merriam-Webster, 2001, p. 299), figuratively, it means ‘sexiest’, ‘egotistic’ and ‘emotionally androgynous’, and thus, it represents ‘liquidity’, as well. On the surface, the play is, with a simple theme on pornography and censorship, between an ambiguous and fanatic female porn-film maker and an alienated bureaucrat without any combative masculine energy, but clearly, it is more than that.

The Censor includes the articulation of a dialectic between loneliness and being with the Other. During the process of the analysis of the film, Neilson lets the Censor ignore Miss Fontaine as if she is a *flâneur*, the Other or an intruder. There is no exact proximity at the beginning other than their technical debate on Miss Fontaine’s film. The Censor seems not to open his emotional world quickly to an outsider. This makes him the Other for Fontaine, too. He intentionally hides his personal world:

Censor Miss Fontaine –

Pause.

Please put your shirt back on.

Fontaine Are you married?

Censor No –

Fontaine Are you gay?

Censor No – I would just like you put your *shirt* back on.

Pause. (Neilson, 1998b, p. 245)

That the ambiguity in *The Censor*’s plot, on the other hand, is limited to the life of the Censor beyond his work place differentiates the play from the other works of the period. This reveals that Postmodern theory also urges the ambiguity in plot structure.

The major and vivid dialogues between the Censor and Fontaine are sometimes interrupted by short and cold dialogues between the Censor and his wife in their kitchen in the mornings. The first dialogue between the couple shows that the Censor's wife had dinner at her friend's, and she came home late in the morning. The Censor asks her whether a man named David was there, and she nods. David is the one with whom the Censor does not want to contact. It is obvious that there is a marital problem between the Censor and his wife because his wife is away home during the whole night and there is no exact communication between the wife and husband. Instead, it is heard that the Censor works over Fontaine's film in detail at his home office as if he were a lab assistant taking notes on a scientific experiment:

Fifteen forty-seven: outer labia.

Sixteen o two: inner labia. Penetration by inorganic device.

Sixteen twenty-three: anal penetration by same. Digital insertion to vagina.

Additional oral stimulation of vagina – sixteen forty-two

Seventeen ten: masturbation of erect penis.

Seventeen twenty-six: oral stimulation of erect penis.

Seventeen fifty-one: repetition of anal insertion sequence.

Eighteen o three: repetition of oral sequence. (Neilson, 1998b, p. 247-248)

These notes are as mechanical and artificial as the dialogues between the Censor and his wife are. They are the reflections of the emotionless postmodern world outside. The Censor seems as if he were a factory worker who works in the production line, possibly a conveyor line, such as in a canning factory. Actually, he just tries to finish his report over Fontaine's film for their next meeting. According to the Censor, Fontaine's film is nothing more than other films that the Censor has always encountered. It is so full of hard-core scenes that it is impossible to let her distribute it outside. It has no plot and character. Then it needs cutting "somewhere in the region of [...] thirty-five minutes" (Neilson, 1998b, p. 248) for the Censor to recommend it for selling in licensed video stores as a restricted 18 material. However, Miss Fontaine determinedly insists him on passing it without any restrictions and classifications. For the Censor, to do such a thing requires preparing a very strong case to the director of the office, but he should be convinced to believe that the film is strong enough to prepare such a case.

More importantly, there is a sense of closeness within the distance between the Censor with Fontaine, the Other in time. The Censor starts to open his heart to Fontaine after a few meetings, but Fontaine is still suspicious about why he has told that he is not married. It is understood that the Censor has been down there for six years. The Censor thinks that he is a moral man who just tries to do his job. He also believes that Fontaine always tries to take off her bra before him during the meetings because she thinks that he always has had sexual intercourse in such conditions. Fontaine, on the other hand, reacts against the Censor's generalisation over the thoughts of a porn star. In fact, without any expectations, Fontaine just feels herself to help the Censor. However, it is impossible at that moment because she does not know

his problem exactly. That's why, Fontaine continuously forces him to tell his darkest problems by mentioning his wife, putting her hands in the Censor's trousers and seducing him. It is such physical proximity for delving into the mind of the Censor.

After a short time, Fontaine seems suspicious that the Censor is impotent. She decodes both the emotional and the moral world of the Censor slowly after she breaks the measures of physical distance with him. Miss Fontaine thinks that the Censor has neither any moral strength in bureaucracy nor has potency as a husband. This becomes more obvious when Fontaine pretends to have a sexual affair with him:

Censor (*flabbergasted*) Miss Fontaine – we are *not* having an affair – !

Fontaine But I've touched your genitals!

Censor I didn't *ask* you to touch them, did I?!

Fontaine Did though!

Censor There's more to it than that, surely to God!!

Fontaine I don't believe so.

Censor So I become an adulterer the minute you put your hand down my trousers?!

Fontaine No – the minute you put talc down your *boxers*.

Pause. She can't keep the joke up any longer.

I know we're not having an affair. So stop acting like we are.

Pause. (Neilson, 1998b, p. 255)

Fontaine gingerly starts to get into the memories of the Censor. She is so successful for analysing the sexual problems of people around herself that the Censor highly becomes suspicious of her motive. But, Fontaine continues to tell the Censor about the sexual problem of the male character of her film: "Because he needs distance. Engagements scares him" (Neilson, 1998b, p. 259). By means of the mental puzzles of Fontaine, the playwright gently readies his audience for the climax of his play.

In one of their meetings, the Censor behaves as if he were waiting for a romantic therapy session with his psychologist, Miss Fontaine. He first places a bottle of wine and two glasses on his desk. Then he decides against the bottle before Fontaine arrives with some flowers in her hand. His unwillingness whether to put a bottle on the desk is not because he is a moral man, but because of his shyness. The Censor and Fontaine start to discuss the film intensely. This therapy session abruptly turns in to a moral course after Fontaine says that she wishes him to have sex with her. Such a behaviour cannot be regarded as bribery for the film Fontaine produced because she just wants to help the Censor. The Censor also rejects to have sex with her because he thinks that it is not ethically right. However, Fontaine does not believe in him, and she reacts against the Censor accusing him of not being ethical: "It's not right, it's not right. Your *job* isn't *right*, Mr Censor! Your *marriage* isn't *right*! And if we're talking about ethics, then buying that bottle of wine probably wasn't *right*, was it? For someone who's always talking about what's right, you seem to have an awful lot *wrong*!" (Neilson, 1998b, p. 265). She is right to tell him that he is not ethical, but the

major intention of Fontaine is not to pass her film by having sex with him or threaten him under the pressure of global financial capitalism. In reality, she just tries to save the Censor's manhood because she is aware of that the Censor is unhappy, and she feels herself responsible for the Censor. Because the Censor is also the Other or a victim for Miss Fontaine. She wishes to help the Censor both physically and psychologically. But, according to Fontaine, the Censor lies or does not tell about the true reason why he does not want to have sex with her. The Censor cannot share his "a bit clinical" (Neilson, 1998b, p. 268) problem directly and prefers to defend himself morally saying that "I'm not one of those men that can just do it at the drop of a hat. Never have been" (Neilson, 1998b, p. 268). His words do not make any sense, and Fontaine, in the end, boldly asks him whether he is impotent or not. Certainly, this question disturbs the Censor although she just acts as if she were a guardian angel.

Before the next meeting, the Censor completes his report over Fontaine's film. He softens this hard-core utilizing his report. However, Fontaine is not satisfied with the result. She insists that her film is important for the whole world because of the changing world with "artificial insemination, cloning, male contraception" (Neilson, 1998b, p. 273). According to her, sex is in danger, too. All the innovations she mentions are immoral for manhood and they all question man morally; thus, her film should be regarded as the saver of manhood or as a moral material:

Very soon, sex will be completely divorced from reproduction.

You think it'll just disappear?

No, it'll be free to evolve into the most sophisticated level of interaction attainable: a completely universal non-verbal language.

Think about that! What that'll *mean*!

No more repression! No more witch-hunts – A world absolutely without guilt or shame! And one by one all the institutions that've got fat on that shame – the church, the courts, the social services, even this rotten building we're in now – they'll fall, Mr Censor! They'll come crashing down!

And the people we dare to call perverts and deviants – the victims of this war – the good humane people we've criminalised and traumatised, they'll be recognised for what they truly are: Visionaries! (Pause.) Visionaries! (Neilson, 1998b, p. 273-274)

Fontaine's long defence of sex, which makes her a modern Jeanne d'Arc according to Aleks Sierz, is not only related to the release of her film but also it is related to the wisdom and philosophy behind it. Because, similar to this patroness or the Queen of Angel who was bold and strong, Miss Fontaine encourages the Censor to regard sex in a different point of view like a science. Besides that, she specifically wants to hear the Censor's psychological problems about sex. After her lecture, Fontaine makes some guesses about the problem of the Censor. According to her, the Censor's problem is about watching something taboo in the community. She believes that the Censor somewhere in his childhood encountered a scene, and he did not manage to bury this strong sexual feeling. Scene Ten which is the most infamous one without any words but a visual show reveals that Fontaine's all guesses are true: Laying newspaper down on the floor of the Censor's office, Fontaine defecates on it before the very eyes of the Censor, she cleans herself, then they make love. This

proximity could be regarded as an example for what Bauman calls 'suppression of distance' and meeting the Other's need.

In the next meeting, it is seen that the Censor still feels lonely and there is still no exact communication at home. More importantly, it is learned that Fontaine is about to go to New York for an installation at an art gallery. It is not running away from herself as the Censor thinks. However, the Censor is afraid of her departure, and for the first time, it seems as if he loses his control over Miss Fontaine if there is any because the Censor is just partly recovered physically and mentally by the Other. The Censor makes some promises about her film before Miss Fontaine leaves:

Censor I'll do some more work on the recommendation.

But there's only so much I can do. I still can't see what you see.

Fontaine Don't worry.

Pause.

You will. (Neilson, 1998b, p. 281)

At the final and the longest scene which is the repetition of all the other scenes between the Censor and his wife, it is learned that nothing changes for the couple. The Censor opens himself to his wife as he has promised to Fontaine, and he accepts meeting his wife's boyfriend. His wife misunderstands him because she has just read the news telling Fontaine is found dead at a hotel room. For the first time, she calls for her husband with his first name, Frank. She exchanges that Frank does not have to meet David, and continues saying that "We'll work it out. We'll always do" (Neilson, 1998b, p. 284-5) hopefully. Yet, Frank cannot tell his wife what he feels for her frankly. *The Censor* ends when this bureaucrat appears in his office watching Fontaine's film for the last time, and after a while, he smiles hopefully. Because according to Şenlen Güvenç (2011), Miss Fontaine teaches the Censor "to look beyond existing, accepted categories, definitions, systems of rules and values, and helps him to transform from a 'standard' person to an individual who accepts 'non-standard' sides. But at the end of the play, Miss Fontaine dies, and is thus censored and destroyed by the system" (p. 19). Frank still seems to be professionally taught about his life and his self in the end.

All in all, it is possible to regard *The Censor* as an example of the liquid dramaturgy which has some common characteristics as indicated by Grochala (2017):

[A] more simultaneous understanding of time; spatial dramaturgies become less concrete and more virtual; plot structures question linear mechanical and socio-psychological models of causation; the focalization of the social subject moves from an objective to subjective viewpoint. Through their liquid dramaturgical structures, these plays tackle the question of how to have agency within a society made up of ever-shifting social structures (p. 17)

It could be said that some of these characteristics also question the moral world of the modern man in this social structure as *The Censor* does, but it is not the conscious of the Censor. *The Censor*, then, is an alternative play with its characteristics of liquid dramaturgy to the socio-political plays in Thatcherite literacy. It is *The Censor* which mainly demonstrates how difficult for the man in the postmodern world to carry out the conflicts between the moral responsibility for others and solitude.

4. Conclusion

Like its predecessors, *Normal* (1991) and *Penetrator* (1993), *The Censor* (1997) “is an ambiguous work that has been interpreted with different emphasis both by critics and in performance” (Reid, 2012, p. 155). Such a liquid drama can also be evaluated through the aspect of morality in the liquid modernity. And, it is not hard to make such an analysis in the light of a porn-star, Miss Fontaine who represents ‘liquidity’ in modern society.

Bauman says that “any safety that can hope to be found within the shifting structures of liquid modernity depends not on fighting the endemic contingency and uncertainty of the human condition, but on recognizing it and facing its consequences point-blank” (Bauman, 2012, p. 213). Considering the conception of the community “not as a united collective, but as a dialectic between solitude and being with others”, the new world order constructs “new understandings of both the nature of the world and the social subject within the context of liquid modernity” (Grochala, 2017, p. 220). Similarly, Neilson reflects such a social understanding via *The Censor*. That is why this study mainly focuses on the moral aspect of *The Censor* through Zygmunt Bauman’s views on responsibility for the Other. It makes its connections between Bauman’s ideas and Neilson’s moral sociology or ‘Liquid Morality’ – aestheticism on a ‘liquid’ dramaturgical basis as the play “is all about looking deeper than the surface, the moral being that ‘if you can understand somebody, they’re no longer alien.’ Censorship is a symptom of ‘not wanting to understand people’, an example of alienation” (Sierz, 2001, p. 83). In this regard, both Neilson and Bauman are aware of the fact that social and moral changes diminish the strength of unity, and this negatively influences the moral proximity through bureaucratization and commodification. Although the Censor becomes an alien because of his working conditions, Miss Fontaine as ‘the Other’ resolutely saves his social life. Besides that the Censor’s wife ignores his sexual and mental problems at home, but Miss Fontaine heals his sexual life.

Although it is agreed that *The Censor* is a typical In-Yer-Face play in terms of the themes it deals with at first glance, it is a play in which “morality comes in shades of grey” (Sierz, 2001, p. 83). Therefore, this study prefers to evaluate the play in a postmodern line. In doing so, it argues that Anthony Neilson has developed a moral perspective so as to evaluate some postmodern themes such as selfishness, censorship, miscommunication, responsibility for the Other, sex, proximity and loneliness in the play. In this sense, the director and producer Stephen Daldry was right when he once said that “*The Censor* is about trying to find a new morality” (qtd. in Sierz, 2012, p. 85). To better understand Neilson’s ‘Liquid Morality’, this study analyses Zygmunt Bauman’s moral sociology, and evaluates the play through his postmodern moral discourse. But, it propounds that Neilson creates his own moral sociology which partly reflects postmodern ethical approaches of postmodernists such as Bauman, and it indicates that Neilson’s drama is larger than any rules within the liquid modernity. For Anthony Neilson, the postmodern man psychologically and sociologically suffers from what happens around himself, and this negatively affects his moral outlook for the Other. Anthony Neilson indicates that it is improbable to traditionally reflect such trauma on the stage. His theatre is bold enough to reveal what moral condition man has, and it contributes to realize the nature of modern man. This means that Neilson projects a world around moral values which does not discard the values of the Other as in *The Censor*, in contrast, this world builds a strong bridge between the man who is

morally lost and the Other who voluntarily helps him. Anthony Neilson's vision partly resembles to Zygmunt Bauman's, however it includes its own moral energy which is sometimes regarded as gloomy or grey.

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