

HAVING A PEEK INTO *THE ROOM* OF HAROLD PINTER

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Özet

Sessizliğin konuşma, konuşmanın bir anlaşamama olgusuna dönüştüğü Pinter’ın “the Room” adlı oyununa farklı bir açıdan bakılınca görülenlerin paylaşıldığı bir yazı. Küçük bir odada, iki kişilik bir toplumda karşılıklı çıkar elde etme olgusu etrafında birleştikleri iddia edilen iki insan arasındaki ilişkinin bir yorumu. Pinter’ın karakterlerine yüklediği görev nedeniyle “ne tam ispatlanabilecek ne de inkar edilebilecek” yorumlar. Marksist pencereden bakıldığında bu oda içerisindeki birlikteliğin Bert in (koca) Rose üzerinde uyguladığı baskı, dış dünyaya kapalılığın getirdiği daha iyi olanı görmemişlikten doğan mevcudu kaybetme korkusuyla her şeyi beğenme durumu. Karı koca arasındaki bir ilişkiden çok, patron ve çalışan arasındaki ilişkiye benzetilen bir ilişki. Rose’a geçmişindeki muhtemelen bugüne göre daha güzel olan durumunu hatırlatmak üzere gelen Riley’nin Bert tarafından öldürülüp bir anlamda tarihin susturulması. Sonuçta iki kişilik bu toplum ve bu toplumdaki baskı rejimi bir şekilde sona eriyor. Rose’un etrafında dönen olayları apolitik olmasından dolayı görememesi fiziksel bir körlüğe dönüşüyor, Bert ise en büyük desteğini kaybediyor.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Toplum, Marksizm, Baskı, eş

Introduction

When we say ‘society’ mostly we mean some hundred, thousand or some million people. What about a society of the two: a husband and a wife? This is not a usual

Having A Peek Into The Room of Harold Pinter

Kadir ALKAYA

one: the two are together for the purpose of satisfying only one of their desire(s). What is more, theirs is a closed society, they do not like any one into their society and any interference from outside. Any external interference to that society is accepted as hostility because the leader, the king of the society does not want to lose his power and property...One may think this portrayal can not be applied to *The Room* by Pinter and his two characters, Bert and Rose. Because the work is known mostly its 'Pinteresque' properties: "oblique dialogues, repetitive interspersed with pauses, menacing and loaded with hidden meanings" (Sharma 1) . The play is "full of dark hints and pregnant suggestions, with the audience left uncertain as to what to conclude" (1): we do not know their history, the exact nature of Bert's job, if Riley is Rose's father, if the landlord is a real one Those uncertainties and some hints let us have our own comments, and through this premise we build our discussion. Another standing point of ours will be Peter Hall's assertion that "all Pinter's characters have masks...almost never slips" (Sharma 2). "Like all statements of fact in Pinter, they are capable of neither proof nor denial" (Stone 3). In the work none of the characters "confide their concerns to an audience, offer [an] explanation or [a] conventional denouement. Nor above all "any motives are given for the actions" in the play (Sharma 1). Language, menace and memory are used to create and destroy masks, while masks are used to protect the motivations, emotions and insecurities of the characters (Hrisohoidis 9). However, in this paper, we will have a look into the room from a Marxist window putting the silences and pauses into words and certifying some

Having A Peek Into The Room of Harold Pinter

Kadir ALKAYA

uncertainties; taking away the masks the characters are wearing; not taking the words at face value and share what we see inside the room.

The room may be read as a short play of a husband and a wife who have problems of communication and whose marriage will end soon. However, when we see the room through a Marxist point of view “the room, in effect, becomes a sort of static society whose creator, dictator... is Bert” (Hrisohoidis 11). At first look, one can see the main characters in Pinter’s *The Room* are working class, which is obvious from the room’s furniture (defined in stage directions), characters’ clothing and the language they use. “Within the room Bert creates his own order and he reduces her to a function or a role” (Hrisohoidis 11): Rose is the worker and Bert is the boss. Bert is a van driver and bread winner of the house but the boss of the ‘Hudd society’. He works outside, probably earns money but within the society he is the boss. The relationship between Bert and Rose is more like a boss and worker than that of a wife and husband. It is clear that Bert does not appreciate her services, never says ‘thank you’ for what she does. This is quite like the typical bosses. They mostly do not thank because they consider that somehow they pay for the service.

“Rose’s husband does not speak [foretelling] his authoritative nature in the house. (Sharma 2). “Pinter’s characters are reticent to reveal their identity, language being a way of disguising one’s motives and aspirations, an instrument of dominance and evasion.” (Roşca 95) We see oppression through silence: Rose speaks and she wants to share something but Bert keeps silent through which he acquires power. When you ask someone a question and you do not get an answer you feel uneasy

Having A Peek Into The Room of Harold Pinter

Kadir ALKAYA

about the person and what he or she is thinking. This is another type of oppression you keep people under control.

“The conscious life of Pinter’s characters directly or indirectly determines, and is determined by, their surroundings” (Hrisohoidis 103). In the room it is obvious that for Rose her consciousness is limited to the room’s diameter and in Bert’s allowance wide. Rose is a worker in the room, she is not aware of the value of her service and herself the only thing she is doing is serving Bert and asking him for the approval that if it is ok for him. She asks “I look after you, don’t I, Bert?” to get an approval (Pinter 95). Even about the rasher, she asks “What about the rasher? Was it all right? It was a good one” (92). She thinks the rasher is good but she still needs an approval. Because she thinks she can not lead a life if Bert does not exist and the question “I look after you, don’t I, Bert?” was asked to show that she is not a useless one in the room to throw out. In this context, her fear of the outside can be commented as “the fear of the uncanny” and fear of being away from (or losing) work. We will take the latter suiting our discussion. Most of the workers who think if their boss disemploys them they can not find another job and can not lead a life. This is the feeling of the working class that causes the oppression of the oppressor. What is more, in the sentence “It is better than the basement, anyway” you see thankfulness for the present situation rather than bettering it up or having the desire for more. Once they are aware of the power of their service they will see that the bosses are nothing without them, that is ridding of the alienation of the workers to their products (or services) then is the time that we will see the revolution. This is the case in real life as

Having A Peek Into The Room of Harold Pinter

Kadir ALKAYA

it is in Hudd's society. Therefore, we can not talk about the class consciousness in Marxist sense and revolution under these circumstances in the room. We can say there is this class "unconsciousness" in our case. "Consciousness exists [in Pinter's plays] as a distinct entity to the exclusion of others" (Stone 1). All Rose cares is only "we're not bothered... nobody bothers us" (Pinter 93). Nobody should ever intrude because "this room is occupied" (108). Pinter's working class is not engaged in class conflict, lack[s] any form of political consciousness [and they] are oppressed. And this "apoliticalness can be construed as supportive of the status quo" (Stone 7). Rose thinks that she has her share from the wealth of the room as far as we can deduce from her words: "The room keeps warm" (Pinter 91), "[I can look]" out of the window. It was enough for me" (91), In this place "you know where you are" (92). However, here in this transaction Bert has the big share being the boss.

The characters are "estranged from himself (or herself), and they experience a divorce between the self and objectifications which it has posited out as itself". This fracture "is experienced as a thoroughgoing imperfection in all conscious life. Hegel calls this 'unhappy conscious'. Being alienated from the self and estranged from the others they can not have "the reality for his/herself. Instead they project their essence and value, in a Marxist sense into objects." (Stone 8) This is room itself for Rose in our case. Another side of the alienation is that "the propertied class and the class of the proletariat" represent the same human "self-alienation". But the former feels comfortable and confirmed in this self-alienation, knowing that this alienation is "its

Having A Peek Into The Room of Harold Pinter

Kadir ALKAYA

own power and possessing it”, the latter feels “ruined” in this alienation and sees in it its impotence and “the actuality of an inhuman existence” (Cox 4).

In our case Bert seems to be the propertied one within the room and he is the comfortable side with it because alienation is in his power. Rose feels impotent about leaving this society and she grasps firmly to the room. When we consider Rose’s words “No, this room is all right for me. I mean you know where you are. It is good up here”. “This is a good room...The ceiling on top of you...” (Pinter 93). The word ‘no’ at the beginning of the sentence means there is something going on at the background in her mind. May be it is the question if this place is a good one for a living or should she find another place to live or as we see in the following paragraphs she wants to go back her earlier life somewhere else. We can see that she wants to go back to her earlier life at the end of the play through her dialogue with Riley. At the beginning she says she doesn’t know who he is but soon after when the blind negro introduces his name as ‘Riley’ she says “...What? That’s not your name. That’s not your name.” (112). This name reminds her of someone important for her. Riley has a message for her “Your father wants you to come home”. Going further he says “I want you to come home [Sal]” (114). She reacts to the utterance of the name ‘Sal’ as twice saying “Don’t call me that” (114) which is most probably her real name. Riley’s saying “So, you are here” she answers “Not Sal” so she is here with another name, a fake name and most probably she doesn’t want anybody know that she is (they are) here. People hide when they feel insecure or when they do something illegal. Sal is here may be to

Having A Peek Into The Room of Harold Pinter

Kadir ALKAYA

be secure but after some sentences we see that she twice said “I have been here” meaning I want to come back but I have been her “for long”. She tries to recognize Riley touching his head. We could opine this as she is trying to understand if it is really his father. Because first Riley says “Your father” wants you to come home and soon after he says “I” want you to come home. So he identifies himself as her father. What is the relationship between Riley and Rose? “Pinter rarely provides these sorts of answers; he seems to be more interested in the fact of these alliances than reasons for them” (Coppa 49-50). And she is checking if this is true by touching him. Her reactions getting smoother and finally she says “I have been here”. One or two more sentences of Riley would make her say yes for his call. This is the moment Rose’s mask falls she is not happy there and she is under oppression not only because of an outer menace but also as we will see that of Bert’s. But at that moment The ruling class of the society enters and ends this interaction to keep his worker within his society. Rose starts remembering her past through Riley’s words and she was almost convinced. Bert, who has been silent so far, came in and ended this process by killing Riley. The man who hasn’t spoken so far spoke for the first time in the play and His action spoke louder, and he obliterated history by killing Rose’s ‘father’. He changed the course of the history to guarantee his economic situation in the room. This is “a power game” for Bert “a battle for position” which must be won (Mishra 1). Also through that murder he thought he kept his place safe from the intruders so that Rose, his worker will not leave the place and he will go on his present life as it is. As most other things in the play, the possibility that if she could achieve his aim is not certain.

Having A Peek Into The Room of Harold Pinter

Kadir ALKAYA

One thing which is certain is that Rose cries “I can’t see”. This blindness is passed from Riley and can be commented as she takes Riley’ side. This supports our idea that she is actually not happy here in this room under oppression. If she were so, she would not react this way. The blindness which strikes Rose at the end of the play symbolically signifies the end of her relationship with Bert. What is more, “by declaring herself blind, Rose declares that she is, on some level, to the person who previously represented everything that she seemed so far” (Coppa 50) Rose is more tied to the blind negro than to her brutish husband who simply “walks away” (Pinter 116). When Bert murdered Riley, “the representative of Rose-Sal’s past, he murdered part of her at the same time. Her past itself perished and she got lost in her new fake life; she is helpless and blind, trapped by Bert” (Petraz 31)

To sum up, the Hudd society has collapsed because Bert’s, the ruling class, oppression did not work anymore. Riley in a way as a savior came in and saved Rose from the oppression at the expense of his life. She as a worker, unconscious of her service’s value and her “apoliticalness” supporting the status quo, could not realize the revolution, but an outer power saved her. Now being blind she is useless for Bert and most probably he will leave her free. Still, one thing Bert has achieved is he obliterated history of Rose by killing Riley, who is possibly Rose’s father. The result seem to be more profitable for Rose than for Bert because she will be free of Bert’s oppression but Bert lost his most important support, his worker.

Having A Peek Into The Room of Harold Pinter
Kadir ALKAYA

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Having A Peek Into The Room of Harold Pinter
Kadir ALKAYA