

Socio-Historical Reading of Harold Pinter's *The Room* from Georg Lukács' Perspective

Ali Masoudi

Faculty of Humanities
Khatam University, Iran

*Hoda Shabrang

Faculty of Humanities,
Khatam University, Iran

e-mail: al.masoudi@khatam.ac.ir, h.shabrang@khatam.ac.ir

*Corresponding author: Hoda Shabrang

Received: 09 August 2022 **Accepted:** 26 June 2023 **Published:** 30 June 2023

To cite this article (APA): Masoudi, A., & Shabrang, H. (2023). Socio-Historical Reading of Harold Pinter's *The Room* from Georg Lukács' Perspective. *AJELP: Asian Journal of English Language and Pedagogy*, 11(1), 49–61. <https://doi.org/10.37134/ajelp.vol11.1.4.2023>

Abstract: Considered by critics the earliest example of Harold Pinter's "comedy of menace", *The Room* is Harold Pinter's first play, written and first produced in 1957. Although stylistic features of the play have been studied by many scholars, socio-historical readings of the play have been neglected. In this article, a new approach of reading will be suggested that considers social and historical elements of the play, in addition to the form and stylistic features. Using Georg Lukács' theories regarding historical drama, this research aims to show how Harold Pinter's *The Room* depicts capitalistic reproduction and social threats the working class faces in a world that forces classes to engage in the internal social competition, where one always is doomed in falling out of socio-economical order. Although Lukács bases the definition of the historical novels on Shakespearean's historical dramas, it will be showcased how Lukacsian concepts like totality, anachronism, and distance forms a socio-ideological product in Pinter's *The Room*. The play becomes essentially interesting applying Lukács' theories regarding aesthetic and social elements of drama. Exploring *The Room*'s historical significance by highlighting Lukács' notions such as distance, totality, and character's social struggles, Pinter portrays a picture of a proletariat collision that results in a fatal resistance, where maintaining individuals revolutes against the capitalistic mass-reproduction to become world-historical figures, which as we see at the end of the play, is necessarily obnoxious.

Keywords: comedy of menace, Georg Lukács, Harold Pinter, Historical Drama, Mass-reproduction, Resistance.

INTRODUCTION

Harold Pinter (1930- 2008) is a modern British Noble-prize winning dramatist. He is associated with the generation of British playwrights who emerged in the 1950's and are known as the Angry Young Men. When he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in October 2005, not a single party leader in Britain congratulated him on it, for from the very beginning of his career

he was aware of the ideological dominance of capitalism and never stopped fighting it through his works. Asked by Woolf to write a play for Bristol University's newly established drama department, Pinter began to write his first play, *The Room*, in 1957. To do so, he started off with this picture of the two people in a room and let them carry on from there. His first play, with its dingy, working-class settings and surface naturalism, seemed to link Pinter with this group, but only the surface of his plays is naturalistic; most of a Pinter play takes place beneath the surface. His closest affinities are with a more centrally important movement, the Theater of the Absurd. As a young man, before he started writing plays, the works of Franz Kafka and Samuel Beckett made a great impression on Pinter. Like Kafka, Pinter portrays the absurdity of human existence with a loving attention to detail that creates the deceptive naturalism of his surfaces. In love with Beckett's style of writing, Pinter previously mentioned he liked the way Beckett created his own world, but one which "had so many references to the world we actually share" (Andrews, 2008, p. 2)

Pinter's first play, *The Room*, contained a number of features that were to become his hallmarks. The play is set in a single small room, the characters warm and secure within but threatened by cold and death from without. *The Room* is overtly symbolic, more so than Pinter's later work, but the setting and characters are, for the most part, realistic. Rose sits in the cheap flat making endless cups of tea, wrapping a muffler around her man before she lets him go out into the cold; her husband, Bert, drives a van. Under the naturalistic veneer, however, the play has a murky, almost expressionistic atmosphere. The room is Rose's living space on earth. If she stays within, she is warm and safe. Outside, it is so cold it is "murder," she says. She opens the door, and there, waiting to come in, is the new generation, a young couple named Mr. and Mrs. Sands (the sands of time? Mr. Sands's name is Tod, which in German means "death"). They are looking for an apartment and have heard that Rose's apartment is empty. "This room is occupied," she insists, obviously upset at this premonition of her departure (Pinter, 1957, p.17). A man has been staying in the basement. She imagines it to be wet and cold there, a place where no one would stand much of a chance. The man wants to see her.

Again the door opens, to reveal a terrifying intruder from the outside. He comes in. He is a black man—the color of death—and he is blind, tapping in with his stick, blind as death is when claiming its victims from the ranks of the good or the bad. "Your father wants you to come home," he tells her. Rose's husband comes in at this moment, shrieks "Lice!" and immediately attacks the man, tipping him out of his chair and kicking him in the head until he is motionless (Pinter, 1957, p. 23). On the naturalistic level of the play, the action seems motivated by racist hatred, perhaps, but at the symbolic level, Bert seems to have recognized death and instinctively engages it in battle, as later Pinter characters kick out violently against their fate. It is, however, to no avail: Rose has been struck blind, already infected by her approaching death.

The first of many brilliant plays of Pinter, *The Room* set out many of the themes that dominate Pinter's works. A housebound wife and her silent husband find their home mysteriously threatened by a domineering landlord, a pushy couple, and a blind man. There is an unspoken sense of threat of impending catastrophe from the very beginning, which is at essence Beckettian, but through the play generates social concerns within through Pinter's unique style of depicting social crises of his generation through short plays. In *The Room*, this article attempts to show how Pinter leaves a perfect Lukacsian historical drama, a drama that with its deep sub-text, "draws out those features in all men which in the course of history have been relatively the most permanent, general and regulative. It aims at a total embodiment of the life process. This totality, however, is concentrated around a firm center, round the dramatic collision. It is an artistic image of the system, so to speak, of those human aspirations which, in their mutual conflict, participate in this central collision". For Lukács, significance of a

historical drama its aim “at a total embodiment of the life process, especially concentrated around a firm centre, round the dramatic collision”. (Lukács, *Historical Novel*, 1983, p.91).

Noticing the early depiction of Pinter’s idea, what he brings between these two people, is of the necessity, and it is Pinter’s brilliance to make these ontological necessities social, distaining from Beckett to claim his own Pinteresque style. Susan Harris Smith (2006), a professor of English, observes that the term “Pinteresque” had an established place in the English language for almost thirty years: “Resembling or characteristic of his plays.... Pinter’s plays are typically characterized by implications of threat and strong feeling produced through colloquial language, apparent triviality, and long pauses” (Harris Smith, 2006, p.97). In this paper, we further study this “firm centre dramatic collision” before concluding what this totality of necessities that Pinter brings into play demonstrates an aspect of Lukacsian “totality of life”, which Lukács acknowledges as the purpose of every art form (Lukács, *Historical Novel*, 1983, p.92). Adding his theory to Hegelian perception, the dramatic action “rests essentially upon colliding actions, and true unity can have its basis only in total movement” (Lukács, 1983, p.91).

For Lukács, characters are of necessity of a historical play, whereas you can neither add one nor remove one. Pinter, too, maintains this element through his play. For Lukács, characters of a play are either “maintaining individuals” or “world-historical individuals” (Lukács, *Historical Novel*, 1983, p. 128). “Maintaining individuals’ is Hegel’s all-embracing term for men in ‘civil society’, it describes society’s uninterrupted self-reproduction through the activity of these individuals. The basis is formed by the personal, private, egoistic activity of individual human beings” (Lukács, 1983, p. 39).

Considering characters by this Lukacsian term, we find in Bert and Rose the old working-class maintaining individuals who are doomed to give their place to a new generation, Pinter further depicts their resistance to this self-reproduction that at the bosom is capitalistic through their system of landownership. Mr. Kidd, as the capitalistic symbol, can be considered further in addition to totality of movement, the potentiality of Rose to becoming a “lice”, collisions they participate and their mutual conflicts, and how Pinter’s totality of social necessities depicts this Lukacsian “central dramatic collision”, how Pinter portrays the “social truth” through a brutal resistance, which of course, is of necessity (Lukas, *Historical Novel*, 1983, p. 39). Therefore, this paper provides an aesthetic and social/historical analysis of the play using the most suitable framework available for this purpose, Georg Lukács’ aesthetic and social/historical framework that Lukács develops through three separate periods of his life in *Soul and Form* (1908), *Essays on Realism* (1950) and *The Historical Novel* (1983). Distinguishing purposes and significances of forms, which as the most social element of literature, Lukács has a valid theoretical framework for several forms of art, from epic poetry to novel, and by using a framework that would not endanger totality of a Lukacsian study of the play, we limited our theoretical tools to Lukács’ theories.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This paper’s subject focuses of the study to Pinter’s early play, *The Room*, which although has been aesthetically analyzed for the sake of Pinteresque stylization, its social-historical importance fell out of canonical notice. Although the term “historical drama” is still strange for a social study as Georg Lukács were most concerned by “historical novel” in his study, still a methodology can be attained from Lukács book, *The Historical Novel*, as he tries to distinguish historical drama, historical novel and epic in several chapters of his book. In addition, he attends several plays in two of his other books, *Soul and Form* and *Essays on Realism*. We use these resources to extract a methodology applicable to the study of Pinter’s short masterpiece. Through *Soul and Form*, we query primary destiny and prospects of the

dramatic form. Following on, we continue the distinction between dramas and novels in their destiny and portrayal toward *The Historical Novel*, noticing how historical novels are a product of the Shakespearean plays, it will be noticed how leading elements of historical novels play a key part in Pinter's play. This argument of destiny of characters, symbolizations, and reaction of the Capital will be further argued through *Essays on Realism*. Attending the damnation of the Huddles in *The Room*, we study the totality of actions that leads to Riley's death, and Rose's blindness, finding roots in social competition within classes under capitalistic reign. In *Soul and Form*, the young Lukács brings his aesthetic look toward a literary piece, how a literary piece is embodied by three elements, form, life, and totality. He further brings literary pieces to analyze through this scope. Lukács' aesthetics evaluate to a whole mechanism in his later book, *Historical Novel*, where he chases the emergence of historical novels, their necessities, and advantages. He further argues that historical novels cannot be considered as a genre, through what he calls "bourgeois tendency", as they arise from certain necessities to provide us historical truth. He analyzes how social-ideological collisions appear through historical novels, and how a correct portrayal can provide us their whole-sided truth and being. According to Lukács, a historical drama should contain "the limitless and scattered profusion of factors must be concentrated around those which really represent all the factors, all the driving forces of the political-historical collision" (Lukács, 1983, p. 137). We should therefore contribute to the totality of actions and subtext that brings such a class collision into a picture masterfully in a short play, *The Room*. Shaw (1988) in his article "Capitalism and the Novel Georg Lukács on Modern Realism" further explains that how working class should be unified against capitalist society (Shaw, 1988. p. 553)

Kavoulakos (2015) in his article, "The Drama in an Age of Fragmentation" explains how things began to change when Lukács' early Marxist texts suddenly gained actuality. In fact he emphasizes that Lukács' shift from bourgeois philosophy to Marxism (Kavoulakos, 2015, p.23). Several other sources are considered while doing this research in order to have better understanding of Pinter's play, such as the article "Alienation in Harold Pinter's *The Room*" by Kohzadi et al. which emphasizes on lack of communication between different generation. Another article which provides a better understanding about Harold Pinter's style is "The Dramatic Value of "Pauses" in Harold Pinter's *The Room*" by Basaad Albadri Maher Mhayyal. She states that "language is no more important to modern man; instead, he uses silence to express his feelings. Silence is more powerful than the words themselves." (Maher Mhayyal, 2017, p.95)

METHOD

Corpus

The corpus of the present study includes Harold Pinter's first play, *The Room*, produced in 1957. Known as the earliest example of Pinter's "comedy of menace", the play contains features considered hallmarks of Pinter's early work and the so-called Pinteresque. Brown (1982) suggests that the interior drama of *The Room*, though looks simple, "has rich subtext and is highly suggestive. The characters do not tell the audience everything, but leave them to discover the incomplete parts" (Brown. 1982, p. 121). The former scholars have studied *The Room* more in Existentialism terms as its historical significance has been deemed through time. However, even in his form that has been hugely influenced by Beckettian elements, Pinter never falls to abstractness as he gives a clear historical picture through symbolic characters. As Lukács argues, most of the characters in a historical drama must be of "typical representatives of the age and history, to present the dash of the different classes in situations alive as they were typical" (Lukács, *Historical Novel*, 1983, p. 110). Through this research, the play

represents material dialectics that such a collision contains, that contribute to the historical truth. “The importance of real-world conditions and the presence of contradictions within things, in relation to but not limited to class, labor, and socioeconomic interactions” (Lukács, 1950, p. 62).

Theoretical Background

Lukács argues that all different forms of arts are purposed to show a “totality of life”, but different aspects of this totality result in forms. “Drama, too, aims at a total embodiment of the life process. This totality, however, is concentrated around a firm centre, round the dramatic collision. It is an artistic image of the system, so to speak, of those human aspirations which, in their mutual conflict, participate in this central collision” (Lukács, 1983, p. 91).

For Lukács, the drama becomes more important when he is criticizing modern drama, demanding:

The formal laws of drama arise out of the material of actual life; the form being the most universal and supremely generalized artistic reflection of this material. Hence great writers in different periods create entirely different types of drama. Yet, for this very reason, the same inner laws of form are operative in these very different works of art. These are the laws of movement of life itself, of which the plays are artistic images. Hence the laws of artistic reflection are operative, and the drama is a true work of art, if these are applied and observed. (Lukács, 1983, p. 105)

Hence, Lukács sees a “true work of art” in certain artistic reflections that the drama possesses. Among those who contributed to the matter of “historical drama”, was Göran Printz-Påhlson, who tried to quarry a framework to analyze Strindberg's plays to mark their historical significance. He suggests that “the general observations of Lukács’ historical drama and fiction to be accepted as simple truths. In a way, this acceptance further investigation of the subject. However, the novel is the main concern of Lukács. But the almost scientific very rare thing in aesthetic theorizing” of Lukács can bring us perfect application toward understanding the historical being of a play. (Printz-Pahlson, 1990, p. 4)

In his own books, Lukács brings many aesthetical and social/historical elements that become interwoven in a literary piece. However, Lukács has been more concerned with novels as he found naturalist dramatists of his time unable to obtain necessities that a drama requires for their ill-conception of history. However, the science-like aesthetic framework of Lukács provides us the necessary tools to study *The Room* as a historical drama, “All those facts of life which find their appropriate reflection in historical drama can only crystallize in answer to their inner requirements if the colliding forces, whose clash is caused by these facts, are so constituted that their struggle concentrates itself in persons whose individual and social-historical physiognomies are equally in evidence” (Lukács, *Historical Novel*, 1983, p.112) . He further argues that “in historical drama what ‘concerns us’ has something of a paradox about it. We have to experience a happening of long ago as if it is actually taking place in the present and has direct reference to us” (Lukács, 1983, p. 150).

Further on, criticizing one of Strindberg’s plays, *To Damascus*, Lukács finds Strindberg’s views as “a self-inflated and hence mendacious 'objectification' of petty-bourgeois superstition”. Finding the root of this “superstition” in “the uncertainty of life under capitalism, concluding: “Unrealistic mode of portrayal of the late Strindberg does not disclose this real source of the experiences he portrays. On the contrary, it serves only to give these underived, unexplained and unelucidated experiences a false air of profundity and mystery. Strindberg does nothing more than give literary objectivity to the normal conceptions of the petty -

bourgeois philistine, which he regards with complete lack of critical distance” (Lukács, 1950, p. 164).

The distance varies through form, but what Lukács defines as the necessary distance in a historical drama is “as a fact of life, as an artistic reflection of how life itself is objectively at certain moments and how it necessarily appears accordingly”. However, this distance in drama observes the distance of characters together, how they generalize their social being and act accordingly to their destiny. “The absolute appearance of the relative image of life must, of course, be founded on content. It requires a real grasp of the essential and most important normative connections of life, in the destiny of individuals and society (Lukács, 1983, p. 97).

Procedure

Pinter, in contrast to Strindberg’s depiction, draws a more realistic scenery. He runs away from demonstrating from “below”, he tries to contain a totality of classes within the threatened middle-class, and his realistic attitude toward the set of actions enriches the totality of life he reflected in his play, to achieve a necessary distance from the play as the narrator, for example, one of the main things he does is to not demonizing the antagonist of the play, Mr. Kidd, to show a more whole-sided social truth that is a result of Pinter’s social consciousness Lukács., in aesthetics of a drama, argues that “the immediate effect of drama, the necessity for each phase of action and character development to be understood and experienced immediately and simultaneously with the events they represent, for there to be no time in which the spectator may ponder, pause or go back over what has happened, etc” (Lukács, 1983, p. 29).

Hence, this paper investigates through the play to find its “totality of actions”, seeing how the “distance” of characters and their generalization provides Pinter to showcase a post-feudalistic ideological/social collisions through *The Room*. Despite Pinter’s minimalistic attitude regarding characters and the setting, in social-ideological aspect they all gather a totality providing a capitalistic feature within the masses. Analyzing characters through class representations, we tend to another important Lukacsian literary aspect at later stages. Watching how the world-historical individuals present through the play and how their actions, resistance, echoes the author’s depiction. World-historical individuals for Lukács are “conscious bearers of historical progress, or of the ‘spirit’ according to Hegel. They are so only in the sense of granting consciousness and dear direction to a movement already present in society” (Lukács, 1983, p. 39). Hence, although *The Room* is not historically committed to a certain era, the totality of actions and reactions of the symbolized characters, as it will be discussed, provide a portrayal of the Capitalistic system toward the primary subject matter of the novel through the history.

Through this research, the following questions regarding Harold Pinter’s *The Room* will be answered. To what extent Georg Lukács’ theories regarding aesthetic and socio-historical elements of the literary pieces come into action to build a social-ideological play. How these elements become a force behind every action and reaction of the characters to portray a capitalistic interplay within the working class? And how the resolution of the play concludes the urge of Capitalistic mass reproduction?

DISCUSSION

The Room sets in a realistic manner, a single small room where a couple in their 60s lives, Bert and Rose. As we mentioned before, Pinter started the play with the two characters and then brought the social necessities that force them within as actions. The characters are warm and secure within but threatened by cold and death from without. Rose sits in the cheap flat making

endless cups of tea, wrapping a muffler around her husband, Bert, before him going out into the cold for chauffeuring with his van.

As Lukács (1908) argues, “Drama is always ruled by a world necessity, by an inexorable, always self-fulfilling, all-embracing, cosmic set of laws,” and the world that rules *The Room* is the capitalistic order and reproduction, efficiency. He further adds “Among an unlimited number of possible contents there are always several which are equally suited to serve as the basis for dramatic stylization”. Pinter’s early Beckettian dramatic stylization tends to achieve a realistic depiction that can both be abstract and sympathetic, but also a historical tragedy that depicts the reproduction of generations under capitalistic order, where classes fall to competition internally to maintain their social order (p. 140).

The play starts with a conversation between the couple, which is of course Pinter’s first necessity, even though Rose does all the actions as well the conversation. Supposedly, Rose is serving Bert teas and meals as she is preparing him for going out for his work, in what Rose calls “murder”. Rose, through the play, is always in seek of validation for Bert’s ability to work as a driver, and this is of the play’s main tension. The room, which serves as her whole existence, depends on Bert’s ability to work, and their ability to pay their landlord, Mr. Kidd. Rose’s insecurities are vivid from the very beginning, he repeatedly tells Bert that she “will take care of him”. Throughout the play, Rose’s conception of the room is her social and existential being, her possession. The room and the attitude Rose gets through the threats is a measure of the social distance of the characters from each other through the background of the capitalistic landownership. People outside the room, within their symbolic positions, enter to threaten Rose’s being, and the only way Bert seems to find ending this totality of threats is in the brutal way of denial, murdering Riley, which its social and existential horror leads Rose to her tragedy, becoming blind, or a social “lice” as Bert says.

Potentiality and Totality

For many critics, the minimalistic approach of Pinter is nothing but an ideology of absurdity, as Aliakbari (2006) suggests, Pinter “tries to establish an ideology which tries to reject the doctrines of determinism, an ideology which puts man in the center of life. Nonetheless, the paradox lies in the fact that our life is limited both by our existence and by the others” (Aliakbari & Pourgiv, 2006, p. 7). Nonetheless, Pinter’s approach throws spotlight toward dialogues and tensions they provide. The supposed meaning lies behind the circle of actions and reactions of the characters when they are provoked by conversations and totality of actions that shape the whole play. Hence, chasing this totality is the most important aspect of this Lukacsian analysis.

Analyzing toward “totality of actions” through the play, we can notice the distance the characters get from each other. From the very beginning, the play starts with threatening, cold, Rose’s outside world. As a housewife dependent on Bert, Rose’s class safety, which is resembled in the room, is dependent on Bert’s ability to work, and she variously defends this ability through the play. This emphasis is because of their haunt, the danger of becoming downgraded in the class system. The room is Rose’s living space on earth, assumedly, if she stays within, she is warm and safe, but outside “it is murder”, she says. Living a seemingly comfortable middle-class life, Rose’s deepest insecurity is falling through the class ranks and finding herself where her parents went, extinction. Their landowner, Mr. Kidd arrives. He asks Bert many questions regarding if and when he is leaving the room. The questions are answered by Rose while Bert still remains silent, leading to an irrational dialog. She repeatedly asks for Mr. Kidd’s approval of Bert’s ability in driving, again showing insecurities. She asks about “basement” and “upstairs” from Mr. Kidd. The basement is a downgrade but they’re too old to push their luck for the upstairs. After Bert and Mr. Kidd leave, Rose opens the door, and there, waiting to come in is the new generation, a young couple named Mr. and Mrs. Sands. Rose

invites them inside and remains friendly as they discuss the weather and the house. Rose becomes curious when he finds out someone is living in the basement. Mr. Sands tells her: "The man in the basement said there was one [room available]. Number seven he said, the very same room. They hurry out as Rose becomes hostile as Mr. Kidd appears after they leave" (Pinter, 1957, p. 37).

Their conversation is still vague, with Rose more insecure about class struggle, but Mr. Kidd tells her of the man from the basement, Riley, and how desperately he, a blind black man, wants to see her. Rose finally agrees to see him but remains hostile to him ever since the door opens. Riley seems to be a haunt from the past, telling Rose "Your father wants you to come home" after Rose continuously insults him. "Home? Go now. Come on. It's late. It's late. What do you want?" Rose answers and Riley simply says: "Come home, Sal" (Pinter, 1957, p. 39). Insulted to be called Sal, Rose touches Riley's eyes, the back of his head, and his temples with her hands before Bert comes back, telling Rose he's done his job. Noticing Riley, Bert shrieks "Lice!" and immediately attacks Riley, arguably murdering him. But the tragedy of the play goes further on when like Oedipus, Rose goes blind. This potentiality of Rose has been followed through the play, and the place of its occurrence is where a long haunt finally takes action. With Bert's final action, Rose's haunt becomes real as she becomes blind, breaking down to a knowledge that the totality of these threats and brutality of Bert's action consist. This knowledge, or horror, is, of course, debatable, which is the point of its tragic being.

Riley is nonetheless Rose's pre-history, whether socially or historically, and Bert's action reflects the within-class struggles more deeply, Rose's blindness, like Oedipus, is of the conception of the guilt that threatened by the system, Rose and Bert have rouse to their current level by being brutal to their past. Bert seems to have recognized this threat, death, in Riley, and neutralized it most savagely, while "now" she understands it was the capitalistic order, all directed by Mr. Kidd. Against the whole tension of the play, Mr. Kidd appears as the person with the least danger for Huddle's social condition. Moreover, Pinter's abstract attitude toward dramatization of the play takes a unique social view, neither completely from "above" nor "below". This attitude, in addition to his dramatic tendency toward Beckett, helps Pinter to achieve his form of Pinteresque, dialogues, and elements that is comically familiar and yet disturbingly unfamiliar, simultaneously or alternatingly both mundane and frightening. However, by Rose's tragedy, capitalistic order continues, as no one is to "look over Bert" nor Rose, and they're doomed to see their "father". Here we can notice another Lukacsian element of the play. "The "moment" of decision is an extremely important and ever-recurring fact of life which plays a very important part in both the destiny of individuals and of classes", and from the very beginning, this destiny was described through the subtext of the play (Lukács, 1983, p. 101).

Now tending to the potentiality of the protagonist, Rose. "Lice" Bert screams as he attacks Riley, but change is inevitable, hence, Rose, like Riley, becomes blind. Bert recognizes blind old Riley as a social parasite, out of social order, what Rose fears of becoming by losing the room, living in the basement, being a louse. This potentiality arises through actions and is also visible in dialogues. She performs at a high level of a "housewife" at the beginning of the play, not only placing bacon and eggs on a plate," but also buttering the bread and pouring teas (Pinter, 1957, p. 1).

Then becomes the matter of ability that society requires from them. As Bond (2009) states, Pinter used "a new kind of realistic dialogue that sounded the way people spoke in real life, with concealed meanings and unspoken texts. Hidden pasts lurked in characters' silences, and the world outside the closed room was always threatening to burst in" (p. 5). The abilities that allow the characters to maintain their social order, for Rose, are Bert's ability to drive despite being in his 60s, and her ability to housekeeping. In her monologue from the start of the play, Rose mentions both: "You looked out today? It's got ice on the roads. Oh, I know you

can drive. I'm not saying you can't drive. I mentioned to Mr. Kidd this morning that you'd be doing a run today. I told him you hadn't been too grand, but I said, still, he's a marvelous driver. I wouldn't mind what time, where, nothing, Bert. You know how to drive. I told him. I'll have you some nice cocoa on for when you get back" (Pinter, 1957, p. 2)

There's also a male dominance in the couple which at first is implied by Bert's silence, and later the same dominance reproduces in Sands' relationship. This is of historical importance, patriarchal social order dictated within families

Mr. Sands: You didn't see a star.

Mrs. Sands: Why not?

Mr. Sands: Because I'm telling you. I'm telling you you didn't see a star. (Pinter, 1957, p. 6)

Rose's main obsession is neither the weather nor the room, but both echo social struggles he faces. Bert is supposedly out of working weather as basically Rose puts him in the dress before going out, and later when he returns, he's proud of his success.

Bert: I got back all right.

Rose: Is it late?

Bert: I had a good bowl down there... I drove her down, hard. They got it dark out.

Rose: Yes.

Bert: Then I drove her back, hard. They got it very icy out.

Rose: Yes.

Bert: But I drove her... I got back all right. (Pinter, 1957, p. 9)

As well as that, we can notice a shift of gender roles in conversations in the beginning and end. In the beginning, Rose fell into a monologue while servicing Bert, in the end, Bert enters with a monologue separated by yesses from Rose before noticing Riley. However, since this social change is inevitable, the metaphysical action cancels Bert's resistance, Rose becomes blind (or rather a "Lice"), and the Huddles are doomed to falling out of social order, extinction. Another noticeable thing in the word selection of Bert is he's using a plural form of a species that is known in their generalization, louse. By recognizing Riley as a lice, Bert assumedly believes that he can also turn them into louse, as it's not only their history but the history itself, in its cruelest way.

Characters and Distance

Although Beckettian features in characters open up walkthroughs for many approaches, Pinter insists on the likeness of his world to the world we live for his aspiration. The central theme of the drama is the collision of social forces at their most extreme and acute point, and at the center of *The Room*, we have a breakdown. As Akdoğan (2016) states,

The ambiguous settings of the plays do not refer to a particular period; however, considering the relevance of the subject matter of these plays to their context, it is evident that they actually derive their material from their socio-historical background. Criticism of the relevant historical contexts in these works is only implied through representative victimised characters in oppressive settings (p. 331).

This feature helps Pinter to establish an ever-present subject matter into his plays. Pinter's mix of realism and absurdity "represents the authority of the state over the individual and the other characters stand for the victims of the state" (Akdoğan, 2016, p. 332). Sets of actions by the characters unify the "totality of movements" in the manner of how capitalism leads generations through generations, making them afraid of "downstairs" and dreamy of

“upstairs” while it gently and politely regenerates them. The characters demonstrating middle/working class are neither aware of “upstairs” and “downstairs”, but all opportunistic and defensive, as a result of capitalistic reproduction., which still through “landownership”, regenerates need and capacity. For example, the way Mr. and Mr. Sands leave the room right after they find out it’s the room they want to rent, the room number. They psychologically avoid emotional attachment with Rose as they understand the essence of their social competence.

Pointing out Shakespeare as one of the best authors of historical dramas, Lukács argues that “the playwright must disclose the social foundations of politics by portraying living human destinies, individual destinies which concentrate in their individual uniqueness the typical, representative features of these connections. Drama must give central place throughout to all that is typical in characters” (Lukács, *Historical Novel*, 1983, p. 147). In *The Room* this typicality plays a great role to present classes. Typical “newcomers” in Sands, typical landowner in Mr. Kidd, a typical housewife in Rose, and accordingly a typical working-class Bert. What isn’t typical, of course, is Riley. That is, despite racial claims, because Riley is of Huddles’ destiny, a symbolic representation of their pre-history as well, as no one knows Rose, as well as Riley, does. Maintaining Rose as the hero and Riley her destiny, the whole course of the play contributes to their symbolic collision. As Lukács argues, “In drama everything must serve to support the basic possible attitudes and concentrate upon one central collision. Hence dramatically, a single basic trend of human conduct can by its very nature have only one representative; any doubling, as we have seen, would be artistic tautology” (Lukacs, *Historical Novel*, 1983, p. 140).

Meanwhile, Mr. Kidd, who is the director of the actions and the symbol of authority within the play, is both aware of the couple who are looking for him to rent room number seven and the man in the basement, however, stays out of the scenes of collisions, where he forces characters to meet each other. The course of the play demonstrates Bert first as the man of inaction, he has only one job, to drive people, and is absent over most of the course of the play. The passivity of Bert suggests that he only comes to action when his existence is in danger, screaming “Lice”, he recognizes Riley as a danger to their level of comfort, a parasite, while he is the symbol of their history, their past, even knowing Rose’s real name, Sal, driven from Hebrewic Sarah. In addition, in Nazi Germany, female Jews who did not have “typically Jewish” given names were forced to add “Sara”. Given that it has been mentioned Mr. Kidd’s mother was Jewish, it might indicate that’s why Rose got offended by being referred to as Sal. The name “Riley”, of Irish decedent, means “valiant”. Riley has enough courage to inform Huddles of their extinction. “Sands” can represent time, while Bert’s name means bright light, despite his inaction, he’s a symbol of resistance in the social order of the play, while capitalistic reproduction of classes goes on through this very “landownership”.

As it was discussed earlier, Pinter’s aesthetical attitude, which is neither completely abstract nor realistic, leaves a perfect example for a social phenomenon that stays over the centuries. The characters demonstrating middle/working class are not aware of “upstairs” and “downstairs”, but all opportunistic and defensive, which is a result of capitalistic reproduction. Sets of actions by the characters unify the “totality of movements” in the manner of how capitalism leads generations through generations, making them afraid of “downstairs” and dreamy of “upstairs” while it gently and politely regenerates them. Pinter’s social attitude, in addition to his dramatic tendency toward Beckett, helps Pinter to achieve his form of Pinteresque, where dialogues and elements that are comically familiar and yet disturbingly unfamiliar, simultaneously or alternately both mundane and frightening. Meanwhile, it helps to showplace a frightening phenomenon to the audience through text and subtext.

Here once again we come at Lukács’ ultimate definition of historical drama. He suggests that in historical drama what “concerns us” has something of a paradox about it. We have to

experience a happening of long ago as if it is actually taking place in the present and has direct reference to us. While the essence of a collision must remain historically authentic, historical drama must bring out those features in men and their destinies which will make a spectator, separated from these events by centuries, feel himself a direct participant of them. The drama draws out those features in all men which in the course of history have been relatively the most permanent, general and regulative (Lukács, 1983, p.152). What Pinter attains in *The Room*, briefly but significantly, is of most historical essence that he adapted to a simple plot scenario he developed the story on, but as Lukács suggests, the anthropological essence of drama draws Pinter back to this historical matter, perhaps an everyday collision of the capitalistic dominance.

World-Historical Individuals and Resistance

One of the main characteristics of what Lukács knows as a historical drama is the appearance of world-historical individuals. Their essence is, of granting consciousness and dear direction to a movement already present in society. Lukács suggests that: “the dramatic hero and the ‘world-historical individual’ are near to one another in conception does not, of course, make them identical. There are highly important figures in history whose lives contain no potentiality for drama, just as there are dramatic heroes, who can only be called “world-historical individuals” in that extended and figurative sense”. He further suggests that, “in this sense, the hero of a historical play must be a “world-historical individual”. And it is this very character of his pathos, the very quality of his passion which is neither abstractly general nor individually pathological, which enables the concentration of personality upon pathos to find a direct response among the masses” (Lukács, 1983, p.128). In Lukács’ dramatology, there maintaining individuals make the masses, with an inaction opposite to world-historical individuals. “‘Maintaining individuals’ is Hegel’s all-embracing term for men in ‘civil society’, it describes society’s uninterrupted self-reproduction through the activity of these individuals. The basis is formed by the personal, private, egoistic activity of individual human beings” (Lukács, 1983, p.39).

Getting all these together and getting back to *The Room*, Rose begins as a “maintaining individual”, the one who is unable to actively show resistance to the change, even though she tries, because she’s dependent on Bert, who briefly is present as the hero, but still commits the greatest action of the play, killing Riley. These briefly being, and this generalization of an action, resistance, makes Bert the “world-historical individual” of the play. However, the tragic ending of the play makes Rose the tragic hero of the play, but her blindness is a symbol of the inevitability of change. Hence, in this matter, Bert’s action becomes heroic, but still, terrifying ethically. This leaves the audience with a moral-duality of actions, especially resistance, which at Huddles’ historical life comes brutal. This final action sums up the whole totality of the play, where the proletariat is being called to action for their survival while constantly threatened, and no matter how brutal, it’s still resistance. However, this resistance falls to Pinter’s naturalistic tendency, the inevitability of change. As Lukács implies, “For the greater the playwright, the more intimately bound up with the life of his time, the less inclined he will be to do violence to important manifestations of life which are closely connected with his heroes’ psychology and the nature of his collisions for the sake of dramatic form. Inevitably, these tendencies add increasingly to the ‘novelization’ of drama” (Lukács, 1983, p.124)

Bert stands out as the hero as “the action of the play demonstrates a succession of intruders who in fact do bother their social security” (Stone, 2003, p. 4), he refuges to violence to shut down this insecurity, however, since Riley is the very point of their past, this violence brings a double edged end, a tragedy. Hence, Pinter ends his play with an old Leninian question, whether a person should ethically “excuse” himself from revolutionary violence, or fall in a liberal “maintaining individual” and adjust to this capitalistic reproduction (Lenin, 1984,

p.238). He answers this question in naturalistic scope as well in Rose's blindness, after all, it's just a matter of time for the old couple to fall out of the social/labor cycle.

CONCLUSION

Through this article, Harold Pinter's first play, *The Room*, has been studied as a historical drama. It been discussed that Pinter's minimalistic use of the setting puts the spotlight into characters' dialogues and actions. Hence, the subject matter and destiny of the play was chased through these dialogues, actions, and reactions. Using Georg Lukács theories regarding aesthetic and socio-historical elements of the literary piece, the totality of actions was ultimately noticed in the protagonist's final tragedy as her "potentiality" was searched through the first part of the discussion. Noticing the Lukacsian element of "distance", we saw how Pinter's artistic position through the play helped him to generalize characters into collective masses, and how the proletariat falls to the regeneration of class in the Pinteresque post-feudalism world. Pinter's dual-use of realism and absurdity helped him to create an ever-present history, while within this history he perfectly portrayed a social concern within the working class. Moreover, he introduced the double play of the Capital to maintain mass reproduction in a way that it satisfies its needs.

Adding all of these elements up, the concept of "world-historical individual" come into discussion, and how finding in Bert a "world-historical individual". Despite being a silent character for most of the play, after his social security came into danger Bert rose up to the status a world-historical figure by killing the final and the most intruder, Riley, who was a symbol of their past. This violence both symbolically and literally led to Rose's blindness. We noticed Pinter's outtake on proletariat resistance toward this reproduction, that falls to naturalistic scopes of Pinter, to the inevitability of change, the further material dialectics within the text, from other characters, empowers Pinter's in his unique form of narration, that leads a simple play with minimums of characters to represent a social/historical phenomenon that has been staying long for a long time, and noticed how Pinter's totality of necessities drew a Lukacsian historical drama centering a social struggle.

REFERENCES

- Aliakbari, H. & Pourgiv, F. (2006). Harold Pinter: The Absurdist-Existentialist Playwright. *Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities of Shiraz University*. 23(1). 2-10
<https://www.sid.ir/FileServer/JE/103120064601.pdf>
- Andrews, J. (2008). *Interviews: Harold Pinter's "The Room"*. The University of Sheffield.
- Bond, P. (2009). Harold Pinter: Independent and Critical to the Last. *World Socialist Web Site*.
<https://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2009/01/pint-j05.html>
- Brown, John Russell. (1982). *A Short Guide to Modern British Drama*. London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd.
- Georg, L. (1908). *Soul and Form*. Columbia University Press.
- Georg, L. (1950). *Essays on Realism*, The MIT Press.
- Georg, L. (1983). *The Historical Novel*. University of Nebraska Press.
- Harris Smith, S. (2006). *American Drama: A Bastard Art*. Cambridge University Press.
- Kavoulakos, K. (2015). "The Drama in an Age of Fragmentation: Toward a New Reading of Georg Lukács's Evolutionary History of the Modern Drama". *New German Critique*, 124, 23–44. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43910656>

- Lenin, V. (1984). "The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky". *Collected Works*, Vol. 28,
- Maher Mhayyal, B.A. (2017). "The Dramatic Value of 'Pauses' in Harold Pinter's *The Room*". *Special Fifth Scientific Conference for the year 2017*. AL-USTATH. University of Baghdad, Iraq.
- Özmen Akdoğan, Ö. (2016). Social Criticism through Elements of Dystopian Narrative in Harold Pinter's Political Drama: One for the Road (1984) and Party Time (1991). *Hacettepe University Journal of Faculty of Letters*. 37(2). 330-340. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/308167055_Social_Criticism_through_Elements_of_Dystopian_Narrative_in_Harold_Pinter's_Political_Drama_One_for_the_Road_1984_and_Party_Time_1991
- Pinter, H. (1957). *The Room*. First published by Eyre Methuen.
- Printz-Påhlson, G. (1990). "Historical Drama and Historical Fiction: The Example of Strindberg". *Scandinavian Studies*, Menasha, Wis. Vol. 62, No. 1.
- Shaw, B. J. (1988). "Capitalism and the Novel Georg Luckacs on Modern Realism". *History of Political Thought*, 9(3), 553–573. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/26213800>