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# Psychoanalytic analysis of Harold Pinter's *The Home Coming*

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**Abstract :** *Psychoanalytic criticism itself is a form of literary criticism which uses some of the techniques of psychoanalysis in the interpretation of literature. Psychoanalysis is a form of therapy which aims to cure mental disorders by investigating the interaction of conscious and the unconscious elements of the mind. These theories were put forward by Sigmund Freud, and his impact on how we think about ourselves has been incalculable. His works investigate into the states of our mind: conscious, subconscious and the unconscious. He also suggests a three part model of the human psyche: Ego, Super Ego and Id; which roughly corresponds to the conscious, subconscious*

*and the unconscious respectively. He also talked about Infantile Sexuality and Oedipus Complex. Freud's theories of psychoanalysis have a subtle implication on the plays of Harold Pinter, a great exponent of the Theatre of the Absurd which emerged after World War II as a rebellion against the essential beliefs and values both of traditional culture and traditional literature. Central to this earlier tradition had been the assumptions that man is a rational creature who lives in an, at least partially intelligible universe, that he is capable of heroism and dignity even in defeat. The Absurdist stood tall against these assumptions and projected a world full of disillusionments, anxiety and lacking solution. Besides Camus, Sartre and Beckett, Harold Pinter remains one of the major cultural forces of his time. The 1930's was the period of World War II. As a result there was a racial conflict in the society which filled him with a sense of fear, awe and disillusionment. This sense of fear and awe finds an expression in the plays of Harold Pinter, which are classed as 'Comedies of Menace'. Pinter's mastery can be seen in projecting this sense of isolation, disillusionments and anxiety in most of his plays like 'The Room' (1957), 'The Birthday Party' (1958), 'The Dumb Waiter' (1959), 'The Caretaker' (1960) and 'The Home Coming' (1965).*

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## **Introduction :**

Psychoanalytic criticism is a form of literary criticism which uses some of the techniques of psychoanalysis in the interpretation of literature. "Psychoanalysis is itself a form of therapy which aims to cure mental disorders by negotiating the interaction of conscious and unconscious elements in the mind." (Barry 2008 : 96 )

Sigmund Freud (1856-1939), a medical practitioner, clinically examined hysterical patients and formulated the theory of bi-cameral mind, that is, unconscious mind and the conscious mind. The duality of human mind is based on the "pleasure Principle" and the 'Reality Principle'. In the first, man seeks pleasure from his activities whereas the second impels him to recognize reality which often frustrates the desired fulfillment of pleasure sought by him. Later in his career, Freud suggested a three part rather than a two-part model of psyche, dividing it into the 'ego', the 'super ego' and the 'id'. These three levels of the personality roughly correspond to, the conscious the sub-conscious and the unconscious. Freud's theories of psychoanalysis have a subtle implication on the Drama of the Absurd .

The name, 'The drama of the Absurd' is applied to a number of works in drama, during the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, which have in common the notion that human condition is essentially and ineradicably absurd. Martin Esslin says that "...it is a term applied to a group of dramatists in the 1950s who did not regard themselves as a school but who all seemed to share certain attitudes towards the predicament of the man in the universe."(Esslin 1961:10) Central to the earlier notion was the assumption that man is a rational creature and he is capable of heroism even in defeat. The Absurdist stood tall against these assumptions and projected a world full of disillusionment, anxiety, lack of communication and solution .

Besides Camus Sartre and Beckett, Harold Pinter remains one of the major cultural forces of the time. The World War II left its indelible impression on both Pinter's personality and his works. A sense of fear and awe finds expression in most of his plays like 'The Room' (1957), 'The Birthday Party' (1958), 'The Dumb Waiter' (1959), 'The Caretaker' (1960) and 'The Home Coming' (1965).

## **New Drama and Harold Pinter :**

The 1950s brought a wind of change in the history of British Drama. There were inventions of new dramatic forms like expressionism, symbolism, epic theatre, contemporary verse drama and anti-theatre. New philosophies emerged which were convinced that the surface of life is often deceptive and reality could only be brought to the fore by penetrating the surface. Raymond Williams has rightly remarked that " The more real it all looks, the less real it may actually be." (Hugh 1989 : 28 ) This development in thought led to the emergence of Naturalism.

## **Naturalistic Drama :**

The Naturalistic Dramatists held the notion that a dramatic form which simply reproduces the surface is of little use. Their plays constructed accurate models of life for the purpose of analyzing the cause and effect of human behaviour, Naturalism astonished the audience with plays like "A Street Car Named Desire" with its rawness, and plays dealing with subjects like homosexuality in Arthur Millers 'A View from the Bridge' and Andersons 'Tea and Sympathy'. Dramatists like Ibsen and Hells borrowed the formula of well-made plays from French Dramatists and made a compromise between naturalism and the well-made play.

## **Experimental Drama :**

After the war, Britain suffered from a bad balance payment deficit. At this time the British

theatre looked towards Broadway for the best commercial theatre; towards Paris for philosophical drama and mimes, and also to Moscow Art Theatre for the classic plays by Chekov, Antony and Brecht. This experiment gave a number of successful dramas like 'The Waltz of Corridors', by Jean Anouith, 'The Three penny Opera' by Brecht and 'Waiting for Godot' by Samuel Becket'. America also contributed to the British theatre through musicals like 'Plain and Fancy' and 'The Payjama Game'. In April 1956, a new group, the English Stage Company took over the Royal court Theatre to put up new plays in repertory. "The Mulberry Bush" by Anges Wilson was its first production, followed by Arthur Millers' "The Crucible" and John Osborne's "Look Back in Anger".

#### **John Osborne's look back in anger-a break through :**

With the production of 'Look Back in Anger' a new phase emerged in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. The play managed to touch the frustrations of the new agitated class of Britain. They belonged to parents of limited education and they went to Red Brick University instead of Cambridge and Oxford. This created an inferiority complex and as a result they became angry at the 'establishment'. This situation brought disappointment and frustrations.

The influence of Osborne lead to the emergence of 'kitchen-sink drama' under the leadership of Arnold Wesker. His drama deals with the theme of how a modern man in an industrial society fulfil himself?

By this time drama became less of a presentation of social life and more of an exploration of the mental state. Martin Esslin, the drama critic called this drama, 'The Drama of the Absurd'.

#### **The theatre of the Absurd and Harold Pinter :**

For the Absurdists it appeared that life was out of harmony, and the world full of disillusionment,

senselessness and futility. They do not argue about absurdity, "they presented it in being" and it heavily relied on dreams and fantasy. (Esslin 1961: 25), The dramatists had a shared attitude towards the predicament of man, but had their own distinct approaches to both subject and matter.

Samuel Beckett in 'Waiting for Godot' does not tell a story, but explores a static situation, Jean Genet's concern is to contrast between appearance and reality in 'The Maid', Ionesco shows dream situation on stage in 'Amedee', and Adamov's approach in 'Professor Taranne' is psychological. Harold Pinter's plays progress with little development but have revelation of inner tensions with a final clarification. His 'The Caretaker' shows a failure to communicate and also the problem of verification, which is found also in 'The Poem' and 'The Birthday Party'. From 'Night School' to 'The Home coming' he shows multiple relationship of a woman.

#### **The Home coming – A Review :**

In Harold Pinter's plays ,the characters' conflicts are more upon psychological intrusion than upon territorial intrusion. In the Home coming the key activity and central source of conflict arises from the fact that the characters seek to find a situation in which they can be what they wish to be. There is a father, Max who lives in the house with his son Lenny. He has two more sons Joey and Teddy but they do not stay with him. Max's attitudes to others in the household depends much upon the fulfillment of financial obligations and domestic obligation incurred by virtue of family role each has been assigned. But there is always a disagreement on the part of Lenny which is evident by his habit of mocking his father.

On one hand Max boasts of the primacy of man's abilities as a home males, but on the other hand he battles to justify himself in terms of his achievements in the world outside. There are numerous references of Late Maegregor in the

Play, a philanderer, with whom, it seems, Jessie, Max's late wife, was fascinated with. So in this field, Max was a defeated husband which adds to his agony. With the introduction of Sam, Max's brother who is a chauffeur, Lenny gets an opportunity to mock his father again. Sam's relationship with Lenny initially seems to be harmonious but his inquiries regarding Sam's working days are means of mocking his uncle as well. With the entry of Joey, the family that Teddy left behind is fully assembled on stage. Now the focus shifts to Teddy who returns to his home with his wife Ruth. At his return there is an excitement in Teddy which is not shared by Ruth. This lack of shared response exposes the disharmony between them. Lenny gets aware of this disharmony and he begins to approach Ruth, Ruth calmly agrees to his approach, her calm assurance indicates her ability to function within the family. It seems, in her there are other abilities regarding male/female relationships than those demanded of a dutiful wife. With her authoritarian attitude towards Lenny, she reminds him of his mother.

Teddy is not welcomed by his father as he had married Ruth against his father's wishes. But when Max comes to know that the couple has three sons, he accepts them for the sake of continuity of family tradition. In this course Max insists on Ruth to take on her domestic role to which she resists. Her resistance to this is an indication of her resistance to her role as Teddy's wife. She discovers her task to create the home in which 'the self' (Pinter 1965 : 52) can operate, for which she needs an ally and that she finds in Lenny. Teddy, for some days goes back to America. During this time Ruth turns to the process of creating the environment in which 'the self' might flourish. She acted as a nude model as her husband was not there and looking for an outlet, she chooses to turn into a professional. When Teddy returns he finds

himself ignored and a very changed Ruth who is too friendly to his two brothers. Teddy tries his best to take Ruth back but he has to retreat alone, this retreat seems no less than a failure in his domestic life. Teddy has to face his inability to reconcile 'the self' that is, a professor of philosophy and 'the self' who is either a dutiful son in London or a dutiful father and husband in America, and he has to make his choice. Ruth has made her, and Teddy is forced to make his. The focus of the family shifts to Lenny and people look on Lenny for his advice, as he was the first to advise Ruth to become a prostitute. So the control of the finances goes directly into the hands of Ruth and her Pimp Lenny.

At the end there is no reconciliation in the play but Pinter remarks that Ruth achieves "a certain kind of freedom" (Pinter 1965 : 62). There is a final irony in the repeated suggestions of cycles in this play, for if the London family is confronted once more by the power of Jessie-figure, so, too, Jessie-figure is confronted by the power of London family once again.

What psychoanalytic critics says about this family is that it suffers from a classic condition known as Mother Fixation, in which an exaggerated reverence is given to the figure of the mother. These people are attracted only to the women who resemble the mother, but because of this the shadow of the incest taboo makes the expression of the sexual desire towards them difficult. So in order to generate sexual excitement they have to degrade the love object, because if they are not degraded they will resemble the mother. Teddy accepts the activities of Ruth easily because he himself has thought of Ruth as a prostitute in order to establish a sexual relationship with her. Again Ruth's acceptance of the ideas of Lenny, can be an outlet of her suppressed desires to be a commercial 'model of body'. ( Pinter1965 : 64).

**Conclusion :**

Harold Pinter with his Spanish-Jewish East End London background is a great English playwright. His approach to theatre is very different from that of new wave of dramatists which began in 1956 with the production of John Osborne's 'Look Back in Anger'. Pinter has obvious influences of the drama of the mid-century but he provides it with his own post-existential stance. The sense of loneliness, menace and fear of the unknown have added a new depth and dimension to British Drama. His attempt at psychological realism has made him one of the most successful British playwrights writing in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century.

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