



Mini Review Paper

Religion and Mode of Presentation in the Works of Franz Kafka and Harold Pinter

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Available online at: www.isca.in

Received 9th February 2013, revised 17th April 2013, accepted 18th July 2013

Abstract

As famous writers, both Franz Kafka and Harold Pinter deal with a variety of issues such as religious, allegorical and psychological ones. In their literary works, they also concentrate on key concepts such as alienation, identity, and absurdity in a world of vacillation and fluctuation. But, what are of great importance to the author of this paper are respectively traces of religion and mode of presentation in both Franz Kafka's novels and Harold Pinter's dramas. Since both authors have some writing styles in common, this paper aims at analyzing these common characteristics too.

Keywords: Literature, novel, Franz Kafka, drama, Harold Pinter, religion, writing style.

Introduction

The first analogy between these two authors is that both of them have a Jewish originality. This should not be seen as a racist perspective, but as one that provides a considerable idea to their psychological make-up and to the way of their growth as authors. Of all the races, the Jewish people, from periods immemorial, have been a roaming group. From the Old Testament Guides like the Genesis, Exodus and Most all judges, it can be quickly seen how they have had to walk in look for of a house or the Guaranteed Area. Though Moses separated them from the yoke of the Pharaohs, he could not take them into the promised land of Canaan. Until the development of Israel after the Second Globe War, the Jewish origin had no set house and was propagated all over the experience around the globe. This reality of Judaism record has tremendous significances for the growth of Judaism authors in common and of Kafka and Pinter in particular. Limitless roaming, exile and drawback are aspects of their intuitive monetary gift. This creates these authors particularly responsive to the lugubrious discussion of Existentialism, especially to the principles like drawback and exile. The popularity of these styles in the works of Kafka and Pinter is illustrative of how the traditional reality of being homeless and endless roaming has become an inalienable aspect of their psychological structure as authors.

Religion in the Works of Franz Kafka and Harold Pinter

As in all religions, in Judaism also God is seen as our Father. But this image is held in the Jewish religion with particular severity. This Father represents the highest and infallible Authority in the world. This Father demands sacrifices from his children as in the story of Abraham and Isaac. More importantly, this Father punishes the children severely if they

disobey His will as in the story of Adam and Eve. It is not only in the story of the Original Sin, but also in the later books of the Old Testament that we find God punishing his chosen seed with exile and homelessness among other things, whenever they indulge in wickedness and sin in sight of God. He sends his scourges to punish the sinners.

There is one more aggravating factor. Hebraic religion conceives God only as Law, whereas Christianity sees Him as Love. Man is guilty of the Original Sin and has, therefore, lost the Paradise, but he can regain it by following the teachings of the Son of God, who with his blood has washed all the sins of mankind. Now in Judaism, there is no such Redeemer and therefore no such hope of salvation. For the Jews, life is only a matter of unquestioning obedience to the Father without any promise of Paradise at the end.

Consequently, along with homelessness, exile and wandering, a sense of guilt, an overpowering awareness of the intransigent Law an apologetic sense for one's existence, and a sense of hopelessness constitute inseparable parts of the inheritance of a Jewish writer. It is of particular interest to see how these themes work out in Kafka's case and later on in Pinter's with some variations. In discussing Judaism, it is interesting to see how the image of God-as-Father has been made into its logical corollary of Father-as-God in Kafka's ease. The original image is subverted and made to stand on its head. Referring to Kafka's long, self-justificatory letter to his father, Politzen argues:.....no doubt, Kafka in Letter to His Father, has not succeeded to direct his writing towards divinity, nevertheless, his embodiment of his father, lies in his equation of: father =Father=God¹.

Thus the Father comes to symbolize all forms of oppressive authority. He is an emblem of the punitive and inscrutable Law.

In Kafka, the family, the work-place, the labyrinthine bureaucracies, the court and the Castle — all stand for this mysterious, mystifying and punishing Authority. Kafka's works broadly speaking are all stories of the pathetic struggle of his protagonists against this supreme, inscrutable and malign Authority, emanating from the Judaic archetypal image of God-as-Father. In Pinter, this image recurs in the form of some menace from the world outside, the Sands or the blind Negro in the case of Rose in *The Room*, the Organization in the case of Stanley in *The Birthday Party* or in a slightly comic form in the figure of Davies in *The Caretaker*.

Kafka's unique and original version of the Original Sin similarly provides an important clue to the way his mind worked and also to one of dominant thematic principles of his works. According to Kafka, Man's Original Sin is double: first, disobedience to God's will by eating the fruit of the Forbidden Tree of Knowledge and secondly, not eating the fruit from the Tree of Life which was not forbidden! Thus all the children of Adam are born tainted with the double guilt— i. having angered God and ii. not having the will to live a full life. The man from the country in the parable 'Before the Law' in *The Trial* is representative of all humanity that chooses to die before the gate, meant only for him, like a dog. As is clear from his Diaries, this constitutes the very nadir of humiliation man can suffer; the lowest point to which man can demean himself. Perhaps that is why, Kafka tries to save his protagonists in *The Trial* and *The Castle* from this final humiliation by making them struggle against the Law. Born guilty as they are, they can gain some modicum of dignity by putting up a fight rather than meekly surrendering to the inscrutable Law. They go down at least fighting. Like Thomas Hardy, Kafka also believes that human dignity consists not always in victory but fighting a losing battle, "sighted, but enduring²."

And it is here that Pinter differs from Kafka, as it will be seen later on in the examination of individual plays. Suffice it to note here that Pinter's characters, unlike Kafka's, give in too meekly, be it Rose or Stanley. Perhaps the reason for this divergence may lie in the writers' lives. Though both of them are oppressed by a feeling of dread and anxiety, for ill or good, Kafka never lived to see the actualization of his fears in the Second World War, never lived to see his sisters perish in the concentration camps of Hitler. But Pinter born later lived through the cataclysmic events of the Second World War and is perhaps more acutely aware of the futility of one's struggle against a blind and insane Authority.

Consequently he is indifferent and pessimistic about such struggles and does not make his characters put up such fight but shows them cowering under the force of some unknown menace from outside. Despite this difference, which may really stem from the circumstances of their lives rather than from their artistic vision, it is quite instructive to trace out Kafka's presence, implicit or otherwise, in Pinter's plays one by one.

Mode of Presentation in the Works of Franz Kafka and Harold Pinter

Before the examining individual plays, however, a brief look at the textual strategies employed by Kafka and Pinter will be beneficial. As is clear from the previous two chapters, both writers present their vision in the non-realist mode. Naturally their works have to be seen as allegories consisting of general overall situation. And this situation, as Martin Esslin pointed out very perceptively, has to be understood as a poetic image³. Any poetic image has two characteristics: i. it appeals to emotions rather than to reason and ii. it lends itself to multiple interpretations. Nonetheless, there is a subtle difference in their deployment of the non-realist mode of presentation. It relates not to the obvious difference between the novelistic and dramatic modes but goes even deeper.

In Kafka, the things that happen are so unrealistic, so far removed from the quotidian world that they seem to be what Aristotle would call improbable possibilities. For a man turning into a monstrous vermin, the Court located in the dingy lodgings of a washerwoman, a painter's studio opening out into the courtroom belong not to the real world as one knows it but rather to the world of dream or even nightmare. But as the stories progress, the latent dreads and anxieties of human existence make these strange and unfamiliar happenings so real that they seem to become a part of our day-to-day life. In short, Kafka so handles the non-realist mode as to make the unfamiliar one look familiar.

In Pinter, on the other hand, things seem to be realistic enough. For instance, nothing could be more 'real' even pedestrian, than two persons sitting in a room. The happenings in Pinter would fall into the Aristotelian category of probable impossibilities. But as the conversation begins, and the external menacing forces increasingly make their presence felt, these ordinary things begin to acquire frightening aspect and become Kafkaesque! Thus in Pinter, the journey is from the familiar to the unfamiliar. To use the words of the Russian Formalists like Shlovosky and Jakobson, like the technique of poetry, Pinter's technique also is one of 'defamiliarization'. Thus Kafka makes the phantasmagorical, nightmarish world a part of our reality, whereas Pinter makes the real world look nightmarish and unreal. This strategic difference is reminiscent of the one between Wordsworth and Coleridge as outlined by the latter in *Biographia Literaria* chapter fourteen where he discusses the occasion of the Lyrical Ballads.

During the first year that Mr. Wordsworth and I were neighbours, our conversations turned frequently on the two cardinal points of poetry, the power of exciting the sympathy of the reader by a faithful adherence to the truth of nature, and the power of giving the interest of novelty by the modifying colours of imaginationthe thought suggested itself.... that a series of poems might be composed of two sorts. In the one, the incidents and agents were to be, in part at least, supernatural

.....For the second class subjects were to be chosen from ordinary life.....

In this idea originated the plan of the Lyrical Ballads; in which it was agreed, that my endeavours should be directed to persons and characters supernatural... Mr. Wordsworth was to propose to himself as his subject to give the charm of novelty to things of everyday life, by awakening the mind's attention to the lethargy of custom ...but for which, in consequence of the film of familiarity,....we have eyes yet see not, ears that hear not and hearts that neither feel nor understand⁴. This slightly longish quotation not only brings out beautifully the difference in the poetic techniques of the Founding fathers of English Romanticism but serves equally well to highlight the difference in the strategies of the two modern writers. If Kafka makes the nightmarish world a part of our everyday reality, Pinter's rips "the film of familiarity" from off the everyday reality and transforms it into the nightmarish world of Kafka.

Conclusion

Both Kafka and Pinter describe a world dominated by an often intolerable anxiety and rationally inexplicable behavior patterns. Their work can be seen as the fictional equivalent of Freud's scientific attempts to show the depth of the human unconscious.

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