

# Reading Harold Pinter's "The Lover" as a Schizophrenia play

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**Abstract:** - This paper deals with the study of Harold Pinter's play 'The Lover' as a schizophrenia play. It tends to analyze the instances which occupy the play although it is a mental term but with a literary point of study. The splitting of psychic is as an escape from the life of monotony of monogamy. Implications of various tools such as change of role, names, appearances and time which plays an important factor in the play. The game of fantasy occupies the mind of the characters which contrasts between the bourgeoisies of domestic yearning and sexcapades. This schizophrenia adds on to the play as absurd.

**Key words:** Absurd play, fantasy, monotony of monogamy, schizophrenia, sexcapades.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

The name schizophrenia which is a German word, derives from the early observation that the illness is typified by "the disconnection or splitting of the psychic functions."<sup>1</sup> It is a form of mental illness in which a person forms split personality. This schizophrenia life is present in Pinter's play 'The Lover' which is a comedy of sexual manner.

The change of role in the characters is a deliberate agreement between the husband and wife in the play. Why such change occurs which urges the character to do so. How the appearances, costume, names are changed in order to create split personality and here time also plays an important role. As a whole it is a game which is to get sexual pleasure which is the main motif in order to escape from the monotony of monogamy. In the play the couple Sarah and Richard day and night existence is that of a middle-class where the husband goes to work early and Sarah stays in house but their afternoons are filled with their lover having illicit affairs. It is finally seen that the lovers are in fact the couples themselves who have deliberately created this whole sexual game in a way to avoid the monotony of monogamy by having schizophrenia life. It can be seen that the setting of the play is divided into living area and furniture gleamed-out. The couple in the play meets in the domestic space for their romantic interludes. The play shows us that there is a changing of role between the couples wherein the husband Richard is the lover Max and the wife Sarah is the mistress or whore Mary. Both allow going for extra marital affair which is a deliberate. It is an agreement between the both to start a game relating to changing of

roles in order to have a change in life. The play contrasts bourgeois domesticity with sexual yearning.<sup>2</sup>

With the changing of roles the couples spice up their marriage by pretending to be adulterous lovers in the afternoons from a soliticious protector to a rapacious seducer from wife to a whore of sexual pleasure. The deliberate agreement can be seen in the beginning of the play in the conversation between both the couples:

Richard (amiably): Is your lover coming today?

Sarah: Mmmn.

Richard: What Time?

Sarah: Three.

Richard: Will you be going out . . . or staying in?

Sarah: Oh . . . I think we'll stay in.

Richard: I thought you wanted to go to that exhibition.

Sarah: I did, yes . . . but I think I'd prefer to stay in with him today.

Richard: Mmm-hmm. Well, I must be off.

The question that can be raised is that why there is agreement even though both the couples were aware of the fact that the lovers are they themselves? As we can see the setting of the play is domestic and there is absence of outside place. Belonging to a middle class family they were bored of the unchangingness in the daily life. They were bored of the monogamous life. They want to have romantic interludes which will add life and adventure to their boring marriage life. Here they use domestic props for erotic use. This fantasy game reaches to its climax under the tea table which is the strong symbol of middle class. The costume in the play is seen as to introduce the appearance of the new character of the lover and the whore. It gives the couples a new identification. They emphasized the double, yet shared, life of couple and fastidious care marked their dress in the domestic area.<sup>4</sup> It can be seen that during

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the day to day life of the married couple. Sarah wore a crisp, demure dress and her husband goes to the office with the formal clothes with a brief case. But in afternoon “sexcapades” Sarah wore a tight suit, sensible shoes which are quite high and a French knot whereas Richard as the lover Max wore the uniform of middle management i.e., a black suit and a tie with white shirt. But the erotic resemblance in here includes the leather jacket of Richard and the tight black dress with four inch shoe of Sarah.

It is reflected that there is a presence of discontent with the direct contact. So it seen that there is use of mirrors in the play through which the couple contact. The language between the couples is dry there is lack of communication between them. The changing of names in the play adds to the new identification. Sarah as Mary and Richard as Max, both these two names provide them a new identity of lover and mistress. To notice, time here plays an important role. For it is only due to the time wherein we come to know the indulgence in romantic interlude. It is evident in the play that when the husband goes out to his office he is aware of the fact that his wife’s lover would be there in the afternoon. For again Sarah she knew that her husband would be with his mistress which is evident from diction in the play.

This split personality is present in the play with the sole consciousness of the couples. Again here another question that can be raised is that is the couples suffering from any sort of mental illness? Although schizophrenia in terms of psychology is a mental illness but the characters in this play are not suffering from any sort of mental illness. But the characters in the play wanted to avoid the monotony of monogamy. All these forms are taken in the characters who maintain split personality deliberately. This schizophrenia is present in the characters which is only a game to derive sexual pleasure. All these are absurd in nature and it is in fact an absurd play. Ibsen gives the initial impression that the Absurd play is dark and devoid of hope, and perhaps should have been called the Theatre of Despair. If we understand “absurd” as ridiculous, discordant, and baffling, then the term is a fitting description for the playwrights of The Theatre of the Absurd. Many Absurd plays lack conventional plots. At times their characters appear to give meaningless speeches that contradict their actions; time and chronology are often disjointed, and when the plays end, so many loose ends are left hanging that audiences balk at paying full price for a ticket to what they believe is half a play. These plays have no moral lessons to preach, no distinct stories to tell; they are simply: absurd.<sup>5</sup>

Richard in Pinter’s play is in a stage of nervous breakdown and in his dual existence is being driven

towards schizophrenic life. It is evident in the play that the couples although were playing the role of two different characters were aware of their duties and responsibilities towards each other and their children. In the final part of the play, Richard was in the verge of making an attempt to stop the affairs and if that was to be carried out it had to be out their domestic life. But Sarah still urges to continue it. Sarah gets control of the situation and drags Richard under the table where she offers to change her cloth and he replies three times to change addressing her “You lovely whore.” Both the two different personalities merge as one in the end of the play. The game which was played as lovers gets mixed with the domestic life of husband and wife coming together as the same person. Here it is a question that is raised: the end of game or it will be continued? Both the couples loves each other and joyfully serve each other but in order to fill their lives with more pleasure they change their personality and enjoyed that part of their existence too. But when the different characters merge as one character in the end of the play it was evident from the desperate responses of Sarah that mixing up the characters would in a way alter their relationship not only their sex life but their marriage and identities were at stake. The main motif behind these changing of character and personality was a part of game urge for more sexual pleasure which is all absurd in nature.

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