

Offstage Figures Causing Perplexity in Neil Simon's *Rumors*

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Abstract

The interest in the invisible could be traced back to the Greek theater where fate acted as a mysterious, invisible force that brought sorrow and suffering to the protagonists. In Shakespearean drama, the interest shifted from fate to man as a power, whose action decided the course of events. There, the offstage world was an invisible realm inhabited mainly by absent characters belonging to the past. They exerted a powerful effect on the onstage world. Drama witnessed an increasing interest in the human mind that encompassed the past and the present, the physical and the metaphysical. That interest reached its prime in modern drama. There, the offstage characters acted either as reflections of the inner world of the onstage characters or as representatives of external forces that influenced it.

The aim of the present study is to show the significance of the offstage characters in shaping the onstage characters' psychology and their perception of and reaction to the world. The offstage characters denote and illustrate important cultural and social aspects of the twentieth century as reflected in selected American plays through family relationships.

In Neil Simon's *Rumors* (1988), the absence of essential characters gives the onstage couples an insight into their relationships and consequently leads them to overcome their marital problems.

Keywords: Offstage characters, perplexity, rumors, intuition, marital problems.

شخصيات غائبة عن خشبة المسرح تسبب الحيرة في مسرحية اشاعات لنيل سايمون وضاح حسن محي الخزعلي

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الخلاصة

يرجع الاهتمام بالمرحح اللامرئي الى العصر الاغريقي حيث كان القدر قوة غامضة لا مرئية تجلب الحزن والمعاناة للشخص الرئيسة للمسرحيات. وفي المسرح الشكسبيرى تحول الاهتمام من القدر الى الانسان كمتحكم بتوجيه مسار احداث المسرحية بقراراته. حيث كان العالم اللامرئي على خشبة المسرح مأهولا بصورة رئيسة بشخصيات بشرية من الماضي ذات تأثير كبير في احداث المسرحيات، وشهد فن المسرحية اهتماما متزايدا بالعقل البشري الذي يستوعب الماضي والحاضر والابعاد المادية وما ورائها. اذ وصل هذا الاهتمام اوجه في مسرحيات القرن العشرين، اذ استخدمت الشخصيات الغائبة عن المسرح اما لتعكس جوانب من العوالم الداخلية للشخصيات المرئية او لتمثل قوى من العالم الخارجي ذات تأثير في العوالم الداخلية للمرئية او لتمثل قوى من العالم الخارجي ذات تأثير في تلك العوالم الداخلية.

تهدف هذه الدراسة الى بيان اهمية الشخصيات الغائبة عن خشبة المسرح في التكوين النفسي للشخصيات الحاضرة وفي تحديد ادراكهم ورد فعلهم للعالم المحيط بهم وتمثل وتوضح الشخصيات الغائبة جوانب اجتماعية وثقافية مهمة.

تتناول الدراسة مسرحية نيل سايمون "اشاعات" اذ يوفر غياب شخصيات مهمة في تلك المسرحية للأزواج على خشبة المسرح الفرصة لتفهم بعضهم البعض والتغلب على مشاكلهم الزوجية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: شخصيات غائبة عن المسرح، الارتباك، الشائعات، الحسد، المشاكل الزوجية.

1. 1. Introduction

The secret of the theater's charm lies in its capacity for presenting the world of the play within the limited space of the stage. It offers the audience a direct confrontation with the various aspects of this world. Dramatists have attempted to overcome the limitations of the physical space to give a comprehensive picture of human existence and the forces which govern it. They presented and represented the visible and invisible dimensions of the real world. The representation of the invisible instigates mental activities like imagination, reasoning, and reflection. The audience's minds become the real space where the plays are enacted.

Twentieth-century American drama was influenced by classical dramatists, Shakespeare, the symbolists, the surrealists, and the absurd dramatists. It was also influenced by specific European dramatists, like Ibsen, Strindberg, and Chekhov. Like them, American dramatists were also interested in the invisible as they widely used the technique of offstage characters.

1.2. Offstage characters

Offstage characters maintain "a liminal space between absence and presence and are both outside (not in the plot) and inside (in the story) of the drama."^[1] As they never emerge in the plot, they never appear physically onstage. They are given a mediated presence; they are brought to life through the onstage characters' utterances.^[2] They must be represented or alluded to in the discourse. Otherwise, they are not offstage ones as they are absent, not only from the plot, but also from the story.

Offstage characters may exist in "past time prior to the action of the play,"^[3] like the offstage fathers in Chekhov's *The Three Sisters* and Strindberg's *The Pelican*. They may also exist in the present time, but they are spatially removed from the presented action, ^[4] like Minnie in Glaspell's *Trifles*. They could be detected in "the ellipses between presented actions,"^[5] like Pepe el Romano, the suitor of Angustias, in Lorca's *The House of Bernarda Alba*.

Twentieth-century American dramatists employed the technique of offstage characters to approach issues of concern to them: "the status of the imagination, the primal family unit, questions of gender and race, the role of truth and illusion, the compromise of self-reliance, and the collapse of physical, mental and moral space."^[6] They have a special interest in the family. The present study examines the use of offstage characters to illuminate familial issues and perplexity in Neil Simon's *Rumors*.

1.3. Neil Simon

Marvin Neil Simon (1927—) was born in the Bronx, New York City, the setting for nearly all of his plays. He is the son of Irving Simon, a garment salesman, and Mamie Simon, a homemaker. He was nicknamed 'Doc,' because as a child he used to examine his family with a toy stethoscope. During the Great Depression, his family suffered from financial hardships. He escaped those dreary conditions by going to the movie theaters, where he enjoyed watching the early comedians, like Charlie Chaplin.^[7] Sheila Ennis Geitner notes that "as an accomplished playwright, Simon

understands the connection between pain and laughter. He apparently approves of his nickname Doc, for the implied comparison between the work of a playwright and the function of a doctor—to relieve suffering." [8]

Simon wrote comedy scripts for radio and television shows. He also wrote stage plays and screenplays, which were often adaptations of his stage plays. Commercially, "he was the most famous and most ... successful playwright in America." [9] Literally, he achieved recognition after winning the Pulitzer Prize for drama, in 1991, for *Lost in Yonkers*, a "blend of ...one-liner comedy and heartfelt emotional drama." [10] He was considered USA's master comic playwright. Behind his "deceptively simple [comedies] ... lurks a real problem that needs to be solved." [11] Like Chekhov who portrayed in his life's work the absurdity of human life, Simon makes use of comedy not to evoke laughter, but to reflect the absurd aspect of the man. [12]

1.4. *Rumors*

Simon had difficult times due to the break-up of his marriage and the death of his son-in-law in an automobile accident. Therefore, he decided to write *Rumors*. [13] He also chose his parents' relationship as its basis in an attempt "to erase the bitter memories of what he termed their 'lost love.'" [14] He stated that "work is always a cathartic process for me, and I thought it would be really good just to get into a comedy." [15]

Rumors deals with the gathering of four affluent married couples to celebrate the tenth wedding anniversary of their friend Charley, a deputy New York mayor, and his wife, Myra, who never appear onstage. The first couple to arrive are Charley's lawyer, Ken, and his wife, Chris. They are driving up when they hear a gunshot from Charley's house. The front door is locked; therefore, they run around the back door, break in the kitchen window, and get in. They discover that Myra and the servants are missing. Charley is upstairs in his bedroom with a self-inflicted gunshot wound in his earlobe. Being overdosed with valium, he is unable to explain the situation to them. Ken sees Charley throwing a note into the toilet. He thinks it to be a suicide note. Suspecting a scandal, he attempts to cover up the whole issue. More guests arrive. They are Charley's accountant, Lenny, and his wife, Claire, Charley's psychoanalyst, Ernie, and his wife, Cookie, who runs a TV cooking show, and a senate candidate, Glenn, and his wife, Cassie.

The guests are confronted with an overwhelming sense of absence: "There's no food out, there's no ice in the bucket. Where's the help? Where's the cheese dip? Where's Myra?" (Act 1, p.16) They attempt to fill the void by cooking the food themselves. They dance and invent stories. Moreover, they are entangled in a web of rumors. They keep the gunshot from the police. Minor offstage characters are mentioned to be part of a net of cover-ups invented by the guests to hide their knowledge of Charley's situation:

ERNIE. Myra's mother broke up her hip this afternoon and .. Myra took her to the hospital and is going to stay there the night. The help, thinking the party was off, left the food and went home. ... We ... decided to cook the dinner ourselves ... That's the story. ...

CLAIRE. [Her mother] died six years ago.

ERNIE. Then her father broke his hip.

CLAIRE. Her father lives in California.

ERNIE. Does she have a relative in the city?

CHRIS. She has a cousin Florence.

ERNIE. Florence is married. Why didn't her husband take her?

ERNIE. Then Myra broke her hip. The neighbors took her. ...

CLAIRE. Can't you think of something else?

ERNIE. (*Upset.*) *I did!* I thought of the mother, the father, the cousin, the wart and the hip. Nothing satisfies you people.

KEN. There's no logic to it. Nothing in the story is plausible.

ERNIE. (*Losing it.*) We don't need plausible. The man is in shock, mental anguish and emotional despair. [¹⁶] (Act 2, pp. 84-85).

Chris justifies the absence of Mai li, Charley and Myra's cook, saying that she is in Japan to see her sick mother. It appears that she does not know that Mai li is Chinese (Act 1, p.18). The guests also do not get the names of some offstage characters right. Cookie names the cook Moo Loo instead of Mai Li. Chris calls Charley's doctor Dr. Diddley instead of Dr. Dudley and Lenny names him Dr. Doolittle. That denotes the perplexity they experience in Charley's house. They lie to the police to protect Charley. Alvin Kein thinks that "the sheer *lunacy* ... to which farce should build is unmotivatedly unleashed in a burst of uninventive hysteria at the rise of the curtain, and it multiplies *illogically*, with each new arrival -- four couples in all and, in the second act, two stock police officers". [¹⁷]

However, their attitude sustains the fun of the play and supports the irony that results from the absence of the party people. Kevin Anderson says: "it's the situation Simon puts you in, and all of witty dialogue. It's all legitimately funny." [¹⁸] The play also provides a "farcical look at upper-crust America." [¹⁹] Beneath the comic surface of the play lies complexity of relationships that defies logic. Kirstin Finneran, thinks that "this story is sure to please audiences of all ages. It's the kind of comedy everybody can understand, because there's very witty, sarcastic humor, but then there's also farcical running up and down the stairs, knocking things over, people who can't hear, and accidents that happen." [²⁰] On the surface it looks like it is just this broad farce and it is about these crazy things that happen and how people deal with them. But on a deeper level, it is so much about relationships because it involves four couples who all arrive and deal with the situation differently; and how their relationships change during the course of the evening.

The relationship between the guests and their host is rather complicated. The absent host loses his individuality and becomes a touchstone to his guests' irrationality. They cover up the bitter truths of their own lives and marriages threatened by greed and betrayals, as they show a protective attitude towards Charley.

His residence is suggestive of their puzzling situation. It is a Victorian house with a gingerbread exterior that denotes the fanciful nature of the play. The dominant color is white. The house becomes like a blank sheet onto which the guests project their fears. Ken says that Charley's injury is superficial. Still, he believes that Charley is "bleeding like crazy, ... [blood is] all over the room. I don't know why people decorate in white" (Act 1, p.10). He is disturbed, because it is hard to hide blood spots spreading over a white background. It seems that his fear of an impending scandal magnifies the image of blood in his mind.

Ken does not want Charley to be involved in a case of an attempted suicide. This might stain his reputation and destroy his future as a politician. He decides to lie to cover up the situation. His decision reveals much about his crooked ways as a lawyer. Though Chris is a lawyer as well, she is not familiar with those ways. She does not like the idea of lying to the other guests. It is not easy for her to make up false stories. Ken tells her "you're a lawyer yourself, can't you figure out something to say?" (Act 1, p.16) Yet, Chris supports her husband's lies. When asked by the police about her occupation, she answers "I 'm a liar—a lawyer" (Act 2, p.106).

Unlike Ken, Lenny thinks that it is better to call the police, because if one of the neighbors has heard the gunshot, all of the guests will be considered accomplices. Being Charley's accountant, he fears the possibility that the whole issue will be investigated by the IRS (Internal Revenue Service). [²¹] Each has her/his own perspective concerning the situation. Ken and Chris introduce the idea of suicide. Lenny and Claire instigate rumors. They are members of a tennis club, a place where people gossip all the time (Act 1, p.25).

The theme of rumors is supported by offstage characters from the tennis club, Carole Newman and Harold Green. Lenny hates them because they circulate rumors about his best friend, Charley. He says that Carole has "a mouth big enough to swallow a can of tennis balls" (Act 1, p.25). He confirms that Harold is "a new social member who doesn't even play tennis. Comes to the club to eat lunches and spread rumors"(Act 1, p.29). Actually, Lenny and Claire are their onstage counterparts. They transform Charley's house into a space paralleling the tennis club. They tell the other guests about the rumors they have heard about Charley. Lenny claims that Myra betrays Charley. Claire insists that Charley is the one who betrays Myra. Rumors get a wider scope with the arrival of Glenn and Cassie. Ken assumes that Glenn and Myra have an affair as she helps him in his campaign. On the other hand, Cassie accuses Glenn of having affair with Carole (Act 1, p.58).

The rumors circulated by Lenny and Claire reflect their own marriage. They reveal that they have thought of breaking up. It is not surprising then that they link Charley's situation with the rumors they have heard about him in the tennis club (Act 1, p.24). Glenn and Cassie's marital problems are revealed during the so called wedding anniversary. Cassie re-enacts what has happened to them at a cocktail party for the Democratic Fund Raising Committee. She flirts with Lenny to imitate Carole, who has tempted Glenn, but she does not reveal Carole's name to the guests. Cassie creates tension among the guests. Claire threatens to use Charley's gun when she finds that Cassie is flirting with her husband:

GLENN. (*Without looking at her.*) All right Cassie, cut it out.

CASSIE. What do you mean, sweetheart?

GLENN. You know what I mean. Push your hair back up and sit on a chair. ...

CLAIRE. Excuse me. I'm going up to get *Charley's gun*.

ERNIE. Cassie, everyone here is your friend. Why don't you and I go out on the terrace and have a nice,

quiet talk?

COOKIE. (*To Ernie.*) You do and you'll have a back worse than mine.

(*Italics mine; Act 2, p.79*)

Charley's gun, the offstage rooms, and the telephone establish links between the onstage characters and the offstage ones. The guests constantly move in and out the offstage rooms of the house: Charley's room, the bathrooms, and the kitchen. By spending time offstage, they get closer to Charley's mode of absence.

In Charley's room, Ken re-enacts Charley's situation. He attempts to hide Charley's gun to prevent him from committing suicide. Yet, he trips on Charley's slipper and the gun goes off. He becomes deaf temporarily. Ken's gunshot parallels Charley's. Mistakenly, both Charley and Ken harm their ears with the same gun. The gunshots cause confusion. Ken lies to cover up Charley's gunshot. Similarly, Lenny, Claire, and Chris lie to cover up Ken's gunshot. Lenny claims that it is a car backfire. Later, he says that Ken's ears are stuffed up because he has bad cold. Claire justifies the harm done to Ken, saying that a can of shaving cream has exploded next to him.

Cookie and Ernie also cause confusion in the kitchen. Ernie lifts the hot platter so as not to fall on Cookie, who leans to pick her ice bag. He drops it on the table and it breaks the water pitcher. She is wounded, because of the broken glass. Other guests are physically harmed as well, like their injured host. Before arriving at the house, Lenny and Claire have a car accident. Lenny's neck and Claire's lips are wounded. The tension drives Chris to smoke after quitting it for months. Cassie quarrels with Glenn offstage and hits his nose with a phone. Chris wonders "Why are we protecting Charley this way? Ken is deaf, Lenny can't turn his neck, Cookie's walking like a giraffe, I'm getting a blood condition ... For what? One more gunshot, the whole world will know anyway" (Act , p.50).

When the police arrive, Chris begs to go to the bathroom. When Ken is in Charley's room, Chris says that he is in the guests' bathroom upstairs. Lenny wonders:

LENNY. (*Points to the powder room.*) Why didn't he use this one?

CHRIS. I don't know. He said he had to go badly and he ran upstairs.

LENNY. If he had to go so bad, the one downstairs is closer.

CHRIS. You know how it is when you have to go badly. You don't want to stop running.

LENNY. But this is a shorter run. (Act 1, p.19)

The telephone is a significant symbol in the play. It connects the guests with offstage spaces inside and outside the house. Its long cord indicates the difficulty of realizing the truth of what has happened to Charley offstage. Some of the calls the guests receive complicate their situation. Cassie's cousin calls from Venezuela. Glenn summons Cassie out of the bathroom to talk to her before losing connection. He bangs the bathroom door loudly. Cassie is confused. She drops her crystals in the toilet. Consequently, Cassie and Glenn quarrel furiously. The guests receive another call from a woman asking for Glenn. Some of them think her to be Myra and suspect the call to be related to Glenn's betrayal of Cassie (Act 2, p.86).

Ken urges Chris to call Dr. Dudley. But, when he realizes that Charley's situation is not critical, he changes his mind. That initiates a funny telephone conversation:

CHRIS. But I already said were getting out of the car and we suddenly heard an enormous—what? What did we hear? ...

KEN. (*Thinks, coming downstairs.*) We heard ... we heard ... we heard ... an enormous--*thud!*

CHRIS. *thud?*

KEN. When he tripped down the stairs.

CHRIS. Good. Good. That's good. (*Into phone.*)

Dr. Dudley? I'm sorry. I was talking to my husband. Well, we heard this enormous *thud!* It seemed Charley tripped going up the stairs.

KEN. Down! Down the stairs.

CHRIS. Down the stairs. But he's all right.

KEN. He's sitting up in bed. He'll call him in the morning.

CHRIS. He's sitting up in bed. He'll call him in the morning.

KEN. *You!*

CHRIS. *You!* He'll call you in the morning. (Act 1, pp.12-13)

All the guests are Dr. Dudley's clients. Each time they have an accident, they call him and get him out of the theater where he is watching *The Phantom of the Opera*. The title of that show is suggestive. The opera parallels the onstage world, where the guests are haunted by the influence of offstage characters. Besides, like the opera, *Rumor* has its own musicality that springs from the dialogue and the guests' movement onstage. Anderson says that "the banter back and forth between the characters makes the show sing, so to speak."^[22] The guests' movement up and down the stairs, and in and out the rooms has a rhythm that is orchestrated first by Ken and then by all the guests together. When the police arrive, they dance furiously. This creates a tableau suggestive of the situation of the whole play. It gives expression to their inner urges that make them behave irrationally.

Through the telephone, Ernie is connected with three couples of his patients. He holds with them a group therapy session. They have a psychiatrist consultation together with their partners. The parallelism between the guests and Ernie's patients is supported by the fact that Claire is also one of his patients. Among the guests, there might be other patients whose names are not revealed; when Ernie reveals that Claire is a member of one of his groups, Lenny angrily threatens to reveal the names of all the people in Ernie's Thursday night group (Act 1, p.41).

As the play develops, the guests appear to have much in common with Charley. Besides having the same doctor and the same psychoanalyst, they all exhibit child-like behavior. Chris says that they all behave like children. Ken says "[Charley is] crying like a baby. I can't stop him. He needs a woman" (Act 1, p.21). Cookie's backache makes her crawl like a baby. Cassie acts childish when she loses her crystals. Names establish further affinity among the characters (Act 2, 80-81). The affinities between the male and female characters show that the differences between them are demolished as they undergo the same absurd situation. That is supported by the fact that Lenny skillfully imitates Myra's voice (See Act 1, p.60).

Lenny pretends to be Charley before the police because the latter cannot get out of his room, Lenny invents a long story to justify the gunshots. He attributes the whole confusion to the fact that he, "Charley," does not speak Spanish. The Spanish cook's son, Romero, comes with a knife to ask him and his wife about heating the dinner. He thinks that Romero is a thief and aims his gun at him. Myra tries to stop him, but fails. He ends by shooting himself in the earlobe. The servants run away. Then, mistakenly, he locks Myra inside the basement and has valium instead of aspirin (Act 2, pp. 109-111).

Lenny's story sounds irrational. Welch, the policeman, tells him that he does not believe it, but he will "buy it because I *liked* it!" (Act 2, p.111) However, it proves to bear some truth in it. After the departure of the police, the guests hear a knock from the basement. It appears to be Myra, who is locked inside and they hear only her voice. (Act 2, p.113) Lenny is able to come close to the truth, because the absent hosts represent all the guests. That is why they don't appear physically onstage. The guests also lose their identities and come to represent the same type of people. Ernie feels like one of his patients. Ken plays Lenny and Lenny plays Charley.

The experience the guests undergo in Charley's house has a healing effect on them. Lenny digs deep beneath the shallow surface of their relationships to find some genuine love that can restore the vitality of their marriage. According to his story, Charley expresses his love for Myra. That is inspirational to the other characters. At the end of the play, Claire says that "just when I was getting bored with our marriage, I fell in love with [Lenny] all over again" (Act 2, p.112). Cassie and Glenn come to terms again. Even Welch says "I love my wife, too, and that's why I want to get home early" (Act 2, p.111).

Notes

[¹] Paul Rosefeldt, "From Strange Interlude to Strange Snow: A Study of the Absent Character in Drama," *Journal of Evolutionary Psychology* (August 2002) pp.3-4.

[²] *Ibid.*, p. 2.

[³]Ibid., p. 3.

[⁴]Ibid.

[⁵]Ibid.

[⁶] Christopher Innes *et al.*, eds., "Introduction," in *The Methuen Drama Guide to Contemporary American Playwrights* (London: Bloomsbury MethuenDrama, 2013), p. ix.

[7]Sheila Ennis Geitner, "(Marvin) Neil Simon,"*Dictionary of Literary Biography Volume 7: Twentieth-Century American Dramatists Part 2: K-Z.*,ed. John MacNicholas (Detroit: Gale Research Company, 1981) under "Neil Simon" in *Literature Resource Center*. [online]. Available: <http://go.galegroup.com/ps/i.do?id=GALE%7CH1200002019&v=2.1&u=wash89460&it=r&p=LitRC&sw=w&asid=cb860e97e5e54e80b6236dddb94fecc> (accessed April 6, 2017).

[⁸] Ibid.

[⁹] Gary Konas, *Neil Simon: A Casebook* (New York: Garland Publishing, INC., 1997), p. 2.

[¹⁰] Lois Kerschen, "Critical Essay on *Lost in Yonkers*," *Drama for Students* 18, ed. David A. Galens (Detroit: Gale, 2003), under "*Lost in Yonkers*" in *Literature Resource Center*. [online]. Available: <http://go.galegroup.com/ps/i.do?id=GALE%7CH1420050210&v=2.1&u=wash89460&it=r&p=LitRC&sw=w&asid=4e5ab6ab2da41cfcfe93486d7b9ff5f3>(accessed April 6, 2017).

[¹¹]Konas., pp. 2-3.

[¹²]Ibid., p. 1.

[¹³] Mervyn Rothstein, "For Neil Simon, the Prescription was Farce," *New York Times*, November 13, 1988. p. 8

[¹⁴] Levine-Brown Patti, "*Rumors* Is the Talk of Orange Park; the Community Theater's Latest Production Is Said to Be a Comedic Hit," *The Florida TimesUnion*,

[¹⁵]Rothstein.p.12

[¹⁶]Neil Simon, *Rumors* (New York: Samuel French, 1990).Act II, P. 84-5). All subsequent references to Act and page number, of this edition will be given within the text.

[¹⁷] Alvin Kein, "Simon Tackles Farce in Slick Staging of *Rumors*," *New York Times*, January 12, 1992. p. 13.

[¹⁸] Kevin Anderson, "St. Viator to Take on Neil Simon's *Rumors*," *Daily Herald*, April 16, 2010. p. 6.

[¹⁹] "Word Is, It's Fast and Fun Dundee-Crown High School Stages Neil Simon's *Rumors*," *Daily Herald*, December 13, 2007. p. 9.

[²⁰] Kirstin Finneran, "Wit and Slapstick Cary-Grove High Stages Neil Simon's *Rumors*," *Daily Herald*, November 3, 2005. p. 12.

[²¹] Internal Revenue Service (IRS), Agency of the U.S. Department of the Treasury charged with administering and enforcing federal tax laws, except those relating to alcohol, tobacco, firearms, and explosives. It issues rulings and regulations to supplement the provisions of the Internal Revenue Code; determines, assesses, and collects internal revenue taxes; and determines exempt organization status.

[²²] Anderson, p.7.

From *Encyclopedia Britannica Online*, s.v. "Internal Revenue Service [online]. Available:"<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/290571/InternalRevenueService-IRS> (accessed April 5, 2017).

Conclusion

The offstage characters belong to a realm that either counterbalances or parallels the onstage world. The latter is usually a materialistic domain whose inhabitants are trapped in an endless pursuit for fulfilling material demands that leave a limited space for creativity, contemplation, and spiritual elevation. The onstage characters react against their harsh realities by approaching the offstage characters.

In Simon's *Rumor*, the couple onstage passes through perplexing experiences caused by the absence of essential characters. Those experiences give them an insight into their relationships and enable them to overcome their marital problems. In this play, a subjective perception of truth leads to characters' revelations. Lenny, makes up a story in which Charley reveals his passionate love for Myra. He is so expressive that his storytelling revives his own wife's love for him.

Rumors also raises questions that support the theme of rumors: Why does Charley shoot himself? Is it a pre-meditated suicide or an accident? Is it a reaction against an act of betrayal by Myra? Does it have anything to do with tennis club rumors? Where is Myra? Being a farce, the play does not present a real case of murder. The audience know that Charley is still alive. The gunshot involves circumstances that evoke laughter. Simon makes the most use of the offstage characters, Richard and Myra. The playwright also employs minor ones to charge the atmosphere of the plays with credibility and liveliness.

The onstage characters' disagreeing attitudes towards the offstage ones create dramatic conflicts. In this plays, Ken insists to cover up Charley's situation, but Lenny thinks it is better to call the police. Friendship is also used to show the impact of offstage characters on the onstage ones. In *Rumors*, the affinity between the guests and their friend Charley urges them to protect him.

The dramatist endows the onstage characters with unique, intuitive capacities to deal with the offstage realm. In this play, Lenny has a creative ability to find out Charley's situation. Hence, the power of human mind is stressed. He sublimates his sad memories into art. The play includes autobiographical elements. Influential people

in the dramatist's life are offstage characters in the subtexts of the play that are grounded on his personal experiences.

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