Eastern Journal of Languages, Linguistics and Literatures (EJLLL)
ISSN: 2710-3412
https://www.qabasjournals.com/index.php/ejlll

The predicament of man in Harold Pinter's play (The Birthday Party)

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ARTICLE INFO

Received: October 13, 2022
Accepted: November 13, 2022
Volume: 3
Issue: 4

KEYWORDS

predicament, wiped characters, puzzle, impendence, disappointment, dilemma

ABSTRACT

Harold Pinter frequently depicts the dilemmas of destroyed individuals who are incapable of perceive their own existence. In a society that strips them of their humanity, these characters are fatigued and dissatisfied. They withdraw into a small world in search of safety and security. The character's sense of security is threatened by external forces, represented by invading figures who represent the mysterious forces that are indefinable. The conflict between these invaders and the characters eventually ends with the character's defeat. The reason for the intruder's attack on the victims remains unclear and is not explained. The element of mystery pervades Pinter's games and is one of its main characteristics. This paper attempts to examine how Pinter dealt with this problem in his first play, The Birthday Party (1957). How man escapes his reality, what types of threats attack man, and why man cannot fight these threats are the questions this essay seeks to answer.

1. Introduction

Modern drama is a reaction to the many crises that people witnessed in the 20th century. Playwrights dealt with the essential questions of their lives. Attempts were made to deal with the current problems of modern society, avoiding the romantic view of life. The two world wars dealt mankind a catastrophic blow. Her outcome was both dreadful and remarkable. The world became a real dystopia; hence man's illusions of the dream world have been destroyed. The playwright's presented modern man as a lost, alienated, and hopeless creature in a devastated community.

English playwright Harold Pinter was writing at that time when people were weary from the trauma of those two wars. The mystery is a general atmosphere in his plays. Pinter describes the superficial details of his characters' everyday lives, while at the same time portraying what lies beneath the surface. In the opening scene, for example, Meg converses with Petey, to whom she is apparently wedded, about trivial matters. This conversation depicts the discord, boredom, and worry that are prevalent in this married couple's relationship.

The element of mystery in Pinter's plays is never resolved. The characters are threatened by two types of dangers; the outside world and the inside world of the characters, but they are unable to identify the sources of these dangers. Consequently, they crave security and strive to create it within by shutting out the outside world. However, this security is illusory because the area is insecure and destined to be destroyed by the violent forces occupying the outside world. Security thus becomes an illusion, a vain hope, part of human fragility in a world that does not allow anyone to remain alone. (Martin Esslin / 1980)

Unlike ancient Greek dramas where the characters usually suffer from a flaw within them, Pinter's characters suffer because they exist within them a broken and fractured reality that symbolizes their failure Simon O. Lesser clarifies that both Meg, the "seedy woman who runs this establishment, and her husband, Petey, are firmly entrenched in the world of all beings". (Simon O. Lesse / 1972).

Playwrights of the period generally pointed to the shrinking of a once great world. This is evident in the deliberately limited use of scenery and props. (Hasina Wahida, Living in a no Man's Lan / Autumn 2013, 8)

Pinter, like many other writers, notably his late contemporary Samuel Beckett, refuses to define the themes of his plays. They are what they are, and he vehemently rejects all attempts by performers and filmmakers to engage him in a debate about meaning.

Pinter and the absurdist theater:

Because Pinter has not offered any specific explanations or background information about his work, some believe that it is the result of a tormented imagination, a vision that draws on an universe that has little to do with regular people's everyday lives and has little significance to us. (John Somers,2008)

Martin Esslin argues that Pinter rejects the well-done play theory because it tends to give a lot of information about each character's background and motivation. Humans are complex creatures and their psychological characteristics are contradictory. Therefore, it is impossible to know the true motivation behind their actions. Any play that provides a detailed description of the motivations of the people involved in the plot is far from realism. (John Pesta, 1972)

One of Pinter's primary concerns as a playwright is the difficulty of verification. In his speech at the National Student Drama Festival in Bristol (1962), Pinter explains:

The desire for verification in all of us

about our own and other people's experiences

is understandable but unsatisfactory. I propose

that there are no sharp differences between what is real

and what is unreal, or between what is true and what is untrue.

A thing is not always true or false; it might

be both true and untrue.

A figure on stage who is incapable of presenting

compelling arguments or providing facts.

about his previous experiences, present behavior,

or objectives to provide a comprehensive examination

of his motivations, is just as genuine and deserving

of consideration as one who has all of these can do things scary.

The less eloquent the expression, the more vivid the sensation.

(See Pinter's speech to the Seventh National Student Drama Festival in Bristol,1962)

Esslin counts Pinter among the poetic absurdist because, like other absurdists, he is not interested in telling stories, but in exploring states of being and uncovering patterns. In such pieces what is of interest is not what is happening in the present but the unfolding pattern or poetic image. Pinter doesn't choose to write his plays in the narrative form because it doesn't help him to confront the audience with the incomprehensible. He writes with the poetic image because it doesn't develop. It is static because it represents a mood while a narrative form moves steadily until it reaches the core where the expected solution becomes available. Like absurdist playwrights, he changes direction from the well-made play to the absurdly poetic play because he feels the absurdity of existence. (Martin Esslin," Godot and His Children,1968)

Pinter explores the theme that human life is absurd because it is utterly devoid of purpose or aim other than surviving the next day without facing the futility of existence. This subject need not be somber, as playwrights often point out that life is meaningless only because its fundamental nature is not understood. If only people could face the fact that they were alone in the universe, with no divine purpose in their lives, then a realistic way of life could be devised.

Most playwrights show their audience the futility of life, but they give little idea of any hope for a new or better life. Playwrights of the absurd belief that life is irrational; it follows no laws or logical patterns. They transfer this irrationality to the stage. Her plays have no plot, make no sense of chronology, and contain obscure incidents. Plays of this nature were a great shock to audiences when they were first performed. They obeyed none of the laws of conventional drama, and because absurdity is amusing, the plays are often very funny. They are capable of very different interpretations. In his plays, Pinter insisted on the precarious security of human existence. His vehicle for expressing this theme is the Usurper, a scary person who actively or quietly undermines the existence of other characters while also being undermined. (Martin Stephen,1980)

This figure occurs in early plays such as The Room, The Dumb Waiter, and The Birthday Party as a mystery agency in direct confrontation with a steadily dissolving victim. Later pieces, such as The Caretaker, investigate more nuanced interactions between usurpers and their victims. The plays become complex psychological explorations of individuals who are both violent and in desperate need of human relationships to provide them with the stability they desperately want. (John Pesta)

Pinter, therefore, suggests that people need to communicate with each other because it would give them the security they need to give meaning to their lives. Pinter always tries to emphasize the gap between his characters and their lonely existence. The weaknesses in her personality are attributed to her selfishness; therefore they cannot enter into worthwhile relationships in which they can find real security. (Ibid)

The protagonists in Pinter's plays seek security through feeling lonely. They construct a wall of isolation around oneself for protection, which is either a vain attempt to escape, as in The Birthday Party, or a sterile, inert condition, as in A Slight Ache Other. Pinter typically uses a focal picture in a place that offers the actors a sense of comfort to portray the characters' damaged psyches. Above all, they are terrified of what is beyond space, because they are surrounded by a dark, dangerous, and unknown environment. (Ibid)

The importance of space in Pinter's pieces does not derive from its being an architectural feature, but rather a means of describing a state of mind. The household that the space houses, one or more people, represents bodily feelings and postures that give both a particular emotional identity. The characters entering the room develop a state of inertia that involves denial of some aspects of existence. They stay in their rooms because of their feelings of fear or inadequacy, or because of their traumatic experiences. They cut themselves off from certain aspects of life that are vital to humans, such as family relationships, competitiveness, sexuality, etc., and lead a secure but limited existence in a place that is protected but limited. In The Birthday Party, for example, Stanley Webber flees to his room, fleeing his family and home, and an unnamed organization he has betrayed, into a world of "idleness and infantile, Oedipal(sic) sexuality". (Arthur Ganz,1972)

Pinter illustrates the modern man's position, in which his self-integrity is endangered by external influences. Modern man no longer believes he has a fixed place in the scheme of things. Pinter uses people who dwell in restricted settings and withdraw from nature to reveal the human problem. (John Lahr, 1972). Unlike the characters in classic tragedy, Pinter's characters lack the redeeming self-awareness of modern drama to reflect human loss and belief in an ordered universe. (Katherine H. Burkman, 1971). Pinter's play "The Birthday Party" has a feeling of dread and violence that is undisturbed by the finale. Pinter emphasizes this through dramatic, rapid-fire speech scenes; nonetheless, we gain just as much from the characters' silences and gestures as we do from what they say. Pinter uses conversation to demonstrate how language has become an insufficient method of communication for these individuals, who cannot comprehend one other even at the most basic level. The fact that we are never told who the people are, how they connect to one another, what they may have done, or what might happen to them conveys the impression that life is an illusion. (Susan C. W. Abbotson, 2003). Pinter describes the absurdity of the human condition and presents this tragic vision mixed with a little humor because he sees life in its absurdity as fundamentally comical. There are funny moments in life, especially with people who build their worlds out of illusions and self-deception. This fictional world contradicts its real state. This state is exemplified in Meg's character, who comes across as comical and pathetic as she pretends to be the prom beauty.

(Martin Esslin).

The predicament

The dilemma is a Greek term that means "double statement" or "confusing position"; it presents two possibilities, both of which appear to be practically appropriate. It is a rhetorical strategy that generates a competing difficulty for a person to choose between good and wrong when both appear to be of equal importance. A conundrum frequently entails an ethically flawed option that may result in attractive outcomes but may have moral ramifications. Or it is a decision in which a person must pick between two possibilities, both of which are equally excellent or equally horrible. ("Dilemma." Dictionary Definitions. 2015). A dilemma in literature is a mental battle experienced by a character. As a result, it provides readers with a look into the lives of the characters. A tale may have a single or numerous dilemmas. However, the goal is the same: to introduce confusion and competing ideas to

a story to build suspense and complexity. It also adds tension and excitement to the tale from start to finish. (Dilemma - Examples, and Definition of Dilemma). Simply put, the main characters in a story must fight, evolve, and make choices to transform themselves effectively. The human dilemma is evident from the start of Pinter's The Birthday Party. Pinter likewise performs his play in the confines of a single room. (Hasina Wahida). The room represents a place like a womb. It shows a longing for their existence when dependent on their mothers. Pinter's dramatic work depicts the human dilemma as man attempts to emerge from the horrors of war and settle into the domestic sphere. Man's dilemma occurs when he tries to move from one room to another and falls somewhere in between.

People's dilemma at a birthday party

As a man grows up, he feels that he must have contact with other people and other spaces different from his early childhood when he lived under the protection of his parents. Then, as expected, his life changes as an amateur. Man sometimes does not cope with the requirements of this new life. This would lead him to an unconscious defense through which he could hide his failure. It also leads him to feelings of inferiority and powerlessness. The opening scene of the play presents Meg, the landlady of the house. She is a simple elderly woman. Her husband Petey sits at the breakfast table with a newspaper and begins to read while she talks about various subjects. She seems to think her cornflakes are prettier than everyone else. She treats Stanley, a man in his 30s and the only renter in the house, as a spoiled child and at the same time as a lover of sorts. She starts flirting with him, she goes into his room, tickles his neck, and says I had a lovely couple of afternoons in that room. (Harold Pinter. The Birthday Party. 1976).

This sexuality and lavish attention sometimes disgusts Stanley. Stanley is a former pianist. He claims that he used to work with certain people who arranged his concerts, but at the time of the play's action, he is not working as a pianist. He isolates himself from the outside world by living in a space that is like a shelter for him because it gives him a sense of security, but that feeling is threatened by the outside world. He's scared when he knows Meg is expecting visitors. This fear is almost like a doomsday prophecy in Greek tragedy. It's not clear why he's so concerned about these visitors. (Ronald Hayman, Contemporary Playwrights: Harold Pinter, 1975).

The play's construction of the past might take the shape of intricate fables, such as Stanley's account about his career as a pianist, which grows from his absurd assertion that he was considering a job offer in Berlin followed by a global tour. The quickness with which Stanley constructs his stories is also visible in the way he rapidly revises his claims of having played everywhere in the globe and is satisfied to have played throughout the nation.

His story is psychologically revealing, as bitterness seeps through, even though he originally only wanted to present himself as a successful pianist. By the end of the monologue, Stanley can't stop complaining sullenly about being called to a concert in a hall that turned out to be boarded up, which is probably the only part of his portrayal that's true. Stanley's weakness and defensiveness are represented by his vision of the past, which ironically was intended to enhance his image in his own eyes as well as in other characters. (Sherman, May / 2011)

Stanley accepts the awkward situation of Meg's motherhood. He is disinterested in everything around him, he doesn't like to go out, and he just wants to lie in bed or sit inside like a child afraid of meeting people. His treatment of Lulu, the girl next door, suggests his immaturity. She is willing to take an interest in him, despite her complaints that he doesn't wash or shave, but he refuses the chances she gives him to go out with her. (Ronald Hayman, p. 21.)

Stanley's withdrawal from society has roots in his earlier one's Experiences. He tells Meg about one of those experiences as a pianist. Once, he claims, he gave a concert in London. But this success did not last, However, at the second concert, individuals intervened to ruin his career as a pianist:

They carved me up. It was all arranged, it was all

worked out. My next concert. Somewhere else it

was. In winter I went down there to play. Then,

when I got there, the hall was closed, the place was

shuttered up, not even a caretaker. They'd locked it

up... They want me to crawl down on my bended

knees(1, 33)

This painful experience may help excuse Stanley's current behavior. His fondness for living in a childlike state and his dependence on Meg reflect his sense of insecurity, but he sometimes yells at Meg and it shows his conflict. But he doesn't want to separate from her because the separation would make him a mature man and have to face the outside world, which he rejects. (Edinburgh, Oliver & Boyd, 1973)

While the title and dialogue relate to Meg preparing a party to honor Stanley's birthday: Stan, it's your birthday. I wanted to keep it a secret until tonight, even if Stanley denies it is his birthday:

That's not my birthday, Meg, says to Goldberg and McCann: Anyway, that's not my birthday...

No, it's not till next month," he says, responding to McCann's "Not according to the woman Meg." "Her? She's insane. "Go around the bend." (II, 41). Meg suggests celebrating Stanley's birthday, despite not knowing the day of his birth. She announces that she will be celebrating his birthday in the presence of Goldberg and McCann, who arrive at the house. Goldberg, who enjoys playing the role of a very sociable man, suggests they give him a party. Stanley retires to his room when he knows the two men are on the scene, and he returns after their departure. Meg shows him her present, a boy's drum. At first, he's surprised, then he wraps the drum around his neck and starts beating it in a normal rhythm, but later he bangs it wildly, afraid of Goldberg and McCann threatening to destroy his tenuous security. (Ruby Cohn, " The World of Harold Pinter,)

The birthday party with its drum, its lights out, and its blind buff game unleashes the violence, in another theatrical stroke Aside from the acceptable evasion of probability, the central interrogation scenes, the human fracturing, and the confusion, can occur in their way, and the scene also reflects Meg's personality contrary. By giving him the drum, she reveals her unconscious passion for keeping him close and it expresses her fear of loneliness. His way of hitting is like that of a wild primitive man. (Guido

Almansi and Simon Henderson , Harold Pinter, 1983). At the same birthday party, Stanley, despite feeling inadequate as a man, attempts to rape Lulu by assaulting her in what appears to be a rape attempt. unconsciously he searches for a new source of the protective Edenic womb life he has lost. The loss of this protected world makes him insecure, scared, and vulnerable. When Meg fails to protect him from the agony he is facing, he tries to seek a new source of protection in Lulu, who proves that she is no mother figure and can never be Meg's replacement. She demands his answer as a man rather than a child.(Frankfurt : Hirschgraben – Verlage , 1979)

In both Pinter's and Beckett's plays, people keep silent to avoid talking and talk to avoid silence. Meg wants to be surrounded by others to avoid being alone. Meg's dialogue is the epitome of existential discourse. She plays her vain puns with the sincere intention of having her existence confirmed by the sound of a mutual sound, by the mere succession of two - way exchange. (Guido Almansi and Simon Henderson , Pp. 42, 43). Meg's marital relationship lacks harmony and mutual understanding, leading to her finding a surrogate lover in Stanley. Stanley attempts to escape before the party begins, but is prevented by increasingly overt threats of violence from McCann, who breaks Stanley's glasses during the party. In so doing, he destroys what symbolizes Stanley's status as an artist. The drum is an image of the decay and ultimate destruction of his career as a pianist. By breaking the drum, he ends his existence as Meg's little boy, reflecting his desire to break free from his mother's bonds. Throughout the play, Stanley faces many psychological stresses imposed on him by outside forces. He is unable to confront the outside world. He reveals his vulnerable personality at the birthday party, where he appears as a man who bravely avoids confronting the things that disturb his life and turn it into a prison. Before the birthday party begins, Stanley sits silent and pathetic in the corner of the room. Memories of his past as a successful pianist. It seems that human memory is one of the inner forces that enslave humans and cannot give them a chance to free themselves from their limitations.

(Quoted in William Baker and Stephen Ely Tabachnick, p. 52)

The Birthday Party looks at first to be a simple narrative of a former pianist now holed up in a dingy boarding home, as Bob Bows comments in his review of the 2008 Germinal Stage Denver performance, in this play as in his previous plays underneath the symbolism on the surface. Ultimately, whether we take Goldberg and McCann to be the devil and his agents, or simply their earthly emissaries, the puppeteers of the church-state apparatus, or some variation thereof, Pinter's metaphor of a bizarre birth-death party is a compelling interpretation of this flash - an eye we call life. (Bob Bows, 11 April 2008). Pinter creates a nostalgic world of the past that perhaps only exists in the characters' minds. His nostalgia springs from his characters' worldly memories and draws its power from the contradiction between a character's present and imaginary memories of the past. While the characters grow down to earth, they evoke a high degree of sympathy. Pinter doesn't give his characters a chance to escape into the world of memories, putting them in a very difficult situation. (Quoted in William Baker and Stephen Ely Tabachnick, p. 53). In a 1997 interview with Jeremy Isaacs, Pinter relied on another much-discussed interpretation. He argues that our lives in Britain are confined, and he recognizes Stanley as a man who does not follow society's standards. Pinter said that Stanley was not always a pleasant character, but he was a free one, and the Society found him unbearable, so she dispatched Goldberg and McCann to find him. (John Somers, p. 6)

There are clear signs that Goldberg and McCann are on the payroll of a mobster.:

What do you think, Goldberg, McCann?

A gentleman resides in this house.

He has a birthday today and has completely forgotten about it.

As a result, we'll remind him.

We're going to throw him a party...

we're going to get him out of himself. (I, 43)

Goldberg and McCann play the roles of the pursuers who torment Stanley and bring about his destruction; they are themselves victims of external forces. In this play, the characters try to understand both the force that is after them and their conditions. In portraying a character like Stanley, Pinter seeks to portray the character's sense of inner sin and guilt and the outer crime and punishment. Stanley's inner crime is his incestuous feelings towards his mother. He moves to a new place and becomes the spoiled son of his current family. He then supplants now-dad Petey to develop a relationship with his wife. However, he does not admit his sin until his confrontation with Goldberg and McCann. Stanley feels entangled in a relationship with Meg and can't break free. Meg realizes that Stanley is threatened by the stranger's presence, but she cannot protect him. Even Petey can't save him, although he recognizes the evil intentions of the two men. (Patrick Roberts, 1975).

The two men, Goldberg and McCann, drag Stanley out of his sanctuary and bring him face to face with reality. When Stanley confronts McCann, he finds himself tearing a sheet of paper into five equal strips. Stanley twice picks up a strip of the paper, which McCann rips, but the latter stops him. Leave it (II, 49). This scene shows symbolically what the two men could be like Society officials to tear him to pieces to prevent him from realizing his dreams as an artist. Stanley's destruction of his earlier career as a pianist in an earlier scene may lead to this interpretation. Goldberg and McCann's help transform Stanley from boy to man. They try to instill in him some sense of responsibility towards others, his elderly mother, and maybe a fiancé he has left. After provoking his guilt to the point where he finally screams, the menaces consider their main task of killing old Stanley done, and Goldberg tells him you're dead (II, 62). But he's not dead because he kicks Goldberg in the stomach Goldberg and Meg wage a war of sorts over ownership of Stanley. Goldberg achieves the ultimate triumph due to his willpower. He succeeds in freeing the infant Stanley from his mother's womb and leaving him outside with his moral, social, and family obligations. He causes a kind of forced birth. He tells Stanley that getting up every day should be more like giving birth.

(Charles A. Carpenter, p. 105). The third act reveals that Stanley has become a new person the morning after his birthday party. Goldberg talks to Stanley about the future after his symbolic rebirth. He describes the new world as full of material advantages. Goldberg agrees to provide him not only with adult material utensils but also with baby powder, eventually naming him Stanny Boy (III, 93 94). In the final scene, Petey behaves responsibly towards Stanley. In an attempt not to think about Stanley's defeat and failure to save him, Petey opens the newspaper and finds five strips of an inside sheet fluttering to the floor. They stay on stage, mockingly exuding the destructive power of Goldberg and McCann.(John Pesta, p. 127). Man can become trapped by his thoughts and doubts that make him unable to form healthy relationships with other people. The image of Stanley at the end of the play is that of the nostalgic adult leaving the world of childhood, or the image of Adam being expelled from paradise to face

the hardships of life. Pinter is not at that open about the issue; Meg knows Stanley is no longer alive, but she cannot and will not confess it. Meg claims she was the prom queen four times, but it was the tragic party that wrecked her surrogate son and stole everything away from her. She refuses to speak about the impact she created at that gathering. She attempts to maintain the illusion that everything is still the same as it was, that the catastrophic party was actually a success. (Martin Esslin, p . 37).

The play reflects the dilemma of a man living in a fantastical world of persecution anxiety. The characters in this play remain closely connected to their primitive selves. Therefore, they address neither the readers nor the audience as adult people. Pinter describes the dilemma of people fighting against inner forces. (Patrick Roberts, p. 84.). The play shows the dilemma of the self in its confrontation with the mysterious represented by death and also shows the horror of loneliness. This is why characters have nostalgic thoughts about the past.

Conclusion

Pinter's pieces reflect the failure of human relationships to protect humans from feelings of loneliness and fear. This is reflected in dialogues that reflect man's failure to expose his true self to others because doing so makes him vulnerable to attack from others. The Birthday Party is Pinter's first full-length game, combining some of the characters and situations from his early plays. The play describes the suffering of people who withdraw from social life and live in an emergency shelter of passivity and indecisiveness. It shows man's fear of external threats imposed on his life and destroying his defenses. These threats can symbolize two warring tendencies within the man's psyche, each trying to gain dominance. The last image is that of a man, lonely, vulnerable, bullied, and helpless. His vision is tragic and ironic. He searches for identity and understanding, for ways to overcome human loneliness in a socially confused world.

2. Conclusion

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