

AN ANALYSIS OF REALITY AND ILLUSION IN HAROLD PINTER'S *THE HOMECOMING*

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Abstract:

Harold Pinter is one of the major figures in contemporary drama and is best known for his blend of reality and illusion in his plays. It is difficult to demarcate the line between the reality and illusion of human action in his plays. The elusive nature of reality and illusion fill his plays with mysterious, suspense and ambiguities which are constant in conflict and collusion with each other in personal, social and psychological dimension of human action and consciousness. Pinter thinks that though the event of his plays apparently appears unfamiliar and vague, but they are as real as the ordinary life of human being which can be found anywhere, at any time, in any place in real life of ordinary man in the world. His plays are realistic in the sense that the people of his plays are the inhabitants of the same world where we belong. Pinter explains reality is as faulty as illusion which is not absolute qualities. The perception of reality is different to different persons so it is difficult to hold it. He generally engenders his plays with an image of situation and a couple characters from real life which further develops with entrance of intruders and fear of insiders. The present paper is an attempt to analysis of reality and illusion in *The Homecoming*.

Keywords: Homecoming, reality, illusion, character, Ruth, Teddy, Max, Lenny, Sam, Joey

Introduction:

Harold Pinter's plays are full of with reality and illusion of human action that it is difficult to demarcate the line between the two. The elusive nature of reality and illusion fill his plays with mysterious, suspense and ambiguities which are constant in conflict and collusion with each other in personal, social and psychological dimension of human action and consciousness. Aristotle said in his famous theory that the playwright may represent men as they were or as they ought to be in real life. Martin Esslin said that there is no difference in reality and play, but only that what happens in reality is irreversible, while in play it is possible to start again from scratch. Play is a simulation of reality. He further says that drama is mimetic action, an imitation of the real world and contains a far greater element of reality. His plays depict the confrontation of man with an unknown and malicious unreality of the world. Pinter accepted in his interview with Harry Thompson that his characters are from real world and his role in depicting them in his plays is merely as a detached observer. They come up on the pages often with pointless stream of consciousness that he feels these people also live in the same world where we lives. Harold Pinter created an entirely and remarkably familiar world by arranging and selecting particular situation of the characters in his plays.

Pinter's realism begins with his use of an English vernacular at different levels of series of variable. He often locates to the conventional ideas of the speech of the working middle classes. His ear for ordinary speech is very accurate that he painstakingly gives more important to pause and silence of their speech as their thought in the dialogue. In *The Homecoming*, Pinter uses North London speech which involves abusive language of butcher family as Max says, 'Listen! I'll chop your spine off, you talk to me like that! You understand? Talking to your lousy filthy father like that! (6), while Lenny simply tells the way how to prepare cheese roll, 'I made that roll myself. I cut it and put the butter on. I sliced a piece of cheese and put it in between. I put it on a plate and I put it in the sideboard. I did all that before I went out. Now I come back and you've eaten it.' (103) The natural colloquial rhythm in the speech pattern of this play is noted by Bill Naismith. He pointed out idiomatic, colloquial and unsophisticated expression like 'knock about with' and 'shove off' which associated more with the working-class language. Even William Baker and Stephen Tabachnick say that 'this language derives directly from the East End of London and mirrors the violence with infects the characters' historical world.' We agree with Gale

who said that Pinter does not use stylized dialogue like the dramatists of well-made play, his dialogue are instinct production of the characters' intense emotion than logical structure and coherent thought of it.

In *The Homecoming* Pinter uses room which is large extended by removing the back wall of an old house in north London. His insistence on removed wall, a square arch shape marked on wall and a staircase in the hall reflects his idea about the realistic presentation of it. The room has a window and a front door upper right of the stage. He uses very limited stage property including odd tables, two large armchairs, a large sofa, a large sideboard, a mirror and a radiogram of which every object is handled by the characters in the play. The situation of *The Homecoming* is more realistic than his earlier plays where the characters are associated with the social function of the society. The head of the family, Max, an ex-butcher works as a cook of the family. His younger brother Sam is a chauffeur in the firm. The younger son, Joey is building-labourer-cum-part-time boxer. Teddy, the elder son is a respective professor of philosophy in America. There is uncertainly and mystery about the profession of Lenny and Ruth, otherwise all the characters are bound to the function of the society. It is certain that the play is about the homecoming of Ruth and not of Teddy who brings her to meet his family. Michael Billington noted in his biography that Pinter had coincided the story of this play with his friend, Morris Wernick's situation and his homecoming. He married a Gentile girl and kept secret from the family. Pinter had expanded on the idea and after writing it sent the first draft freely in acknowledgement of him. So *The Homecoming* has its roots in a specific locality of the Hackney which being 'triggered, in part, by a particular domestic situation and is much closer to observed reality than has ever been acknowledged.' (Billington) There are a lot of explicable series of events in the play which seem real and realistic that can happen to a family living in this circumstance as the most natural thing in the world. Pinter begins it with a couple of dialogue between the father and son; the father recalls his past which the son doesn't like it. Max might repeat it several times, so Lenny is reluctant to listening him. Sam, the best chauffeur in the firm and Joey, the younger son are introduced being the unit of the family. The unheralded entrance of Teddy and his wife in the midnight is somewhat mystery, but it appears real when Lenny welcomes him coldly and asks him about his insomnia because of the tick of the clock. Ruth meets her brother-in-law in early morning, drinks with him and lastly drains the glass. The scene of the next morning begins with family atmosphere of Max's resentment about Sam's engagement in scraping the leaving in the kitchen. But the entry of Teddy and Ruth makes Max furious being unknown about the visit from last night. He scolds Ruth with abusive language. At the end, his desire for the cuddle to his eldest son, Teddy with the words - 'He still loves his father!' expresses his love for his son.

In the second act, the family gathers for the coffee after a luncheon, Max again recalls him past, Teddy tells Ruth's help to him and Lenny asks philosophical questions to Teddy which answers by Ruth objectively exposing her sexuality. Teddy would like to return earlier than their plan, but Ruth likes to stay longer. Lenny gets chance to dance and later kiss her. Joey joins him rolling with Ruth on the sofa and later spends two hours upstairs with her without going whole hog. Max puts the plan to keep Ruth their house and Lenny suggests putting her on the game to Greek street which Sam opposes reminding them her motherhood. Teddy without object or protest informs her about the family's invitation to her to live in the bosom of family to keep them happy and do a bit of household work, but she has to pull her own weight by earning herself with the prostitution spending a couple of hours a night at Greek street. William Baker and Stephen Tabachnick say that '*The Homecoming* presents a variation on the theme of the outsider rejected by society who achieves acceptance to the point of controlling that society. Thus Ruth has always belonged in a way to the society which attempts to reject her.' Max hitting Joey and Sam, his lifting his stick at others, Ruth emptying a glass of water in Lenny's mouth and later her rolling on sofa with Joey, Lenny's question of conception, Max's teasing to Sam about his marriage, Sam's revealing of secret about Jessie, Teddy's speech of intellectual equilibrium, his stealing of cheese-roll, Ruth's demand for mutual contract of agreement and condition of employment are the series of the events which really supported the action towards the realistic atmosphere in the play. Pinter disagrees with critics who call it unrealistic. When Henry Hewes asked Pinter whether the family of *The Homecoming* representing universal forces in modern society distorted from reality, he replied, 'I certainly didn't distort them in any way from any other kind of reality. I was only concerned with their reality. The whole play happens on a quite realistic level from my point of view.' Even Martin Esslin calls the play as a poetic image of a basic human situation and a piece of realistic theatre which is the perfect fusion of extreme realism with the quality of an archetypal dream image of wish fulfillment. (Esslin 149)

The stage setting seems to be realistically functional within each Pinter room for the social and individual background of his characters. Even his use of entrance and exist in his plays lessen the mystery and heighten

realistic atmosphere of the plays. The intruders and other inhabitants of the house enter the room direct through the door maintaining the reality of them. He uses the stage setting of the plays mostly in the room which are photographic realism of exact real room of the society. Even his characters bear ordinary names, wear ordinary clothes, and works in the normal function of the society. The link between everyday reality and the way that it is represented on stage with stage setting in Pinter's plays is apparently resemblance that sometimes what we see and hear on stage appears so closely with reality that we fail to notice the difference between them. Clifford Leech finds the overall effect of as things that do happen in our world: 'And in Pinter's setting the things that happen are not ordinary things: we are often puzzled by them, but we have a sense that they correspond to things that do happen in our world.' The setting of his plays is so resemblance to the real world that it has its impact on the overall presentation of vision of the playwright. The setting of the room does not only reflect the atmosphere of reality, but also indicates the social class to which the inhabitants belong. In this regard David Thompson says, 'Visually as well as linguistically Pinter's plays have a realistic context and frame of reference; they are set in a recognizably contemporary world with characters dressed in the everyday clothes of that world. Perhaps as the plays move beyond that frame of reference and tap deeper level of meaning the visual 'ordinariness' of the characters involved creates its own particular effect.'

It is, however, the reality of the play, the realism of the setting, simulation of situation which seems to have permeated Pinter's career as a dramatist giving him world-wide success. Pinter probes into the masked reality of everyday life by the ritualized daily activity of household, but it is sometime comic as well as pathetic representation of emptiness and boredom of routine life. The private daily activities of life sometime evoke to the most passionate emotions, revelations and aggressive remarks for others. The ritual activities in the plays diminish the mystery of the plays and create the atmosphere of reality. Pinter creates the realistic atmosphere in his plays through the small rituals of family living including breakfasts, tea, dusting, opening and closing windows, sandwich, cheese-roll, and drinks. Even the very nature of his characters obsesses with cleanliness is an indication of routine life. Max obsesses with cleanliness and feeds family by cooking, while Sam scrapes all the leavings into the bin every morning. Ruth serves coffee and Lenny serves the drink to all the members and prepares cheese-roll for him. Joey combs his hair in the mirror. They are the embodiment of human beings. They would like to take revenge for the wrong doing to them. Max's contempt towards Lenny, Sam, Jessie and Teddy is his inability to exert his power over them. He throughout the play abuses Sam and Jessie for their secret liaison. Lenny's long speech against Teddy's stealing of cheese roll is a disdain for a bit of generosity of mind from him. Arthur Ganz says that 'the removal of our certainty about the common events of external reality always serves in his work to focus our attention on the greater truths of the inner reality.'

As Katherine Burkman finds Pinter's plays abound in those daily habitual activities which have become formalized as ritual and have tended to become empty of meaning, an automatic way of coping with life. John Russell Brown finds Pinter's interest in such ritual 'from a birthday party to a homecoming, through seeking living space, taking possession, or taking 'care' of room, to taking breakfast or lunch, taking orders, fulfilling routines, visiting, collecting, and so on. According to F. R. Storch, Pinter's 'most remarkable achievement is that at his best his vision is not a fanciful distortion of reality, but has the effect of a more direct honest understanding of it. This honesty is the strength of all original art; with Pinter it often reaches the extreme point of seeming naivete: the pouring of a cup of tea, the reading of a newspaper can become events fraught with climatic meaning.'

Pinter's characters are masters of illusion beside their realistic appearance on outward level. Though his characters cannot ward off the inevitable threat for very long, they escape in fantasy to deceive them. They struggle to impose his or her point of view of truth upon the others to achieve higher degree of reality in their opinion in compare to others. For that purpose his characters' tell the stories about their past –Max's story about Jessie are mixture of fact and fiction, untruth and genuine belief that it is impossible to sort out what is true and what is lie. William Baker and Stephen Tabachnick say, 'Rather than seriously questioning the nature of their world, Pinter's characters remain caged in a world of dream and memory, a falsely nostalgic place where all good things absent from the present can exist unthreatened by reality.'

In *The Homecoming*, Max often lives in an illusion by telling his stories of youth with his best friend, MacGregor when he was strong enough and was the most hated man. He boasts about his good knowledge of horses, his sense of an instinctive understanding of animals, his gift of particular trick, and a kind of hypnotism to tell a good filly. He couldn't accept the offer of job by the Dukes just because of the family obligation. He has

a mixed feeling about his dead wife, Jessie and his family. He tries to impose his illusion of past memories to supplement his old age and infirmity. He has illusion that his sons love him, but they shatters his illusion when the elder leaves and two younger sons take the side of Ruth making him to kneel and beg for kiss in the desperate condition. Max is the one of the victims of illusions. He talks most of times about the inner reality of his life, but that seems to others as the external illusion. Lenny forces to impose his illusion of the external reality on others. In the beginning, he calls his father 'a dog cook, but later he corrects himself by reminding him 'your own special brand of cooking, Dad.' He helps Sam to weave the illusion about his driving. He tells two stories of his brutal power over women in the external world to Ruth which she breaks with his own inner illusion by calling him Leonard. She also breaks his illusion of philosophical discussion on known and unknown merits by interrupting her physical objectivity. His long speech about thieving of cheese-roll is the revelation of his false conception regarding Teddy and his campus life. Joey dreams as the top boxer. He has illusion that one can happy without going whole hog. Joey and Lenny indulge in illusion of a violent sexual life. Sam has his own illusion about his being the best chauffeur in the firm. He gives two reasons for it the first he is the best driver and the second he doesn't take liberties. He never presses other and knows to pass the time of the day. He has idealized memories of dead woman, Jessie and he regrets that he doesn't get the wife like her. He is the only person in the play who doesn't like to play a game of sex again. Teddy also lives in an illusion of his intellectual equilibrium. He wrongly assumes that the people of his family are warm and not ogres, but they reveal the reality of their nature being worst than beast. He tells the family that Ruth is a great help to him and she is a wonderful wife and mother, but she neither plays the role of wife nor of the mother. His image of America is so clean compared to dirty London with a filthy urinal. Though he doesn't lost in the object, the idea of his maintaining intellectual equilibrium is false. He being the father of three sons couldn't teach Ruth how to operate on things and not in things in six years. Ruth the central of the play is the illusion for everybody as 'an archetypal dream image of wish fulfilment'. Teddy becomes the victim of idealized life of American university professor, but she realizes the false dogma of sophisticated life after six years of marital life. Martin Esslin says that she was unable to adjust herself to a life of respectability in America. Though she accepts the proposition of family to stay at London home to play the role of wife-mother-whore, she breaks the illusion of the males by suggesting 'all aspect of the agreement and conditions of employment' must be clarified before finalized the contract for their mutual satisfaction. But she postpones the agreement 'till later' and she is enthroned relaxed on the chair in the final picture of the play to get 'a certain kind of freedom.'

Pinter has juxtaposes unknown and known, fact and fiction, truth and untruth, real and unreal that it becomes difficult to judge his plays without understanding their important in the plays. All Pinter's characters have illusion which offers a purpose in life, but the very illusions are shattered by morbid entrance of the intruders which expose the emptiness and loneliness, harsh reality of the contemporary world. William Free says about this play, 'Pinter has created enough dramatic illusion and suggested enough undercurrent of causality among the other characters and other action of the play to teas us into believing that there is more here than meet the eye.'

Pinter inextricably mixed reality and illusion in his plays that it becomes difficult to find where the reality begins and illusion interweaves in it. In his plays reality is as undefined as illusion, for reality change with the changing illusion. There is immediate and instant shift of reality to illusion that sometime it is difficult to identify reality which remains hidden and inscrutable under illusion. Even it is impossible to draw a clear line between the real and the imagined in his plays. Michael Billington says that Pinter is a realist as well as an idealist. His characters are personification of human beings with all their weakness, fault, aspiration, dream, illusion, astute reality of pathetic condition and trauma of their life. As said by James Boulton, 'He does not set out to provoke sociological thinking or to address his audience on "life" like Wesker or Osborne; rather he requires an imaginative response to the truth of human experience presented (with varying degrees of success) in his plays, and he thereby increases our ranges of sympathetic insight into the business of being human. Guru Charan Behara expresses his opinion about the reality and unreality in the plays of Harold Pinter which appears to him ungraspable, unstable and multiple images of them:

"In Pinter, reality and unreality have a relative praxis. If for someone the observable actual world is real, the unknown force behind it becomes unreal. And if the formal is unreal, the latter becomes real. Everything lies in the perception of the characters. When either the object or the observer changes its or his position the reality is ungraspable. When both are unstable, there appear multiple images of reality, the external world and internal mind overlap each other, reality and illusion, fact and fantasy get confused.'

Conclusion:

Harold Pinter regards his characters and situation on the stage as real as the people in the world. His plays are as truth about them as their illusion also. So the reality about them has the resemblance with the reality of the world as the illusion of the real people of our world. Pinter examines the human condition from the society as a detached observer adeptly and competently that few others can. He allows his characters to let them on the stage what they have to do and keeping him aloof without distorting their consistency. He thinks that 'it is up to the audience to decide how much is truth and how much is lies.' The success of his plays is not so much in the reality of them as in the unreality. Pinter's art and vision is so vital that displays the perfect potent image of human being in the most realistic manner with unrealistic way. His plays with all their initially realistic appearance, their cumulative impact, their illusion and unreal dream represent the whole humanity. Pinter's plays seem much closer observed reality of human condition of the world, but their potent image of characters in particular menacing situations represents the complexity and ambivalence of the unreal world. Though he doesn't provide explanation for every motive of his characters; their tape recorder colloquial language, the stage setting of his plays in the room with the familiar objects, the traumatic situation of his characters, their habitual activities, their human instincts, their weakness and fear are the representation of the most realistic approach of him towards the mankind.

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