

The Idea of Communication and Solitude In Pinter's The Dumb Waiter

By: Instructor Assistant Alaa'.M. Abdulrazaq

UNIVERSITY OF ALANBAR- COLLEGE OF EDUCATION
FOR WOMEN
ENGLISH DEPARTMENT

Abstract

This study deals with Harold Pinter's concept of communication and solitude. We note that Pinter influenced by the events that take place in World War II, the impact on the individual in particular and society in general appears in most of his works.

Most of Pinter's works belong to absurd theatre, which means the inability of anyone to explain what life is really about. The theatre of absurd conveys many themes such as the human loneliness in a world without God, the inability to communicate; especially the impact of World War II causes the feeling of loneliness, isolation in society. So the individual in such states may express his depress through anger and hostility, the best example for these states is Pinter's *The Dumb Waiter*.

This study falls in three sections and conclusion.

Section one is an introduction about *The Dumb Waiter*. Section two presents the idea of communication and solitude in *The Dumb Waiter*. Section three is about the influence of Samuel Beckett on Pinter's *The Dumb Waiter*. And finally the conclusion sums up the final findings and the main idea behind choosing this study.

الخلاصة

تتعلق هذه الدراسة بمفهوم الكاتب هارولد بنتر بالتواصل والعزلة . حيث نلاحظ أن بنتر متأثر بأحداث الحرب العالمية الثانية . فتأثير هذه الحرب على اغلب أعماله ظهر على الفرد بصورة خاصة وعلى المجتمع بصورة عامه .

اغلب أعمال بنتر تعود إلى مسرح العبث ، الذي يعني عدم قدرة أي احد على تفسير وجود الحياة . مسرح العبث يحمل عدة معاني من ضمنها وحدة الإنسان في الكون من دون اله، وعدم قدرته على التواصل خصوصاً تأثير الحرب العالمية الثانية سبب الشعور بالوحدة والعزلة في المجتمع. أذن الفرد في هذه الحالات يمكن أن يعبر عن الضغوطات بالغضب والاعتداء . فمسرحية بنتر النادل الأخرس هي أفضل مثال على ذلك .

هذه الدراسة تقع ضمن ثلاثة أقسام وخاتمه. القسم الأول مقدمه عن مسرحية النادل الأخرس. القسم الثاني يقدم فكرة التواصل والعزلة في مسرحية النادل الأخرس. القسم الثالث هو عن تأثير صامويل بكيت على مسرحية بنتر النادل الأخرس. وأخيرا أختامه التي تلخص الحلول النهائية والفكرة الأساسية خلف اختيار هذه الدراسة.

CONTENTS

Title	Page
Abstract	i
Contents	ii
I. Introduction.	1
II. The Idea of communication and Solitude in Pinter's The Dumb Waiter.	2
III. The Influence of Samuel Beckett on Pinter's The Dumb Waiter.	6
Conclusion	
NOTES	12
BIBLIOGRAPHY	13
	15

I. Introduction:

The Dumb Waiter was written in 1957; it was the second play after The Room, written in the same year. It's a one act play, in which one can find the same situation familiar in Pinter's plays: It's a play of an imaginary picture of the close room, in which there are few characters sheltering temporarily from the dark mysterious world. In fact the whole play takes place in a kitchen room. In this play, there are two characters, Ben and Gus, who are hired killers in a secret organization for assassination. They are waiting in a basement for an order to do the next mission. They kill the time arguing over different matters including ,the next mission, their victims, their boss, and even the place in which they waiting. However, at the end of the play, Ben receives an order to kill Gus, and the play ends with Ben directing his gun towards Gus.¹

The title of the play, The Dumb Waiter ,is not a reference to a person; instead, it is a small elevator used for conveying food and other goods between floors, usually in restaurants or hotels. This device, with its accompanying speaking tube, becomes an agent for murder as the play ends, but it also serves as a symbol for the broken one-sided communication between Gus and Ben. It is impossible for these characters to communicate in a true way, just as the dumb waiter restricts language to one person at a time either in the form of an abbreviated note or the speaking tube.

1

II. The Idea of Communication and Solitude in

The Dumb Waiter

One of the most important themes of Pinter's plays is the inability of human beings to understand (or communicate with) each other, because the characters differ from one another in their mental abilities. This will cause misunderstanding between the characters , which leads to comic situations , even if the subjects they are talking about are tragic . This is very explicit in The Dumb Waiter .

The Dumb Waiter is a play that depicts the solitude of the individual in modern society , especially those who have slight education , and who suffer deeply from the continuous pressure of the industrial society. It criticizes very clearly the organization and obedience , dehumanizing the human being in the process.³

Their society prevents them from disclosing their real feelings. Such pressure and in justice which cause their frustration are regard as a social aggression under which the simple individuals fall .4

Gus can be seen as an outsider in The Dumb Waiter, because he tries to realize the truth about everything that surrounds him , including the room , the town , his job and his victims. His aim is to be free from the restrictions his society imposes up on him .so , he is a symbol of protest

2

against everything his society represents .the organization that represents

the superpower in Gus's world will not allow him to protest against this superpower , he is convicted to death .5

This is the main problem of Gus as an outsider, verification .Gus's uncertainty about everything as very clear in his conversation with Ben about the football game:

Gus: I saw the villa get beat in a cup-tie once. Who was

It against now? white shirt . It was one-all at half-

Time. I'll never forget it . Their opponents won by a

Penalty. Disputed. They got beat two-one, anyway,

Because of it, you were there yourself.

Ben: Not me.

Gus: yes, you were there . Don't you remember that

Disputed penalty?

Gus: he went down just inside the area. Then they said he

Was just acting, I didn't think the other blocker touched

Him myself. But the referee had the ball on the spot.

Ben: Didn't touch him! What are you talking about? He laid

Him out flat!

Gus : Not the villa .The villa don't play that sort of game.

(The Dumb Waiter,P.649)

3

Ben on other hand ,accept whatever Wilson tells him to do , making him a human dumb waiter . His betrayal of Gus at Wilson's request suggests what workers will do to gain the acceptance of their superiors . The theme of betrayal is a constant theme in Pinter's play's ; he has a play entitled Betrayal .6

From the early point of the play ,it is obvious that the relation between these two persons has reached a precarious degree of tension. They do not trust each other .They can not even communicate peacefully, for Ben does not allow Gus the opportunity to express his opinions or to protect his ideas more than ever when he is trying to be truthful. Their discussion about whether to say " light the kettle " or "light the gas" is a good example for such fallibility of communication that Gus says at the beginning that " I can light the kettle now" (The Dumb Waiter,P.650) but, then he correct his mistake that is to say "light the gas ."

As Gus is a symbol of protest against his society and specially against Ben's attitude when he does not permit Gus the chance of protest and to put an end to their conversation . Therefore, Gus takes the hands from his throat and says " All right , all right." (The Dumb Waiter,P.651) .

4

Thus Gus hesitates between remain a common person who accepts the other's decisions or to be an outsider and bear that responsibility . He has understood the rules of the game ,and decides to protest .

Gus reaches the peak of his ability to take a decision of a protest is in the moment of his departure of the stage angrily to drink a glass of water since he can not have a cup of tea . At this stage the end of the play comes with end of Gus when the organization sends Ben the instructions for killing the first coming person who is Gus .7

5

III .The Influence of Samuel Beckett on Pinter's The Dumb Waiter.

Harold Pinter is one of the outstanding contemporary British playwrights. He was born in London , the son of a Jewish tailor .He began act in plays at his grammar school , and later received a grant to study at London's prestigious Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts .8

Pinter's works belong to the theatre of absurd. He was greatly influenced by Samuel Beckett, and the pioneers of the absurd theatre .His plays generally take place in a signal, prison – like room is temporary shelter for world .9

Pinter's plays are ambiguous .Many critics fail to analyze his plays because of the amount of ambiguity they contain. His plays never offer solutions at the end , because they end mysteriously .The Dumb Waiter is a good example .It ends as Ben directs his gun towards Gus , an end that surprises and puzzles many critics .

6

The influence of Samuel Beckett on Harold Pinter is apparent in The Dumb Waiter . As in Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* , in Pinter's *The Dumb Waiter* , there are two characters , one is dominant (Ben) , while the other is submissive (Gus) . These characters are also waiting in one place for a mysterious person , Wilson , who will never come throughout the play . Moreover ,Pinter's use of repetition and silence also shows the influence of Beckett .

The latter's primary use of these is to suggest the ideas of alienation and the approach of death .Pinter also uses repetition and silence for the same reasons , but with a more sinister ,violent touch .10

All the time of the play , there is someone who does not appear on the stage ,Wilson ,the third character in the play , but he is directly or in -directly behind the message from the dumb waiter and speaking tube . He performs an off-stage role similar to that of Godot in Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* , but whereas Godot symbolizes a natural god-like figure for whom the characters wait ,Wilson is a malevolent god whom the characters wait for in violent silence.11

7

Pinter's language is simple ,concise and expressive .Dialogue is of central importance in Pinter's plays, and is perhaps the key to his originality .The characters speech , hesitation and pauses reveal not only their own alienation and the difficulties they have in communication , but also the many layers of meaning that can be contained in their statements.12

The language used in *The Dumb Waiter* is one of the important things in the play .Pinter's language is full of pauses and silences. Ben's most prominent response to Gus's constant questions about the nature of their job is silence . Lurking underneath this silences is always the theatre of violence and the anticipation of something deathly.13

Pinter is known for the innate violence in his characters' language ,violence that lurks beneath the clipped structure of the language, and nearly causes the

physical violence. This is very clear in the arguments of Ben and Gus over the phrase "Light the kettle."¹⁴

Pinter's use of repletion also points to violence and the nearness of death. Gus almost always has to repeat and rephrase his important questions to Ben, questions that touch upon darker issues Ben does not wish to reveal, as it is clear at the end of the play.¹⁵

8

Ben's language denotes other parts of his personality ,especially his shame over his lower class . He feigns understanding the names of the orders for exotic dishes sent down via the dumb waiter .When they run of food in the basement, he tells Gus (who yells up the hatch) to observe decorum ,then strains to make a formal apology . He is also immensely pleased when the person upstairs uses Ben's phrase "Light the kettle".

Like Gus , Ben is a slave to the organization (one with several " departments ") , but he does not have the same class-consciousness as Gus ; his partner is more aware of their unfortunate lot in life , while Ben considers themselves " fortunate" and diverts himself with hobbies .He also accepts whatever Wilson tells him to do , making him as much as manipulated mute carrier of action as Gus is to Ben - human "dumb waiter ".His betrayal of Gus at Wilson's behest is an unsettling reminder of what workers will do to gain the acceptance of their superiors .¹⁶

Gus eventually confesses , " It was the girl made me start to think ." (*The Dumb Waiter*,P.651) with these words , Gus marks his fault for which he , as an outsider .They mark the end of the enterprise of Gus and Ben .Because with declaring this guilt Gus's vision about his profession becomes very comprehensible.

9

Gus's feelings of guilt are quite clear and being mentioned in *The Dumb Waiter* . It is sharply observed , as Esslin suggests , that Gus " in the process of developing guilt feelings ; his discipline is getting slack ."¹⁷ Gus tells the audience that his last victim was a girl and so his job was an unusually messy one and so Gus said :

What a mess . Honest ,I can't remember a mess like

That one .They don't seem to hold together like men,

Women.A looser texture, like., Didn't she spread ,eh?

She didn't half spread ,kaw !¹⁸

Therefore , things can not persist as to be in the past. Batty paints out that "Gus's behavior and changing attitudes implicate him , whereas Ben remains the consummate professional."19 He reaches the point that what is going on in this room is a test for them :

Gus: (feverishly) I told you before who owned this place,
Didn't? I told you.

(Ben hits him viciously on the shoulder.)

I told you who ran this place ,didn't I?

(Ben hits him viciously on the shoulder .)

(violently.)well, what's he playing all these games

For? That's what I want to know. what's he doing it for?

Ben: What games ?

Gus: (Passionately,advancing) what's he doing it fo?

We've been through our tests , haven't we ?we got

Right through our tests,years ago,didn't we,we

10

Took them together, don't you remember,didn't we?

We've proved ourselves before now, haven't we ?

We've always done our job.what's he doing all this

For what's the idea ?what's he playing these games for?

(*The Dumb Waiter*,P.658)

11

Conclusion

Harold Pinter is one of the most acclaimed contemporary British playwrights. His most obvious influential is Irish playwright Samuel Beckett, who took silence to a new level. Pinter's silence hint at alienation, boredom, and the slow approach to death. In this regard what Pinter believes in is the fact regarding one's identity which is simply not what he is or who he is but what he does.

The Dumb Waiter reflects the fact that the surroundings do not give the people who are feeling in alienation, their rights in being themselves causing their destruction. In fact they are victims of their own society.

Pinter also believes that people do not wish to be known and do not wish to know other people. Moreover, the people are the victims of their social obligations and restrictions. The individual who tries to keep his uniqueness should be punished ;however , the person can be destroyed not because of an outer force. Rather, there should be inner forces, which are inspired by certain past guilt that affect him and thus destroy him.

12

NOTES

1.*The Dumb Waiter* :Part One: summary and Analysis,file:// A:\4.htm, retrieved in 28/1/2011,P.1-2.

2. *The Dumb Waiter* :Themes, Motifs ,and symbols,file:// A:\2011.P.2.

3.Ansam Riyadh.Al.Ma'arof, Outsiders and the Impact of the Aggressive Forces on Them in Selected plays of Harold Pinter.University of Tikrit 2003,P.49.

4.Martin Esslin ,Harold Pinter: The playwright.(London: Methuen, 1982) ,P.77.

5.George E. Wellworth , The Theatre of protest and paradox. (New York: University Press, 1964)P.227.

6. *The Dumb Waiter* :Analysis of Major characters,htm.2011.p.2.

7.Mark Batty ,Harold Pinter .(London: Northcote House publishers Ltd, 2001)P.17.

8.*The Dumb Waiter*: Contex,htm.2010 .P.1.

13

9.Ruby Cohn & Bernard F. Dukore, eds., Twelfth Century Drama: England, Irland, the united States ,(New York: Random House,1966),PP.617 -18.

10. *The Dumb Waiter* :Part One: summary and Analysis,file:// A:\4.htm, retrieved in 28/1/2011,P.1-2.

11. *The Dumb Waiter* :Themes, Motifs ,and symbols,file:// A:\2011.P.2.

12.Encyclopedia Britanica, Pinter,Harold,htm.2010.P.1.

13. The Dumb Waiter :Themes, Motifs ,and symbols,file:// A:\2011.P.2.

14. The Dumb Waiter :Part Two: summary and Analysis,file:// A:\4.htm, retrieved in 28/1/2011,P.1-2.

15. The Dumb Waiter :Themes, Motifs ,and symbols,file:// A:\2011.P.2.

16.Derek Wayan, Spark Notes on *The Dumb Waiter*.WWW.Spark Notes .com //Drama / *The Dumb Waiter*.p1-2

17.Esslin,p.76.

18.Ibid.p.76. 19.Batty,p.17.

14

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Al-Ma'arof ,ansam Riyad. Outsiders and the Impact of the Aggressive Forces on Them in Selected plays of Harold Pinter.

University of Tikrit 2003.

Batty,Mark.Harold Pinter.London: Northcote House publishers Ltd,2001.

Britanica,Encyclopedia,Pinter,Harold,fill://c:\program htm,2010.

Cohn, Ruby & Bernard F.Dukore, eds., Twentieth Century Drama:

England ,Ireland, the United States, New York: Random House ,1966.

Encarta,Encyclopedia,Pinter,Harold, 1993-2003.Microsoft corporation.

Esslin,Martin.Harold Pinter:The Playwright.London:Methuen,1982.

Pinter,Harold ."The Dumb Waiter." In Types of Drama: Plays and

Essays.4th editions.Edited by Barnet,Sylvan Morton Berman,and

William Burto.Boston:Little Brown and Company,1985.

Wayane,Derek. Spark Notes on *The Dumb Waiter*.WWW.Spark Notes

.com //Drama / *The Dumb Waiter*.

Wellworth,George E.The Theatre of protest and paradox. New York:

University press,1964.

15