

**Jerry and Harold Pinter
Identity And Selfhood-
A Reconciliation:
Betrayal And Elements of Autobiography**

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Abstract

Betrayal is perhaps Pinter's most deceptive play, it progresses and regresses along the lines of an adulterous affair between Jerry and Emma from the afternoon of the breakdown, back to the tired final phase, then to its climax, right down to its exuberant beginning. Although the main emphasis is on marital infidelity that shapes the action of the play, but there are many forms of betrayal that the play exposes: betrayal of lover by lover, betrayal in the family relations and betrayal in friendship. The play presents a story of multiple betrayals that breeds ecstasy and pain in its spiral of desire and deception.

Introduction

Human Behaviour is very wide and complex subject reflecting fundamental changes, both in the attitude and magnitude of men and women under various circumstances of the life. Inequalities in status and class and discriminatory treatments linked to cultural identities or patriarchic considerations define much of its contents. However, there are certain anthropological conducts, though sinister looking, present the true face of the society. One of such acts is betrayal, which has been

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omnipotent in all the ages of human existence and civilizations since their inception, in greater or lesser degrees.

Deceive or betrayal is the subject upon which, much has been written by eminent writers of almost all the literary periods in different forms like poetry and Dramas. Harold Pinter is one of such writer in English Literature, whose play "Betrayal", critically regarded as one of the English playwright's major dramatic works, reflects the images of the contemporary society on the parameters of morality and human reality.

Author of this article has, by critically analyzing this Play, made a humble attempt to evaluate its contents and qualities.

Plot of the Play

Harold Pinter's work "Betrayal" is a highly sensitive and exotic play simple yet very expressive. Although the subject of the play seems trivial, yet the treatment is done well. Inspired by Pinter's clandestine extramarital affair with BBC Television presenter Joan Bakewell, which spanned seven years, from 1962 to 1969, the plot of *Betrayal* interrogates different permutations of betrayal relating to a seven-year affair involving a married couple, Emma and Robert, and Robert's "close friend" Jerry, who is also married, to a woman named Judith. For five years Jerry and Emma carry on their affair without Robert's knowledge, both cuckolding Robert and betraying Judith, until Emma, without telling Jerry she has done so, admits her infidelity to Robert (in effect, betraying Jerry), although she continues their affair. In 1977, four years after exposing the affair (in 1973) and two years after their subsequent break up (in 1975), Emma meets Jerry to tell him that her marriage to Robert is over. She then lies to Jerry in telling him that, "last night", she had to reveal the truth to Robert and that he now knows of the affair. The truth however, is that Robert has known about the affair for the past four years.

It is submitted that this Play depicts the truth of the human societies and cases of betrayal of such nature are numerous, though considered immoral, so hidden behind the veil of morality, thus, living a double standard life.

Evaluation of the Play

The beginning of the play has an incredible emotional dynamism. Emma and Jerry are ill at ease after being separated for so long, there is enough emotional residues between them to suggest the possibility of reconciliation or the emotional closure they both evidently need. The play begins in a flashback, with a meeting between two adulterous lovers, Emma and Jerry, two years after their seven-year affair came to an end. In all the nine scenes we move forward and backward along with the characters and stages of affairs. And finally the play ends with its beginning in the apartment of Emma's husband Robert, who is Jerry's best friend. It is about a temporal triangle of love at the mercy of time measured in years.

Emma's confession of driving past the flat where they once shared illicit afternoons and Jerry's repeated 'I don't need to think of you' (*Betrayal* 163), are charged with potential pathos. Once intoned, these things are left unexploited, and it is the crushing revelation for Jerry that Robert has finally discovered his affair with Emma that gives the play its initial start. In fact this instigates scene two between Robert and Jerry, in which Jerry is further distressed to learn that his friend has in fact known of the affair for four years, not simply one day. His emotional reaction to this, as opposed to his relatively calm response to Emma, suggests that it is his friendship with Robert that holds more importance for him.

It is submitted that Robert's knowledge about the affair between Jerry and his own wife shows the unusual degree of tolerance keeping in view the human fallacies. Not to forget that

from the beginning of Twentieth Century, voices for women emancipation and liberation from the bondage of men are very high, continuing till date, many consider such illicit adulterous relations by women as their expression of freedom from male dominating society.

However, on the other hand, Robert's long-standing pretension of ignorance seems the greater betrayal, one that is compounded by Jerry's being replaced as Robert's squash partner by Casey, the off stage character, who is displaying him in all fields as the cycle of betrayal is being repeated. This initial emphasis captured by a burst forward in time between scenes one and two, suggests that the play is chiefly concerned with male friendship not the morality of infidelity. In fact, the play quite categorically refuses to comment on betrayal and if anything it presents infidelity as pretty much the sexual *status quo*, a norm to which all of its characters confirm.

In this play the realism relates to the paradox of veracity and indulgence. What seems to matter most is that all this has been achieved by manipulation of the scenes in the time past with a sort of cinematographic fidelity. In place of the carefully formed innuendoes, sinister ambiguities and impending disasters, the triangle configuration traces a complex variety of betrayals. It is a kind of twister to human relations.

Enoch Brater is of the opinion that Pinter's concern in *Betrayal* is with an entirely different level of ambiguity. She says that:

“What ties this ambiguity together in the nine pieces of *Betrayal* are Pinter's images. . . . Jerry's lunches with Robert, the impossibility of setting a date for a game of squash, Jerry's drinking problem and his business trips to America, Emma's work at the gallery, Ned's problem with sleeping and our with his paternity, the school days back at Oxford and Cambridge with

impassioned letters about Yeats and the trips to Venice and Yeats again on Torcello. Often involving offstage characters and specifying offstage action, these images link betrayal very closely to the principle of organization Pinter used so adroitly. (**Cinematic Fidelity and Forums of Pinter's Betrayal** 511-512)".

Autobiographical Elements in the Play:

In **Betrayal** we find certain traces of the playwright Harold Pinter in the character of Jerry. Most of the elements and situations present in this play indicate towards Pinter's own life. To certain extent Pinter has delineated his own offense of betrayal by the character of Jerry. From his biography we get to know that Pinter was married from 1956 to the actress Vivien Merchant, who frequently appeared in his plays and became in the early 60s, the embodiment of a certain kind of Pinter woman. But in 1975 Pinter's life underwent an upheaval that was to have a profound effect on his work: his marriage broke up in blaze of publicity, and he went on to live with the historian Antonia Fraser, who in 1980 became his second wife. Although Pinter denies the fact that **Betrayal** is inspired from his own life that deals with the corrosive effect of infidelity. But somewhere in the corner of his heart lay his unexpressed crime. Pinter must have suffered with his own guilt of betraying his first wife, his haunting offense must have given rise to his emotions and the result is **Betrayal**. Through the character of Jerry, Pinter is apparent; in a way Jerry is Pinter himself, who is applauding his self and identity.

General understanding of 'self' and the quest for its meaning has always been a difficult task. While analyzing one's inner being the question related to self arises itself, that what is self and how it is associated with one? Self is an essential and important feature of human personality that grows gradually and

naturally. It is the development of one's sense of being 'I' or an individual, which contains both negative and positive characteristics of personality. Self as a word denotes one's own desire, needs, strength and shortcomings. It is a cognitive representation of an individual, projects, peculiarity or eccentricity of a person that differentiates him from others. Self is associated with emotions and that way self is most personal.

Pinter has thus, illustrated his own feature, desire, needs and shortcomings through the character of Jerry. Like Pinter, Jerry is also involved in writing profession. He is a writer and has also been an editor of a poetry magazine. Harold Pinter's main intellectual interest was English literature particularly poetry. He even published his poems in London like Jerry.

Selfhood and Identity of Pinter in the Play:

Questions arises that why Jerry had to be in the profession of writing, and particularly his taste in English poetry is a perfect example of Pinter's search for selfhood and identity through the traits of Jerry. Jerry is representing Pinter with his guilt, complexes and deception similarly Pinter is delineating his own identity, and his own 'self'. Analyzing Pinter's autobiography, and going through his play **Betrayal**, we find the two families of Robert and Emma and Jerry and Judith identical to the family of Harold-Vivien and Antonia Fraser and her husband Sir Hugh Fraser, the Catholic Conservative Member of Parliament. Although, there is no evidence of Pinter and Sir Hugh Fraser's relation as friends, but the love triangle between Pinter-Antonia and Sir Hugh Fraser can be perceived. For instance if one would identify the character of Emma with Antonia Fraser, by and large **Betrayal** can be seen as Pinter's own betrayal to his wife Vivien merchant.

As in the case of **Betrayal** the central character Emma is a smart assiduous, candid and fanatic, who devours fancy-

free life and lives in the world of fantasy. She is just like a butterfly full of colour and of a free will, any boundation or confinement would, prove futile to her. She is a chirping bird and a blooming flower of the orchid that would fade and become weary in a state of captivation. She enjoys being Jerry's lover and expects warmth and compassion as a young spinster in love would expect. In the very first scene when Jerry and Emma meet in a pub, she is reminiscing and lost into fanciful memory with Jerry.

Jerry : Seems such a long time ago.

Emma : Does it?

Jerry : Same again

Emma : I thought of you the other day (pause).

I was driving through Kilburn. Suddenly I saw where I was I just stopped and then I turned down Kinsale Drive and drove into Wessex Grove. I drove past the house and then stopped about fifty yards further on, like we used to do, do you remember?

Jerry : Yes

Emma : People were coming out of the house they walked up the road.

Jerry : What sort of people.

Emma : Oh. . . . Young people then I got out of the car and went up the steps. I looked at the bells, you know, the names on the bells. I looked for my name (**Betrayal 167-168**).

Emma's carefree attitude towards life is by far identical to Antonia Fraser, who was a historian and despite being married to a Tory M.P and mother of six children she recklessly fell in love with Pinter. Antonia and Pinter lived together for a couple of years until they finally got married in 1980. It only reminds us the sharing of time and love between, Jerry and Emma in a rented flat in Wessex Grove. Through the character of Emma

Pinter has made an attempt to portray Antonia's rich and varied life, which is colourful and profuse.

Moving on to Jerry or Pinter's biography, we come to know his iron loyalty, meticulous precision and innate capacity for friendship. Almost alone amongst famous dramatists, he remained close to the friends of his youth: in his case the Hackney gang. Similarly Pinter's loyalty and bonding with friends is remarkably projected through the bond of friendship between Robert and Jerry. They both are so comfortable with each other that at times Emma's interference seems like a "destructive intrusion of a female into a solid male friendship" (**Betrayal and Bridges Burnt 72**). Sharing the same female partner (Emma, Robert's wife) in their life as well as in bed shows Jerry and Robert's comfort level of friendship.

Once again analyzing Pinter's identity as Jerry, we find that Pinter was a gifted writer, he was a good listener, and he keenly listened to what other people said. He had an immense zest for life: he loved poetry, wine, bridge- playing and just about every kind of sport, but most especially cricket. Further our findings in **Betrayal** leads us to the opinion that Robert has a great liking for squash playing while Jerry has no taste to this sport, but his friendship with Robert and his dormant admiration for him compels him to imitate his friend's characteristics: agreeing to play squash. Instead of squash, if Pinter had introduced cricket as a sport, Jerry would have acquired taste for it willingly, because it was Pinter's sport of choice.

In Pinter's **Betrayal** the food of love is perverted. It is like a real betrayal which is luscious and bitter, venomous and sugary, enchanting and at the same time suffocating, verisimilitude and deceptive, but still an adorable and precious love. As an image, it is a drink and a banquet a sickness and a pleasure, a wintry lust and a spring hunger uncontrolled emotion

of mind, a flow of sentiment a sexual experience and aphrodisiac element impulsive persistent and reckless. It is Pinter's basic instincts that provoke him to find a grim, but fragile beauty in such relationships. Each scene and every action has a certain motif, which carries the story ahead. The characteristic movement of the imagery in the play has a think-back in time it does not anticipate events, but recalls only the past in a flashback movement in which the play's action takes place. Pinter has delineated the story of his own betrayal through 'Jerry' and Antonia's in the form of 'Emma'.

Conclusion:

What one can derive from his play is entanglement of relations and each character intrigued in the maze of love and sex relation striving hard and finally submitting to it. Overall study of **Betrayal** brings us closer to Harold Pinter, who is actually playing the role of Jerry. The play is echoed with autobiographical elements suggesting Pinter's own identity and selfhood as Jerry. In the true sense it is a Reconciliation of the guilt which Pinter acknowledged that he had betrayed his wife on another woman and made use the medium of **Betrayal**; as a passage to secretly release his acute pain of treachery.

Like Pinter, Jerry is both the prime mover and ultimate outsider in these marital maneuvers. All the three characters Jerry, Emma and Robert shared some mysterious complicity in their mutual betrayal similarly what Pinter Antonia and Vivien Merchant must have had in common. Ultimately this is what gives Pinter's play its lasting power; realization that everyone is like insect that unknowingly gets entrapped into the cob-web of betrayal, given to their desire of sex and love and the entire attempt to release oneself from this magnet charms proves to be futile.

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