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The Bases of Postmodernism in Harold Pinter's play "The Homecoming"

Salome Davituliani

Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University, Georgia
davituliani.salome1@gmail.com

Abstract

The modern world, in which we live, is regarded as the period of postmodernism. In this period it is hard to perceive the reality in a right way. So are Harold Pinter's plays. Mostly they are somewhere between reality and absurdity. Based on his writings, he is considered to be, one of the first postmodernist authors. The simplicity of the dialogues makes the feeling that the play is easy to understand, but after reading/watching all the relationships between the characters you feel a bit confused. Nothing is real, and exactly this is the reality of their world, not to be real. And not only the relationships but the characters themselves do not know who they are in reality and it is hard for them to identify their own personality. As it has been already mentioned above, in Pinter's plays, we can easily find the elements of postmodernism. In the given papers this idea will be expressed depending on the play "The Homecoming", where Pinter presents us so-called "family", the group of people, and shows us their emptiness from the family relationships. Even relationships between father and sons, and wife and husband are not real. All this are presented with the very simple language and this is also the essential characteristic of the postmodern world, also the difficulty of understanding each other, and almost meaningless words. Pinter uses other forms of communication such as pauses and silences, in a manner typical of postmodernism. There should be also noted that "the homecoming" the title itself, makes the reader/audience confused, the expectation about perceiving the title at the beginning does not coincide the perception of it in the ending part. The aim of this paper is to highlight the key elements of postmodernism in Harold Pinter's play "The Homecoming" and to show us once again, that Pinter's works are really important in our postmodern world.

Key words: Harold Pinter, absurdity, postmodernism, reality

Introduction

Postmodern epoch is a period in which we live today, where Jean Baudrillard's "simulations", create processes that are called "Hyper realistic", by Umberto Eco. And all this is ultimately a picture of where it is difficult to properly evaluate different values, facts and events and determine them at all. This is the period when reality and unreality are combined with each other and they have no limits between them. On the surface, we have a lot of valuable things for humanity and

they are empty from their values. There are absolutely no determined elements, such as time and space, and everything are mixed together. The concept of "truth" and its significance has disappeared, as in this world the general decoders have collapsed and lost their value. In his famous Nobel lecture, in 2005, Harold Pinter notes: "There are no hard distinctions between what is real and what is unreal, or between what is true and what is false. A thing is not necessarily either true or false; it can be both true and false" (Pinter, 2005). That's what his plays are. Harold Pinter is one of the famous British writers of the 20th century, whose works are really different for his period writings. In his playwriting he introduces reality and unreality, truth and false together with each other. Pinter is considered to be one of the Postmodernist authors.

The Bases of Postmodernism in Harold Pinter's play "The Homecoming"

In The Play, "The Homecoming", Harold Pinter represents the characters that are family members. It is easy for the reader to consider their relationships as a reality. However, in the course of the play you realize that the reality is at the same time surreal, because their family relationships do not correspond to the concept of the "family", the definition of which is in our minds. Periodically you realize that they have a completely false attitude towards each other. In this play, Pinter, simultaneously identifies one and the same concept, in both case, like reality and unreality. It is not really easy to understand the play itself. So Noorbakhsh Hooti and Samaneh Shooshtarian in their article "A Postmodernist Reading of Harold Pinter's "The Homecoming", note that "Since Pinter does not disclose the things clearly, the spectators have to construct the play out of small hints that may or may not be true. Ambiguous cases within the play, then, are numerous. It is not clear that Lenny's story about beating up women is true or not; it is not revealed where in America Teddy teaches or if he truly has a teaching job; and, we did not inform what Ruth means when she tells us that she has been a model for the body. The whole past experiences of Max and his dead wife, Jessie, is clouded mysteriously; all of his recollections of his wife are vague and ambiguous. In short, there are many doubts about the characters and their interactions throughout the play" (Hooti & Shooshtarian, 2011, p. 49).

Derrida's deconstruction is a phenomenon that accompanies Pinter's plays. "Derrida proceeds to talk about the center of a structure, which controls the structure by orienting and organizing it. Derrida admits that an unorganized structure is unconceivable and that a structure without a center is unthinkable, but he contends that the center delimits and diminishes the possible play within the structure. Play, then, is whatever goes against the organization and coherence of the structure. Derrida now points out the paradox that the center of the structure must be both inside and outside the structure. It must be a part of the structure, but also independent of it, in order to control it. Derrida appears to delight in

refuting the Law of Identity. He exclaims that since the center is both inside and outside the structure, “the center is not the center” (Derrida, 1993, p. 279). Nevertheless, he continues to write about the center, confident that it can exist and function while not being itself” (Cohen, 2011). It's hard to understand, who is his main character and here we can look for elements of postmodernism. When any determiners are disappeared, the perception of any character is not simple. Also, it is important that some events and facts with which humans from the early centuries, have some attitudes and background knowledge, Pinter is quite cynical and does not offer any coincidence to the reader /viewer in the given text. On the contrary, all the previous expectations are related to different facts and events are disappeared. As for the perception of reality and reality in one of the interviews, he notes: “If you press me for a definition, I'd say that what goes on in my plays is realistic, but what I'm doing is not realism” (Burkman, 1971, p. 3). Everything that happens in the play, we can consider as the reality of the modern world. The reality of which is less important the values that have once been determined by different events. Pinter shows us the postmodern reality in which daily elements takes the larger place than some other important issues for humanities.

For example of this idea, we can discuss a passage where Lenny asks Teddy to think philosophically about Shakespearean phrase, like “being or not-being”. When he gets silence in response to this phrase, later, he asks him to take a table of philosophical discussions and talk about it, but Teddy does says nothing about it too:

“Teddy: I'm afraid I'm the wrong person to ask.”

Lenny: But you're a philosopher. Come on, be frank. What do you make of all this business of being and not-being?

Teddy: What do you make of it?

Lenny: Well, for instance, take a table, philosophically speaking, what is it?

Teddy: A table.

Lenny: Ah. You mean it's nothing else but a table. Well some people would envy your certainly.”
(Pinter, 1965, p. 52)

With this episode, we can really confirm postmodern basics, where the words are missing their meanings. Teddy's silence can be considered one of the postmodern characteristics. This is the period when everything is already said about the issue of “being or not-being”, and it does not say anything, or it's no more interesting for anyone in this modernity. World War II humanity is more concerned about the daily problems and there is hard for them being interested in philosophical issues and the play itself starts with such simple phrase: “What have you done with the scissors?” (Pinter, 1965, p. 7).

Also, it is very interesting episode when Teddy notes, that the table is a table and nothing more. The reader / viewer will definitely recall the Platonic theory of ideas, where Plato speaks about the existence of the idea before the matter exists. And we see Teddy, a philosopher, who spent six years teaching philosophy in America. And we are waiting that he will say at least, the simple phrase about the table and the theory of ideas that you have already thought in your mind when Lenny asked about its discussion, but no, he is silent. He says that the table is just a table. In such a time you go to the conclusion that in the modern, postmodern world, there is no time for philosophical discussions.

It is important to note, that Pinter actively uses and reveals the daily elements, which are given some sort of ritual importance. For example, the process of tea and its making is an absolute ritual, and this is the only issue in the course of the play, where the characters come in conjunction with each other and where the dialogue is in logical coincidence. In other cases the dialogues are not logical. The characters do not listen to each other, and sometimes we can say, that they cannot even communicate in the right way. For example, when Teddy and Ruth are talking in the beginning part Teddy says something about his family and Ruth answer is very far from this point:

“Teddy: They’re very warm people, really, very warm. They’re my family.

Ruth: I think I’ll have a breath of air.” (Pinter, 1965, p.23)

In general, an important thing is the title itself and the change of its perception during the play. When Teddy’s character appears in the beginning part of the play, we consider that the title belongs to his return home. However, the play changes its perception quite differently, and the suspicion is that this title is for Ruth, a foreign character for Teddy’s family who came with her husband and who realizes that her place is here. She finds herself and understands that someone needs her. She feels comfortable here and does not want to return to America at all, unlike Teddy. On the contrary after his returning home, Teddy finds out that there are too little in common between him and his family members. They do not even know him well. Teddy does not want to be like them and he says: “You’re just objects. You just ... move about. I can observe it. I can see what you do. It’s the same as I do. But you’re lost in it. You won’t get me being... I won’t be lost in it.” (Pinter, 1965, p.62)

As we have already mentioned Derrida’s deconstruction we can also consider, as the difference of perception of the different concept. The concept of "homecoming" is a sort of circle making of old legends and fairy tales. In almost every story and fairy tale, the main hero goes out of the house, passes the way on which he gains some necessary trips and finally returns home. The main is to make the circle which is perfected with the homecoming. In the case of Pinter everything is on the contrary, he offers us the deconstruction of this classical formation. And

his play is starting with returning home, and later he changes the reader's/viewer's perception of this concept too.

It is important that Pinter shows us the relationships between the characters' with the very simple dialogues. And depending on those dialogues we can say that the given relationships are not real. Also, here should be mentioned that very often Pinter uses the "silence" and the "pause". And he notes that sometimes the silent has more meaning than the words. "We have heard many times that tired, grimy phrase, "failure of communication," and this phrase has been fixed to my work consistently. I believe the contrary. I think that we communicate only too well in our silence, in what is unsaid. And that what takes place is continual evasion, desperate rear-guard attempts to keep ourselves to over selves. I'm not suggesting that no character in a play can ever say what in fact he means, not at all. I have found that there invariably does come a moment when this happens, where he says something, perhaps, which he has never said before. And where this happens, what he says is irrevocable, and can never be taken back" (Burkman, 1971, p. 323).

Depending on all this we can say that Pinter really manages to show the world where the silence is preferred by words. In general, if there is any idea in our minds, it is always ours. And in such a situation it is real and accurate. At the expense of its accuracy we can remain the same true as it is in us. As soon as we begin to express this opinion, we try to find the right words and often in this search we cannot express the idea with its perfection and its original importance, like it was in our mind, but if it will be announced it already exists. Right because of these characteristics of the word and speech, Pinter mentions that none of his characters can express the idea and thoughts like they really have in their minds. Consequently, as we have already noted, for this reason, Pinter often uses "pause" in his plays.

Pinter believes that with the help of the language, this means dialogue of characters, the viewer should understand their personalities, even though he does not offer their biographies or advance information about their lives. Pinter also points out that this is a feature of the language, according to which there is something else to be seen behind the saying, what has not been said yet.

Conclusion

Thus, Harold Pinter can truly be regarded as the author of whom we can find the origins of the world in which we live today. One of the most important of these bases is the disappearance of the determinants. All this is clearly not just about his characters but also in their relationship. His heroes are not much expressive and it is difficult to determine their character at all. In the background, that time and spatial characteristics are disrupted, we can assume that Pinter shows us the global reality and not only the reality that is happening in a room. He represented the common background, not only for its characters but also for the whole world

of his time. So, Pinter is really the author whose work is important in different ways, not only in literature but also in the playwright. He also managed to show the features of the world, which is still problematic and relevant.

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Contact

Salome Davituliani
Georgia, Tbilisi. 0141
davituliani.salome1@gmail.com