

Construction of Self and Post-Modern Consumerism in Richard Matheson's *Button Button*

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Abstract

The present study's focus rests upon analyzing Richard Matheson's short story *Button Button*, (1970) an American postmodern literary text, with respect to Jean Baudrillard's concept of the 'system of needs' as presented in his work, *The Consumer Society: Myths and Structure* (1970) with special emphasis on deciphering the socio-economic dynamics of the post-modern civilized man's never ending pursuit and hunt for both material and monetary gains resulting in the ignorance of moral considerations accompanied by deconstruction of the sense of Self. In this connection, the consequences of the degeneration of human set of moral values have been examined with particular reference to Man's Race Against Himself and Entropy of Feeling, two deadly sins discussed in Konrad Lorenz's (1974) "Civilized Man's Eight Deadly Sins". The study finds out that the female protagonist stands out as the epitome of a typical hollow, post-modern self as she is blinded by greed and competition to supersede in the social hierarchical structure where self-imposed individual preferences outdo the collective benefit or welfare. Having similar priorities on a macro level, the consumer society engulfs individuals by compelling them to make choices (deadly sins) that are potentially destructive forces for an ideal survival in a consumedly entrenched post-modern society.

Keywords: Consumerism, post-modern, self, seven deadly sins, entropy of feelings

Readers are more familiar with Richard Matheson's characters than they are with him despite the fact that he has been winner of many awards including the popular World Fantasy Award for Life Achievement, Bram Stoker Award for Lifetime Achievement, and Science Fiction Hall of Fame. Perhaps Matheson is not as household a name as popularly acclaimed names of Ray Bradbury or Stephen King for that matter. Perhaps this is also owing to the fact that the characters he portrays, be it Norma, Lousie Carey or Scott Carey are so life-like, so mysteriously foreboding and so unforgettable that the audience's imagination are caught up in, overwhelmed with and appalled by their representations for long after their reading or watching them. Due to their unique appeal to the viewers, many of his writings including 'The Shrinking Man' and 'I am Legend', 'What dreams may Become', 'Bid Time Return', 'Hell House', and 'A Stir of Echoes' have been adapted for television and screen much like Ray Bradbury's writing. Matheson's works like 'Third from the Sun', 'Deadline' and 'Button Button' primarily belong to the middle-brow short popular fiction tradition of the 19th and 20th centuries and have the potential of scaring the soul out of the reader and audience, similar in vein to Hitchcock's adaptations of screen plays filled with utmost horror and suspense and equally psychologically deep with penetrating undertones of a didactic message.

The paper primarily focuses with special consideration upon the female character of the protagonist, Norma and her disrupted sense of distorted self that is drenched in post-modern psyche and increased pursuit of materialism and consumerism, in short this need to possess the concrete. She is an archetype of a typical American woman from the post-modern times who is caught up in the whirlpool of worldly desires that

blind her to the potential act of murdering (as her husband puts it in the short story) any human being around the world. She assumes that if someone dies anywhere around the world just by pressing a single button, that should not create a difference in her life. She, being a human being, turns into a man eater as a result of this act. However, ironically, the consequences turn out to be fatal for her personal life.

The Twentieth century literature has been inspired by technological and scientific advancement that have brought about revolutionary and challenging modifications in the modern and post-modern pseudo civilized societies. Quite recently, industrial capitalism has introduced a new culture at sociological levels equating *living* with *consuming* (Agbisit, 2014, p.1). Consumption has become the new ‘morality’ of the consumer society which is shattering the very foundations of the human world (Mayer, 1998, p. x). Todd (2012, p. 48) is of the opinion that consumerism is directly linked to the creation of the sense of self. Therefore, it is apt to state that consumerism is ubiquitous and has penetrated in every aspect of identity formation and life, from art and culture to human action and relations (Agbisit, 2014, p.1). Arsel and Thompson (2011, p. 793) suggest that people deem making investments in time, money and identity building akin to the sense of self formation. People see goods as a source of helping them build identities and, hence, are in a constant state of race or war to maintain the status, differentiation and group loyalty the products bring to them when they associate themselves with these goods and products.

In a postmodern society, an important feature which is akin to consumerism is the never-ending competition that the modern man has landed his self into. Eliot reiterates similar notion in his poetry where he mourns the loss of genuineness in

fact Eliot writes during modern times and lays bare the thematic concerns of post-modernism to follow. This competition, whether with others or his own self, has led the individual to set aside moral considerations to achieve success. The ever-growing hunger for “instant gratification” (Lorenz, 1974, p.37) and avoidance of strenuous effort have deprived individuals of the sense of real ‘joy’ or happiness resulting in entropy of feelings. According to psychological school of thought and Instant Gratification Theory, one of the most basic drives inherent in humans is considered to be a quest for instant fulfillment i.e., the tendency to evade pain and seek pleasure which could take any form. When sliced, short term pleasure turns out to be a temptation difficult to resist. Matheson is interested in dissecting the results of getting lured by similar short-term pleasure for temporary monetary benefits.

Richard Matheson’s “*Button, Button*” (2006) is a story about difficult moral choices people have to make when drooled by worldly desires with a powerful dénouement. The act of pressing the button which Norma, the female protagonist, initially considers it a childish act to improve her life style proves disastrous for her family life. The story was originally published in 1970 (Christian, 2006) and has been examined in this paper with respect to Jean Budillard’s (1998) concept of consumerism, Konrad Lorenz’s (1974) “Man’s Race Against Himself” and “Entropy of Feeling”, mainly focusing on two deadly sins from his book “The Civilized Man’s Eight Deadly Sins”. The study aims at achieving the following objectives:

1. To identify, in the text, symbols and character(s) representing a generation of the system of needs in a consumer society

2. To find out how self-created competition deprives individuals of any sense of morality in a postmodern society.
3. To explore how the drive for instant gratification and neophilia results in entropy of feelings.
4. To understand how competition in a postmodern society deludes the sense of self and frames society to be more and more tilted towards consumerism.

Literature Review

The Postmodern era refers to the period following the Second World War (Bradbury, 1995, p. 763) that lasted from 1938 to 1945 and the term 'post-modernism' started to gain a degree of artistic and literary currency during the 1950s (p. 767). Postmodernism is considered to remain a prominent social theory for about three decades (Christensen & al., 2005, p. 156). An American critic Irving Howe (1959) in his essay 'Mass Society and Post-modern Fiction' describes postmodern writing as a protest against American postwar alienation. These writings directed an angry criticism against 'a relatively comfortable, half-welfare and half-garrison society' in which people become passive, insensitive, and atomized—an affluent America which comprises conformists who seem worthless, being dominated by an oppressive and hostile culture (as cited in Bradbury, 1995, p.767). An important feature of the postmodern era is its social fragmentation of which disintegration of family is an important aspect (Rezaie, 2014, p. 17). Rosenau (1992) associates the post-modern period with disintegration, depression, meaninglessness, a vagueness, social chaos and absence of moral standards (as cited in Fierlbeck, 1994, p. 108).

Keeping in view the societal disintegration, several writers of the period drew people's attention towards how civilization was leading them towards destruction and damnation. In one of his book '*Civilized Man's Eight Deadly Sins*', Lorenz (1974), an Austrian zoologist and writer, pointed out eight sins that could cause human destruction. The sins he discussed in his book are overpopulation, devastation of the environment, man's race against himself, entropy of feeling, genetic decay, the break with tradition, indoctrinability and nuclear weapons. *Man's Race Against Himself* represents the modern man's cut throat competition with others as well as with his own self. It focuses on the constant pursuit of meeting artificial standards of success. The concept of *Homo homini lupus* (Lorenz, 1974, p. 25) or in its unabridged version *homo homini lupus est*, is a Latin proverb that means "A man is a wolf to another man," or more precisely "Man is wolf to man." By comparing individuals with wolves, Lorenz highlights what harm people can cause others in quest for their own material gains. The wolf as an animal is related to having traits of being predatory, cruel, and inhumane. Hence in making this analogy, Lorenz declares humans to be more like a brutal animal than civilized when dealing with other humans. Likewise, consumerism leads man to *Entropy of feeling* referring to the shriveling or death of feelings which are caused by man's never-ending pursuit of "instant gratification" (p. 37). When people are unwilling to sacrifice or resist pain, they are unable to experience real joy (p. 39).

Post-modern American literature depicts a growing consciousness of the adverse effects of industrialization and commercialization of public life which led to consumerism (Rezaie, 2014, p. 17). The advent of consumerism globally and at societal

levels has led the modern humans to be more oriented towards consuming services and goods for material gains and instant, but ironically not very long lasting, satisfaction of acquisition and idealizing a world containing increasing demand of goods. The main reason deciphered for doing so is the urge of the modern man to feel good about himself and the surroundings and to drive the economy of the world (Suzuki, 1997, p.56). When we delineate the dilemmas of the modern man, self-love is a major factor behind his ever increasing obsession with individual, luxurious material possessions in comparison to the emotional demands and fulfillment.

Man's ever growing hunger to satiate his needs and desire is highlighted in Jean Baudillard's *The Consumer Society: Myths and Structures* (1998) originally published in 1970. He regards the modern civilized man as *homo oeconomicus* (economic man), the one who is driven by his/her own self -interests and who pursues self-defined goals. Describing the post-modern man's effort to satisfy his self -created needs as a folk lore, he says that man is “‘endowed’ with wants or needs” which take him towards objects yielding satisfaction but since he is never satisfied, this course of action is repeated over and over again (Baudillard, 1998, p. 69).

Cushman (1990) describes the modern post World War Two individual as an “empty-self” who is hollow in terms of a sound identity formation. This giving away of historical identities that are linked with status, place of stay, the group associated with and tradition followed creates the need for forming new identities. He says “the empty self is soothed and made cohesive by becoming “filled up” with food, consumer products, and celebrities” (p. 603). Baudillard's (1998) contends that it is the ‘system of

needs' which is the outcome of the 'system of production' meaning thereby, needs are created by companies and imposed by capitalist societies (pp. 74-75).

Theoretical Framework

The present study carries out an analysis of Richard Matheson's short story "Button Button" (2006), a post-modern literary text, in the light of Konrad Lorenz's two out of eight deadly sins "Man's Race Against Himself" and "Entropy of Feeling" discussed in his book "Civilized Man's Eight Deadly Sins" (1974). The book was originally published in 1970 (Christian, 2006). The study also examines the text with respect to Bauillard's concept of the "system of needs" presented in his book *The Consumer Society: Myths and Structures* (1998, p.74) originally published in 1970. A/the "System of needs" is a product of a/the "system of production" which inculcates needs in people they didn't have before and triggers *homo oeconomicus*, an economic human, who pursues subjectively defined goals out of self-interest.

Lorenz predicted the relationship between market economics and the threat of ecological catastrophe. In his 1973 book, *Civilized Man's Eight Deadly Sins*, Lorenz addresses the following paradox:

All the advantages that man has gained from his ever-deepening understanding of the natural world that surrounds him, his technological, chemical and medical progress, all of which should seem to alleviate human suffering... tends instead to favor humanity's destruction. (Lorenz 264)

The eight pathologies identified by Konrad Lorenz are considered in the essay. They

are explained and corresponding therapies are proposed. Firstly Lorenz talks about overpopulation about which he states that a high-density population causes a loss of humanity, community and solidarity. Secondly, he mentions about devastation or destruction of the Environment in which greed and profit maximization lead to destructive exploitation of resources. At number three, he discusses about competition by which he means a constant struggle of humankind competing against itself which breeds fear and leads to accelerated work rates and the desire for instant gratification on part of the populace. Fourthly, Lorenz labels the lack of emotional empathy as a cause of social unrest. He names it emotional entropy by which he means the degeneration leading to a loss of empathy. Fifthly, the debate is on genetic decay by which Lorenz means that a selfish or free economic competition leads to negative selection in the society. Lorenz goes on to decipher the reason or causes of such malpractices in society and reaches to the sixth point of discussion which is based upon the break with tradition, past or roots. According to Lorenz, addiction to novelty leads to a loss of culture and a post-modern society embodies novelty in totality. At number seventh, Lorenz speaks upon indoctrination done on part of science on mankind. This indoctrinability allows domination by natural science and positive economics that lead to mechanistic ideas. And lastly, the debate rests upon nuclear weapons and the potential havoc that these weapons could project. This paper dwells on these points put forth by Lorenz to develop an argument as to how the characters in *Button Button* personify a modern man paving his way towards the deadly sins as enumerated categorically by Lorenz.

Analysis and Discussion

The short story “Button Button” (2006) starts with the portrayal of an apparently content couple, Mr. and Mrs. Arthur Lewis, receiving a box with a red button delivered by Steward, an agent of an international organization, with the temptation of \$ 50,000. If they push the button, it will kill someone they didn’t know, anywhere around the world. Matheson develops a chain of psychological plotting where the female protagonist impulsively gives up on the moral side of getting someone killed and resorts to pressing the button which apparently is an insignificant and benign act bringing blessings or material satisfaction to the family in the form of money. The box with the red button in the play symbolizes Baudillard’s (1998) concept of the ‘system of needs’ (p.74). The color red is symbolic of impending danger, warning and threat. Also, it represents man being drooled over by passions and desires where logic and rationality lack.

For Baudrillard, societal and cultural system in its entirety is but a system of signs. In his works, such as *Le système des objets* (1968), and *Le société de consummation* (1970), Baudrillard has reconstructed the political economy of Marxism. For Baudrillard, any consumer would desire what others possess. This fundamental alteration and desire in human species from consuming or utilizing what is considered necessary to aiming for what is not necessary, except psychologically (desire), has led to a culture of affluent individuals or those with the aim to achieve elitist status (p.170). Earlier, Norma, Arthur’s wife who eventually falls prey to her greed, might not have any desire to get \$50,000 or go on a trip to Europe etc. but the box with a button becomes the triggering force and generates a need to satisfy her yearning for improved lifestyle. When

the line between wants and needs; desires and necessities is blurred or removed and materialism takes precedence of all humane considerations, entropy of feeling ensues and this is what Matheson wants to signify through the plot of the story. Confusing wants with needs is thus linked to the entropy of feelings as Matheson intends in the play which is an epitome of the larger consumerist and capitalist society. Mechanisation of consumerism has made the process even easier than before. As Tanaka & Murooka (2012) have it, lacking self-control, consumers even borrow on their credit cards to attain instant gratification. Nora does not even have to do that. She just needs to press a button to accomplish his worldly desire. Roberts (2014) calls America “the impulse society” due to a common urge for instant gratification in this age. Commodities are part of a “system of objects” which is correlated with a system of needs. As Baudrillard (1998) writes, “It is even the ultimate in morality, since the consumer is simultaneously reconciled with himself and with the group. Thus becomes the perfect social being.”. It is in fact the international company that compels Norma to hit the button regardless of the consequences. Likewise, organizations in the consumer society arise needs in consumers to buy and aim for what they even do not need in their lives. They aim to create the need of the needless so much so that the unnecessary products and objects appear to be an essential commodity to buy. The wishful desire is hence created in the subconscious self of the individual that blinds the conscious self. This *system of needs* triggers Norma, a homo economicus (Baudillard, 1998, p. 69), who does not display care for others and yields to her self-interested goals. Contrary to traditional neo-Marxists, Baudrillard does not accept the socio-cultural approach, insisting that

there is no way to demarcate between “true” and “false” needs in the whirlpool of a system that is governed by magical signs by which it is meant that what is consumed is not the material goods or actual objects. The point is that the consumed objects are only signs of needs and satisfaction of desire, a desire that always recurs in a post-modern society.

Matheson further develops the appearance and case of Mr. Steward in the play. Just like attractive offers presented by famous brands and companies, Steward sets up the creepy, devilish temptation of awarding \$50,000 on pressing the button. Even though Arthur returns the box immediately to Steward rejecting the idea of getting a large fortune in return for murdering someone, Norma succumbs to the temptation presented by Steward after wavering and showing indecisiveness for some time. Curiosity and greed win over all Norma’s moral considerations as she keeps asking her husband “Doesn’t it intrigue you?” (p. 106). Similarly, the companies in a consumer society arouse people’s curiosity by employing different techniques so as to entrap them in their web and the already entrapped customers try to tempt the others and the chain goes on. Out of curiosity, Norma contacts Steward later refusing his offer on moral grounds. However, on finding the box again at her doorstep left by Steward, a figure symbolic of famous brands who keeps tempting till one falls a prey, Norma takes the box in giving herself excuses for what she is doing, thinking it is ‘ridiculous’- ‘this furor over a meaningless button’. Justifying to herself that she is not being ‘selfish’, she presses the button, shuddering afterwards at the thought whether its result i.e., killing somebody, was taking place somewhere else.

The story line invites and is receptive of much critical debate. Norma, the conventional wife, is the traditionally symbolic representation of Eve who was tempted to eat the apple and bring man down from heaven to the Earth. In the current post-modern analysis, Norma stands for every man. She is a universal figure of human beings who have to struggle between Id and Super Ego in Freudian terms. On a much larger scale, Norma stands for a typical modern man, “hollow man”. as Eliot puts it in his poem with the same title. This hollow man is stuffed n brain with an increased obsession with material pursuits and possessions and has little to no consciousness beyond selfish gratifications. Norma’s surrender to wishful thinking, greed and material possessions is something any post-modern individual striving in a setup of a system of needs is likely to fall prey to. In the same context, it is apt to understand that Arthur is not only the better half of Norma but also her insider- the conscious self that constantly reminds man to stay within the naturally and morally acceptable bounds.

In addition, Norma’s action of falling prey to impulses can be analyzed by keeping in view Konrad Lorenz’s one of the deadly sins “Man’s Race against Himself”. Lorenz (1974) regards human being as “homo humini lupus—Man is the predator of man (p. 25) stressing upon the fact that in order to surpass others in cut throat competitions, he ignores almost all the values for the pursuit of “value-blind commercial” goals (p.26). This notion is largely relatable to Darwin’s conception of ‘survival of the fittest’ i.e. who so ever is able to stand the test of time and survive in the worst possible scenario in the best possible way, guarantees his survival and evades extinction. Norma runs after surviving in her best possible manifestation and the trip to Europe is a realization

of that. Blinded by her greed to acquire \$50,000, she shows willingness to commit the indirect murderous act of pressing the button despite her husband's disapproval of this idea. She rejects the insider's voice. The norms and systems of a post- modern society, largely mechanical and robotic in essence, govern and direct the protagonist's mind. The advancements of the Western society go against the favor of creating a social system that values morality and a humanistic approach. It is a cruel aspect of the advancement of technology where a device with a red button is powerful enough to kill someone somewhere and generate monetary benefits for the one pressing it at some other corner of the world. Hence, science turns into an evil, rather an instrument for evil instead of being a rescuer. Lorenz (1979, p. 7) addresses the following paradox: "All the advantages that man has gained from his ever-deepening understanding of the natural world that surrounds him, his technological, chemical and medical progress, all of which should seem to alleviate human suffering... tend instead to favor humanity's destruction".

The civilized man surviving in a post-modern society cares only for what brings commercial benefits in order to surpass the fellow human beings. Driven by her desire to go to Europe and buy a cottage on an island (p. 108), Norma becomes indifferent towards who would die if the button is pressed. For Norma, it is alright as long as it kills 'some old Chinese peasant' or 'some diseased native in the Congo' (p.108), far away from America's geographical boundaries and racial identities although Lewis declares that a murder is a murder no matter who it kills. In her psychological frame of mind, Norma is running a race and aims to win the competition by hook or

by crook. Therefore, her mind joins the dots that allow her to foresee triumphing in the race of achieving the best of the best in terms of material possessions especially when presented to her in the most enticing and easy-to-get manner by the modern digitalized consumerism. She makes a sincere effort to convince her husband to support her win the race. The principle of competition, typical of the Western societies, destroys any chance of this: “The competition between human beings destroys with cold and diabolic brutality... Under the pressure of this competitive fury, we have not only forgotten what is useful to humanity as a whole, but even that which is good and advantageous to the individual. [...] One asks, which is more damaging to modern humanity: the thirst for money or consuming haste... in either case, fear plays a very important role: the fear of being overtaken by one’s competitors, the fear of becoming poor, the fear of making wrong decisions or the fear of not being up to snuff...” (Lasch, 1979, p. 45–47). Norma indeed, fears lagging behind and is afraid of losing the opportunity which the red button provides her with. However, the big question arises as to who she is competing with or who she wants to outdo. It is no one but her own selfish and greedy self. Lorenz (1974) criticizes the civilized man for being indulged in a race that gets him nowhere. In this pursuit of the so-called success, civilized man has lost his peace of mind. Throughout the short story, Norma remains occupied with the idea of whether or not she should press the button to bring a revolutionary change in her life instantly gratifying her lust for material possessions. She does not want to lose the opportunity to go on the “trip to Europe” or a chance to purchase “that cottage on the island.” (p.108)

Norma’s desire to acquire a large fortune is what Lorenz (1974, p.37) calls

“an impatient demand for instant gratification of all budding wishes” which is one of the reasons of entropy of feeling and the absence of the sense of empathy. Norma experiences death of feeling as nothing can bring happiness to her but a lot of riches which she desires immediately. She grows impatient to acquire “a nicer apartment, nicer furniture, nicer clothes, a car” (p. 109). As for Arthur, the idea offended him while for Norma, it is a source of intrigue. Arthur sees it as an immorally sickening practical joke while Norma considers it a case for psychological research. In short, Matheson juxtaposes rational and illogical viewpoints, moral and materialistic considerations by using his male and female protagonists in a semblance of the Adam and Eve tale:

“Fifty thousand dollars, Arthur,” Norma interrupted. “A chance to take that trip to Europe we’ve always talked about.”

“Norma, no.”

“A chance to buy that cottage on the island.”

“Norma, no.” His face was white. (p.108)

As stated earlier, Arthur acts as the inside voice of Norma’s conscience. He is the in-built sense of right and wrong, yin and yang occurring in every individual’s mind regardless of which time he or she belongs to. Norma’s struggle is real. The comparative angle used by Norma suggests that she is fed up with her already possessed nice apartment, furniture, clothes and a car. This reiterates the notion that modern man is dissatisfied and contains an unflinching urge for more and more. Afflicted with the civilizational disease “neophilia” (Lorenz, 1974, p. 40), she desires to get new, improved and nicer

things to enjoy life. The term neophilic or neophile, was popularised by the cult writer Robert Anton Wilson. He called it a personality type characterized by high level of affinity for newness or novelty irrespective of need. The same term was used earlier by Christopher (1969) in his book *The Neophiliacs*, and by Salinger (1965) in his short story *Hapworth 16, 1924*, Lorenz's criticism centers round an individual who easily forsakes his possessions and shows no concern for a long affiliation with the things he has possessed for a long time. The desire attains the shape of a vicious cycle where the new overtakes the older. This is contrary to the current popular belief of minimalism. At its core, minimalism is the intentional promotion of the things we most value and the removal of everything that distracts us from it. Minimalism propagates holding on while the philosophy that Norma preaches is to let go of what we have in search of more and better using any kind of means available. Norma, hence, craves for new and 'nicer' things to improve her lifestyle. Mr. Steward merely acts the voice of temptation present in every being. He keeps on knocking down her sense of right and wrong by confusion and successfully blurs the boundaries between the two in her mind. Norma seems to be unaware of the fact that things acquired without making effort cannot bring happiness to anybody's life and that the process of acquiring is equally important as a result. For Baudrillard, our purchases or the products bought reflect our innermost desires so that consumption gratifies our psychological realization of self. Postmodern consumers can never be fulfilled because the products they consume are only "sham objects, or characteristic signs of happiness" and do not have any real power to bestow happiness to the possessor (Malpas, 2005, p 122). According to Lorenz (1974, 39), pleasure may be

acquired without making effort but the pursuit of ‘joy’ is impossible without strenuous effort. Norma, driven by her desire to achieve pleasure, ends up getting neither joy nor pleasure as her husband dies as a result of her pressing the button. “Baudrillard’s ideas on consumerism lead to a sense of loss, as there is no real identity, and no way of gaining fulfillment” (Todd, 2011, p 50). The story, therefore, meets a tragic, unanticipated but rationally acceptable denouement. Matheson strikes the cords and touches didactically upon the message he had to convey to the audience belonging to the times the story is produced in and hence, coming across similar circumstances on day to day basis.

The study also throws light on the conjugal relationship of Mr. and Mrs. Arthur Lewis. Apparently, the couple seems to be a contented couple kissing and patting each other. However, there are a few examples in the text which give an insight into their mutual understanding. The story takes a hard look at the most intimate relationship and, in its ending, asks the readers a very difficult question, a question Norma did not previously consider. What does it mean to “know” someone? After the button is activated, the presser’s husband dies and the baffled, despondent presser is told, in a smirking, ironic-twist fashion, that she never really knew him, neither in his life, nor in death. This also reminds of Arthur’s words to Norma, “I don’t understand you”, and ‘Are you saying what I think you are?’ (p. 108) when she argues whether it will be a murder even if we do not know the killed. Despite living contentedly with each other for long, there is lack of understanding between the husband and wife.

Conclusion

The analysis of the short story “Button Button” from the perspectives of Baudillard’s theory of hyper consumerism (1998) and Lorenz’s (1974) two deadly sins i.e. “Man’s Race Against Himself” and “Entropy of Feeling” presents the selected literary text in an entirely different light. The symbolic representation of the box as the “system of needs” (Baudillard, 1998, p. 74) generated by capitalists is a different interpretation of the box used as a tool for temptation. Another important aspect that the analysis highlights is the civilized man’s attempt to outdo his own self just as Norma yearns for nicer furniture, house and clothes without comparing her lifestyle with anybody else’s. She creates and indulges in a competition for her own self with her own self and blinded by her greed to win the competition, goes to the extent of murdering a person she doesn’t know. Her “neophilia’ leads her to wishing for getting rid of the old stuff and makes her aspire for an improved standard of living and makes her lose her husband in the process. Deconstructing the conjugal relationship of Arthur and Norma depicts a lack of understanding and a sense of alienation between the couple. Despite living an apparently contented married life, Norma is exposed to the bitter reality in the end that she never knew her husband. This highlights the communication gap and a sense of alienation or estrangement between the two which Norma had never realized before.

In short, the selected text sheds light on the element of consumerism which has penetrated in our modern, civilized society making people lose their peace of mind. It also highlights how a civilized man, driven by commercial gains, goes to the extent of taking people’s lives mercilessly and without significant second thoughts.

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