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## **Machiavellianism and Cruelty in Harold Pinter's *The Homecoming* and Barzan Faraj's *Yousif Nightmares***

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### **Abstract**

Cruelty and evil behaviors, widespread among human beings, have inspired many authors to examine the reasons and justifications for violence which destroys the life of man. This study inspects two plays, *The Homecoming* by Harold Pinter (1930-2008) and *Yousif Nightmares* by Barzan Faraj to show how the family members, as Machiavellian individuals, exploit and confront one another only for their own interest. The research observes the cruel nature of man in these texts written in two different periods by two playwrights who were born in two distinct countries with diverse social and cultural background. Harold Pinter is a British writer and wrote the play in 1964 and Barzan Faraj is a Kurdish playwright and wrote his play in 2001. The characters are tied by blood, but have no regard for one another's emotions. The needy are ignored and the females are exploited. The psychological study of the oppressors and the oppressed is based on Roy F. Baumeister's theory on evil and the origin of cruelty. Baumeister (1999) summarizes the roots of evil into lust (desire), egotism, revenge, fundamentalism and idealism. He believes that evil and violence have deep roots in the history of human kind and the problem is that most people who commit evil acts do not themselves regard their actions as evil. The study focuses on egotism and desire and concludes that the characters perform physical, verbal and sexual assaults without feeling guilty or showing regret. This shows that man creates several motives to commit crimes, and violence is part of human nature

## 1- Introduction

Cruelty and violence have become the subject of many literary texts, tableau, pieces of music and many thinkers, philosophers and psychologists have discussed them. Themes of evil, bloodshed, violence, betrayal and torture have occupied the stage everywhere, and the fictional characters have become the source for many psychological studies because such individuals can easily be seen in real life. Roy F. Baumeister (1999, p.6) asks, "Why is there evil. He also adds that the question has bedeviled humanity for centuries though many educated men and women have tried to answer it. Baumeister's view shows that cruelty exists for a very long time and has various forms and is caused by diverse motifs. Lionel Corbett (2018, p.2) states, "Evil is an inescapable part of our world, to the extent that some people believe that a proclivity towards evil is an intrinsic aspect of human nature". Katz (1993, p.10) defines evil as "behavior ranging from deliberate destruction of human dignity to deliberate destruction of human life". This definition is compatible with Taylor's (2009, p.22) definition of cruelty who states, "In everyday usage 'cruelty' involves unjustified voluntary behaviour which intentionally causes suffering to an underserving victim or victims". According to Taylor, the major factors which prompt us to define a behavior as cruel center on the two axes of participants involved: the perpetrators motives and behavior (unjustified/ gratuitous, voluntary, intentional) and the victim's status (innocent, undeserving) and

experience (suffering). Thus the cruel behavior of the characters in the plays can be regarded as evil since they degrade one another psychologically, morally and socially (ibid).

Pearce (2011, p.520) states that "people with zero empathy are liable to treat others roughly or instrumentally, as objects, and can reasonably be assumed to be responsible for most of the human cruelty in the world". If this view is applied to the characters in the chosen plays, it is noted that the antagonists do not care about the feelings of their victims though they are biological brothers; what they think about and care for is only their own interests. So, the motives behind perpetrating cruelty are stronger than the motives that keep man away from carrying out harmful actions.

To show how these issues are reflected in drama, two plays are selected in this study. The choice is based on some reasons including the time in which the plays were written, the nationality of the authors and similarity of the subject matters. The Homecoming was written in 1964 by the British playwright Harold Pinter, and Yousif Nightmares was written in 2001 by Barzan Faraj, a Kurdish author in Kurdistan Region of Iraq. In Pinter's play, The Homecoming, six characters play their roles, Max and his three sons, Lenny, Joey and Teddy, Sam, Max's brother and the only female character, Ruth, who is the wife of Teddy and the mother of three children. The names of two other characters are mentioned; Jessie was Max's wife and now she

is dead, and MacGregor, the man who had relation with Jessie. In Barzan Faraj's play, *Yousif Nightmares*, there are eight characters, the Mother and her five sons, Braym, Kardo, Najo, Shero and Dan, Sarah, the wife of Braym who lost his legs in war, and Yousif, a nine-year old boy whose father was killed and his mother left him. The texts display struggle between the family members and how they cause each other's downfall. The time of the publication and the different background of the authors obviously clarify that people everywhere in this world have suffered from evil for centuries and the distress would continue as far as man exists.

## 2- Cruelty and Power

To study the relationship between cruelty and power and to display how the powerful oppresses the weak, some extracts from the two plays are scrutinized. The *Homecoming* opens with Max, the father, talking about his past and his wife, Jessie, but Lenny does not want to listen and tries to end the talk in this way:

Lenny: Plug it, will you, you stupid sod, I'm trying to read the paper.

Max. Listen! I'll chop your spine off, you talk to me like that! You understand! Talking to your lousy filthy father like that! (Pinter, 1978, p. 25)

Max is old now (70 years), but he proudly talks about his past so that he will show his son that he still has power in the house, but his son refuses to acknowledge his role anymore in the house. This is the core of the struggle between Max and his sons. In the forward of

Baumeister's book (1999) *"Evil: Inside Human Violence and Cruelty"* Aaron T. Beck writes:

When someone with an overblown sense of self-worth fears a threat to his self-esteem, a kind of reflexive hostility can result: "Stop the threat before it inflicts damage." The person feels diminished in some way (rejected, devalued, exploited) and is driven to punish the offender (p. vii)

What Aaron asserts is applicable to Max's situation; he is ignored, devalued and thus he tries to regain power through verbal attacks, using vulgar language. The same circumstances are experienced in *Yousif Nightmares*, but this time the conflict is between Braym, the eldest son, and his younger brothers. Because their father is dead, and Braym was used to financially support them as he says "I used to take care of your mother and an orphan boy; I saved the family; if I were not here, you would have become vagabonds", and he also adds "every month, I sent you half of my salary, I quit smoking and I had only one suit and a pair of shoes..." (Faraj, 2001, p. 77-78). Now he is on a wheelchair and, like Max, he cannot fulfill his needs alone. When he sees his brothers grown up and they devalue him, he cannot endure this indifference and thus he always complains and attacks and insults them. The brothers are fed up with his constant yelling. His brother angrily tells him "if you don't shut up, I'll throw you into my car and take you to a psychiatric hospital" (Faraj76).

Both Max and Braym feel humiliated and realize that their authority is in danger; therefore; they exert great efforts to emotionally affect the rest of the family members through recalling their past, but it is futile because nothing has remained to tie them together any longer. Morgan (1973) states, "If we are going to ignore the "fancy dressing" of Max's reminiscences about his happy past, his good friend MacGregor, and his being the terror of the neighborhood, what we are left with is a retired butcher" (p.491). Morgan's speech shows that Max's memory of the past is his only source of comfort though he finds out that his wife, Jessie, was cuckolding him.

The characters in both plays now live under one roof but nothing ties them together; they regard each other as threats. Even the relationship between Max and Sam, is loose. Max and Sam are brothers, but in the following dialogue it becomes quite clear that the only thing which allows Sam to stay in the house with his brother is the money he pays since Max needs that rental payment. Sam is a chauffeur and he can still work and earn some money, but brotherhood, blood tie and familial love cannot secure his residential place if he cannot afford the rent.

Max: As soon as you stop paying your way here, I mean when you're too old to pay your way, you know what I'm going to do? I'm going to give you the boot. (Pinter, 1978, p. 35)

Max obviously threatens to drive his brother out if he cannot pay him. Max is a retired butcher

and he needs Sam's money; this is the only reason that keeps them together. The statement displays that the characters react hysterically and violently when their power is threatened. Teddy is a professor of philosophy who has returned from the United States, and Dan is an artist who has come back from abroad as well. They are educated but cannot abstain from the struggles; therefore, they decide to go back to their former places; Teddy leaves his wife behind to serve his family, father and brothers, but Dan takes his brother's wife, Sarah, with him.

### 3- Machiavellian Characters and Cruelty

Machiavellianism derives from a reference to the political theories of the fifteenth-century Italian statesman and philosopher Niccolò Machiavelli (1469-1527), and according to Statt (1998, p.82) Machiavellianism is also used as a psychological term to mean " a personality characteristic in which a person manipulates others for his own gain". Machiavellian individuals see only their own interests and to achieve their personal aims they take all possible means such as betraying, abusing and manipulating the people live around them. Richard Christie (1970) describes the Machiavellian individuals as selfish who see others as mere objects and devices to reach their goals. Such individuals can be found among educated people, politicians and businessmen. Such characters think only of their personal gains and they even do not care if they have justifications for being violent or not.

Christie (1970) pointed out that Machiavellian individuals see others as objects to be manipulated, rather than individuals with whom one can empathize. Such characters have no concern with conventional morality; any form of lying and cheating is acceptable to them. They are not necessarily motivated by ideology; rather, they simply wish to achieve particular ends. These individuals surface in many areas of life, including science, academia, politics, and business. (quoted in Corbett, 2018, p.19)

The characters in *The Homecoming* and *Yousif Nightmares* have different occupations. In Pinter's play Max is a retired butcher, Teddy is a professor of philosophy at a university, Lenny apparently works as a pimp, Joey works in demolition during the day but regularly trains to be a boxer, and Sam, Max's brother, is a chauffeur. In Faraj's play Braym is an amputee officer who lost his legs in war, Kardo is a politician, Najo is uneducated and works freelance, Shero is a businessman, and Dan is the youngest, twenty-seven, and he is a fine artist. The brothers are proud of what they are doing and their only concern is themselves and their interests, nothing else, nobody else.

In Pinter's *The Homecoming*, the selfishness of the characters reaches its peak when Max, Lenny and Joey ask Ruth to stay in the house only to use her as a prostitute. Max calls her a 'whore' and Lenny says she is a 'tease'. They are all sexually attracted to her, and finally Max suggests that they can keep her in their house,

maybe as a sex doll. Teddy left home to America and during those years, this is the first time he comes back. He brought home his wife, Ruth, to introduce her to his family, but his father calls her "whore", "slut" and he refuses to believe Teddy when he says she is his wife. Max's stance will completely alter at the end of the play, Act Two, because they need her to serve them by all means.

Max: You know something? Perhaps it's not a bad idea to have a woman in the house. Perhaps it's a good thing. Who knows? Maybe we should keep her. (Pinter, 1978, p. 85)

Teddy is her husband. He lets her choose if she agrees to stay or she goes back with him, and Sam, Max's brother, believes that it is a silly idea to keep her here because she has three children and must go back to them, but other, Sam, Lenny and Joey, want her to stay. Ruth was a model before she married Teddy, but it seems that living as a mother is hard for her and thus she decides to stay. Morgan (1973, p.490) states, "Ruth comes home to the realization that the life she lived as a respectable woman in America was an illusion". Ruth's consent to stay proves Morgan's view that being a prostitute is the reality for her.

The three, Max, Lenny and Joey, have decided to keep her, yet they find it difficult to pay for her needs.

Joey: Of course we'll pay her. She's got to have some money in her pocket.

Max: That's what I'm saying. You can't expect a woman to walk about without a few bob to spend on a pair of stockings.

Lenny: Where's the money going to come from? (Pinter, 1978, p. 86)

Lenny's question opens a new area of discussion; how to pay her? Machiavellian individuals only receive, they do not pay, and thus Lenny makes a suggestion.

Lenny: There's no need for us to go to all this expense. I know those women. Once they get started they ruin your budget. I've got a better idea. Why don't I take her up with me to the Greek Street?

(Pinter, 1978, p.88)

Lenny can easily manage this since he has many flats and knows many 'distinguished clienteles' which means they will pay her a lot for her services. They arrange everything without consulting Ruth and even they do not tell her that she should work as a prostitute. Max, Lenny and Joey exploit Teddy's educational background; he is a man who cares about his family and respects his wife's freedom of choice. He does not force her to go back with him; he tells Ruth that they should go back to their children, but he never obliges her. They also manipulate Ruth's past as she was "a model for the body" before she went to America with Teddy.

The cruelty of the characters is clear. When Sam faints, they do not care about him at all and even Max rather coldly says "A corpse? A Corpse on my floor? Get him out of here!" (Pinter, 1978, p.94). They have no time for this as they make

preparations for Ruth's new job, prostitution. Both Sam and Teddy state that she has three children, but they do not care about separating her from her children. They keep her only if she can serve them and when Joey refuses to 'share her with a lot of jobs', Max threatens to send her back directly to America, and thus Joey keeps quite as signs of agreement because he also does not want to lose her.

The cruel nature of the Machiavellian individuals in Barzan's *Yousif Nightmares* are worse. The victims are Braym, his wife Sarah, and Yousif who is a 9-year old orphan boy. Yousif's father who is the brother of Braym, Najo, Kardo and Dan, was executed by the Baath regime when he was an infant and his mother left him marrying an agent of the party. He was brought up by Braym and Sarah; therefore, he believes that they are his biological parents. The picture of his father is hanged on the wall but they never tell him the truth. His grandmother lives in the house and she has kept the memories and belongings of her son, Yousif's father, in an upstairs room but no one can enter the room. They have kept this secret for several years maybe for Yousif's sake, but now Kardo, his uncle, wants to disclose everything because he is a politician and uses his brother's death for his personal gain.

Kardo is now preparing Yousif to participate in the ceremony of digging one of the mass graves thinking that the body of Yousif's father is

among the bodies, but Braym disagrees with him because he buried his brother secretly after he was executed and he is sure his body is not in that mass grave.

Kardo: (Coming out hurriedly) I need to search an hour to find the clothes of that child?! (He shouts) Common, hurry up.

Braym: What sin did that child commit that you take him to the site and take a photo of him beside an old grave and the crumbled skeletons which are not of his father's. (Faraj, 2001, p. 43)

Braym obviously accuses Kardo that he intends to emotionally affect people so that they vote to him to become parliament member. He also asserts that his mother knows the truth and she has still the clothes smeared with the blood of Yousif's father, but of course, Kardo refuses to believe in this since it does not serve his aim though he has no evidence that his brother's corpse, Yousif's father, is in that mass grave.

Another aspect of utilization is related to Braym and Sarah. In the previous section, Power and Cruelty, it is clarified that Braym's authority is in danger and he goes through a rough and tough time with his brothers. In this section, the focus will be on the brothers' attempts to get rid of him. Braym has to go to hospital every month for treatment, and his brothers find this a chance to keep him out of the house so that they can spend some time with his wife.

Braym: Every month when my time comes to go to hospital, these gentlemen help me without hesitation, they are more eager than me, but for bringing me home, nobody cares. They want me to be far from here even if it is for a short time, and my wife also behaves like them, she dresses

very well and puts on makeup every day, and these gentlemen shamelessly call out her name. (Faraj, 2001, p.

So Braym is considered as an obstacle to their plans, especially to get Sarah. She is still young and beautiful, 28-years old, her husband, Braym, is handicapped and spends the entire days locking himself in his room. The brothers exploit this situation to flirt with her.

Najo: nobody is here... have a seat. I need to tell something important.

Sarah: Leave me alone, tomorrow. I will listen to you tomorrow.

Najo: tomorrow ... tomorrow. Tomorrow that crippled man returns and you have to stay beside him.

Sarah: Please... leave me alone. You're mad.

Najo: Sarah you make me mad. You ignore me, you don't give me a chance to chat with you. I only want your happiness. I have to tell you something. (he takes out a check and points it to her) Look, all my money is for you, only promise to have an affair with me. (Faraj, 2001, p. 55)

Sarah is a respectable woman, but she is afraid that she cannot save her purity among a group of lustful men. When she refuses to surrender to Najo's desires, he accuses her of having an affair with Dan, the youngest of the brothers, and tells her:

Najo: You always give your beauty, body passion and emotion to that artful artist. Is not a sin? I will tell your husband...one day I will bring him in while you are comforting each other to kill you both.

Najo's speech is a direct threat, but she does not surrender and escapes his tricks. Kardo has also

the same desire to get her but in a different way. He wants to take her with him for a big party in a big hotel full of people and even he said that if Braym had died, he would have married Sarah.; Shero asked her to be his private secretary in his new office; Dan asked her to elope with him. Dan expresses his love for her and asks her to go with him, but she refuses.

Dan: (he turns to her and catches her hands) We should leave here.

Sara: (She collapses) What? Go? Dan, are you OK? Lower your voice. (Faraj, 2001, p. 65-66)

She believes that such deeds are deadly and her husband can never bear this. Sarah realizes that life has become very difficult for her in this house, but she endures the difficulties since her husband needs her and she refuses to be disloyal to him. After Najo's sexual harassment, she thinks of telling her husband to leave the house but it is difficult to convince him since she cannot tell him the reason and everything about that night. Sarah never complains because she thinks that her husband still loves her and he never speaks rudely to her. She is exhausted as she has to take care of her husband, four brother-in-laws, her mother-in-law and Yousif, but She thinks she needs to stay for her husband.

After that night, everything will change because Sarah's jewels are stolen, and the brothers accuse each other of the theft, and Sarah cannot tell her husband about that night when Najo tried to rape her. To save himself, Najo alleges that Sarah

intentionally let the door open to take one of the brothers into her room. The accusation is really harsh and Braym starts suspecting her.

Braym: You always try to avoid my comments by asking a question. They say you left the door open all night long, how did they know that?

Sarah: (Confused) They want to escape the accusations. You mean I brought one of them in?

Braym: I ask questions, not you. Why did not you lock the door? (Faraj, 2001, p. 82)

The only thing that has kept Sarah in the house is the mutual trust between her and Braym, but now she feels that the bond has broken. Consequently, she elopes with Dan. She does not betray her husband. On the contrary, he obliged her to make that decision after he accused her of betrayal. She explains all these points in a letter she left to her husband. Realizing the truth, Braym suffers a lot and finally commits suicide of overdosing his pills. Braym's selfishness and the brothers lust ruined the family.

#### **4- Conclusions**

In conclusion, the study shows that cruelty and violence have a long history with various forms. Human beings by nature are selfish creatures and behave rudely with one another when they find their authorities and interests are in danger. They, no matter kin or strangers, confront each other only to keep their interests and gain what they want. Besides, they regard one another as mere objects which can be manipulated as means of entertainment. In such situations, humanity does not exist, no emotion, no feeling



of attachment; what matters is the 'self' or egotism. Self is the center and everything else should serve that self; or else, they should be removed. In Pinter's play, *The Homecoming*, Max is the father but treated badly by his sons, and Braym, in Faraj's play, is the oldest brother who, after the death of his father, looked after his younger brothers, but now they disrespect him and even they think that he is a real problem in the house.

The characters in Harold Pinter's *The Homecoming* and Barzan Faraj's *Yousif Nightmares* are next of kin but behave like strangers or even worse. They exert power on one another to prove their existence. They are somebody only if others submit to their wants and desires. The cruelty of the characters lies in their indifference to each other, parents to their children, siblings to each other. Almost all the male characters are Machiavellian individuals since each believes he is the best and thus all should listen to him. They also agree that the female characters, Ruth and Sarah, should serve them and fulfill their desires. Max, Lenny and Joey ask Ruth to stay and not to go back to her sons, and she obeys without hesitation; the same thing is true for Sarah, she does all the house work and even she is obliged to sit beside Najo and Kardo while they are drinking, only to entertain them. All in all, the characters lack

consideration for others and hate their rivals; self is the focal point in their moves and deeds.

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