



Politics of Harold Pinter’s Dystopian Drama: *One for the Road* and *Party Time**

Harold Pinter’in *One for the Road* ve *Party Time* Oyunlarındaki Distopik Siyaset

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Abstract

This article discusses two of Harold Pinter’s political plays, *One for the Road* and *Party Time* as examples of dystopian drama which criticise the contextual background of 1980s Turkey and 1990s Britain respectively. This reading illustrates that dystopian images observed in Harold Pinter’s political plays, *One for the Road* and *Party Time* are used as responses to certain socio-historical problems of two different locations. While the panorama of a military state in *One for the Road* provides a criticism of the political atmosphere of Turkey following the 1980 coup, the economically unbalanced and depoliticised society presented in *Party Time* resonates with the socio-economic inequality of Britain during the Thatcher and Major periods. Unspecified settings of the plays, ambiguous characterisation, and hierarchical social structures presented in these works are viewed among the dystopian elements which help Pinter criticise the political atmosphere of Turkey following the 1980 coup and the unbalanced socio-economic background of contemporary Britain. Discussing dystopian narrative elements – that are commonly studied in relation to the novel genre – in relation to dramatic texts offers the idea that although there is no reference to particular states or political figures in these plays, dystopian elements such as totalitarian regime and state violence derive their material from the real events of the two countries. By way of this dystopian perspective, it is aimed to discuss the necessity of observing the close relationship between Pinter’s plays and their historical background despite their seeming distance from their political milieux. A reading of Pinter’s works with an emphasis on their dystopian images also helps to interpret Pinter’s detached attitude to the politics of his plays from an alternative perspective.

Keywords: Harold Pinter, *One for the Road*, *Party Time*, dystopian, politics, Turkey, Britain.

Öz

Bu makale, Harold Pinter’in sırasıyla 1980’ler Türkiye’si ve 1990’lar İngiltere’sinin bağlamsal arka planını eleştiren *One for the Road* ve *Party Time* başlıklı iki politik oyununu distopik tiyatro örnekleri olarak tartışmaktadır. Bu okuma, Harold Pinter’in siyasî oyunlarında gözlemlenen distopik imgelerin iki farklı ülkenin belirli sosyal ve tarihî sorunlarına birer tepki/yorum niteliğinde olduğunu göstermektedir. *One for the Road*’daki polis devlet temsili 1980 darbesi sonrası Türkiye’sinin siyasî atmosferinin bir eleştirisi olarak görülürken *Party Time*’da gözlemlenen ekonomik dengesizlik ve apolitik toplumsal düzen Thatcher ve Major dönemleri İngiltere’sinin sosyo-ekonomik dengesizliğine ışık tutar. Oyunların belirtilmemiş mekânları, muğlak karakter temsilleri ve hiyerarşik toplumsal yapılar, Pinter’in 1980 darbesi sonrası Türkiye’si ve 1990’lar İngiltere’sini eleştirmek için kullandığı biçimsel öğeler olarak incelenmektedir. Daha çok roman türünde incelenen distopik anlatı öğelerini tiyatro türünde tartışmak, bu oyunlarda gerçek bir devlet veya gerçek siyasî kişilerden bahsedilmemesine rağmen totaliter rejim ve devlet destekli şiddet gibi distopik öğelerin

* This article is based on a conference paper that was presented at the 10th IDEA Conference in 2016.

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kaynağını bu iki ülkede yaşanan gerçek olaylardan aldığını göstermektedir. Bu distopik bakış açısı yoluyla - görünüşte uzak gibi dursalar da - Pinter'in oyunları ve tarihsel arka planları arasındaki yakın ilişkiyi incelemenin gerekliliği vurgulanmaktadır. Pinter'in eserlerini barındırdıkları distopik öğelere dikkat ederek okumak aynı zamanda yazarın eserlerinin siyasî içeriğine olan mesafeli tutumunu inceleme konusunda da alternatif bir yorum getirmektedir.

Anahtar sözcükler: Harold Pinter, *One for the Road*, *Party Time*, distopik, siyaset, Türkiye, İngiltere.

Introduction

Throughout his writing career, Pinter was almost always interested in national and international politics. Even though political issues are not discussed at large in his works of comedy of menace, these plays also represent individual power politics with an emphasis on the vulnerability of human beings against threats like coercion and oppression. To exemplify, the implicit danger of the unknown in *The Dumb Waiter* (1957) and the menacing interrogative atmosphere in *The Birthday Party* (1957) are suggestive of Pinter's concern for the ideas of insecurity of the individual, impending danger and state oppression which he openly discusses as socio-political problems in his later political plays. Implication of topics such as "totalitarianism, fascism, torture, brutality, cruelty, and anomie" (Chiasson, 2013, p. 80) in his earlier works prepares the ground for a much more serious treatment of these concepts in Pinter's overtly political plays like *One for the Road* (1984) and *Party Time* (1991) that allude to actual political matters of the contexts in which they were written.

Harold Pinter was involved in a number of political activities with his membership of Amnesty International, English PEN, and Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament. With regard to his socialist political standing, Germanou states that Pinter "argued repeatedly against the non-democratic and aggressive policies that the USA, England, and international organizations such as NATO and the IMF had adopted in addressing situations in various countries around the world" (2013, p. 360). However, rather than employing his ideological views in his plays in the form of propaganda, Pinter preferred to criticise the social reality of his time implicitly by presenting problematic settings of inequality, censorship and torture, which helps to discuss the mentioned plays in this article as works of dystopian drama.

One for the Road and *Party Time* present common concepts like totalitarianism, state oppression, the vulnerability of the dissident, the legitimation of violence and ills of a class-based society against the rights of the individual. Since these ideas are commonly used in works of dystopian narrative, the two plays illustrate that Pinter formulates his social realist criticism by employing elements of dystopia. The function of social criticism of dystopian narratives is mentioned by Gregory Claeys as such: "Dystopias . . . may in fact be sharply critical of the societies they reflect" (2010, p. 107). This idea is appropriately manifested in these two dramatic texts of Pinter although they lack definite characters or settings taken from actual contexts. 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. In light of this idea, the aim of this article is to explore Pinter's implicit social criticism of the context of Turkey in the 1980s and that of Britain in the 1990s through instances of ambiguities in these works. Additionally, the dystopian perspective is offered as an alternative functional tool while interpreting Pinter's covert discussion of political ideas in his works.

Dystopia is defined as a "portrayal of a society in which evil, or negative social and political developments, have the upper hand" (Claeys, 2010, p. 107). Although dystopian narrative has more often been associated with the novel genre, dramatic texts with dystopian impulses should not be overlooked as "the genre of drama tends toward more direct engagement with contemporary political issues than does the novel" (Booker, 1994a, p. 301). Keith Booker's claim concerning which literary texts could be considered as dystopian helps to explain how these plays of Pinter can also be regarded as works of dystopia:

[A]ny number of literary works (especially modern ones) can be seen to contain dystopian energies, and readings that emphasize these energies can reveal dystopian impulses in works that might not otherwise be considered clear examples of dystopian literature. Virtually any

literary work that contains an element of social and political criticism offers the possibility of such readings. (1994b, p. 3)

It is necessary, at this point, to note that critics like Grimes and Silverstein have regarded Pinter's political plays as examples of dystopia in the dramatic genre. Grimes acknowledges Pinter as "the dystopian" (2005, p. 93) and addresses the specificity of his dystopian politics to the real socio-historical context of his plays: "The perverted history of the mid-twentieth century . . . is perhaps the most important foundation for Pinter's dystopian politics" (2005, p. 201). Similarly, Silverstein believes that Pinter's late political plays "offer a dystopian vision of the invincibility of regnant forms of cultural and political power" (1993, p. 152), which is most clearly depicted in the two plays discussed in this study.

Main Body

Unlike most dramatic texts with overt political interpretations and messages, *One for the Road* and *Party Time* are not propagandist plays in favour of a certain ideology but they deal with threats of oppression and violation of human rights by portraying exploitation of power politics. Without employing popular techniques used in political drama such as agitprop, docu-theatre, verbatim theatre or epic theatre, Pinter provides plots that take place in unspecified settings with almost stereotypical characters that embody no certain incentive in these plays. The ambiguities around setting and time, indeterminate intentions and motivations of the characters, their indefinite ideological commitments, and the meanings behind their elusive statements as stylistic characteristics of Pinter's drama make it viable to consider these plays in similar terms with some examples of dystopian literature. Not much is known about the characters in either one of these plays except for the fact that Nicolas in *One for the Road* represents the authority of the state over the individual and the other characters stand for the victims of the state. Similarly, in *Party Time*, the characters are not portrayed in dimension but as representative figures of a certain class. Moreover, as seen in seminal examples of dystopian fiction, neither of these two works point to a definite setting as they take place in an unknown location and an indecisive period. The dystopian vision in these two plays is not manifested in the form of a post-apocalyptic universe as is often seen in widely known examples of dystopian fiction; however, their depiction of totalitarian states, which is accepted as the prototype of the dystopian genre (Gottlieb, 2001, p. 40), renders them closer to the dystopian genre.

In relation to the obscurities in *One for the Road*, specifically, questions arise as to who are the detainees that are being interrogated, what is their crime, if any, who is the interrogator, what kind of ideological commitment he has, and evidently what happens to the child, Nicky. Among these floating unanswered questions, the horrific experience of living in a military state is, nevertheless, overtly portrayed. The crime of the victimised family is not stated clearly any more than the indication that Victor is not a devout patriot as much as the state requires him to be. This is evident in the following accusation Nicolas addresses to him: "We are all patriots, we are as one, we all share a common heritage. Except you," (Pinter, 2006, p. 328). Apparently, Nicolas represents a fundamentally fascist ideology, and he interrogates the family for being heretical to the norms of the state without providing a certain offence. In terms of presenting the conflict between the non-conformists and the standardising policies of a dictatorship, *One for the Road* represents a society in which individuals are punished for "thoughtcrime" in Orwellian terms.

In addition to the subject matter of *One for the Road*, the play also represents dystopian elements in terms of its characterisation. The protagonist Victor's condition in *One for the Road* bears resemblance to the experience of the dehumanised central figures of dystopian works in which the "nightmare journey ends invariably in the protagonist's trial, followed by retribution tantamount to his destruction or, even more horrifying, to his sinister transformation" (Gottlieb, 2001, p. 6). Accordingly, Victor ends up in an inquisition room to be interrogated for no clear reason, he finds out that his family unit is destroyed, and he is only set free after he is transformed into a silent figure unable to follow what he believes in. Considering that Victor and his wife Gila are released only after losing their ideologies and individual identities, the liberation of these characters needs to be seen as their defeat to the state rather than their eventual salvation.

To draw a parallel between Victor and the dystopian protagonist, it is useful to note Gottlieb's following suggestion:

The protagonist's experience and fate is [sic.] tragic in the sense that it deals with irrevocable loss on the personal level: he or she loses his [or her] position, his beloved, his freedom, and . . . faces a loss possibly even worse than the loss of life: the loss of his private, individual identity. (2001, p. 13)

Likewise, Victor loses his belief, his ideology, the family unit is broken, and even when he is released it is evident that there is no hope for his future in such an oppressive state. The individual in dystopias cannot defeat the pressures of despotism because the only way to "freedom" is through submission, which is similarly observed in Victor's case.

The encounter between the family members in the play and Nicolas as their tormentor also evokes the popularly employed practice of unjust trial of the individual by the state authorities in examples of dystopian fiction. Gottlieb argues that Nicolas represents "the Bad Angel in his secular incarnation as the Grand Inquisitor, high priest of the state religion and God-like ruler of totalitarian dictatorship" (2001, p. 4) who embodies the power of the state. Although there must be an even more frightening power figure behind Nicolas as is indicated from his regular references to "the man who runs this country" (Pinter, 2006, p. 327), with the power he gets from that higher figure, Nicolas thinks he has each and every right to destroy the family, and he eventually leaves its individuals bereft of their own personality, identity, and ideology. Therefore, the oppressiveness of the system represented in the play is indicated with Nicolas' blind attachment to the head of the state. As suggested in his radical statements about issues of religion and nationality, he is strongly tied to the ideals of the state, which explains why the power of the establishment is attributed to him. Although Nicolas follows particular ideals such as nationalism and religion, his commands for the torturing of Victor in order to preserve the ideology infused into him proves his blind attachment to the state and displays how false idealism might turn men into brutes. The ambiguity regarding who is the real power holder behind Nicolas' sadistic practices renders the play's dystopian undertones even more evident as it refers to the existence of a mysterious power holder in the background.

The legitimation of violence in the particular state depicted in *One for the Road* is critically displayed in the scenes of interrogation of the family members. They are primarily chosen as victims of the state, and Nicolas is the sadist interrogator who behaves at liberty with the power he assumes to be deriving from God as he claims "God speaks through me" (Pinter, 2006, p. 324). The ideologies of individuals are not respected by/in totalitarian states on grounds that they are antithetical to the benefits of the state. Among many immoral practices committed within the context of totalitarianism is "to destroy large numbers of domestic 'enemies' in the name of the goals of the regime" (Claeys, 2010, p. 119), a clear example of which is presented in *One for the Road* where individuals are sacrificed for the preservation of the norms of the state. During the interrogation scenes, it becomes apparent from the victims' torn clothes and bruised faces that they are harshly tortured. Although physical violence is not performed on stage in this play, it is implied in Nicolas' words that Victor's tongue is cut, Gila is raped several times, and Nicky is probably murdered at the end as implied by Nicolas' words: "he was a little prick" (Pinter, 2006, p. 332). By leaving Victor speechless, allowing Gila's body to be abused, and possibly murdering Nicky, Nicolas exploits all power he has for the disintegration of the family.

From the change of tense in Nicolas' sentence when he refers to Nicky, it is mostly interpreted that the boy is killed. However, an alternative interpretation would be that Nicky might also be forcefully transformed into a conformist. Rather than killing him, Nicolas could be of the opinion that he might use Nicky for the operation of the state as he asks the child if he likes soldiers or planes to test if he has an interest in the military profession. Historically speaking, Mark Batty argues, "from Bonaparte to Ceaușescu, it is not an uncommon practice for dictators to make soldiers of the orphans of victims, replacing their extant family structure with an all-providing patriarch in the form of the state" (2001, p. 103). Nicolas' elusive and seemingly irrelevant questions create ambiguity as to what really happens to the child, and the possible use of a child for the purposes of state protection also illustrates another dystopian characteristic of the play.

Gottlieb also points out the deliberate use of young characters in dystopian works by arguing that the representation of such characters functionally refers to the lack of hope for the future in such works:

To evoke horror, at the overwhelming menace of a nightmare society, it seems natural for the writer of dystopian fiction to introduce a helpless child or a still immature, innocent teenager as a victim, even a martyr, sacrificed to a monstrous state machine. (2001, p. 275)

Considering the possibility that the state chooses to use Nicky as a conformist or as a future soldier, it is hinted that the type of corrupt state depicted in the play is always in search of an alternative figure to secure the future of the establishment.

Offstage physical violence is accompanied by onstage verbal violence in *One for the Road with Nicolas'* abusive, humiliating and denigrating words against his detainees. In Pinter's drama, language functions as a tool to signal the very clear-cut hierarchy of power among individuals. Therefore, in Pinter's plays, another instrument used by the oppressive figures is their particular language that "is very often abused to mask political deviousness and overpower and demonize the underdog" (Batty, 2001, p. 91). This idea is epitomised in the scene where Nicolas also tortures Victor psychologically through verbal means as he informs him that his boys ruined his books, pissed on the rugs in his place by ironically adding that these are among the responsibilities of the state (Pinter, 2006, p. 326). Like his report of what his boys made to Victor's books, he also talks about the rape of Gila with ease, which is an apparent demonstration of "domination over the individual's private self, family, feelings, sexuality, thoughts, and emotions" (Gottlieb, 2001, p. 11).

Another dystopian narrative element in *One for the Road* is the presentation of fascism as a seminal theme, which is an indispensable instrument of a totalitarian state used in the ideological oppression of individuals. Despite the lack of reference to a specific national identity in the play, Nicolas' accusation against Victor for failing to become a good patriot is a rare instance that provides a probable reason for Victor's punishment. As a tool for discrimination and standardisation of individuals of a state, fascism as an ideology is mostly employed in works of dystopian fiction. In relation to Pinter's approach to this issue in his works, Visser observes that ". . . fascists are represented in [Pinter's] plays as the negative force, either known or unknown, who want to straighten out everyone according to the rules of their society, in which there is no room for dissenting opinions or people who do not belong to the mainstream" (1996, p. 330). Since Nicolas is in an attempt to create stereotypical individuals with identical ideologies, he is the spokesperson of the fascist regime in *One for the Road*.

However vague these dystopian narrative elements may seem in terms of their relevance to a specific state or society, they are indeed constructed in accordance with Pinter's critical approach to the extant problems of actual states. As Keith Booker draws attention to the function of socio-political criticism of dystopian fiction, "the treatment of imaginary societies in the best dystopian fiction is always highly relevant more or less directly to specific 'realworld' societies and issues" (1994b, p. 19). Appropriately, the imagined setting and period depicted in *One for the Road* serve as a critical response to the condition of Turkey in the 1980s. As the play is "[w]ritten in response to his [Pinter's] outrage against Turkish academics being detained and tortured for political views" (Prentice, 1994, p. 28), the experiences of the victims of Pinter's fictional state need to be considered in light of the actual events concerning the plight of the dissident figures of a factual state.

In September 1980, General Kenan Evren initiated a coup in Turkey on grounds that the future of the country was under threat, which ultimately resulted in disorder in various circles. Consonant with the claim that "series of wars, revolutions, and civil wars create a spiral of violence and coercion, giving birth to a totalitarian dictatorship" (Arendt as cited in Gottlieb, 2001, p. 38), the military overthrow in Turkey led to the emergence of a totalitarian state that commanded almost all administrative and judicial bodies. Following the coup, prohibitions and bans of various kinds began to be seen in the country as following examples illustrate: "In June 1981 all public discussion of political matters was prohibited. In 1982, an NSC decree forbade the old politicians, in almost Orwellian fashion, to discuss publicly the past, the present or the future" (Zürcher, 2004, p. 279). Ensuing this seminal event in the country, intellectuals were sentenced to death for voicing dissenting opinions, some of them would disappear in a suspicious way, academics and

teachers were made redundant on the basis of political opinion, politicians were dismissed while all new parties also needed to get the approval of the National Security Council in order to participate in the elections (Kaçmaz, 2011, p. 56). Following the coup, Turkey turned into a state of siege as martial law was accepted above the constitution, which explains the reason for the oppression and imprisonment of a variety of people along with the closing down of several institutions. All government bodies in Turkey including education, press and trade unions were restrained by the NSC that was represented by officials who “were put in charge of education, the press, chambers of commerce and trade unions, and . . . did not hesitate to use their powers” (Zürcher, 2004, p. 279).

Upon learning that members of a counterpart organisation, Turkish Peace Association were also under arrest at the time (Merritt, 2014, p. 135), a group of writers including Harold Pinter and Arthur Miller paid a visit to Turkey. These writers and other intellectuals were of the opinion that the punishment and violence practised in Turkey during those days were in opposition to human rights. As Pinter made observations of the prisons and the punishment practices during his visit, he projected his opposition to such operations in his play *One for the Road* by portraying characters like Nicolas representative of an oppressive state and the victims personifying its nonconformists. The relation of the play’s plot to the condition of Turkey at the time is mentioned by Pinter himself as he makes it evident that he wrote *One for the Road* as he was inspired by his conversation with two people who had no idea “what Turkish military prisons were like and about torture in Turkey” (Interview by Hern, 1985, p. 12-14). Pinter states the anger he felt upon this encounter as: “[I]nstead of strangling them, I came back immediately, sat down and, it’s true, out of rage started to write *One for the Road*” (Interview by Hern, 1985, p. 12-14). In several of his interviews following his experience in Turkey, Pinter voiced his concern for the unjust punishment practices and the abuse of human rights in general:

Hundreds of people are held in prison for two to four years without a verdict given; in other words, they have been found neither guilty nor innocent. While held they are subject to torture. We met people whose lives had been ruined, both those who have been tortured and their relations. (1985, p. 24)

As Pinter writes his observations of the prisons in the country in his postscript to the play, the horrific atmosphere of the interrogation room in *One for the Road* as “a place of internment where a dictatorial state might recondition its dissenting citizens before sending them, broken, back into its world” (Batty, 2001, p. 101) needs to be considered as an epitome of those prisons. Pinter thought punishment practices during the process in Turkey were against human rights as there were many unjust penalties and trial practices among which is “execution without due process” deemed suitable for “suspects, who according to the police, had resisted arrest” (Zürcher, 2004, p. 371-2). As a result of his observations, Pinter projected the kind of police state he witnessed in the country following the 1980 coup to his play with an emphasis on the corruption of power politics between the establishment and the nonconformists. In addition, considering the transformation of the characters into non-entities in Pinter’s play, the characters become once more symbolic of the punished individuals of the state as it is known that “[i]n the four years after the coup, 178,565 people were detained, 34,505 formally charged, 41,727 convicted and 326 death sentences passed. Of those sentenced, 25 were executed” (Pope and Pope, 1998, p. 152); however, “nobody became a hero. On the contrary, they became nameless, anonymous and alienated against those victimised” (Durna and İnal, 2010, p. 126).¹ As another representation of this actual account, the detainees of Pinter’s play are similarly subjected to harsh punishment and no other detail is given about them. When such common points are evaluated, it is seen that Pinter’s *One for the Road* depicts Turkey in the 1980s despite the absence of any specific reference to Turkey or to any Turkish political figure.

In a similar vein, Pinter’s other play *Party Time* provides social criticism of Britain in the wake of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s through a depiction of another dystopian context. The play’s dystopian nature lies in the portrayal of two dissimilar worlds, one dominated by the power-hungry ruling elite of eight people and the other represented by an offstage group of state victims who are tortured on the street for no apparent reason. In the play, the artificial conversation of the petit-bourgeoisie characters about their luxurious

¹ Translation of Turkish sources belongs to the author.

leisure activities is juxtaposed with the violence exercised on the protestors outside. Although the word “party” in the title of the play refers to a joyous and mirthful event, the idea of celebration turns out to be in stark contrast with the atrocious and menacing underlying feeling on the outside.

The fact that the power to rule the state is only in the hands of a small group of elite in the play indicates a plutocratic state structure. Alternatively, the kind of society depicted is considered as an example of “majoritarianism” (Etzionias cited in Grimes, 2005, p. 111) “in which the few might be made to succumb to the desires of the many” (Grimes, 2005, p. 111). *Party Time* displays “an unjust society, a degraded mob ruled by a power-crazed elite” (Gottlieb, 2001, p. 3). In this regard, the play employs an important aspect of dystopian narrative in its depiction of an unequal society in crisis as it consists of two groups divided from each other both economically and ideologically. Whereas the upper-class characters are ironically the only ones who enjoy the right to discuss political matters, the concern of the protestors on the street is not even on their agenda. The criticism of monopoly of power in capitalist states, where the difference between the rich and the poor is at its highest, is indicated in Fred’s ambiguous remark when Charlotte wants to learn what is happening on the outside:

Charlotte: I think there’s something going on in the street.

Fred: Leave the street to us.

Charlotte: Who’s us?

Fred: Oh, just us . . . you know. (Pinter, 1991, p. 30)

This remark, which points to an emergent discrepancy between groups of people who share the same society, aims to depoliticise the masses who are, at least, curious about the problems of people from another class. Since the group is characterised by a lack of contact with the outside world where others are exposed to violence, Cave suggests that the bourgeoisie is there “to celebrate their supposed superiority and absolute right to rule” (2009, p. 139), a statement which implies that the members of the group are supporters of the establishment as Mary Luckhurst also considers them as the “henchmen of the regime” (2007, p. 64).

An evident class-based social structure in *Party Time* is a significant dystopian device used as a tool for social criticism. The play’s identity politics concerning class is made evident at the beginning with a scene in which a waiter is serving the elite group of guests that are about to enjoy their night without taking any heed of the barricade going on the outside. Michael Billington suggests that what Pinter aspires to criticise in this play and illustrate is that “our lives are increasingly governed by an apolitical materialism in which it is uncool to get het up about injustice and corruption” (para. 2). The fact that members of the party are insensible towards the ills of society is revealed through their meaningless speech about the facilities appealing to their class, good dresses, and their appearance. Such scenes indicate the existence of strong class-consciousness among the upper class; however, it is far from representing any bond of fraternity as their relationships appear to be based on common benefits and a concern for ostentation as seen in Liz’ pride in being a member of their club: “Is it silly to say I feel proud? I mean to be part of the society of beautifully dressed people?” (1991, p. 21). Despite their pride, this class-consciousness fails to serve solidarity among that particular group and does not, in any way, refer to coexistence within society. With such examples, Pinter approaches the problem of class division with discontent and tries to prove the idea that

the seemingly innocent desire to belong to a group and play one’s part in an ordered society can never be wholly free of political exploitation, and that the impulse to participate and the comfort of sharing ethical values can easily degenerate into the rejection and castigation of those who dare to question the motives behind that participation and the basis of those ethical values. (Batty, 2001, p. 118)

This explanation serves as a very appropriate reason as to why Pinter almost parodies the artificial relationship of the members of the elite club based on sheer economic benefits.

Ironically enough, despite the upper class’ lack of attention to the cause of the protestors on the streets, the host of the party, Gavin seems to be responsible for the violence during the barricade as he works for the government. As a disapproved concept in dystopian works of art, state power is attributed to Gavin in this play like Nicolas in *One for the Road*. Most probably, he is behind the state torture outside, yet isolates his distinguished members from the issue to keep them apolitical by directing their attention to fancier subjects. State

torture, conceivably initiated by Gavin along with other offstage state figures, is reinforced by the support of other members of the club like Terry who threatens the dissenters decisively:

We could suffocate every single one of you at a given signal or we could shove a broomstick up each individual arse at another given signal or we could poison all the mother's milk in the world so that every baby would drop dead before it opened its perverted bloody mouth. (Pinter, 1991, p. 24-5)

As Terry's sinister discourse reveals, the language used by the authority figures of a dystopian state conveys a political message that the powerful are invariably the cruel ones. As a *tour de force*, Terry states how easy it is to sacrifice the different ones that threaten the alleged unity of their class. This scene, in itself, demonstrates the horrific and sadistic practices that are arbitrarily used by the state power against individuals in case of any attempt of objection and outcry.

The fact that the socialites lead the state in the direction they choose is denounced as an act of despotism in *Party Time* as another characteristic of dystopia. Existence of a totalitarian regime that is born out of a "desire for complete control over the hearts and bodies, minds and souls, of the citizens of the nation" (Claeys, 2010, p. 119) is hinted in Douglas' talk in favour of the so-called peace with clenched fists: "We want peace and we're going to get it. But we want that peace to be cast iron. No leaks. No draughts. Cast iron. Tight as a drum. That's the kind of peace we want . . . A cast iron peace" (Pinter, 1991, p. 14). Ironically enough, the use of trenchant words while defining peace in this scene proves the idea that standardisation is a weapon used by authority figures, and justifies Pinter's belief that the language employed by rulers is mostly used to masquerade, manipulate, and to deceive others (Battersea Arts Centre, 2003).

Another dystopian narrative element observed in *Party Time* is the use of double-speak – another Orwellian concept that refers to a state of incongruity between what is said and what is actually meant. An example of this device is illustrated in the scene where Terry speaks of the harmonious unity in their club as opposed to the chaos on the outside: "You won't find voices raised in our club. People don't do vulgar and sordid and offensive things. And if they do we kick them in the balls and chuck them down the stairs with no trouble at all" (Pinter, 1991, p. 33-4). This double-speak implies that the so-called lack of voice in Terry's club actually refers to the fact that no dissenting opinion is allowed there and the club is not all-embracing at all but it only surrounds people who share the same economic background or ideological standing.

The persecuted central figure of the regime in *Party Time* as another pointer of a dystopian state is Dusty's brother, Jimmy. The reason for which he and people with the same cause protest on the streets goes unmentioned in the play and even the utterance of Jimmy's name is treated as a taboo among the group of socialites. The only character that seems to have a connection to the outer world is Dusty with her constant questions about her brother, Jimmy. When she, all of a sudden, mentions his name, the other members of her group get uncomfortable and Terry even threatens to spank her if she is to mention his name again (Pinter, 1991, p. 5). Evoking the ambivalences in *One for the Road* that highlight the play's dystopian undertones, there is ambiguity in *Party Time*, as well, regarding who Jimmy is, what his crime could be, why he and other people are on the streets, and why the upper-class characters avoid mentioning his name. Jimmy only appears at the end of the play and makes a comment that barely explains why he was punished and ignored by the other groups. Much as these issues are rendered obscure in Pinter's two plays discussed here, the protagonists of both texts represent victim figures of dehumanisation in undemocratic states. These ambiguities in both works prevent reaching a specific conclusion about any particular state, yet, they still point to an extant threat of oppression, ignorance and inequality specifically observed in certain modern states.

Gottlieb claims that dystopian narratives tend to juxtapose "the protagonist's belief in individualism with the elite's ideology, aimed at the elimination of the individual" (2001, p. 10). Conflating the experiences of the alienated Jimmy on one hand and the representative mass society on the other, *Party Time* comparatively demonstrates the struggle of an individual against state threat and the indifference of the elite group at the opposite end. In such a state based on strict class and power divisions, inequality and intolerance for the other, Jimmy is turned into an abject figure by a tyrannical power, hence he is the protagonist that has lost his identity in this dystopian text. Through a representation of these two indifferent worlds in *Party Time*, Grimes argues that "Pinter wishes to remind those who may have forgotten or chosen to forget that the reimposition of traditional forms of

social and moral authority can only be achieved through the complete loss of individualism” (2005, p. 126). Evidently, as Jimmy says at the end of the play “I had a name. It was Jimmy. People called me Jimmy. That was my name” (Pinter, 1991, p. 37), he no longer seems to have a distinctive identity as he has also been turned into a conformist by the force of the state like Victor. As a result of suffering from oppression of the state as well as an indifferent mass to his plight, Jimmy is “[a]lienated from himself, unable to connect with a past self or even his name, all his senses have shut down and he does nothing more than exist from moment to moment in a world that condemns him to a living death” (Luckhurst, 2009, p. 116). The last speech of Jimmy which states that even the heartbeat he hears is not his own (Pinter, 1991, p. 38) is another indicator that he has lost his identity throughout the process. On the other hand, the petit-bourgeoisie in the play represent a certain type of community in dystopian states with their ignorant and dictatorial statements, which is resonant with Gottlieb’s claim that “monster state succeeds in breaking down the very core of the individual mind and personality – what remains is the pliable, numb consciousness of massman” (2001, p. 12).

Like the critical allusion to the state of Turkey in the 1980s in *One for the Road*, *Party Time* illustrates problems of British society in the 1980s and 1990s by way of a depiction of a dystopian society in which individualism is lost due to legitimised state oppression. Although Pinter states “*Party Time* did not come from a specific event” (Battersea Arts Centre, 2003) unlike *One for the Road*, actor Roger Lloyd Pack, who performed the characters of Victor in *One for the Road* and Fred in *Party Time*, comments about the specificity of setting of *Party Time* as such: “with *Party Time* we all assumed it was set in England and the club referred to was a particularly trendy place, with a gym and a swimming pool, in west London” (as cited in Luckhurst, 2007, p. 64). Such allusions to the actual problem of class politics in the country reveal the referential aesthetics of Pinter’s play.

After the Second World War, problems of class division and ensuing social inequality in Britain emerged resulting in the formation of a “self-interested, self-perpetuating and unaccountable elite, contemptuous of ‘the people’, which occupied entrenched positions in the BBC, the Foreign Office, the universities and the Church of England” (Cannadine, 1998, p. 174). Class division and inequality were, evidently, among the outstanding problems of Britain in the 1980s and 1990s during the governments of Margaret Thatcher and John Major as two successive leaders that have been considered to be “responsible for the biggest increases in poverty and social exclusion since the Second World War and . . . [who] have purposely pursued policies which widened social divisions in British society, particularly between rich and poor” (Walker, 1997, p. 2). Capitalism as an ideology is considered as the root of social division in terms of class in Britain and in *Party Time* alike. Marshall et al. point out the impact of the capitalist market and monetarism on British society: “Capitalist relations of production and the capitalist market, their logics rooted in the ‘natural’ self-interest of individual actors, have apparently created a truly selfish society” (1989, p. 10). Pinter regarded Thatcher to be particularly responsible for initiating and perpetuating a society of polar opposites with her statements such as the famous one: “There is no such thing as society” (Interview for *Woman's Own*, 2016). Believing that such statements legitimise the lack of concern for the other in particular social constructions, Pinter interprets Thatcher’s above remark as follows: “She meant by it that we have no obligation or responsibility to anyone else other than ourselves. This has encouraged the most appalling greed and corruption in my society” (as cited in Santirojprapai, 2008, p. 127). Correspondingly, the careless socialites in *Party Time* stand for the actual ignorant upper class that emerged and significantly grew during the Thatcher era. The fact that Pinter depicts this emergent group of the elite during Thatcher’s regime in the form of a party consisting of wealthy people is also underpinned by Peacock’s deduction that “the club is a metaphor for a right-wing, fundamentalist political ideology” (1997, p. 145).

Pinter believes that another negative outcome of these successive regimes in the country was state oppression. According to him, during Thatcher’s period, the country was gradually turning into a police state with prohibitions on freedom of expression some of which could be listed as

restrictions on, and implicit threats to, freedom of speech in the media and in university teaching and funding; increased police powers to oppose the early 80s miners’ strike; and Clause 28, forbidding the ‘promotion of homosexuality’ in education and art . . . (Rabey, 2003, p. 58)

These were among the reasons that gave rise to a number of protests in Britain in the 1980s and 1990s, and the barricade that takes place offstage in *Party Time* represents this type of chaotic atmosphere in the country in those years. David Ian Rabey points out the problematic context of Britain during this particular Conservative

government as the period witnessed “insidious but purposeful anti-democratic increases in state power and allied assertions of police power to pressurize any dissenting voice” (2003, p. 57). Since the play reflects the problem of state oppression in the form of violation of freedom of speech specifically with the torturing of the dissenters, it is obviously relevant to Britain in this respect, as well. An atmosphere of crisis between the police and the citizens following violent protests and riots during the period in Britain (Milling, 2012, p. 26; Stewart, 2013, p. 318-9) that generally arose out of conflicts such as racial discrimination, football hooliganism, unemployment, and disillusionment with the regime is mirrored in *Party Time* with the references to a street barricade the reason and result of which remain unknown throughout.

Conclusion

One for the Road and *Party Time* share common characteristics of dystopian narrative as they aim at a particular social criticism and deal with issues such as violence, state oppression, and politics of power and class. Pinter derives the material for both of his plays from the actual events of his socio-historical context; however, he does not point any specific references to these periods, instead, he prefers to illustrate imaginary depictions of two seemingly distant states. As an advocate of human rights, Pinter attempts to raise the consciousness of his reader/audience about the corrupt sides of their societies by presenting facts as fiction with his handling of issues peculiar to dystopian narrative such as “state-sponsored oppression” (Santirojprapai, 2008, p. 90), tyranny, abuse of power, and violence. All in all, both plays mainly emphasise the issue of elimination of the individual by dictatorships with the representation of exploited figures, Victor and Jimmy, respectively. In these political plays of Pinter that were written in accordance with his active participation in international human rights causes, he reflects the real condition of dissenting intellectuals and politicians with contrary opinions. Since Pinter evinces in his Nobel lecture: “Innocent people, indeed, always suffer” (2005, p. 5), his primary concern in these works is to portray the weakness of the individual against state oppression, which ultimately ends in submission and loss of identity.

Rather than accepting dystopias as necessarily referring to “a social structure that is worse than the present social system” (Sargent as cited in Gottlieb, 2001, p. 5), it is essential to consider these works as critical of the current social and political contexts. Accordingly, the speculated dystopian atmospheres presented in *One for the Road* and *Party Time* actually correspond to the real events of two distant contexts Pinter observes. As his statement suggests “[t]here are no hard distinctions between what is real and what is unreal” (as cited in Reitz, 2002, p. 165), his socio-political realism is disguised in the form of imagined dystopian context. While the conflict between the state and the individual in Turkey following the 1980 coup is presented in the form of oppressive practices of the establishment aimed at the elimination of the nonconformist in *One for the Road*, socio-economic problems like capitalism and monetarism in Britain during Thatcher and Major periods are projected in the form of an unequal social structure based on strict class division in *Party Time*. All in all, these two plays of Pinter display the close relationship between dystopian narrative and social criticism, as the former is used as a functional tool for the exploration and discussion of actual problems pertaining to the latter. As this possible correlation between Pinter’s drama and actual historical context reveals, it is necessary to look for certain references to the real socio-political issues of the periods in which his works are written instead of considering them as ambiguous works. Pinter mostly remains detached from a certain context, and he does not convey his ideas and criticism of society directly in his works. Therefore, the dystopian perspective can be seen as an important tool used in his plays to cover overt criticism.

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