

Photography as a Reflection of the Photographer's Pain in *Time Stands Still*

Madhawy Abdulaziz Almeshaal

English and Literature Department, College of Arts
King Saud University, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia
Email: malmeshaal@KSU.EDU.SA

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Abstract

The paper at hand attempts to interpret a female war journalist's, the protagonist's, Sarah Goodwin's, decision to return to war zones after surviving a near-death experience in *Time Stands Still*, by Donald Margulies, (2010). The play starts with the protagonist's strong assertion that she is endangering her life working in different war zones just to help the victims of wars by showing the world pictures of their suffering. After surviving a deadly road-bomb accident, Sarah Goodwin decided to settle down at home and never return to dangerous zones. However, after six months of recovery, this female war journalist decided to return to war zones. The present study finds it intriguing to speculate on Sarah Goodwin's determination to return to such zones at such a time of her life. Through consulting some aspects of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and different aspects of Jacques Lacan's words on photography, lack, and absence, the present study concludes that the protagonist's desire to go back to war zones does not just help show the world pictures of wars victims' suffering, but it helps the protagonist construct her own identity. Photography/war journalism becomes a medium through which Sarah Goodwin asserts her identity as a human being as she cannot fulfill her feminine role as a nurturer in a patriarchal society. The audience realizes that through photography, the protagonist projects her sense of lack and pain and attempts to attain some sense of wholeness.

Keywords: lack, identity, masculine, photography, post-traumatic stress, *Time Stands Still*, war journalism

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Photography as a Reflection of the Photographer's Pain in *Time Stands Still*

Sarah Goodwin makes an intriguing decision at the end of *Time Stands Still*, a play by Donald Margulies (2010). The audience cannot help but wonder about the real, conscious or unconscious, motivation that would cause a middle-aged woman to give up the comfort and safety of home and return to a deadly war zone in a foreign country. She returned to a place where she almost lost her life in a roadside bombing just to record life, a mission she could more easily do at home.

Time Stands Still revolves around a female war photojournalist, Sarah Goodwin, who survives a near-death experience in a dangerous Iraqi war zone. She comes home in a pathetic physical state, declaring she would never go back to such zones. After recovering physically, Sarah attempts to settle down socially. However, in six months, she decides to go back to a different war zone.

Throughout the play, Sarah asserts that her mission in life is to save lives by taking pictures of victims of “violence, famine, and genocide” (Margulies, 2010, p.25) and showing the world these pictures. She states, “I was helping them [the victims of violence] by gathering evidence. To show the world. If it were not for people like me (. . .) The ones with cameras (. . .) who would know? Who would care?” (Margulies, 2010, p.39). Sarah’s belief that photography is a strong and memorable form of expression relates to the idea that

the inclusion of photographs has the advantage of being more memorable for the audience . . . the simultaneous use of words and pictures leads to a greater depth of analysis and . . . to a longer-lasting stronger memory trace in comparison with shallower levels of analysis. (Eysenck & Flanagan, 2000, p. 46).

When Sarah visits a day-care center at a women’s prison, as part of her family friend Richard’s “Keep Sarah Home” initiative, she has many flashbacks of suffering mothers she saw in Iraq. She vividly re-envisions a horrible Mosul market bombing that nearly killed her and did kill her Iraqi friend, Tariq. She emotionally breaks down and questions the ethics of being a war journalist. Sarah states, “I live off the suffering of strangers. I built a career on the sorrows of people I do not know and will never see again (. . .) I’m such a fraud.” (Margulies, 2010, p. 69). At this point, Sarah’s boyfriend, James, seizes the chance to convince her to settle down, to “make a home,” and to “stop running” (p. 70). Sarah hesitatingly accepts even though she profoundly feels that “marriage is not [their] thing” (p. 70). Sarah later admits she accepted James’ marriage proposal only because she was trying to act “grateful” toward him. However, within six months, Sarah realizes she is not what James wants. Sarah tells him, “I cannot be a playmate, have babies, and sit and watch movies with you, I cannot sit still, and I cannot be a Mandy” (p. 70). Sarah asserts that she has a humanitarian mission and even questions James’ decision not to return to war zones: “How can you live with yourself, knowing what goes on there?” (p. 70). At this point, James realizes Sarah needs “the chaos and the drama of the mess” (p. 78) and that she does not need him; therefore, he lets go of her. In the last scene of the play, before Sarah departs to a new war zone, Sarah and James hug fervently, but she gently separates herself from him. After he leaves, Sarah

shuts the door and takes a deep breath, then begins to pack her cameras. She becomes lost in thought as she polishes her camera's lens, then attaches the lens to the camera. She looks out from her window and sees something in the distance; just as she is about to take a picture of it, the stage lights quickly fade to black, indicating the stillness of time (p. 86). Sarah can retake a deep breath again only when she is ready to leave home and to return to war zones such as Kabul and Kandahar.

Does leaving her secure home and going to a war zone shortly after surviving a horrible near-death experience give meaning to Sarah's life and grant her a sense of identity? Though Sarah repeatedly asserts that recording images of life is a humanitarian mission, one cannot help wondering about what kinds of fulfillment this mission consciously or unconsciously brings Sarah and about what pains she might have to silence when taking pictures in war zones. It is striking that Margulies never directly reveals Sarah's inner thoughts and conflicts in a soliloquy. The audience's speculation and analysis of Sarah's actions and reactions lead to a desire to decode Sarah's decisions, particularly at the end of the play. To help interpret Sarah Goodwin's puzzling decision during a certain time of her life at the end of the play, one has to consult some aspects of psychoanalytical theories and trauma studies in an attempt to comprehend it.

An immediate interpretation that most audiences and critics apply to decode Sarah's persistent determination to leave home for foreign war zones shortly after surviving a near-death experience is by applying some trauma theories elements. Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), known as "shell shock" that "occurs after experiencing severe trauma or a life-threatening event" (Smith Lawrence & J. Segal, 2018, p. 2), is often a common explanation

for Sarah's decision. Sarah's inability to feel and stoic attitude is dominant throughout the play. She asserts that to do her job as a war journalist, she cannot be emotional, contrasting herself with Mandy, who cried while describing the separation of a baby elephant from his mother in a TV show. Sarah states,

I wish I could cry like that. But I can't; I can't let it get to me. If I let it get to me
(. . .) How could I do my job? I couldn't. I'd want to take away all the guns and rescue all
the children. But I can't. That's why I'm there. (Pause). I'm there to take pictures.
(Margulies, 2010, p. 40).

Thus, indifference to human suffering seems to be an effect that post-war trauma has had on Sarah. One can argue that Sarah is *compartmentalizing* her emotions (to borrow Roger Simpson's word). According to Simpson and Boggs, a journalist who covers a war "tends to compartmentalize his emotions and isolate them from professional reactions" (Simpson & Boggs, 1990, p. 1). Through such compartmentalization of emotions, a war journalist is able to ensure the job is done, as that process blocks much of the trauma, suffering, and pain that could affect a journalist's nervous system and emotional well-being. According to Herman (1997), "If the nervous system becomes overwhelmed, traumatic reactions occur. Each component of the ordinary response to danger,

having lost its unity, tends to persist in when actual danger is over” (p. 34). Such traumatic reactions, which symptoms of psychological distress, are consequences of experiencing a “life-threatening event.” According to Feinstein (2004), these reactions include fear, sadness, guilt, nightmares, agitation, helplessness, and horror. Feinstein asserted that war journalism is distinguished from other professions by its “repeated exposure to danger” and added that because war journalists are not “schooled in how to react to violence, as policemen or soldiers are, for example, they are more likely to be unable to bear the aftermath of that danger” (p.1). Thus, Sarah, like other war journalists, suffers from the symptoms of PTSD.

PTSD consists of three symptom clusters: re-experiencing, avoidance, and arousal, according to Feinstein, *Re-experiencing* refers to “unwanted intrusive recollections of the traumatic event that may occur during working hours as flashbacks or recurrent thoughts and during sleep as nightmares” (Feinstein, 2004, p. 2). *Avoidance* is “a reluctance to return to the scene of trauma that also may encompass a numbing of emotions or damping down of emotional responsiveness to people and event” (p. 2). *Arousal* refers to “the heightened responses of the body’s nervous system that may manifest as a startled response, an expectation of further violence even in situations deemed safe (e.g., after a return to civil society), problems falling asleep, irritability, and poor concentration” (p. 2).

Considering the symptoms of PTSD helps explain Sara’s behaviors and unusual decisions. For example, Sarah frequently undergoes a stage of re-experiencing. When Richard suggests that Sarah works at a day-care center at a women’s prison, James decides on her behalf with a sharp “No.” As a reaction to her husband’s attempt to control her, Sarah becomes very upset and accepts the offer immediately saying, “I don’t need to think about it. I want to do it” (Margulies, 2010, p.60). This is Sarah’s first job in six months she has spent recovering from her near-death experience in Iraq. Although this job involves a different type of violence than the one she experienced overseas, she is still devastated by a flashback triggered when an inmate asks why Sarah is taking her picture. This brings Sarah back to Mosul, as Sarah narrates:

Anyway, I’m shooting (. . .) sort of getting in the zone and this one woman (. . .) big [and] heavily tattooed with Hell’s Angels’ kind of skulls with fire coming out of the eye sockets, comes up to me, gets right in my face (. . .) and looks at me with such (. . .) contempt (. . .) (Brutish voice) ““What you want to take my picture for? Huh?”” And I was back in Mosul. (p, 68)

For the first time, Sarah vividly tells James what happened to her in Mosul on the day of the explosion; her story sounds as if the event just happened:

The light that day was gorgeous. I remember. (Pause) I was sitting in a café with the Reuters guys (. . .) And a car bomb went off, a block or two away, in the market. I just ran to it, took off. Without even thinking. The carnage was (. . .) ridiculous. Exploded produce, body parts, Eggplants. Women keening. They were digging in the rubble for their children. I

started shooting. And suddenly this woman burst out from the smoke covered in blood (. . .) her skin was raw and red and charred, and her hair was singed. She got so close I could smell it-and her clothes, her top had melted into her, and she was screaming at me. "Go way go way! No picture, no picture!" She started pushing my camera with her hand on the lens. (p, 69)

Sarah's terrifying narration of her flashback allows the audience to witness the psychological suffering she experienced as a war journalist who had just survived a near-death experience. She feels scared, horrified, sad, guilty, and discontented with her work and herself. She is so familiar with violence that she records her pain in a very mechanical manner. This numbness is reflected in her strong sense of addiction to pain and in her familiarity with grotesque images of violence: "This woman burst out from the smoke (. . .) covered in blood (. . .) her skin was raw and red and charred, and her hair was singed. She got so close I could smell it . . ." (p, 69). Sarah obviously has been detached from her emotions after repressing them for so long to do her job. A strong indication of Sarah's familiarization with grotesque images of violence is that she lists "body parts" along with "exploded produce" and "eggplants" while vividly visualizing mothers "digging in the rubble for their children" (p. 69). However, she soon breaks down, saying,

I feel so ashamed (. . .) They did not want me there! They didn't want me taking pictures! They lost children in the mess! To them, it was a sacred place. But there I was, like a ghoul with a camera, shooting away. No wonder they wanted to kill me; I would've wanted to kill me, too (. . .) I live off the suffering of strangers. I built a career on the sorrow of people I do not know, and I will never see again (. . .) I am such a fraud. (p, 69)

As a victim of PTSD, Sarah struggles during her time at the women's prison with unwanted and intrusive recollections of different traumatic events she experienced in Mosul. Sarah's sense of guilt is so immense that she compares herself to a ghoul who "wanted to even kill" herself (p, 96).

Similarly, Sarah undergoes a stage of avoidance because she is reluctant to return to the scene of her trauma. Sarah allows James to convince her that they can be happily married and have a "comfortable life" away from violence and wars; that they can "make a home" (Margulies, 2010, p. 69). However, that desire is short-lived. Sarah uses this desire as temporary avoidance; she admits later that she married James as a way of paying him back for his support, as an expression of gratitude. This confirms her agreement was a temporary form of avoidance.

At one point in her life, Sarah asserts that marriage can make many issues such as medical management "a lot easier" (p, 42). She soon realizes she had engaged in avoidance throughout her six months marriage. She temporarily tries to avoid remembering her near-death experience, and she seems to suffer from both primary and secondary traumas. Obratzsova (2017) defined these two types of trauma as follows: "Besides a 'primary' trauma, when a reporter survives a disaster directly, there is a risk to be traumatized in a 'secondary' way, by intensive interactions with

suffering people and by taking on all the grief" (p.1). Thus, Sarah undergoes avoidance physically and psychologically because of her primary and secondary trauma. She seeks to drink "something harder than tea," and desperately looks for a cigarette "now" even though she has not had "a cigarette in months" (Margulies, 2010, p.71). She gets married but only for six months, and she even briefly entertains the idea of motherhood. These are Sarah's short-term attempts to deal with her primary and secondary trauma via avoidance.

Another way to decode Sarah's decision to return to war zones at the end of the play is to view her choice as an unconscious attempt to overcome what is known as "survivor's guilt," related to PTSD. According to Danieli (1984), "A person may feel guilty without being consciously aware of it. Conscious and unconscious sense of guilt may act as an underlying factor in behavior, emotions and relationships" (p.25). Sarah experiences an unmistakable sense of guilt throughout the play. She feels guilty for cheating on James, and she tries to silence this feeling by marrying him for six months. Sarah feels guilty for Tariq's death and her survival, and she tries to deal with her survivor's guilt by insisting on having Richard be the one to explain Tariq's role when writing their book. Although Sarah feels she has a great mission to show the truth to the world and thus to help the victims of violence, she often questions her professional and ethical principles: "I live off the suffering of strangers. I built a career on the sorrow of people I do not know and will never see again (. . .) I am such a fraud" (Margulies, 2012, p. 69). Sarah's puzzling decision to go back to war zones could be an unconscious attempt to silence her unresolved sense of guilt so that she can heal and be able to live. Sarah's decision to face her sense of survivor's guilt by going back to her job can be seen as a step toward her emotional recovery. Sarah's decision to go back into danger despite her terrifying, near-death experience can be seen as a reflection of her sense of responsibility, as a human being, to document the violent world. Because Sarah's determination to return to war zones could be a symptom of PTSD, it heightens the audience's sympathy and empathy. However, one cannot help but wonder about Sarah's unconscious motivation for returning to danger. In other words, Sarah seems to be asserting herself as a human being by engaging in a universal humanitarian mission, but this could, in part, be an unconscious attempt to compensate for a deep sense of lack and loss.

To decode the source of Sarah's feeling of lack, which she seems to unconsciously compensate through her role as a war journalist, one can consult the words of Lacan's (1991a) on photographs as courtly love. According to Lacan (1991), a photograph is a "picture of lack, absence, something that is already lost" (p.48). Adopting this idea, Howie (2007) further argues:

If subjectivity is based on lack/desire, the photograph is the perfect object to operate on both: it always represents a lack, absence, but at the same time, it offers passion, images of wholeness, and illusion of closeness. A photograph is the (impossible) speculation of a perfect object *petit a*-both the hole in the subject, the lack or gap, and the object that can hide it. (p.13).

Howie added that photography represents “a lack of security, a sense of fear in the photographer and the picture, the photographed” (p.13).

Moreover, Lacan's distinction between a *look* and a *gaze* helps in understanding Sarah's gaze through her camera lens. Felluga (2019) asserted that the Lacanian gaze refers to

the uncanny sense that the object of our eye's look or glance is somehow looking back at us of its own will. This uncanny feeling of being gazed at by the object of our look affects us in the same way as castration anxiety (p.18).

When an object looks back at us, we are reminded of our lack of the fact that only a fragile border from the materiality of the real separates the symbolic order (Lacan, 1954). If Lacan's sense of gaze confirms that an object is looking back at us, thus reminding us of our lack and our sense of nothingness, Sarah's addiction to gazing through her camera's lens and seeing the pleading gaze of the victims back can be viewed as own gaze reflected back at her own pain, nothingness, and lack. That is, by steadily and intently gazing at suffering faces of war victims through her camera lens, Sarah is, in fact, looking at her pain, which is reflected back through the gaze of the victims. Adopting Sartre's (1955) notion regarding “the other as a reflection of oneself” (p.310), one cannot help but think about the significance of that gaze and of how time stands still when dealing with pain. When Sarah is gazing through her camera lens, she is not only capturing someone else's pain but is also projecting her own pain outward. That excruciating sense of pain makes time feel as if it stands still, as Sontag (1990) explains that “photographs are memento mori. To take a photograph is to participate in another person's mortality, vulnerability, mutuality. Precisely by slicing out this moment and freezing it, all photographs testify to time's relentless melt” (p.15). Sarah's projection of her pain and that of war victims through her photography helps “testify to time's relentless melt” (p.15).

Moreover, Barthes' (2010) reflection on war journalism and speculation that there is always an invisible meaning in any photograph is intriguing:

This facility (no photograph without something or someone) involves photography in the vast disorder of objects in the world: Why choose (why photograph) this object, this moment, rather than some other? Photography is unclassifiable because there is no making this or that of its occurrences; it aspires, perhaps, to become as crude, as certain, as noble as a sign, which would afford it access to the dignity of a language: but from there to be a sign there must be a mark; deprived of a principle of marking, photographs are signs which don't, which turn, as milk does. Whatever it grants to vision and whatever its manner, a photograph is always invisible: it is not that we see. (Barthes, 2010, p. 6)

Barthes added that photography “is subversive not when it frightens, repels, or even stigmatizes, but when it is pensive, when it thinks” (p.38). The idea that a photograph can be pensive, and that

it can intrigue when it forces the audience to reflect applies to Sarah's photographs of violence and misery.

If photography is an indication of absence, insecurity, and fear, then Sarah's lack is transparent in her war photography. Even though Sarah's superior attitude is unmistakable throughout the play, her sense of lack is obvious. In other words, her life as an American journalist in developing countries contributed significantly to her superior attitudes towards other groups such as Iraqis, war victims' mothers, and even Tariq. One can easily classify Sarah's gaze through her camera lens as an "imperial gaze" that "infantilizes and trivializes what it falls upon, asserting its command and ordering function as it does so" (Kaplan, 1997, p.10). Sarah's sense of superiority even extends to people in her home country, including James, Richard, and Mandy. Early in the play, as she suffers from physical and psychological weakness, Sarah rejects James' support. During her first trip to the bathroom after getting home from the hospital, for example, she sharply rejects his assistance and harshly instructs him to "stop staring" because "it only makes it worse" (Margulies, 2010, p.14). Though it is part of a normal sense of human pride during such circumstances, Sarah's harsh remarks heighten the sense that she has a feeling of superiority. She describes Mandy, a young party planner, as "embryonic" and "light-weight," and she repeatedly asserts that she "can never be a Mandy" (p.35). Nevertheless, Sarah's sense of emptiness and absence is unmistakable.

Sarah's difficult childhood, youth, and later life indicate that she never felt she could cling to a family or belong to one of her own. This might help explain what she is lacking and why she consciously or unconsciously pursues such a dangerous career. For instance, she remembers her difficult childhood as a war: "War was at my parents' house all over again; only on a different scale" (p.33). Her mother has been absent for most of Sarah's life, and she does not have siblings. One of the most important relationships to a woman is the mother-daughter relationship. According to Walker (1998), such a relationship is very complex and has contradictory influences on the daughter's sense of identity as an adult: "Like the maternal itself, the mother-daughter relation is an experience of contradiction: of love and hate, of mutuality and estrangement, of anger and desire, of unity and separation" (p.162). A troubled mother-daughter relationship creates what Freud called *melancholia*, through which a daughter experiences an ambivalent sense of hate and love towards her absent or lost mother (Walker, 1998). Though Sarah never mentions her mother in the play, her sense of melancholia is unmistakable. Like any daughter, Sarah would have wanted to see her mother after returning home from the hospital or when getting married. In terms of what Sarah might be lacking in a Lacanian sense, it is fair to wonder about her mother's absence.

Moreover, Sarah has a troubled relationship with her father, who never helped with her paperwork when she was hospitalized overseas. He also never approved of her marriage to James simply because he saw her marriage as a way of "begging for gifts" (Margulies, 2010, p. 54). He added that there was something "unseemly about a couple who have been living in sin for nine years throwing themselves a wedding" (p.54). Sarah eventually wishes she had not invited him to

her wedding at all. Thus, Sarah's lack of familial security helps establish her unstable sense of identity and contributes to her inability to recover from PTSD.

The fact that Sarah never fully considers the possibility of being a mother can be interpreted as a result of her lack of familial stability throughout her life. James tries to convince her to have a child of their own, yet, she dismisses the idea very quickly, telling James, "Do you see me pushing a stroller and going to play dates? Honestly, Jamie, do you?" (p.76). She also tells Mandy that she is too old to have a baby and describes having a child at that late stage as "the most ridiculous, irresponsible thing" because it means "depriving a kid of a parent" (p.77). Arguably, Sarah feels too protective of her potential child because of her traumatic experiences. When she describes having a "head full of shrapnel," and says that she "banged up [her] leg pretty good" and was "Medevac'd to Germany" and "kept in a coma till the swelling went down" (p. 55), it is clear that her near-death experience shook her to the core. She thus has to reconstruct her identity and her life in a certain way, which does not involve being a mother. On a different occasion, Sarah interestingly regards her cameras and photographs as her offspring, which can be an example of a protective mother-child relationship. For example, the minute Sarah arrives home from her painful trip, she is momentarily alarmed and asks, "Where are my cameras?" as if she were a mother checking on her children. Then, after Mandy tells Sarah that her "pictures are beautiful. . . I do not mean. . . You know . . ." Sarah replies, "You can call them beautiful. . . I think they are beautiful. But then I'm their mother" (p. 33). In this context, Sarah's conscious rejection of motherhood is intriguing. Of course, life as a war journalist does make it challenging to be a mother, which is understandable.

Another way of speculating on Sarah's unwillingness to be a mother has to do with the absence of her mother, which may have made it hard for Sarah to be a mother herself. This relates to Rebecca West's concept that motherhood, for most women, is an attempt to remain immortal. Although Mandy seeks immortality in having children and being a mother, Sarah seeks immortality in art and photography. West writes, "Motherhood is neither a duty nor a privilege, but simply the way that humanity can satisfy the desire for physical immortality and triumph over the fear of death" (cited in Seldes, 1985, p. V). Unlike most women, Sarah silences her fear of death and fulfills her desire for immortality through her photography.

Sarah's childlessness leads to a reflection on Lacan's idea of absence. That is, Sarah's lack of a nurturing mother, a stable home, and a nurturing family as a child has made it hard for her to be a part of those things as an adult. This feeling creates a sense of emptiness and lack for women in patriarchal societies. According to Klepfisz, (2001), patriarchal societies emphasize the social myth that a woman's sense of identity stems from her role as a wife and a mother. This explains the feeling of pain and horror experienced by some childless women:

It is a myth perpetually reinforced by the assumption that only family and children provide us with a purpose and place, bestow upon us honor, respect, love and comfort. We are taught very early that blood relations, and only blood relations, and can be perpetual,

fluctuating source of affection, can be the foolproof guarantee that we will not be forgotten. This myth, and many others surrounding the traditional family, often make it both frightening and painful for women to think of themselves as remaining childless. (Klepfisz, 200, p. 21)

Throughout the play, Sarah never comes to terms with her identity as a daughter, wife, or mother. Only through her journalism in war zones in her humanitarian mission can Sarah assert herself as a human being.

Instead of limiting her identity to that of a caretaker, Sarah attempts to reconstruct her identity through war journalism. By looking through a camera lens, her "little rectangle," (Margulies, 2010, p.33) to capture pain and violence, Sarah reflects her internal pain. One cannot help but think about what Barthes (2010) called "the type of consciousness of the photograph" (p. 44) when considering Sarah's war journalism:

The type of consciousness the photograph involves is indeed truly unprecedented, since it establishes not a consciousness of the *being there* of the thing (which any copy could provoke) but an awareness of its *having-been-there*. What we have is a new space-time category: spatial immediacy and temporal anteriority, the photograph, being an allegorical conjunction between the *here-now* and the *there-then*. It is thus at the level of this denoted message or message without code that the *real unreality* of the photograph can be fully understood: its unreality of the photograph can be fully understood; its unreality is that one of the *here-now*, for the photograph is never experienced as an illusion, is in no way a presence (claims as to the magical character of the photographic image must be deflated); and its reality that of *having-been-there*, for in every photograph there is the always stupefying evidence of this I show how it was, giving us, by a precious miracle, a reality from which we sheltered. (p. 44)

Sarah's unconscious desire to capture varied pictures of pain is intriguing and perhaps reflects a deep sense of fear. Mulvey (1999) argued, "The grotesque transforms the world from what we 'know' it to be what we fear it might be" (p.5). Sarah might be unconscious of such an attempt, but she is aware of her "addiction to the misery of life" (Margulies, 2010, p. 38). Sarah's sense of emptiness is very clear when she asks James about the boredom of a daily home routine: "What happens tomorrow? What happens the day after that? (. . .) And what happens after that?" (Margulies 2010, p.11). Sarah is addicted to a grotesquely violent routine because that routine makes her feel excited and significant. This apparent addiction to the physical and psychological scars and deformities of others could be interpreted as her gaze and can reflect her psychological fractures and loneliness. Sarah's desires seem to be based on a misplaced desire for concrete images of pain; she describes her addictive need to capture pictures of pain as automatic: "I do not even think about it. When I look through that little rectangle (. . .) Time stops. It just (. . .) All the noise around me (. . .) Everything cuts out. And all I see (. . .) is the picture" (Margulies, 2010, p.

33). According to Freud, most of the pain that people experience is of the “perceptual order,” which refers to “perception either of the urge of unsatisfied instincts or something in the external world which may be painful in itself or may arouse painful anticipations in the psychic apparatus and is recognized by it as ‘danger’” (Freud, 1961, p. 90). In addition to being a victim of PTSD, Sarah experiences a source of pain that can be interpreted as a deep urge to fulfill her unsatisfied instincts to be a daughter, wife, and mother. Interestingly, Sarah attempts to numb her sense of these unsatisfied instincts by taking pleasure in pain by involving herself in a pain-related environment.

To elaborate on the ways in which Sarah’s unsatisfied instincts trigger her need to focus her gaze on violence and pain, one can draw on Lacan’s (1954) attempt to differentiate the conscious self from Freud’s concept of the ego. Lacan compares the conscious self to a camera that captures an image of a mountain reflected in a lake, asserting that any image that is “reflected onto a surface behaves like a mirror” (p. 49). Lacan further stated the following:

Consciousness occurs each time, and it occurs in the most unexpected and disparate places. There’s a surface such as that it can produce what is called an image [or] the effect of energy starting from a given point of the real. Think of images as being like light, since what most clearly evokes an image in our mind-are reflected at some point on a surface [and] come to strike the corresponding same point in space. The surface of a lake might just as well be replaced by the *area striata* of the occipital lobe, for the *area striata* which its fibrillary layers is exactly like a mirror (. . .) All sorts of things in the world behave like mirrors (p.49)

If “all sorts of things in the world behave like mirrors” (Lacan, 1954, p. 49), Sarah’s camera lens symbolically reflects her senses of personal loss and pain, which can be triggered by her unsatisfied instincts and PTSD.

To Sarah, photography is more than a humanitarian mission; it is a means by which she can attempt to reconstruct her sense of self. It is difficult for Sarah to realize her feminine role as a daughter, mother, and wife fully. Whether consciously or unconsciously, she adopts a masculine identity and a masculine quest. In her career as a stoic and persistent war journalist, she takes pictures of suffering mothers who are “digging in the rubble for their children” and putting their blood stained hands on her camera lens while screaming at her to “go way” (Margulies, 2010, p. 69). This is close to the stereotypical image of a masculine figure who cannot identify with maternal instincts. Though Sarah momentarily feels guilty after that event, she continues to record violence and does not directly seek to save lives. In a conversation with Mandy about the role a photographer plays, Sarah sounds convinced that her role as a war journalist is to “record life. Not change it” “to capture truth” not “stage it” (p. 40). Unlike Sarah, James left the war zones and is not planning to return because, in addition to his PTSD, he cannot get over his memories: “Those mothers, those girls, blew up right there, right in front of me! . . . I freaked out! I had to get the

hell out of there” (p. 47). Sarah, on the other hand, insists on going back despite her PTSD and memories of explosions.

In addition, the desire to be in control and in charge is commonly considered a stereotypically masculine characteristic, and this element obviously heightens Sarah's attempt to assert her masculine identity through a masculine quest. Women in photography and films, according to Mulvey (1999), have mainly been seen as objects because of their “lack of diversity in directions” (p.59). After all, most of the time, men have been in control of the camera, so the audience tends to experience films “from a heterosexual male perspective” (p. 59). Mulvey further argues that a woman has typically been “the bearer of meaning and not the maker of meaning” (p. 66). This suggests that in photography and filmmaking, women have not been able to serve in roles that grant them control of a scene. Rather, they have mostly been seen generally as objects with those in control viewing them from a very limited perspective. Mulvey added that this male perspective is not reversed even when men can be viewed, which reinforces the notion that “men do the looking and women are looked at” (p.67). When Sarah is acting as a photographer, she interestingly adopts a male role. Yet when she looks through her camera lens, she captures women's suffering and pain. Her camera lens both captures this pain and mirrors it. Adopting the masculine role of war journalist gives Sarah an unmistakable sense of superiority toward the female victims whom she photographs and minimizes her own femininity so subtly that her action hardly perceived by the audience.

Photography seems to offer Sarah what Lacan (1954) described as “images of wholeness, which offer possession, and an illusion of closeness” (p.48). As a war journalist in a violent, poor country, Sarah's mission is to record life; even though she never saves lives, her mission creates an illusion of being a heroine who reports key information to the world: “If it was not for people like me (. . .) The one with the cameras (. . .) who would know? Who would care?” (p. 39). Though the native women who are victims of the war reject Sarah and constantly tell her to “go way,” (p. 69), she stays. She even runs toward a car bomb “without even thinking” (Margulies, 2010, p. 39) because she feels responsible for capturing the bombing fully in images. Sarah's strong need to be a heroine is reflected in her frustration at James' justification for not wanting to return to warzones. She even questions his integrity as a war journalist: “How can you live with yourself knowing what goes on there?” (p. 77).

Sarah's decision to return to war zones is partly due to her desire to fulfill a deep sense of superiority because she feels she is a heroine who should be in control of others. Even though she can control some aspects of her life at home such as marrying and breaking up with James within six months or controlling Richard's narrative, Sarah has more control over situations and other people in her job as a war journalist, which enables her to control what is seen by the world and to communicate certain political messages. Sarah's masculinity partially seems to fill a deep void within her. Sarah's life is a masculine quest. Like many men, Sarah never sees herself as “sitting on a sofa watching TV,” and she can never imagine herself “pushing a stroller”; she looks for

cigarettes and “hard drinks” when upset despite claiming, “I’m not smoking! When was the last time you saw me with a cigarette? I haven’t had one in six months” (p. 22). Unlike most women, she never questions Richard’s love for another woman, instead she says “Oh! Wow! Good for you” (p. 84). Like Odysseus, Sarah never dwells on her physical scars; rather she views them as markers of her long missionary voyage of showing the truth to the world. When the play opens, Sarah is “on crutches, [with] one leg in a soft cast, an arm in a sling, and one side of her face poked with shrapnel” (p. 6). Upon noticing the injured side of Sarah’s face, Mandy suggests that Sarah have laser surgery. But Sarah promptly asserts she will not, even though she was earlier murmuring to herself after seeing her face in the bathroom mirror: “I gotta do something about this face” (p. 15). Sarah does not appreciate physical assistance when she is in pain. When James comes to Sarah’s aid as she begins “the arduous process of getting up to go to the bathroom,” she rejects his assistance with a very sharp “Stop” (p.5). Thus, Sarah’s adoption of various stereotypical male characteristics is part of her attempt to assert her identity as a human; she does this because she feels that she cannot fulfill a feminine role in a patriarchal society.

To conclude, Sarah’s decision to return to war zones even after surviving a near-death experience can be interpreted as her attempt to recover from a traumatic experience by reconstructing her identity as a war journalist. She unconsciously realizes her lack and her pain, which is reflected in the victims’ gazes into her camera lens. She is a lonely and deprived middle-aged woman who does not feel as though she belongs anywhere or with anyone. Her fractured self as a woman, daughter, wife, or mother seems to be unified in a humanistic wholeness only when she captures images of pain and suffering. By adopting a masculine quest through a masculine means (i.e., war journalism), Sarah seems to gain a sense of wholeness and an illusion of closeness not just in her job as a war journalist but as a human being who struggles to deal with her pain to compensate for her lack.

About the Author:

Madhawy AZ Almeshaal is an Assistant Prof. of English Literature at the English and Literature Department, College of Arts, King Saud University, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. Dr. Almeshaal’s area of research interest is British and American Drama, Modern & Contemporary British drama, and theater Studies. I have published two articles in two different journals. ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0302-0667>

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