

Kierkegaard's Existential Views on Harold Pinter's Dramaturgy

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Abstract

Soren Kierkegaard (1813-55) focused his attention on the existential elements of our existence; Among these elements the concepts of anxiety, dread, guilt and alienation are of primary importance. Existentialism has tried to discover the mysteries of man's existence, and helped him to find a way out of his loneliness, anxiety and dread that threaten his existence and survival. Man's dread caused by the assumption that he was thrown into this alien world. Pinter has depicted the images of life and death, being and non-being, and the reality of man's reduction into a cipher of non-being. His drama is a bitter commentary on human being's existence. In Pinter's world, peace and security remain a mere illusion, vulnerable to utter annihilation. His characters are paralyzed by anxiety and dread. Man's survival depends upon his existence in a room. It concludes that man's place in the world as Kierkegaard claimed is "insecure and non-securable" (Wick, 2006). Man is thrown into the world, and in his loneliness is paralyzed by anxiety. The source of this anxiety as Kierkegaard claimed is nothingness.

Keywords: *alienation, existence, anxiety, guilt, dread, freedom, responsibility.*

Introduction

Among all the great thinkers who have emerged from Europe in 19th

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century, Soren Kierkegaard (1813-55) was the most influential and engaging one. He is prominent not only because of his impact on 20th century great thinkers and movements, but also because of his deep concern about enquiring themes in philosophy and Western culture. In what would be seen as the domain of existentialism, the ideas of suffering, anxiety, dread, alienation, uncertainty, lack of identity as well as their distinguishing features, have become the common and usual concepts for Soren Kierkegaard. Existence for him is always in a state of flux, in what he calls "the constant process of becoming, and in this state of becoming, nothing is predestined or determined" (O'Hara, 2004, p.69).

Kierkegaard, who had engrossed into the depth of human emotion, was a philosopher who has come to the connection of what underlies beneath the human suffering. For Kierkegaard anxiety was a normal response to the terrifying uncertainty of human condition. Our anxiety is the manifestation of our spirit and freedom, and stems from our contingency. Kierkegaard used the term dread to describe the general apprehension and anxiety in man's life. Anxiety leads to the man's confrontation with nothingness, and with the impossibility of finding ultimate justification for the choice one must make.

Dread and angst as existential terms originated in the works of Kierkegaard. Unlike fear, dread has no object or the object is unknown. In dread, we are not afraid of something but we feel or better to say, experience the anxiety of our own condition. Personal identity deals with questions of our own being like "Who am I?" or "What am I?" which has troubled Western philosophy for years. The lack of identity causes mystery, uncertainty, and ambiguity in human being.

Harold Pinter is one of the most significant and influential playwrights of English literature. The two notable facts about his life are: 1) he is a Jew, born of Jewish parents, and 2) he worked as an actor, for sometime, before he becomes a playwright. He was born on October 10, 1930 in Hackney. He achieved international renown as one of the most complex and challenging post-war dramatists. As influenced by the works of some prominent writers like Kafka, Camus, and Becket, Pinter is considered as one of the promising exponents of theatre of absurd. His plays as Lall (2001, p. 259) asserted, "convey in a symbolic term, man's existential uncertainty, fear, terror, anxiety, menace and the impossibility of his finding any refuge where he can feel permanently safe and secure". As Wicks (2006, p. 217) denoted, in French Existentialism "everyone's place in the world is insecure and non-securable. Rationality provides an

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imperfect style of control and a sense of false security". Pinter is not a conventional or traditional dramatist. His plays have made a complete break with the past.

One significant way of looking at Pinter's works is to consider them as an image of man's existential anxiety. Existentialism, in general, portrays a picture of the world that is shorn of God and man who is alienated, insecure, and devoid of any certainty. Man is caught between choice and the responsibility caused by his own free will. His freedom in choosing brings about dread and anxiety. The elements of existentialism as mentioned above are apparently Pinter's concern in his drama. Pinter has been preoccupied with man's existence, and his condition in a world of violence and brutality.

Pinter's first deviation from the rampant construction of realist plays lied in his usage of elements of uncertainty about his characters, their identity, and their background. By withholding information from his readers or audience, he has increased the sense of mystification. To discover the root of anxiety and dread that haunts the atmosphere of Pinter's plays, to reveal the backgrounds and grounds of the study, to analyze the philosophical and literary aspects of Pinter's plays, one has to delineate Pinter's demonstration and portrayal of his characters, and analyze their behavior on the basis of existential terms. In addition, other prominent themes of Pinter's plays such as ambiguity, mystery, lack of identity, loneliness, and their impact in making a menacing atmosphere that begets anxiety will be taken into account.

In Pinter's plays, there is a room, a haven menaced by the intrusion or trespassing of the cold outside world. It is a seedy house where someone has found refuge from the outside trouble of life. His plays also bring into focus the individual's unwillingness to go out of the coziness of a womblike house, and come to a world that is hostile and cruel. His characters are internally terrified and afraid of how to survive their existence in the world as an abominable void. His works depict man's feeling of loneliness as well as his fear of despair. The subconscious awareness of this impending threat is the source of man's existential anxiety. The possibility of danger is hidden from us in a state of anxiety and dread. Pinter is ostensibly a believer in the existential view that danger is present everywhere. He, therefore, gives expression to the feeling of apprehension and danger in almost each of his plays.

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A Philosophical Background of Existentialism

In philosophy, “the terms exist and existence denote something active rather than passive and thus are closely dependent on the Latin root *ex* ‘Out’+ *sister* from *star* ‘to stand’. The term existentialism means ‘pertaining to existence” (Cuddon, 1979, p. 251). Existentialism derives from the ideas of Soren Kierkegaard (1813-55), and especially from his books: *Fear and Trembling* (1843), *The Concept of Dread* (1844), and *Sickness Unto Death* (1848).

Existentialism is associated with the family of philosophers, Jean Paul Sartre and Simon de Beauvoir, who gathered there in Paris at the end of World War II, after the liberation of Paris. The mood is one of enthusiasm, creativity, anguished self-analysis, and freedom. It is linked with the problems of the day, and invites the subsequent generations to view them as having the currency of yesterday’s news. It is as old as philosophy itself, because it addresses the issues that matter most in people’s lives (Flynn, 2006). It is also as current as the human condition it examines. Kaufman (1956, p.12) manifested the heart of existentialism as:

The refusal to belong to any school of thought, the repudiation of the adequacy of any body of beliefs whatever, and especially of systems, and a marked dissatisfaction with traditional philosophy as superficial, academic, and remote from life – that is the heart of existentialism.

The message of existentialism, unlike many academic philosophical movements is very simple and clear: individuals are responsible for what they have done, for who they are, for how and in what way they face and deal with the world, and ultimately responsible for the way the world is. Existentialism is the philosophy of "no excuse" as Sartre declared (Solomon, 2000). We cannot shift our burden to God, or nature. If God exists, we choose to believe, if nature shows us the way of life, it is up to us to choose what we do (Flynn, 2006; Kaufmann, 1956). According to Sartre (Flynn, 2006, p.12) “The fundamental choice man makes and gives direction to his life, is made by reflecting his previous life up to present. In other words, we’ve already made our choice implicitly”. The best individual is the one who struggles for his life.

While many philosophers criticize our feeling and emotions, existentialists will put great significance on such emotions, as anguish (which Kierkegaard defines as the awareness of our freedom), anxiety, and dread. Dreyfus (2006, p.146) asserted that “Kierkegaard calls an unconditional commitment an infinite passion for something finite...

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For Kierkegaard, an infinite passion can legitimately be called infinite because it opens up a world. Not only what actually exists gets its meaning from its connection with my defining passion: anything that could possibly come into my experience would get its meaning for me from my defining commitment.” Although the object of man’s infinite passion is something finite, for example the body of the beloved, but that finite being is vulnerable, and yet the meaning of his life depends on it. This emphasis on emotions linked existentialists to artists who care for man’s emotional and imaginative life. This relation between existentialism and fine arts, make existentialism a solely literary movement for some critics.

Existential ideas come to focus after a deep sense of despair and following World War II, and the great Depression. Kierkegaard, Jasper and Marcel are religious philosophers or theists, while Sartre, Camus, De Beauvoir and Heidegger are atheists, and Nietzsche was an antichristian. All believed that human life is not complete, and satisfying. Every individual experiences suffering and loss, due mainly to his lack of power and control over his life. However they believe that although life is not satisfying, it has meaning (Dreyfus, 2006; Flynn, 2006, Solomon, 2000; Jackson, 1998).

The Definition of Existence

To Kierkegaard, existence is always in flux. He (O’Hara, 2004, p. 69) called existence “the constant process of becoming,” and in the process of becoming, nothing is predestined or determined. The perpetual process of becoming is in the uncertainty of earthly life, where everything is uncertain. Kierkegaard believed that the task of existence is man’s essential task to the process of becoming. Kierkegaard (Ibid.) asserted, “Existing subjective thinkers are constantly striving; but this does not mean that they have a finite goal, and that their striving will be finished when they reach it, for they strive infinitely in a constant process of becoming”.

Man’s experience is never complete. To exist means a constant striving for a goal that is infinite, so no person is ever complete. Kierkegaard holds that existence is not abstract; one cannot think existence, he must live it concretely. Kierkegaard (O’Hara, 2004, p.69) used Lessing’s idea of searching for truth and striving:

If God were holding complete truth in his right hand and in his left a singular and always restless striving after the truth, a striving in which I

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would err forever and a day, and if he directed me to choose between them, I would humbly ask for his left hand and say, Father grant me this, for pure truth belongs to you alone.

The Concepts of Anxiety and Dread in Kierkegaard's Existentialism

Kierkegaard's celebrated book *The Concept of Anxiety* was published in 1844. It has provided the basis for the proper understanding of anxiety. This work is a bridge between Kierkegaard's aesthetic and religious work. Everyone attempting to come to terms with Kierkegaard's philosophy has to face anxiety as a concept. Anxiety is a pivotal concept in Kierkegaard's thought or dread in some translations. Tsakiri (2006, p. 19) stated, "Anxiety resembles chaotic kinesis. It is dizziness, since he whose eyes happen to look down into the yawning abyss becomes dizzy. It is dizziness of the possibility of freedom". Anxiety makes its appearance as the pivot upon which everything turns, or "anxiety is conceived as a pivot around which the whole of human existence, both actual and possible revolves" (Ibid., p. 20).

While other philosophers, like Kant and Hegel, believed in anxiety as a kind of fear, Kierkegaard, however, rejected this idea and took anxiety as different from fear. Kierkegaard has not identified anxiety with fear, for fear is about something definite. It has an object, while anxiety's object is nothingness. Tsakiri (2006, p.35) declared, "Anxiety is best conceptualized when considered in the context of the interplay between non-being and being, which has troubled philosophy for years". Tillich (1980, p.35.) described anxiety as "the existential awareness of non-being", but an existential "not as the abstract knowledge of non-being which produces anxiety" but "the awareness that non-being is part of one's being". This explains why anxiety lacks a definite object, its object this threatening nothingness is not the unknown, as it is commonly perceived. That is as something that ultimately will be revealed; This unknown thing, as Tillich (Ibid, p.37) stated, "which by its very nature cannot be known is non-being".

The object of anxiety is indeterminate. Anxiety is about nothing, and this nothing is future. Because future is tied with possibility, so anxiety is related to possibility. This nothing lies in future, so as Marino (1998, p.319) purported, "in as much as the future is fraught with possibility, our relationship to the future is fraught with anxiety". Concerning the relation between future and anxiety, Kierkegaard (Moore, 2000, pp. 211-2) clarified

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the point as:

Anxiety for the next day is commonly associated with anxiety for subsistence. This is a very superficial view. The next day, it gets a hold of the individual's light craft. If it succeeds, he is under the domination of that power. The next day is the first link of the chain that fetters a person to that superfluous anxiety that is of the evil one. The next day, it is strange indeed, for ordinarily when one is sentenced for life the sentence reads, 'for life', but he who sentences himself to anxiety 'for the next day', sentences himself for life.

Anxiety as Kierkegaard stated is related to the future. Kierkegaard (O'Hara, 2004, p.58) asserted, "For freedom the possibility is the future and the future is for time the possible. If someone is anxious, that anxiety is always related to the future. Concerning the relation between anxiety of the past and future, Kierkegaard (Ibid.) manifested:

If I am anxious about a past misfortune, then this is not because it is in the past but because it may be repeated, i.e., becomes future. If I am anxious because of a past offense, it is because I have not placed it an essential relation to myself as past and have in some deceitful way or other presented it from being past. If indeed it is actually past, then I cannot be anxious but only repentant. If I do not repent, I have allowed myself to make my relation to the offense dialectical, and by this the offense itself has become a possibility and not something past.

Based on this statement, anxiety is about nothing. Future is something not yet come, and it is possible not real or actual. It is nothing, because the future is not defined yet. An individual must create his or her own future; dread is fear of this responsibility of making choices that define person's life. Kierkegaard believes in the presence of anxiety in every individual's life. Kierkegaard (Ibid.) stated, "The moment is there for Adam as well as for every subsequent individual". Sin and anxiety are not just related to Adam, but it concerns every individual. It is the individual, who produces anxiety, so he is responsible for it. Anxiety is not from something external or out of man. Individual alone creates it.

In existentialism of Kierkegaard, guilt is considered as a kind of nothing that anxiety encounters. Guilt exists, and it is not increased by the actual performance of the deed. Camus, like Sartre, displayed a deep appreciation of what we might call original guilt, guilt that is inherent in our very existence as human beings. In Pinter's plays, guilt is one's responsibility toward oneself as well as others. This state ascribed to a person who has done moral or legal wrong. It is distinguishable from having a sense, or feelings, of guilt, since a guilty person may not

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experience such feelings, and an innocent person may be burdened by unwarranted feelings of guilt. Guilt is not simply self-reproach, it is inseparable from awareness of the harm, or neglect, brought about to the others affected by one's action or inaction. Those who permit an evil to seduce them, although it is easy for them to prevent are guilty or culpable and that those who let perish a person that they could easily save are guilty of his death. How, then, could God have let the entire human race fall into crime and misery? He could easily have prevented the disobedience of Adam and Eve or at least have stopped the consequences of their fall (Honderich, 1995; Craig, 1998).

To briefly summarize, on the one hand Anxiety understood as sympathetic antipathy, and an antipathetic sympathy, the longing of the individual to become a self, and as such to explore the infinite possibilities that are open to him. On the other hand, the dread or terror that accompany such an encounter. Nothing for Kierkegaard is the ultimate expression of terror. In possibility, all things are equally possible, and whoever is educated by anxiety is educated by possibility. Both are presented as dizziness. One who sank into possibility, his eyes become dizzy. He sank absolutely, but this is not so in actuality. The cooperation of possibility and anxiety is of tremendous importance. Anxiety discovers fate, but just when the individual wants to put his trust in fate, anxiety turns around and takes fate away because fate is like anxiety and anxiety like possibility is a magic power.

Marino (1998, p. 320) considered anxiety as the structure of the self, and claim, "anxiety is a manifestation of the fact that we are free... it reflects our relationship to possibility, and the future... anxiety is the consequence of sin". We also have the anxiety over being alone in the world, and forgotten by everyone even God. We often respond to anxiety either consciously or unconsciously, to turn aside the anxiety that takes hold of us. If the individual is honest about his past life, in the way that he tells others he is guilty, but if a man is really guilty, he is guilty not by judgment based on the rules or ethics of a group or system like police, but based on general ethics of morality.

Harold Pinter and Existentialism

Harold Pinter was born on October 10, 1930 in London, England. His father was a Jewish tailor. Pinter grew up in the working class area, full of bad-smelling factories and railroads. After the beginning of World War II in 1939, Pinter like other children sent to the urban area to be

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safe from German bombing. Concerning his life in that time Pinter (Rollyson, 2005, p.688) stated, "I was a morose little boy". Before starting to write plays as Rollyson (Ibid., p.687) purported, "the works of Franz Kafka and Samuel Becket made a great impression on him. Like Kafka, Pinter portrays the absurdity of human existence with attention to detail that creates the descriptive naturalism of his surface". Pinter (Esslin, 1970 ,p.38) asserted that there are three problems in describing his characters, "of identity, of motivation, of verification".

There are also the basic unanswered problem of contemporary philosophy and literature. Our anxiety of people or their actions is due to the lack of identity. In other words, knowing nothing about their past life, their tastes, or values begets anxiety. We dread other's actions, because we do not know what they will do in the future. This state of being unknown increases one's anxiety of the possibility of what may happen in the future. In Pinter's characterization as Hayman (1975, p.8) maintained, "the past histories of the characters, like their off-stage lives and their social background, couldn't matter less. The only facts that he's concerned with are the facts of what is said and done on stage".

**The Existential Problems of Existence and Survival,
Anxiety and dread, Guilt and Alienation**

Pinter's drama is a bitter commentary on human being's existence. His drama is a depiction of the reality of man's reduction into a cipher of non-entity or non-being, in spite of his struggle that comes to no avail. His plays are a commentary on man's feeble search for being, even in a small, dingy room, where all his effort finally and inevitably ends in failure. His plays faces us with a brutal world, in which man is alone and in his loneliness is haunted by a sense of guilt, and consequently is beset by anguish or anxiety. In Pinter's universe peace and security remain a mere illusion, vulnerable to utter ruin, and life of his characters ends in annihilation of the individual, physically or mentally. Ruby Cohn stated, if in Becket's *Waiting for Godot* the messenger, the little boy, is sent to keep the two tramps waiting, the messengers in Pinter's plays are sent "not to bless but to curse, not to redeem but to annihilate" (Cohn, 1972, p. 92), or as Esslin (1968, p.271) declared, they are "dark angles of nothingness".

Pinter dramatizes man's helpless existence in the universe among alienated figures. Man is engaged in a permanent but useless strive for survival in an alien world that threatens him, and never let him to live

without anxiety and dread. It seems that each individual inherited in him or her Adam's original sin, and now is forced by the world, is accused of being guilty due to the original sin, is threatened by making man aware of his or her impending death. Man's existence, in Pinter's drama, as Esslin (1968, p.66) asserted, is a "closure or an impasse". Man is thrown into this world as O'Hara (2004, p.69) stated, "man's experience is never complete. No person is ever complete. To exist means a constant striving for a goal that is infinite". Therefore, human being attempts to experience everything freely, so his free actions bring responsibility upon him, from which escape is impossible. Whatever decision man makes, due mainly to its responsibility, he cannot escape its consequent guilt, dread, anxiety and its final annihilation.

Man strives for his existence and survival in the alien world. Man's struggle to survive as Kierkegaard mentioned never stops. Kierkegaard (O'Hara, 2004, p.69) concerning the subjective individual who freely choose, stated, "Existing subjective thinkers are constantly striving, but this doesn't mean that they have finite goal and their striving will be finished, when they reach it for they strive infinitely in a constant process of becoming".

In the brutal world, where man exists among many possibilities in his decision making, whatever choice man makes ends in dread and anxiety. Man is "begotten by infinite and finite, the eternal and the temporal, and is therefore continually striving" (Kierkegaard, 1846, quoted in Tsakiri, 2006, p. 28). It is evident that man in his eternal effort for being and evading non-being, gives excessive value to his existence and survival in the alien world with alien figures who threaten man's freedom and throw him into the feeling of anxiety and dread. If man's eternal effort in making choices in infinite situations of life, end in nothingness, then the effect of this nothingness as Kierkegaard (Tsakiri, 2006, p.35) stated, is that it "begets anxiety".

The sense of guilt is a kind of nothing that anxiety encounters. Man strives in his existence to become a self. He survives and strives for his survival, for his being, but in his exploration of the infinite possibilities that are open to him to be a self, anxiety and dread as a result haunt and torment him. Pinter's drama has expressed "the anxiety and despair that springs from the recognition that man is surrounded by areas of impenetrable darkness, that he can never know his true nature and purpose, and that no one will provide him with ready-made rules of conduct" (Esslin, 1968, p. 416).

His plays as Pinter defined it are "the individual's pathetic search for

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security, of secret dreads and anxieties of the terrorism of our world” (Esslin, 1968, p. 272). In short, Pinter’s drama is about human existence; The fact that man exists in the world and is free to choose; The fact that, man dreads his situation, and is haunted by anxiety about the possibility of what may happen in the future.

Possibility and actuality are two oppositions like a magnet that are constitutive of the self. Man’s struggle for existence and survival is necessary, and it is necessary because as Kierkegaard (O’Hara, 2004, p.69) purported, “existence was always in flux”. Man in the process of becoming a self encounters many possibilities, while these possibilities put man in a state of *dizziness*. The dizziness as Kierkegaard (1844, p.61) purported is “of the possibility of freedom”, It begets anxiety and dread.

Suffering and love are two inseparable forces in the philosophy of Kierkegaard. Man suffers the sufferings of the brutal world, among alienated figures, where “everything is uncertain” according to Kierkegaard (O’Hara, 2006, p. 69), to obtain his love, that is his self or being. In *The Birthday Party*, for example, Stanley as an individual is physically and mentally tormented. He is crushed into a state of non-being, non-entity, of annihilation. *The Dumb Waiter* ends while a disastrous victim faces his impending death. *The Caretaker* ends with Davis’ grievous plea to let him stay in his place of refuge. In *The Room*, the blind Negro is attacked by Bert and is beaten to death, while his blindness is passed into the protagonist, Rose.

The existential perception in Pinter’s plays is not treated as philosophical abstractions, but it is about man’s everyday life. Esslin (1968, p.272) purported, “I think it is impossible and certainly for me to start writing a play from any kind of abstract idea. I start writing a play from an image of a situation and a couple of characters involved”. Pinter does not base his work on abstract idea; He starts with a concrete situation. Pinter (Esslin, 1970, p.38) maintained, "when the curtains goes up on one of my plays, you are faced with a situation a particular situation, two people in a room which has not happened before, and is just happened at this moment and we know no more about them than I know about them”.

Pinter’s plays remind us of Nietzsche’s maxim that great problems are in the street. The world outside is full of problems which undermine man’s totality. This brutality of the world forces man to take refuge and hide himself from the problems that threaten his existence. Therefore, they imprison themselves in a small room, from which the only way to the world outside is a door, another source of man’s anxiety and dread

that relates him to the world outside. Pinter (Esslin, 1970, p.35) maintained, “they are scared of what is outside the room. Outside the room is a world bearing upon them, which is frightening”. Pinter’s plays are permeated with the feeling of anxiety and dread in characters’ encountering with ultimate reality of existence, of annihilation, of death. In his plays we are confronted as Esslin (1968, p.401) asserted, with “an alienated world, without rational principle”.

To guarantee their existence and survival, Pinter’s characters search for a territory or *a room of one’s own*, a safe haven, in which to be secure from the menace outside the room. Behind the menace as Burkmann clarified, is “the consciousness of an anxiety about the cruelty of the post-holocaust, post-nuclear world itself” (Burkmann and Gibbs, 1993, p.41). Our desire to hide ourselves in a room of one’s own is “a panic-stricken desire to shelter from a world pervaded by terror and dread” (Ibid.). The room of one’s own is to take refuge and conduct a personally valid way of life.

Man is thrown into the world; He is alone like Rose and Stanley in *The Room* (1957) and *The Birthday Party* (1958), without the aid of an external force by which they can solve their problems. Esslin (1968, 392) asserted, “Man forever lonely, immured in the prison of subjectivity, unable to reach his fellow man”. They hide themselves to escape anxiety and dread, but they succeed only in deceiving themselves, or as Kierkegaard claimed, a self-deception. The room, the only place chosen by Pinter’s characters to be safe in, is just a self-deception, because they are as Cohn (1972, p. 97) stated, “cells without vista”. The room is like their coffins, like Rose’s room that ends in a vast darkness, a mental death.

In Pinter’s view, all living beings are stuck in a precarious situation. Pinter (Esslin, 1970, p.35) stated, “we are all in this, all in this room and outside is a world which is most inexplicable and frightening, curious and alarming”. In formulating Pinter’s existential ideas or philosophical ones, Esslin commented, “Pinter like Heidegger takes as his starting point in man’s confrontation with himself and the nature of his own being that fundamental anxiety which is nothing less than a living being’s awareness of the threat of non-being, of annihilation” (Ibid., p. 38).

In Pinter’s world, on the surface everything is civil, courteous and banal, nobody is going to show his inner feeling because as Burkmann asserted, “revelation of emotional truth leads to potential annihilation” (Burkmann and Gibbs, 1993, p.4), but at the heart of the play everyone is hostile to everyone else and is going to devastate them. “All of Pinter’s

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works deal with problems such as identity, verification, the nature of reality, existential angst...” (Ibid, p.27). The existence and survival of Pinter’s characters is related to the Cartesian definition that I think therefore I am but here it is substituted by “I fear nonbeing therefore I am” (Ibid., p. 47).

In Pinter’s plays, death is not a physical death but it is a figurative death of the soul, of human spirit and moral values. The death results from the suppression of freedom, choice, and responsibility. Pinter dramatizes an annihilating world in which man’s activity is the only way to escape from nothingness. Therefore, Passivity of mind and body results in nothingness. Taking refuge in a room depicts passivity of body and mind. In Existential view this passivity leads to nothingness as Pinter’s characters at the end face their annihilation.

Existentialism is not a philosophy, but a way of life. It tries to discover the mysteries of man’s existence. Existentialism appeared to help man to find a way out of his loneliness, anxiety and dread that has dominated his life. Man’s despair and dread caused by the assumption that he is thrown into the alien world with a predetermined essence, whose life and actions are controlled by an external source of power; The idea is called the *Platonic* idea. Existentialism appeared to give man a new existence, so it rejects any absolutism or determinism. It puts the individual as the center of existence.

Existentialism is a philosophy about man and his condition in the world; his fears, anxieties, anguishes, and dreads. Nothingness and annihilation are the major themes in existentialism that are also the major themes in absurdism as the offspring of existentialism. Man in existential view is alone, and alienated; thrown into being without any external source of help. Man has no essence in existentialism, so his future is uncertain, because his way of being determines his future condition. While everything is unknown to him, and everything is uncertain, man is haunted by fear and anxiety of the unknown, and the possibility that anything may happen in future. He is standing at the edge of the abyss of life, is looking down the abyss in fear and trembling. He lives a life of dread and anxiety. Looking into the abyss reminds man of death, his final destination, so it begets anxiety. Existentialism does not believe in after life existence, so death is an evidence of the absurdity and meaninglessness of our life. We are trapped in this world that is full of alienated figures. Man, not only feels alienated from other individuals, but also from the society and social systems.

The only way to escape life is death, but even death is horrifying and

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dreadful, because it is unknown, and also we are uncertain about what will happen to us after death. In existentialism, reasoning, knowledge, and science could not give a reliable way of life. What they give is objective knowledge. For existentialists; however, true reality is subjective, a reality which is made by the individual. Pinter's drama explains man's condition in the world. His characters hide themselves out in a room from the outside world. They are isolated figures who escape from an unknown menace that reminds them of non-being and threatens their survival. The existential anguish is due mainly to the impending danger, death, and the loss of a warm and cozy room, as the only secure place of living in this alienated world. Esslin (1970) explained, "the man in the room is bound to be visited by someone. A visitor will come. This is a situation which is pictured by Pinter in his plays" (p.40).

Existentialism may present, in anguish or anxiety, an individual who experiences ultimate realities of existence. An individual who in his dreads, falls into the depth of his personality, dreams, and nightmares. In existential view, man is alone in this world to choose his own path without the help of an external source of power. Eva Metman (Esslin, 1968, p.402) maintained, "In contemporary drama, a new third orientation is crystallized in which man is shown not in a world into which the divine or demonic powers are projected, but alone with them". In Pinter's drama, according to Esslin (Ibid, p.404) "the spectator confronted with the madness of human condition is able to see his situation in all its grimness and despair. Stripped of illusions and vaguely felt fears and anxieties. He can face this situation consciously, rather than feeling it vaguely".

To present a picture of human condition requires depth of feeling, and intensity in emotion. Pinter possesses these things. His drama is concerned with demonstrating an experience of being, so it tries to be honest in and fearless about the reality of human condition.

Conclusion

In Pinter's plays, the existential fear is never a philosophical abstraction. It is based on the experience of a Jewish boy in the East End of London, of a Jew in the time of Hitler. Concerning his first play *The Room*, Pinter (Lall, 2001, p. 182) asserted:

This old woman is living in a room, which she is convinced is the best in the house, and refuses to know anything about the basement.

Kierkegaard's Existential Views on Harold Pinter's Dramaturgy

(دیدگاه‌های وجودی کی‌یرکگارد در باب درام‌نویسی پینتر)

Downstairs she says, it's damp and nasty, and the world outside is cold and icy, and that in her warm and comfortable room her security is complete.

Lall asserted, "Man's existential fear, not as an abstraction, not as a surreal phantasmagoria, but as something real, ordinary, and acceptable, as an everyday occurrence. Here we have the center of Pinter's works as a dramatist" (Ibid.). The feeling of anxiety and dread Proceeds from potential or actual violence in the play, or by an underlying sense of violence. Anxiety may even haunt the individual due to a feeling of uncertainty and insecurity. Pinter in his plays made a good relation between character's predicament and their hidden anxieties. For example, Stanley in *The Birthday Party* is the tragic hero, through whom Pinter wanted to convey his view that there exists "some deep dread at the heart of modern living" (Ibid., p. 238). Even Stanley's unsuccessful concert begets anxiety in the audience, because it informs that he has made some hostile enemies in his past life.

One important way of looking at Pinter's plays as Lall stated is to "regard them as an image of author's anxieties and dreads" (Ibid., p. 243). In *The Birthday Party*, for example the chief agents of this anxiety are the two gangsters, and in *The Room*, it is in the form of a blind Negro, Riley. All are harbingers of death to the protagonist who evades his or her death by locking himself or herself from the world. The theme of blindness, either real blindness of Rose, or broken glasses of Stanley, is a symbol of darkness, and darkness begets anxiety.

Loneliness and personality are other concepts of existentialism in Pinter's plays. In existentialistic view, man is alone in the world. He is to choose his way by free will. He has no essence or predetermined personality that leads him in his life. In existentialism, as Sartre declares, existence precedes essence. Man is free to choose his way and make his own destiny by his own free decisions and actions. A man has two personalities: one, which presents it to the world to deceive others, and the other, is his true personality, his identity, which man tries to hide it from others to be secure.

Trying to place and define Pinter's work based on philosophical terms of existentialism is not an easy work to do. What Pinter presents in his plays are not just philosophical abstractions. Pinter is not a philosopher, although he is influenced by philosophical ideas of existentialism. He is primarily an artist who presents concrete images of the reality of human condition in the world. Existentialism, likewise, is not an abstract philosophy. Its subject is man's everyday life as it is lived. It tries to help

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man to find a way out of his dreads and anxieties of being thrown into this world. It is as Flynn (2006, p.1) clarified, “a philosophy as a way of life” and continues that its “attention and focus is the proper way to live one’s life”. Flynn (Ibid.) purported, “the issues that matter in people’s lives are at least as old as philosophy itself. It is as current as the human condition it examines”. Therefore, as existentialism explores man’s daily life and his condition in the world, Pinter’s works of art, accordingly presents us with concrete pictures of human condition.

Pinter is preoccupied with the dark, ambiguous, unknown, and precarious dimensions of human existence. In his plays, there are many elements of existentialism like isolation, loneliness, lack of security, anxiety, dread, guilt, nothingness, and annihilation. If in existentialism nothing in the world makes sense, except what the individual himself makes sense of it, then man’s existence is a succession of anxieties and dreads about the unknown future. Pinter’s works are filled up with a sense of loss and death. His characters are subjected to death and nothingness, are paralyzed by anxiety and dread, and lack identity. All of these traits are inherent in the nature of human existence, and indispensable for his existence and survival. His drama, in general is a search for the true nature of the individual existence. The primary concern of Harold Pinter is man and his or her existential problem.

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