Research Paper

Investigating The Concept of Social Identity in Pinter's Works

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Abstract

Harold Pinter has targetted the major existential obsessions of human being from personal and existential viewpoint in his work. This paper has tried to look at this existential viewpoint from a social perspective and its requirements in *Dumb Waiter*. The kind of social criteria or expectation that the society exercises upon man to make it approperiate for a required citizen and the required system's plans has drived man towards some social delimmas and problems reflecting the great social problems of post modern man. The paper reveals Pinter's tact in focucing on the social threats of post modern man from a social view point via his theatre of menace. He illustrates the great post modern social identity as a crucial point for the stability of the self mainly in *Dumb Waiter*. It highlights that maintaining the social identity would prove a critical feature for the stability of self for the characters at a micro-level in *Dumb Waitor* and at a macro level for the postmodern man.

Keywords: Social Identity; Self Stability; Harold Pinter; Dumb Waiter

Introduction

Harold Pinter, the great British playwright, has contributed a lot to the revelation of post modern and post World Wars' themes. He has hinged mainly on the socially orientated and driven phenomenona which have targeted the identity of the people in his time. With the rapid advancement of technology and the strange social networks of the society engineered by authorities of different types, led to the formation of ideas totally deterimental to the health of the people mentally, physically, and psychologically. Pinter via the elements of the theatre of the absurd and through his own idiosyncratic theatre of the comedy of menace has tried to show that what areas of that time have acted most as the obsessions of his people. The formation of the organizations of different types with different missions forming a sort of totalitarian system have dominated the nature of the individual, social, and national life of the people whose detection reveals some sort of obsessions of different types for the people. The post modern dramatists like Pinter have tried their best to give rise to the revelations of themes of these types to pace the world progression in congruence with those of the nature of humanity and his being on the globe. Pinter, via the lense of social network has targeted the society of England at a micro level which would be applicable, at a macro level, to the other societies and at other parts of the globe. In his other works like the Birthday Party, the Homecoming, and the Room he has smoothly changed the orientation of his works towards the real social condition of people but in *the Dumb Waiter* this mode of presentation takes a higher pace and is reflected best as the ominious vicious

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and condemning power in the society came into existence by forces of unknown origions and orientations. This paper has tried to answer the question how the retention and violation of social identity of the individual may lead to the annihiliation of an act as a panic to the self stability and identity of the individuals in the society. To aswer this question, the researcher has done a close content analysis of the play, *Dumb Waiter*, and and other related texts and contexts giving rise to the clarification of the idea of the theme at hand.

Discussion

Harold Pinter, the great British playwright, composed *The Dumb Waiter*, a one –act play, In 1957. As it incorporates the major theme of social threat, it can be cosidered as one of Pinter's great works whose analysis reveals some predicting social phenomenon afflicting the man at that time and more specifically at postmodernism. The way Pinter through minimal characters and minimal setting and space has given rise to the creation of some sort of ominous and threatening atmosphere is something which is overshadowed with the theme of absurdity revealing the fact that this paves the way for the reflection of social threats coming into existence at postmodernism and with the termination of the two world wars in Great Britain and more specifically across the globe. In *Dumb Waiter*, Ben, Gus, and a Dumb waiter are staged. Ben and Gus are in charge of killing people whose order is received via the Dumb Waiter taking the order from an anonymous source and giving it to them to perform it. Superficially, he recieves food order knowing the fact that the setting has not been equipped as a kitchten. There is no gas, no match, and other aminities in this kitchen to prove its real funciton. The characters instead of wearing patrons are carring revolvers indicating the dubious nature of their jobs. It corresponds to the many practices top secret agents performing different roles determinded by a kind of social system whose major objective is seemingly controlling the society, knowing the fact that the oreintation of the story is socially centered.

Just like other proponents of the theater of the absurd, Pinter's work is flooded with rediculous and meaningless collequial exchanges whose best examples can be detected in Pinter's *The Dumb Waiter*. The plot of the play revolves arounf modern form of drama which has no detectable ending leaving the burdon of grasping upon reader or the viewer. The abusrd, frightened, and paniced characters; long silences, absurd, illstructured, terrifying, and ambiguious language all lead to a sort of atmosphere which paves the way for the introduction of a dominant social system of unknown origin.

The characters are leading their absurd life in their uncertain and in-tumult state of being totally subservient at the mercy of unknown orders. They get involved in the time-consuming and happy-go-lucky state of behaviour in their waiting. One of them starts reading out aloud a magazine news revealing the above-mentioned features.

A man of eighty-seven wanted to cross the road. But there was a lot of traffic, see ? He couldn't see how he was going to squeeze through. So he crawled under a lorry.

GUS. He what ?
BEN. He crawled under a lorry. A stationary lorry.
GUS. No ?
BEN. The lorry started and ran over him.
GUS. Go on !
BEN. That's what it says here.
GUS. Get away.
BEN. It's enough to make you want to puke, isn't it ?
GUS. Who advised him to do a thing like that ?
BEN. A man of eighty-seven crawling under a lorry!
GUS. It's unbelievable.
BEN. It's down here in black and white.
GUS. Incredible. (Dumb Waiter, henceforth, DW, 5)

This aburd ideas and conversations give rise to the atmosphere of the absurd-stricken atmosphere of the play which would lead to the pavement of the bed for the introduction of the intended theme by the playwright. The post modern drama of Pinter pioneering all other sorts of drama forms has been technicly tailored towards the incorporation and introduction of the theme of menace came into existence by an anonymous system or the like which has targeted the real nature of human being and his existence. They try to penetrate into each others' mind coming up with the nature of what they are doing and are determined to do. "When it comes to a term, Pinteresque, the word "silence" is always evoked. Heroes or most characters in Pinter's works are awkward in communication. Thus, a lot of Pinter's dramatic scenes are demonstrated with silences and pauses to indicate people's alienation, solitude and ill-communication" (Sandie: 2013:18). This indirectly puts the inside of the human being in a a state of tumult which can lead to the instability of one's sense of self and being. The society has overshadowed individualism.

I want to ask you something.
BEN. What are you doing out there?
GUS. Well, I was just-- BEN. What about the tea?
GUS. I'm just going to make it.
BEN. Well, go on, make it. (DW, 8)

Through such absurd and ordinary expressions, Pinter tries to show the personal status the society has ascribed upon the characters. They are initially stuck in a room, controlled, in a delima, and at the mercy of some unknown and ominous threat of the society leaving the man with a blurred idea of his

real being which is determined by the society; striking the mind the work of Huxley and the creation of the people in laboratories and the type of personality they are trained for. This threat is controlled by an unkown and unpredicable source making one ready for the desired changes that may be called for by the ruling system or the like targeting the individuality of the character and the unpredictability of the life events. " There is an open invitation of fear and insecurity in his plays. He seems to create meaning of her plays from an unkown tension accompanied with a long silence. It evokes a sense of disconfiture and the atmosphere is filled with horror" (Pandi, 2012: 45).

GUS. You got any cigarettes? I think I've run out.

He throws the packet high up and leans forward to catch it.

I hope it won't be a long job, this one.

Aiming carefully, he flips the packet under his bed.

Oh, I wanted to ask you something.

BEN (*slamming his paper down*). Kaw!

GUS. What's that?

BEN. A child of eight killed a cat!

GUS. Get away.

BEN. It's a fact. What about that, eh? A child of eight killing a cat! GUS. How did he do it?

BEN. It was a girl (DW, 20).

Such method of theme development has been practiced by the proponents of the theatre of the absurd and Pinter himself has ameralded it with his own comedy of menace. Just like the works of Samuel Beckett which are replete with nonesense words and expressions with characters involved in sheer common and meaningless collequial exchanges, *Dumb Wai*ter, to a large extent, follows the same absurd trend of presetation of the ideas of the play. The instability, indeterminency, and the complicated view of the characters shows the fact that it is somehow like sugar coated pills which, here, is absurd coated threat arising from the social system of undetermined source. This ominous threat has already been pipointed in "another dramatic link of Pinter with anti-imperialistic tenets illustrated in *A New World Order* in which the Imperialistic policies are quite tangible. The idea of New World Order was, firstly, addressed in 1990 by President Bush to the American Congress. President George H.W. Bush defined this New World as "a new era freer from the threat of terror", something that Pinter mocks in his play and show it as a tapestry of lies" (Nadernia, 2015: 96).

"The First Eleven" Cricketers. You seen this, Ben?

BEN (*reading*). What?

GUS. The first eleven.

BEN. What?

GUS. There's a photo here of the first eleven.

BEN. What first eleven?

GUS (*Studying the photo*). It doesn't say.

BEN. What about that tea?

GUS. They all look a bit old to me.(DW, 24)

Time and again, the individuals are socially dislocated and feel panic at the presence of other social members with whom they may even be coworkers but what is supposed to pan out is highly illusive and undetermined. The chaotic state of the society has made the individuals senseless and selfless leaving them amidst a host of problems of different types whose origins are mainly socially oriented. The reception and taking order of food, being armed with revolver, being alone and awaiting some sort of order from an unkonwn source shows that the individual's self is on the verge of being eradicated, forged, or altered for no plausible reason indicating the frailty of the life, identity, and existence of the characters which has proved to be the dominent theme of the post modern societies. The social authorities like Ibsen's The Enemy of the People, find it necessary to twist the reality and instead of changing the nature of the phenomenona put an end to the social identity of the individuals and, if necessary, ascribing him or her the status of a social outcast, a vagrant, or unwanted member which is being exercised in many post modern societies staged in the plays and works of individuals of different fields of experties. Such ideas can be detected in Pinter's characters' conversation. I like to get a look at the scenery. You never get the chance in this job.

BEN. You get your holidays, do you?

GUS. Only a fortnight.

BEN (*lowering the paper*). You kill me. Anyone would think you're working every day. How often do we do a job? Once a week? What are you complaining about?

GUS. Yes, but we've got to be on tap thought, haven't we? You can't move out of the house in case a call comes.

BEN. You know what your trouble is?

GUS. What?

BEN. You haven't got any interests. GUS. I've got interests.

BEN. Look at me. What have I got?

GUS. I don't know. What?

BEN. I've got my woodwork. I've got my model boats. Have you ever seen me idle? I'm never idle. I know how to occupy my time, to its best advantage. Then when a call comes, I'm ready.

GUS. Don't you ever get a bit fed up? (DW, 28)

The uncertainty of their situation paves the way for the instability of their views of their selves and identities. They do not know who they are and what are they doing in the universe; what the reality of their job is, what they are killing for, who is the real authority behind such decision-making procedure. What they are supposed to do is suspension and hesistancy in behaviour and action proving the fact

that they are being controlled by a social system which can determine their being and actions.

GUS *sits* on his bed and asserts: No, I mean, I say the crockery's good. It is. It's very nice. But that's about all I can say for this place. It's worse than the last one. Remember that last place we were in? Last time, where was it? At least there was a wireless there. No, honest. He doesn't seem to bother much about our comfort these days.

BEN. When are you going to stop jabbering?

GUS. You'd get rheumatism in a place like this, if you stay long.

BEN. We're not staying long. Make the tea, will you? We'll be on the job in a minute (DW, 34).

GUS. What's this?

BEN. What?

GUS. This.

BEN (*examining it*). This? It's a speaking-tube.

GUS. How long has that been there?

BEN. Just the job. We should have used it before, instead of shouting up there.

GUS. Funny I never noticed it before.

BEN. Well, come on.

GUS. What do you do?

BEN. See that? That's a whistle.

GUS. Yes, take it out. Pull it out. (DW, 35)

The word whistle reminds one of the whistle blowers who are doing their best due to the orders they take from the authorities implicating the case of the two characters of *Dumb Waiter* in their subserveint obdieance to the orders they take in a kitchen. Such a system dehumanizes humanity and degrades it to the level of a robot or a machine which in the end blurs the individual's sense of self and identity as it is not fixed in time, in status, and in stability. Social identity assigned upon their being and existence, for sure, would give rise to their initial depreviation of their own self and identity with this regard like what some social movements do with their proponents adherning to the movements' principles and defending it techniquely or blindly. Time and again, it has panned out that the self view and concept has been sacrificed at the cost of the service to the organization which implies the already skinned identity of one's self. In *the Caretaker,* Davies is condemned and "he is a victim of a system, which gives him a name but forces him to use another. He combats injustice with inertia and self-righteousness" (Mahmoud, 2012:1) in the Dumb Waiter the two characters are doomed and both are suscipible to danger and lack of individual self and identity. The climax of the story targets this superficial kitchen in which there is no match to light the kettle revealing their temporary and undetermined residence here in that setting.

GUS. What?

BEN. You know what he said? Light the kettle! Not put on the kettle! Not light the gas! But light the kettle!

GUS. How can we light the kettle?

BEN. What do you mean?

GUS. There's no gas.

BEN (*clapping hand to head*). Now what do we do?

GUS. What did he want us to light the kettle for?

BEN. For tea. He wanted a cup of tea.

GUS. He wanted a cup of tea! What about me? I've been wanting a cup of tea all night! BEN (*despairingly*). What do we do now?

GUS. What are we supposed to drink? (DW, 37)

The symbolic use of language and gestures shows the existence of another languag which is unique to postmodern plays in which communication between individuals has become blurred and vague which in purpose may be due to the hovering forces of different types over the life of the characters, of the play and may be in the majority of the postmodern societies. The whistle alrts that the victim is on the way and they should get prepared for doing the job highligting their total subservience and selflessness. The signs and symbols act as the principles for the characters which have become their natural beliefs and mental competence. The letter T in Huxley's novel *the Brave New World* implies exactly an organization-made system and procedures which have been practiced and exercied nation-wide which in reality may prove to really applied to the whole society, nation, or the globe. "Power is the substantive game in all of Pinter, regardless of the gender of the characters who struggle or, relatedly, whether the field of action hosting these struggles is a domestic or private milieu, or a seemingly more public one" (Chiasson, 2010:4).

The box in the shaft comes down behind them. The noise is *this time accompanied by a shrill whistle,as it falls*. GUS *rushes to the hatch and seizes the note*. (*Reading.*) Scampi!

He crumples the note, picks up the tube, takes out the whistle, blows and speaks.

We've Got Nothing Left! Nothing! Do You Understand?

BEN *seizes the tube and flings* GUS *away. He follows* GUS *and slaps him hard, backhanded, across the chest*.

BEN. Stop it! You maniac!

GUS. But you heard!

BEN (*savagely*). That's enough! I'm warning you!

Silence.

BEN *hangs the tube. He goes to his bed and lies down. He picks up his paper and reads*. *Silence.*

The box goes up. They turn quickly, their eyes meet.

BEN *turns to his paper. Slowly* GUS *goes back to his bed, and sits. Silence. The hatch falls back into place. They turn quickly, their eyes meet*.

BEN *turns back to his paper. Silence.*

BEN *throws his paper down* (DW, 37).

"Another kind of violence is the psychological violence where there is no apparent physical force used against a person's body. This type of violence occurs in interrogations, investigations, brainwashing...etc. Pinter's plays are saturated with this kind of violence" (Al-Sweidi & Al-Azraki, 2011:71)

Conclusion

Pinter has proved to be one of the great advocates of the theatre of the absurd who has flavoured it with his idiosyncratic comedy of menace. Pinter in *the Dumb Waiter* has tried to look at the stabsility of self and identity from the viewpoint of social subservience leading to one of the great threats to the stabiltiy of one's sense of self and identity. At postmodernism with the advant of the technology and the formation of societies with different requirement for its controll, there would be a need for the exercise of different types of strategies which violates the individuals'sense of self and social identity which has been assigned upon them by the social system on the one hand, and may act as a threat to their social identity on the other hand. Pinter has tried to highlight on his stage the micro level manifestation of the threat to the social identity of the characters which, in reality, prove to be the great macro level revelator of the reality of the social identity of man at postmodernism being monitored, modified, and controlled by the society and social forces.

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