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**COMEDY OF MANNERS AND THE POLITICS OF
POSTWAR BRITISH DRAMA**

DOKTORA TEZİ

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INTRODUCTION

Comedy of manners is principally a style of comedy that reflects the life, manners and customs of a society; it also represents the complex and sophisticated code of behaviour in fashionable upper classes. Therefore, the main objective of this genre is not to correct the follies and corruption in a given society but merely to demonstrate it in order to produce laughter. For that reason, this genre was not considered as a representative of political theatre. However, the changing social, political, cultural, and literary climate of Britain after the Second World War affected this particular genre as well as the general atmosphere of theatre at the time; and one can observe a critical alteration in the attitude of certain dramatists who were writing comedy focusing on the manners of the society in the post-war period. Therefore, this work aims to examine the history and development of comedy of manners as a genre from the ancient world to the post-war Britain and to analyse its political position and attitude by considering the examples written by two noteworthy representatives, Harold Pinter and Joe Orton.

In order to observe structural and contextual changes in comedy of manners, the first chapter of the dissertation will focus on the origin and development of the genre throughout history. Comedy of manners is mostly associated with the Restoration drama in Britain; however, its origins date back to the New Comedy of the ancient Greece, especially to the plays of Greek playwright Menander and the Roman adaptations of these plays by Plautus and Terence. Following the period of Old Comedy of Aristophanes and his fantastical, critical, and political plays, the political situation in Greece and the taste of society had changed; therefore, there were no more satiric and defiant comedies on stage in the following period of New Comedy represented by Menander. Menander's plays were intricate, domestic/romantic comedies full of stock characters and contained certain techniques such as misunderstanding and mistaken identity which would later be used in the examples of the genre in the succeeding centuries. Actually they were "harmless" theatrical productions without political references and they constituted the beginning of the genre of comedy of manners. The Roman playwrights Plautus and Terence adapted Menander's plays and they became a very important influence on the playwrights of the following centuries. They also

preserved the non-political attitude of the New Comedy; however they developed the genre in structure, language and technique.

In the Elizabethan period, these Latin playwrights had a great influence on the drama of the time. The elements in their works, such as character types, intrigue, mistaken identity, and double plot were used by the dramatists of the period, including William Shakespeare. Hence, the following section of the first chapter will focus on William Shakespeare and one of his plays; *Much Ado about Nothing*. This play by Shakespeare is considered to be an early example of comedy of manners in which society and social behaviour are portrayed by making use of the classical elements of the genre such as intrigue, mistaken identity and misunderstandings. Essentially, comedy of manners is best known as the major dramatic form of the British Restoration theatre. Even though these terms have become identical in time, Restoration comedy and comedy of manners are different concepts and they have to be taken into consideration separately. The term “comedy of manners” is first used for the Restoration comedy, but the genre, as a socio-political construct, had been changing throughout centuries according to the expectations of audience, theatre world, society, and evidently, prevailing authorities of the changing times. In order to analyse the development of the genre, political, social and literary characteristics of the Restoration period will be examined in the next section of the first chapter. As the popular theatrical form of the era, the representatives of comedy of manners will be analysed in terms of dominant ideology of the time and the social values of the period. The prominent playwrights of the period, such as George Etherege, William Wycherley, William Congreve, and George Farquhar, will be mentioned in terms of their contribution to the genre and the period; and Farquhar’s *The Beaux’s Stratagem* will be analysed in terms of representing new forms for the new tastes of the time. The next section in the first chapter will concentrate on the French playwright Molière since his style of comedy of manners represents a sharp difference from the styles of English Restoration playwrights which suggests a critical difference between the social conditioning of the French and English culture.

Comedy of manners can also be seen in the middle-class comedies of the eighteenth century, especially in the works of Richard Sheridan and Oliver Goldsmith.

The artificial comedy of Restoration period left its place to a more sentimental and conservative comedy as a result of the reaction to the corruption and non-moralistic values of the Restoration; yet, it lost its comic spirit. On the other hand, with the works of Sheridan and Goldsmith, who introduced “laughing comedy,” the main elements of the genre came back in more middle-class settings, with middle-class characters; but the concerns of the comedy of manners, namely the “manners” and its distinguishing elements and techniques remained in the complex plot structures of the eighteenth century plays. These plays attempted to produce laughter in the audience by showing the follies of the characters but did not aim at mending current situations, or criticising the power structures which created these situations. In order to represent the eighteenth century comedy of manners, *She Stoops to Conquer* written by Oliver Goldsmith will be analysed in the following section of the first chapter. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, the best examples of comedy of manners were the plays of Oscar Wilde and George Bernard Shaw. The unrealistic but colourful examples of comedy of manners written by Wilde created a sharp contrast with the “Thesis Drama” of Shaw produced in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Actually, Bernard Shaw and his works should be considered as highly political in many ways; so his works may be counted as an exception in the non-political history of comedy of manners. Consequently, to end the first chapter, theatrical ideologies of Wilde and Shaw will be analysed from a comparative point of view.

The following chapter will elaborate on the term “political” or the concept of “being political in theatre,” and also the political function of comedy as a theatrical genre. The major objective of this chapter is to come to a conclusion about the functions of dramatic types and genres as a political medium. Therefore, certain viewpoints and theories about politics in theatre will be explained in this chapter by mentioning dramatic types such as agitprop or avant-garde. Additionally, realist and naturalist styles in theatre will also be examined in terms of reflecting a political point of view. Starting with the idea that all drama is political, the nature of theatre will be discussed in terms of being “social” and “ideological”. The political approaches and methods in theatre in the twentieth century start with the views of German producer Erwin Piscator and his colleague Bertolt Brecht. Their ideas about the function of theatre as a political medium

will be the main component of the first section of this chapter. Afterwards, the politics of comedy will be examined as one of the most serious components of theatre which attacks conservatism and stability of ideologies by producing laughter which functions as a social corrective and leads people to think rather than feel. Moreover, along with the comedy of manners, other types of comedy, particularly farce, will be analysed since it has close connections with comedy of manners and has a political function as an example of low comedy. In sum, types of drama will be discussed within the frame of political medium and also analysed in order to indicate the differences between the objectives of using different types as a means for political attitude in this chapter.

The subsequent chapter will take a look at the social, political, cultural, and literary circumstances of Britain in the twentieth century. First, theatrical novelties and major playwrights of the early twentieth century will be stated; then social, cultural and artistic situations of the post-war period will be scrutinized. The post-war period in Britain was a period of anxiety because of the feeling of loss following the Second World War and its inevitable consequences like unemployment, migrations, losing the colonies all around the world and cold war years which altogether triggered the sense of fragmentation in Britain. The feelings of absurdity, alienation, and anger inevitably affected the atmosphere of the theatres of the time. Especially after the first production of John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger*, young dramatists showed up and inspired a feeling of excitement which created a theatrical renaissance offering a realistic and sharp view of the contemporary British society. Playwrights who broke the bonds with the previous generations and conventions made the new theatre a more radical, political, and social form of art. They reflected changing political and economic climate and created social and political awareness in modern Britain. In the 1960s, the world of theatre was under the influence of revolutionary acts; and it started to acquire a more political attitude than the preceding eras. Hence, at the end of this chapter, an examination of comedy in the 1960s British theatre will be carried out in order to evaluate the plays of Harold Pinter and Joe Orton.

In the last chapter of this work, two plays by two outstanding playwrights of the post-war British drama, Harold Pinter and Joe Orton, will be analysed. Pinter's *The Homecoming* (1964) is one of his most controversial plays about a couple who visits the

man's family. The play will be examined in terms of, first its genre as comedy of manners, and then, of its unusual attitude towards family values and gender roles in the post-war British society. The main discussion about the play will be centred around the concept of comedy since the idea of "comedy" and "comedy of manners" has a different sense in Pinter's work; and then, the play's possible political attitudes distinct from the previous examples of comedy of manners will be explored and scrutinized.

The second play to be analysed is *What the Butler Saw* (1969) written by Joe Orton. Following the tradition of Oscar Wilde, Orton was a keen farceur of his time. In this play, he gives us a very brilliant example of a comedy of manners with farcical elements, using the techniques of cross-dressing and mistaken identity which accelerates the action. The story takes place in a mental hospital full of hilariously drawn stock characters. Orton questions the system by blurring the line between sanity and madness and subverting the authority of the psychiatrists and their methods. He also implies that the mental hospital is a microcosm of the British society, or by extension, the modern world in which all the institutions are inoperative. The other concept under attack is sexuality and the blurring line between the sexes and sexual identities. The play has a complex plot structure with improbable situations caused by disguises, cross-dressings and misunderstandings; and the theme of sexuality creates an anarchic atmosphere in which conventional morality is attacked.

Comedy of manners has neither been a political genre in the history of theatre nor assumed the responsibility of affecting and as a result leading the audience to a political position. The role and function of this genre have always been limited to the intention of entertainment and restricted with the characteristic elements such as setting, character types, techniques of misunderstandings and intrigue, without criticising or challenging anything serious. The major social and political issues like gender roles, sexual politics, class conflicts, or religious debates have never been treated seriously as social problems in comedy of manners although the concept of "manners" suggests a wider glance in theatrical sense. However, after the traumatic Second World War, the genre had turned into a more serious example of drama which provides a harsh critique of society and challenges the power structures on a different level. It still had similar methods of representation of the action on stage; however, the choice of social and

cultural problems as subject matter, the handlings and presentations of these problems in theatre changed fundamentally in the 1960s. Therefore, this work will examine these changes and the major causes behind them by analysing *The Homecoming* and *What the Butler Saw* in order to explore and discuss the political stance and position of comedy of manners in the post-war British theatre.

CHAPTER ONE: THE HISTORY OF COMEDY OF MANNERS

1.1 Greek and Roman New Comedy

As a theatrical genre, comedy of manners is mostly associated with Restoration drama in Britain, however, its origins date back to the New Comedy of the ancient Greece, and the plays of Greek playwright Menander (c.342-c.291 B.C.) and their Roman adaptations written by Plautus (c.250-184 B.C.) and Terence (183 or 193-159 B.C.). As the first period of Greek Comedy, Old Comedy, represented by Aristophanes (c.446-c.386 B.C.), was a blend of social satire, political, social and literary criticism, religious ceremony, wit, fantasy and buffoonery. Aristophanes produced the most outstanding examples of Old Comedy; as O’Byrhim rightly observes, his major plays “revolve around fantastic situations that serve to comment upon the contemporary social and political situation in Athens” (85). A transition period called Middle Comedy follows Old Comedy with less political and less poetic plays. Middle Comedy’s favourite subjects were mythological travesty as well as romantic and erotic adventure. No complete Greek play has survived from this period except the last plays of Aristophanes *Ecclesiazusae* (*Women in Parliament*) and *Ploutos* (*Wealth*). The non-realistic plots and political remarks that shaped the basis of Aristophanic comedy were not popular anymore in the fourth century B.C.; and a domestic type of comedy appeared with the emphasis on family problems rather than community life (Goldberg 124). These plays belong to New Comedy as the last period of ancient Greek Comedy. New Comedy refers to the plays that were written and performed in Athens in the late fourth and early third century B.C. “when the conquests of Alexander the Great had transformed life in the Greek city-states” (Konstan 3). Menander’s surviving plays and fragments are the most important examples of this period. New Comedy is also known to us through the adaptations of Menander’s plays produced by Roman authors of *Comoedia Palliata* (comedy in Greek dress), mainly Plautus and Terence.

Menander’s more than one hundred plays are intricate social romantic comedies including certain stock characters such as strict fathers, lovelorn sons, innocent maidens, boasting soldiers, clownish cooks, and cunning slaves that overstepped their

status. Menander was a pupil of philosopher Theophrastus, who wrote a book about character types in which he defines thirty different characters such as “The Insincere Man”, “The Coward”, “The Man without Moral Feeling”, “The Talkative Man” and “The Man of Petty Ambition”. It is believed that Menander was inspired by this study, and Theophrastus’ book *Characters* had influence on the portrayal of stock characters in New Comedy (O’Byrhim 89). This book was translated into European languages at the turn of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. As Shepherd and Wallis state in *Drama/Theatre/Performance*, “the Greek model in which ‘characters’ were ‘personifications of moral vices and virtues’ mutated into something more typical of England in the early seventeenth century. ‘Characters’ became popular as prose distillations of recognizably topical social types” (179). In the Restoration period, the plays of comedy of manners use these character types extensively, and the plays revolve around colourful types with implicative names.

Since so little of it survives, it would be difficult to speak with certainty about the nature of Greek New Comedy. Everything we learn comes from the surviving fragments of authors like Philemon and Diphilus, and obviously from Menander’s the only almost-complete play *Dyskolos* (*Grouch* or as an alternative title *Misanthrope*) and fragments of his other plays. The major theme of New Comedy is the romantic love of a young man, “ordinary in his virtues, but socially attractive” (Frye 44), and the obstacles to his marriage to a young girl or a union with a “hetaira”, a concubine. These obstacles are generally the lack of money, parental opposition, or the young girl’s lower class origin. Besides, T.B.L. Webster adds that “In these plays what Aristotle calls *agnoia*, misunderstanding, is the major obstacle. . . This emphasis on misunderstanding shows Menander’s essentially Aristotelian view of human behaviour” (21). It should be remembered that misunderstanding or mistaken identity has always been an important traditional plot mover not only in the Restoration comedy of manners but also in the examples following this era.

The lower class girl in Menander’s plays is actually a noble and free person, and, in order to lead to a happy ending, her real identity is revealed at the end of the play by tokens such as jewellery, birthmarks or eavesdropping of conversations. As Webster remarks, the obstacles are overcome with the assistance of slaves, parasites, friends, and

a considerable amount of luck (21). In the example of Menander's *Dyskolos*, the situation is slightly different since the father of the young girl is a human hater named Knemon, and therefore his misanthropy is the main obstacle for the union of young Sostratus and his unnamed lover; however, with the help of certain stock characters and coincidences, love triumphs over hate and the play ends with double marriage. As Konstan puts it, "in all the Menandrian plays, marriage is the sign of civic status and the solidarity of the citizen body" (9). Therefore, the misanthrope Knemon, who does not accept the bond of marriage and rejects all social ties at the beginning of the play, "inhabits the perimeter of social status" (9).

As one can see, the characters of New Comedy, unlike the fantastic characters of Old Comedy, are quite similar to those of the contemporary dramas; the plots are obviously realistic and the plays are true to the unity of time and place. Dealing with universal themes like family issues, the plays contain very few references to political or contemporary situations and figures. The plays draw a very realistic and colourful picture of the society of the time by using certain familiar character types such as soldiers, servants, nobles, courtesans, and faithful friends. The costumes of actors underwent a change and became very realistic compared to the costumes of Old Comedy. The leather phalluses and the grotesque padding of previous plays disappeared; instead, New Comedy replaced them with ordinary daily clothing. Masks were still worn, but they were more lifelike than those of the Old Comedy. Some of these masks represented stock characters which led the audience to identify the behaviour of characters immediately upon seeing their masks (O'Bryhim 88). The structure of the plays had a standard pattern beginning with a prologue delivered by a divine character. The function of the prologue was to reveal the general outline of the plot. The action of the play was divided into five parts – the exact formula of five act play suggested by Horace – and these acts were divided by choral interludes which usually mark the passing of time in the play. The role of the chorus is uncertain in New Comedy since the lines of the chorus are missing in the surviving manuscripts.

There were no sudden and distinct breaks between three separate periods of the Greek Comedy; the changes took place gradually as some elements used by earlier playwrights were adjusted to new expectations or they became completely abandoned

while some others continued to be used in the following periods. Hence, the development of Greek Comedy should be seen as a long and gradual process of change and progress (O'Bryhim 85-87). On the other hand, the thematic shift from Old Comedy to New Comedy happened during the important changes in the social and political arena in Greece. Athens lost the Peloponnesian War to Sparta in 404 B.C. – during Aristophanes' lifetime – and one can follow the traces of this situation in his last plays *Women in Parliament* and *Wealth*. During the time of Menander, Athens ceased to be an independent state and came under the Macedonian dominion. As a result, the freedom that was enjoyed and used by Aristophanes was no more valid for the playwrights of New Comedy since the freedom of thought and speech could only exist in a secure and independent state. Social and political criticism could only be tolerated when the Athenian democracy was at its peak point.

Therefore, beginning with the period of Middle Comedy, comedy pursued new and harmless paths and its focus changed dramatically. The contemporary political references apparent in Aristophanic comedy disappeared and left their place to domestic problems. As O'Bryhim states,

With these political changes came shifts in government, traditional social structures, and artistic tastes. It should come as no surprise that literary preferences changed as well. While poking fun at their own governmental institutions and leaders was funny as long as the Athenians controlled them, it lost its appeal when such jibes could provoke retribution, sometimes of a violent nature. (86)

R. L. Hunter states that the authors of New Comedy no longer wrote for the narrow interest of the Athenian people but for the Greek world in general (13). This quality can be observed in the universal nature of the problems confronting the characters. As the scholars agree, the more universal the problems were, the less political the plays become. As Webster claims, domestic problems, mostly the problems of marriage, touches the issue of class distinction slightly and at the end of the plays love marriages were depicted as superior to the arranged marriages. Hunter further explains:

Whereas Aristophanic drama can fulfil the grandiose wishes of the whole state, in New Comedy, the unit of solidarity is the family; when plays

conclude with the promise of children to come, it is the family, not the individual, which has triumphed. New Comedy offers no grand vision of a new world; the plays offer rather the comforting spectacle of the restoration of the status quo after disturbance caused by folly or ignorance. (12)

The tradition of Greek New Comedy continued in the form of Roman New Comedy. It is believed that Latin literature began in 240 B.C. with the translation of a Greek play by Livius Andronicus. After the Roman success in the first war with Carthage, the Romans expanded the annual festival *Ludi Romani* (Roman Games) in which people watched the performance of this play whose title is unknown. The Romans accepted literary translation as a form of art; they not only translated original Greek plays but also adapted, reshaped and renovated these works in a process they called “vortere” (turning), the root of the English word “version” (O’Byrhim 151). Roman authors also applied the technique of *Contaminatio*, which means the combination of the plots of two different Greek comedies to their plays. The original works and their authors were usually mentioned in the prologue of the plays in order to commemorate these playwrights.

While adapting Greek plays, Roman playwrights felt free to make considerable changes both in substance and in manner of presentation (Griffith 31); however, they kept the Greek settings, costumes and sometimes names. Consequently, the term *Comoedia Palliata*, comedy in Greek dress, appeared. The plays were full of Roman affairs and customs; on the other hand, the freedom of action especially depicted by the slave characters was agreeable only by the Greek tolerance. To give an example of playwrights trying not to offend the Roman taste deliberately and expecting the licence of freedom only from the Greeks, Plautus can be quoted. He jokes about the Greek tolerance in his play *Stichus*:

Don’t be surprised that little old slaves like us
Can drink, make love, and ask our friends to dinner.
Stuff like that’s okay for us at Athens (446-448).

As Goldberg states, “Menander’s slaves are often little more than their masters’ agents, recalling Aristotle’s definition of slaves as ‘living tools’ . . . [but] Plautine slaves, like Plautine soldiers, are broader and bolder comic figures” (“Comedy and Society” 134). From this perspective, as Goldberg indicates, Roman comedy seems to convert or subvert the prevailing definitions of dominance and submission. It also turns Roman hierarchies upside down by juxtaposing the perspectives of slaves and freemen or the poor and the rich, and “by confusing behaviour associated with those distinctions” (134). Yet the plays are not totally political critiques of the time but merely a mockery of the situations.

Roman New Comedy, like its Greek predecessor, used stock characters emerging from “the household and orbits around this central domestic space” (Stott 41). In Greece, the theatrical change of focus from public to domestic, as Andrew Stott claims, was a reaction to the decreasing political importance of Athens. By this shift, a change in the audience is also expectable. When the financial supports which allowed people from all social classes to attend the performances disappeared, the class of theatregoers also shifted to middle class which was dominant at that time. The taste of this class was escapist and interested more in happy ending plays than the problems of social life. Not only the characterization but also the plots were formulaic. Like the Greek examples, Roman New Comedy deals frequently with the forbidden love of a young man for a prostitute, a slave, or an ineligible woman until, in a recognition scene, the real identity of the woman is revealed (Stott 41-42).

The frequent theatregoers were naturally familiar with these plots, characters, and situations; so, for instance, when a professional soldier appeared on the stage the expectation of the audience was to see a braggart soldier since these types had been portrayed so in the previous plays (Rosivach 2). Again, with the same expectation, the audience would like to see the reunion of the unfortunate young couples. Therefore, in order to fulfil the expectations of their audience, the playwrights of the New Comedy tried to create a simple version of contemporary life; then, distorted the real world by transforming it into a comic and happy ending play. The outcome is an artificial comedy which focuses only on the familial affairs, sexual demands, and financial conflicts.

The world of New Comedy is the world of people divided into rich and poor; but rather than being socio-economic classes, these categories are based on possessions of wealth. Certain status activities define the divisions such as “working class” and “leisure class”. In this sense, as Rosivach states, “working” characterizes the poor and “leisure” characterizes the rich. While the wealthy young men were hunting, drinking in parties, or having affairs with prostitutes, the poor had to work. However, poor people in this world were not destitute but reasonably comfortable; only they had to work for their livelihood (4). The result of this is the distortion of reality, and, as Rosivach claims, “New Comedy’s focus on the very rich has its ideological consequences, whether intended or not, for implicit in such a focus is the message that the lives of the rich are much more interesting and important than those of ordinary folk” (4).

As far as it is known, the theatre people of Rome were either immigrants or former slaves like Terence. Hence, their representation of Roman society was cautious, non-political and more conservative than that of the Old Comedy.

By at least the second century B.C., the Roman Senate recognized a *collegium* of poets and playwrights. This “trade-union” was perhaps modelled on the Greek institution of the “Artists of Dionysus” though it was not possessed of quite the same political-social prestige – mainly because Roman theatre practitioners, unlike Greek, were not citizens. Nonetheless it did reflect the growing prominence of actors, musicians and writers within Roman society, even as it also recognized the fact that many of these were immigrants and therefore in need of institutional protection and representation. (Griffiths 30)

While the works of certain authors such as Livius Andronicus, Gnaeus Naevius or Quintus Ennius are mostly lost or survived only in fragmentary quotations preserved by later Roman authors, twenty-one plays of Plautus have completely survived. Moreover, Plautus can be accepted as one of the most prominent and popular actors and playwrights of his time. His plays are mostly adaptations of Greek New Comedy; three or four of his plays are known to be from Menander, two from Diphilus, two from Philemon, one from Alexis, and the rest from unknown sources.

One of the most important and radical changes that Plautus materialized was in language. Using a free style, different from the other Latin authors, Plautus achieved his special comic effect in his plays. His language was not dependent on the strict rules of grammar, and was full of fragments, implied words and phrases, and mixed constructions. Unlike Terence, Plautus wrote for people from all sorts of classes; moreover, while he was using common Latin of his time he also used Greek and Punic languages to contribute to the atmosphere he created. The contribution of other languages served to place his characters in the real world in which Plautus lived. Furthermore, one of Plautus's aims was to strengthen the ludicrousness of the play in order to make it appeal to popular audience. By using elements stemmed from improvisatory theatre and Italic farce, he created a world which seems artificial but also familiar and acceptable to the audience. Actually his plays demonstrate a variety of manners, from sentimental comedy to domestic one, from romantic comedies to burlesque and farce. As O'Bryhim states, Roman comedy is a response to Greek culture in the middle Republic. In adapting Greek plays, Plautus made them Roman by adding allusions to Roman affairs and institutions. He also exaggerated the characterization to the point of absurdity in order to make the plays uproariously funny so that the plays would fit to the Roman tradition of farcical performance (245-246). He, as a master of comic effect, stretched his amusing characters to grotesque proportions and named them with comic names such as Thensaurochrysonicochrysidēs in *Captivi*.

The other important playwright of Roman New Comedy is Terence (Publius Terentius Afer), who was a former educated slave freed by his owner. Unlike Plautus who chose his pieces from the whole range of Greek New Comedy, Terence restricted himself almost completely to Menander and faithfully adapted his plays. As Goldberg puts it,

By restoring the proportions of Menandrian comedy, Terence created a deeply ironic, morally searching kind of *palliata* that skirted the edges of that Roman reality Plautus embraced with such enthusiasm. The difference between them is traditionally explained by appeals to the growing Hellenism of second-century Rome, which encouraged flight

from the crass, often farcical materialism of Plautus to a more gentle, even sentimental view of humanity. (“Comedy and Society” 135)

Unlike Plautus, Terence used less farcical situations, less exaggerated characterizations and he sought to create more thoughtful laughter. These differences could be the reason of the rumour about Terence having aristocratic friends and helpers in writing his plays. Terence’s language in his plays was more restrained than those of his predecessors with less alliteration and assonance, fewer similes and allusions, and fewer comic long words. His style was praised by Julius Ceasar himself who called Terence a “puri sermonis amator” (lover of pure language) (O’ Bryhim 246).

However, his most important contribution to the Roman New Comedy was four adjustments he had made to the Greek original plays. The first one is the double plot dealing with the love affairs of two couples, which will be used in some of Shakespeare’s comedies in the Renaissance period, in some plays of the Restoration drama, and in many romantic comedies in the twentieth century. The second adjustment is an increase of suspense and surprise at the expense of dramatic irony. In the Greek plays there were prologues in which what would happen in the plot was revealed by divine beings in order to create the discrepancy between the knowledge of the audience and the ignorance of the characters. Therefore, dramatic irony would cause the pleasure of the audience and create the essential comic effect. Nevertheless, Terence removed the prologues and created suspense and surprise in effective moments, although dramatic irony was present in many occasions.

His third adjustment is a greater verisimilitude than the one used in the Greek plays. The plays of New Comedy were totally different from those of the Old Comedy in terms of using realistic settings, plots, and characters. However, there were still differences between verisimilitude found in the New Comedy of Menander and Terence. In Menander’s plays the characters generally “think aloud” to reveal their ideas and plans which is non-realistic; however, Terence replaced these monologues with dialogues which seem more realistic. Terence also used everyday conversations one might hear in daily life easily; so he achieved a certain degree of realism that let his audience to find the characters of his plays believable and familiar. The last adjustment he made is the universal humanity of his characters. By portraying universal human

characteristics and foibles in not only major but also minor characters, Terence presents plausible and real characters so that his plays depict the human weaknesses that all humanity share.

Both Plautus and Terence had an enormous influence on the later generations of playwrights, such as Shakespeare, Molière, English Restoration writers and the dramatists of the twentieth century. Although they were very popular during the following periods, while Terence was the most read and taught playwright in the Middle Ages, Plautus was the author of the Renaissance. In the grammar schools and the universities of the Renaissance period, students used to study their comedies and other Latin tragedies in order to learn Latin. In the Restoration period both were famous and influential; however, Terence undeniably remained one of the founders of “high comedy” in the history of western drama while Plautus was the precursor of the best farcical plays.

After the productive and influential period of New Comedy, secular drama cannot be observed until the thirteenth century in the Western world; and the professional theatre started to be active after the sixteenth century. In the Elizabethan period, playwrights borrowed certain suggestions such as comic characters, structural elements like double plot, suspicion and intrigue from Plautus and Terence. Especially the element of mistaken identity was used firstly in the plays of Plautus; additionally, he used double mistaken identity in his play *Amphitruo*.

1.2 Shakespeare

Leo Salinger maintains that “As between Terence and Plautus, [Shakespeare] almost certainly owed less to Terence’s comedy of manners, and more to the comic-opera methods of Plautus. But, directly and indirectly, he borrowed heavily from both” (172). Although, in Shakespeare’s certain plays such as *The Taming of the Shrew*, *Love’s Labour’s Lost* and *Much Ado about Nothing* there are elements and scenes from Terence’s plays *Andrian* and *The Eunuch*, as Riehle stated, Shakespeare preferred Plautus, and followed his formula of farcical plays in his early works like *Two Gentlemen of Verona* or *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* (Riehle 116). For example, *The*

Comedy of Errors (first performed in 1594) is an adaptation of Plautus' *Menaechmi*. However, Shakespeare not only used *Menaechmi* as the major source providing the central plot of long-lost twin brothers who are mistaken for each other, but also used *Amphitruo* providing the second set of misidentified twins – the servants of the characters of the main plot. However, the play is altered so much that it is now a Shakespearean play rather than Plautine. While borrowing plots from other works, Shakespeare usually changes the tone of the original play considerably. Apparently, Shakespeare applies the “right use of comedy” of his period, as Salinger claims, “as an imitation of the common errors of our life” (2). *The Comedy of Errors* employs the Plautine convention of a child lost and found and of a family reunited (Dobson and Wells 347). This convention was later used in many of the Restoration comedies, in Oscar Wilde's plays and also in the post-war comedy of manners.

Early English comedy used other elements of Plautine comedy like stock characters, mistaken identities and plots based on confusion. In Shakespearean romantic comedy, one can observe essential elements like young lovers who try to get together against all odds, complications caused by misunderstandings, mistaken identity and deceit, parental oppositions and vicious characters who try to prevent the union of young lovers. The narrative focus in Shakespeare's romantic comedy “tends to be on the experience of being in love and the complexities created by gender roles and expectations. Witty language . . . is brought into play by the protagonists as a way of dealing with both the attraction and the fear of falling in love” (Gay 71).

In *Much Ado about Nothing* (1598), Shakespeare blends certain elements of Terentian and Plautine traditions with his specific inventions; he combines three different plots and relates them with each other successfully. Similar to the ancient examples, the first two plots are love affairs of two young couples, but the third one is a comic plot dealing with constable Dogberry and his colleague Verges. In order to get married, there are certain obstacles to overcome for the first young couple, Hero and Claudio. Their story is full of intrigue, deceit, and misunderstandings putting Hero's virtue in danger. However, in the finale, the confusion would end with the aid of tokens and helpful people; and the young couple get wedded.

The second plot dealing with Beatrice and Benedick is a novelty in this genre. Shakespeare uses a Terentian second plot; however he situates this couple out of the conventions of society and its expectations. The most attractive side of this second plot is the linguistic battle between these young people who, at the beginning, seemingly hate each other. Unlike Hero and Claudio who never speak to each other until the wedding scene at the very end of the play, Beatrice and Benedick talk abundantly. Within their “merry war” they talk, bicker, display their intellect, energy and compatibility (Gay 77).

BEATRICE: I wonder that you will still be talking, Signior Benedick: nobody marks you.

BENEDICK: What, my dear Lady Disdain! are you yet living?

BEATRICE: Is it possible disdain should die while she hath such meet food to feed it as Signior Benedick? Courtesy itself must convert to disdain, if you come in her presence.

BENEDICK: Then is courtesy a turncoat. But it is certain I am loved of all ladies, only you excepted: and I would I could find in my heart that I had not a hard heart; for, truly, I love none.

BEATRICE: A dear happiness to women: they would else have been troubled with a pernicious suitor. I thank God and my cold blood, I am of your humour for that: I had rather hear my dog bark at a crow than a man swear he loves me.

BENEDICK: God keep your ladyship still in that mind! so some gentleman or other shall 'scape a predestinate scratched face.

BEATRICE: Scratching could not make it worse, an 'twere such a face as yours were.

BENEDICK: Well, you are a rare parrot-teacher.

BEATRICE: A bird of my tongue is better than a beast of yours.

BENEDICK: I would my horse had the speed of your tongue, and so good a continuer. But keep your way, i' God's name; I have done. (1. i. 81-99)

The contrast in terms of linguistic vitality between this couple and the other ordinary people in the play creates a comic effect emphasizing the expected manners and behaviours of their gender roles. This witty dialogue of warring lovers is an example of repartee – a well known convention and an important part of the Restoration comedy of manners as well.

In *Much Ado about Nothing*, there are several intrigues with both good and malicious intentions. Sinister intrigues aim to separate the lovers and try to harm the virtue of young Hero; on the other hand, well-intentioned intrigues aim to unite the lovers. One of the best intrigues works for the second couple, Beatrice and Benedick; although they seem to dislike each other, by the help of their friends and through a very popular technique of eavesdropping, they both separately believe that the other party is madly in love with them; and consequently they are convinced to reveal their true feelings. At the end of the play, as it is expected, they happily unite. As in the Greek and Roman New Comedy, the lower class characters, servants and maids, play an important role in these intrigues; they speak and act freely and are considered the most comic characters of the play.

Another significant issue in this play is the social behaviour and social opinions shaped and oriented by gossip. Overheard conversations and misunderstandings are the major elements of the gossip theme in *Much Ado about Nothing*. As Penny Gay remarks, “Everyone knows everyone else’s business, and if they don’t, they make it up. Gossip is rife, much of it based on overhearing, or on ‘noting’ – watching and making a judgement that may well be false. The word *noting* (which puns on *nothing*) recurs throughout the play” (73). In Messina, the society is ruled by conventions regarding gender and hierarchy; the behaviours of the members of the upper class are shaped by these rumours and scandals. However, at the end of the play, even though they realize the dangers of gossip and rumour, it seems that no character would undergo a change about this issue. Therefore the play ends happily, celebrating the union of lovers with communal gathering full of music and dance.

As it can be seen in this example, Shakespeare uses the conventions of Roman New Comedy mastered by Plautus and Terence, especially the plot structure, and adds Elizabethan comic figures and their witty dialogues, in other words, English repartee

which will be matured by the English Restoration playwrights. This combination was totally different from the Roman tradition and was a new step for the English comedy of manners of the forthcoming Restoration comedy.

1.3 Restoration Comedy Of Manners

Comedy of manners is best known as the major dramatic form of the British Restoration theatre. Albeit these terms have become synonymous in time, Restoration comedy and comedy of manners have to be taken into consideration separately since the former has an ending date and the latter has survived until today. After the long exile in France, Charles II returned to England and restored Stuart monarchy in May 1660. During his absence, Oliver Cromwell and the Puritan regime ruled England without the aristocracy under the name of Commonwealth – starting with the civil war in 1642 and ending with the return of Charles II to the English throne in 1660. As the harbinger of the puritan regime, since they were found illegal, all the theatres were closed in 1642 under the guise of public health and safety; and remained closed throughout the Interregnum. The king's return caused various constitutional and social changes that might indicate a return to the conditions prevailing before the Civil War. With monarchy, theatres were reopened like many other reestablishments; and, as an innovation, the women who were forbidden to be actors before the Restoration, were granted freedom of professional acting which had been customary in France (MacLean 4).

The Restoration officially ended after Charles's Catholic brother James II, who succeeded him after the death of Charles in 1685, left England and fled to France in 1688. Then, after his abdication, parliament brought William of Orange, the husband of Mary II, the daughter of James II, in 1689. This act is called "Glorious Revolution" in the history of Britain. Even though there are certain discussions about it, the period which lasts until the second decade of the eighteenth century, including the reigns of William and Mary, and Queen Anne, is generally called the Restoration period in literary and social terms although there are significant differences in the social and

political lives of these rulers. Therefore, especially for academic purposes, the Restoration drama can be considered as having begun in 1660 and ended in 1714.

Two courtiers, Thomas Killigrew and William D'Avenant, were commissioned by Charles II for establishing theatre companies, gathering actors, and encouraging playwrights to produce new plays for the theatre lover king and his courtiers. King licensed two new theatre companies; the King's Company managed by Killigrew and the Duke's Company managed by D'Avenant, who, later in 1682, were to join forces. The first Theatre Royal in Drury Lane opened in 1663. Charles II, who was fond of theatre, was also a gentleman and a libertine who set the style of the theatres of his time. The productions, the texts, the actors and even the audience were all designed and shaped according to his taste. The influence of French manners, fashion, and theatrical novelties on the English stage that he brought from exile became famous at that time. One of them was the major theatrical form of the period: the comedy of manners. The English Restoration comedy copied not only French but also Spanish dramas, as well as *commedia dell'arte*; however, it was not a translation but a transformation of these styles to fit the English stage. Moreover, especially with the appearance of female actors on stage, Restoration theatre became a sexually permitted space in England after the puritanical regime. King Charles's involvement in the theatre world was not limited with the playwrights and companies; he had several mistresses from the theatrical world and his affairs, lovers, and illegitimate children were the subjects of the conversations among fashionable circles of the time.

The greatest figures of the comic drama in this period were George Etherege, William Wycherley, William Congreve, John Vanbrugh, and later George Farquhar. The English comedy of manners of the Restoration period started with Etherege, reached to perfection with Congreve, and finally declined with Vanbrugh and Farquhar. Etherege wrote his comedies just after the Restoration; however, Wycherley's plays were produced twelve years after the accession of Charles II. Congreve was the playwright of the Orange period, and Vanbrugh and Farquhar were the contemporaries of Addison, Steele and Swift. The comic dramatists of the eighteenth century, Sheridan and Goldsmith, were the leading figures of another era that changed the atmosphere of the comedy of manners and closed the theatrical values of the previous era.

During the Interregnum, the professional theatre had been disrupted, therefore the terms of theatrical discourse and the performance had been changed in the Restoration period. Restoration theatres were more sophisticated affairs than those in which Shakespeare and his contemporaries had worked (Wu 1). Accordingly, the general attitude of the Restoration comedy is different from that of the Renaissance drama; it stands by the institutional structure in which the significance of class relations and hierarchies are aggrandised. Therefore, the bond between the theatre and its audience – the aristocracy and monarchy – is confirmed. Unlike Elizabethan period, Restoration period never had a theatre that appeals to the public, or reflects the national values. Middle and lower classes that supported Cromwell and puritan values drifted apart from the courtly, aristocratic theatre; and the theatrical activities experienced a decline in importance. The restoration of monarchy and the return to the art and stylish manners was a victory for the royalists and aristocracy. In spite of the attacks to the theatrical activities, the court supported them and claimed their innocence and innocuousness. Furthermore, especially during the early years of the Restoration, many dramatists took advantage of the free stage of the time in order to neutralize the oppressions of the Interregnum; and they presented new forms for the tastes of new understandings. However, as Cevat Çapan points out, Restoration stage never allowed the real conflicts of the age to appear on the stage, or never had a genuine critical attitude (63).

While, in France, Moliere's farces and comedies of manners, Corneille's tragicomedies and Racine's tragedies were the best examples of the tension between political and social passion and intellect of Louis XIV's court and country, the court of Charles II was a more cynical and licentious one with amateur playwrights who tried to reflect the freedom gained after the Puritan repression (Hirst 7). However, it should be remembered that the audience of the Restoration theatre was limited to the courtiers and nobility; on the other hand, other classes were totally excluded as audience because of the unattractiveness of the subject matters in the plays and the alienation of the productions from the tastes of the public. Middle or lower class people could not find anything appropriate for their interests or for their lives in these plays.

Libertinism, the fashionable lifestyle related with the king himself, was a sort of public performance in Charles II's time. The Restoration libertines were sexual adventurers and radical questioners of social, political and moral values who were considered as dominant figures of Restoration comedies as well as of the conversations in drawing rooms, alehouses and coffee shops. They continually performed their pursuit of pleasure in front of the audience – a theatre audience or society –, and for that reason, they were always in conflict with traditional authority figures like husbands, fathers, employers, or ministers. Libertines were the ideal gentlemen who dress well, speak well, skilled in love making and courting but never fall in love. In the Victorian period, these libertines will be the centre of attention among the high society as Dandies. Named as “rake” in the theatrical world, these stock characters show different qualities at the end of the plays. While some of them turn into honest and penitent figures, the others continue their rakish life style and immoral conduct. As Jeremy W. Webster observes, libertines usually performed certain actions such as profanity, excessive drinking, carnality, sodomy or assault in the public areas in a variety of ways (2). However, this was not a philosophical or ideological attitude, but a way of life depending on Machiavellian or Hobbesian concepts of “natural man”. As Dale Underwood states:

There is at least an implied recognition by most seventeenth-century libertines that the stress upon freedom of indulgence led in actuality to a state of “war” much like that which characterized the natural man for Machiavelli and Hobbes. The more idealistically minded might tend to skirt this consequence of “liberty.” But the Restoration libertine, particularly as we shall find him in the comedy of manners, is always fully and ironically aware of this reality. He insists, in fact, upon man as naturally self-seeking in motivation and ruthless in his means. (12)

The theatre of the Renaissance had a bare stage which reflected the diversity of the Renaissance life based upon its poetical language and the imagination of its audience. On the other hand, the Restoration stage represented scenes from upper class urban life, mostly the life of London with its coffee houses, drawing rooms and the parks in which the dramatists captured the range of social behaviour. As a signal of his

fondness of leisure activities, Charles II ordered the redesign of St. James Park; and the park was opened to the public. He showed up there engaged in conversations; he also “established the fashion for ambulatory discourse exploited in so many contemporary comedies. Conversations following encounters in parks are frequent plot-hinges, invariably involving sexual pursuit. Here again the King was a model” (Brown 207). As an example, the setting of the second act of William Congreve’s *The Way of the World* is this park where the intrigues are arranged, the gossiping continue and the lovers take a walk as the convention of a typical Restoration comedy of manners. There were few examples in which the story takes place in a country setting; moreover country life is generally ridiculed or always in contrast to the city life in these plays.

The Restoration theatre, especially after the Renaissance, became absolutely antipoetic and anti-theatrical. The poetic language of the Renaissance drama left its place to the prose language of the discussion and intrigue. Sixteenth century theatre was a public institution and it depended on the language of the marketplace. However, the language of the Restoration drama depended upon the elegant verbal wit and repartee of the elite class which can be seen in the plays of the major playwrights of the period. Hence, the success of the Restoration dramatists depends upon their understanding of the speech and language of the classes they treat. As Çapan indicates, speech equals action in the Restoration world. Only by a competence in prose, the difference between appearance and reality, nobility and snobbery, honesty and falsity can be observed and reflected (73).

Restoration dramatists knew that the concepts such as love, honour and bravery have turned into some kind of masks in an age of rationalism. Thus these masks create ambiguity and double meanings everywhere. Especially certain concepts like “honesty”, “goodness” and “charity” lost their meanings in this conflict between appearance and reality, and turned into reflections of the slipperiness and instability of the given society (73). One example for the double meanings and ambiguity can be given from Wycherley’s play *The Country Wife*. The leading figure of the play, Horner, feigns impotence in order to get closer to the married women who look for adventure. While Lady Fidget, with the intention of having sex, visits Horner, her husband comes in; but he never suspects the relationship between his wife and Horner. Lady Fidget, claiming

to look for some china, enters a room and locks the door behind her; Horner pretends that he is angry with her and follows her using another entrance. Meanwhile, the poor husband Sir Jasper Fidget tries to warn his wife:

SIR JASPER: Wife! My Lady Fidget Wife! He is coming to you the back way.

LADY FIDGET: Let him come, and welcome, which way he will.

SIR JASPER: He'll catch you, and use you roughly, and be too strong for you.

LADY FIDGET: Don't trouble yourself, let him if he can. (IV.iii) (135)

When Lady Fidget and Horner step out the room, Sir Jasper and the other visitor of Horner's, Mrs. Squeamish start to question them about the china business.

LADY FIDGET: I have been toiling and moiling for the prettiest piece of china, my dear.

HORNER: Nay, she has been too hard for me, do what I could.

MRS. SQUEAMISH: Oh Lord, I'll have some china too. Good Mr. Horner, don't think to give other people china, and me none; come in with me too.

HORNER: Upon my honour, I have none left now.

MRS. SQUEAMISH: Nay, nay, I have known you deny your china before now, but you shan't put me off so. Come.

HORNER: This lady had the last there.

LADY FIDGET: Yes indeed, madam, to my certain knowledge, he has no more left.

MRS. SQUEAMISH: O, but it may be he may have some you could not find.

LADY FIDGET: What, d'ye think if he had had any left, I would not have had it too? For we women of quality never think we have china enough.

HORNER: Do not take it ill, I cannot make china for you all, but I will have a roll-waggon for you too, another time. (IV.iii) (136)

The conversation about china is apparently a sexual innuendo making the “china” a phallic image. Also, the “roll-waggon” is another decorative object which has a phallic-looking shape. Therefore, with the double meanings of the words, the object of china becomes a sexual symbol and a phallic figure. By creating ambiguity in their speeches, the hypocrisy in society which emphasizes the difference between the strict moral rules in appearance and people’s lustfulness in reality are successfully revealed in this scene.

During the Elizabethan and Jacobean periods, drama – from tragedy to comedy – had shared same ideals such as courage, honour and love. However, during the Restoration period, British drama experienced a significant split in terms of its genres. While the heroic drama reflected the noble tradition with the emphasis on bravery, patriotism, devotion to duty and undying love, the comedy “rejected the moral codes embedded in heroic drama, dismissing them as absurd, impractical and unjustified” (Roston 110). Restoration comedy of manners focused on the hypocrites, fops, villains and the cynical sentiments of aristocracy. The function of this comedy was non-didactic and non-moralistic which caused the creation of the rake or libertine hero; and it used the wit as the main source of laughter. The libertine hero is always free from the distinctions between good and evil, therefore he contradicts the moral codes and functions but his real crime – which is an unforgivable one – is lack of wit (Roston 113-114).

Actually, the wit in the Restoration comedy is definitely unemotional and limited to the conventions of the society of the time. As Roston mentions, the principles of the Restoration comedy relied on the views of Thomas Hobbes, the most influential philosopher of the time. Hobbes defines wit as consisting of two elements: Fancy and Judgement. While fancy perceives similarities in the things unlike, judgement perceives differences in the things alike. Therefore much of the wit in these comedies depends upon the use of simile emphasising the ability to detect similarities and dissimilarities (114). An example of the use of simile can be seen in Congreve’s *The Way of the World* (1700):

MILLAMANT: Oh, I have denied myself airs to-day. I have walked as fast through the croud –

WITWOUD: As a favourite just disgraced; and with as few followers.

MILLAMANY: Dear Mr. Witwoud, truce with your similitudes, for I am as sick of 'em -

WITWOUD: As a physician of a good air – I cannot help it, madam, though 'tis against myself.

MILLAMANT: Yet again! Mincing, stand between me and his wit.

WITWOUD: Do, Mrs. Mincing, like a skreen before a great fire. I confess I do blaze to-day; I am too bright.

MRS. FAINALL: But, dear Millamant, why were you so long?

MILLAMANT: Long! Lord, have I not made violent haste? I have asked every living thing I met for you; I have enquired after you, as after a new fashion.

WITWOUD: Madam, truce with your similitudes. – No, you met her husband, and did not ask him for her.

MILLAMANT: By your leave, Witwoud, that were like enquiring after an old fashion to ask a husband for his wife. (II.v) (187)

Another representation of the wit is the repartee, a form of dialogue in which the characters show their verbal cleverness as if they are in a fencing match. This quick exchange of witty words shows the shallowness of emotions, especially the insincerity of love and affection. This also reflects that, for the couples of the Restoration comedy, love is a game that has to be won in such a verbal competition; and marriage is the reward of it, a shiny but cold medallion that has to be worn in front of the high society. This hopeless game of love offers only dark and sinister ways of survival in a society where fashionable but corrupted manners are praised. Although the endings are happy and the couples are united, their marriages lack affection and love. Apparently, the social approval of marriage and matrimony in *Much Ado about Nothing* creates a sharp contrast with the handling of the marriage institution in the Restoration plays.

The plot of the Restoration comedy of manners generally revolves around certain intrigues of greed and lust. The subject of these comedies is about the way people behave, the manners they adopt in a social context, courting, marriage, adultery

or fortune hunting. Comedy of manners of this age is ostensibly an anti-romantic genre because the major focus of these plays is not the triumph of love over the social obstacles but the invalidation of conventional moral standards. The major character types in these plays are the beau and the fop who are furnished with fashion, dressing and deportment, but not with emotions or heartbreaks. Accordingly, style has an enormous place in comedy of manners. As David L. Hirst claims, style is a definition of behaviour, not a superficial manner of expression. It is also “distinguished by the refinement of raw emotional expression and action in the subtlety of wit and intrigue” (2). On the other hand, comedy of manners does not foreground any action in the plays; it is not the actions such as robbery, rape, murder or adultery that matters, but the way in which they are performed, or the style with which they are concealed is the main concern of the plays (Hirst 2).

The characters of comedy of manners are generally caricatures of one-dimensional types, having implicative names that reveal their characteristics such as Millamant (who has a thousand lovers), Dapperwit, Sir Mannerly Shallow and Sir Courtly Nice. Their emotional drives are mostly greed, lust, and seduction; therefore they are flat and static characters who generally do not change throughout the plays. This kind of comedy are said to portray realistic situations on stage; however, this is not true realism. It is an artificial comedy which exaggerates the common traits of upper class members and their lives. John Barnard, while discussing the idea of the delicate relationship between realism and comedy’s concern for actual life, in relation to *The Man of Mode* (1676), quotes J. H. Wilson that Etherege’s

Idealised portraits are recognisable as the patterns of mannered, aristocratic society. Here is no question of realism; Etherege seized upon and embodied in his play not the real, day by day life of Whitehall, but the life which Whitehall was pleased to imagine it led. Individual items may be factual, but the total picture is a comic illusion (Barnard 9).

As a matter of fact, while comedy of manners reflected artificial and incongruous adventures of high society as well as non-realistic and marginal characters and their scandals, it still became an outlet for the contemporary reality.

The shallowness, artificiality and lack of sincerity of the characters create an immoral tone and unpleasant atmosphere; however, the eloquent speeches and sophisticated wit of those characters create a significant example of high comedy which, in some points, turns into a satirical type of drama. Essentially, comedy of manners is a combination of both satire and farce resulting in a mockery of a particular social group. Most comedies of manners are structured to mock the people who watch them. As it can be seen, the genre has never appealed to the tastes of the lower classes, but only to the members of aristocracy or the people who were close to them. Therefore the playwrights of the time had no intention to criticise or to correct the injustices of the prevailing ideology represented by aristocracy; as Samuel Johnson stated in one of his prologues, “Themselves they studied, as they felt, they writ / Intrigue was plot, obscenity was wit. / Vice always found a sympathetic friend; / They pleased their age and did not aim to mend” (Weinbrot 40).

Comedy of manners can also be seen as a subversive dramatic form, as Hirst points out, since the characters in the plays of the late seventeenth century challenge the codes of marriage and love and try to impose a new and hedonistic point of view about these conventional issues of the time (4). Yet, this would not be enough to call them political plays since their concern was not to change the prevailing conditions with a witty criticism but only to depict the follies of their fellow citizens. Therefore, at the end of the plays these promiscuous, aggressive and ruthless libertines or the artificial and flirtatious fops are not punished, but, on the contrary, awarded with what they had desired.

As Todorov points out, “A society chooses and codifies the acts that most closely correspond to its ideology; this is why the existence of certain genres in a society and their absence in another reveal a central ideology, and enable us to establish it with considerable certainty” (164). In a similar way, the theatrical forms of the Restoration period reflected the dominant ideology of their time. The Restoration comedy was a reflection of the aristocracy of the time with their wealth, corruption and lifestyle full of wit, immorality and pleasure. As a result, the examples of comedy of manners in this period never appealed to the working class of that society; however, they provided the famous and popular way of entertainment for the nobility who define

the prevailing ideology. In “The Secular Masque”, Dryden accurately writes that “Then our age was in its prime, / Free from rage, and free from crime, / A very merry, dancing, drinking, / Laughing, quaffing, and unthinking time.”

Genre is a socio-political construct, shaped by class dynamics rather than literary or formal instruction. Apart from the social construction, there is a historical aspect especially in the Restoration period and the eighteenth century since the discourse of these periods identifies class as a necessary connection of literary practice. Dharwadker states that, the appearance of aristocrats and gentlemen as playwrights contribute to the identification of genres with the interests and expectations of the classes. Therefore, the theatrical and polemical arguments and the theatrical practices of the period are shaped by the categories of genre, class and authorship. In this sense, each genre – tragedy, comedy, farce, or romance – situates the author and the audience within a social and intellectual hierarchy, indicating “high” and “low” values and tastes (Dharwadker 462).

The difference between the genres of tragedy and comedy was highly sharp in the Restoration period, as if they were two opposite mirrors “on which its society was associated with a set of decorums” (Wall 188). Comedy, set in the everyday world and populated with recognizable, stock characters, is in contrast with tragedy in which noble and aristocratic heroes and heroines embody positive examples or models of virtue. Besides, comedy generally offers negative examples or models of behaviour that spectators would find offensive or disgusting. The models that comedy presents are the models of not virtue but human folly; therefore to take these models as examples becomes ridiculous and impossible. Actually, what comedy, and also tragedy, does is to create an artificial and exaggerated depiction of reality. All in all, theatrical performances are just stylized representations of their culture and society.

George Farquhar’s play *The Beaux’s Stratagem* (1707) was written in a time in which the attributions of immorality and superficiality for Restoration comedy were beginning to be forgotten; instead, a sentimental and moralized comedy emerged. However, this play seems to be a transition play following the rules of the Restoration and displaying the sentimentality of the eighteenth century drama. The settings of the Restoration plays were generally the city; however, *The Beaux’s Stratagem* uses a different locale, Lichfield, a picture of a small town life with its houses, inns and

taverns. The character choice is also interesting; a mixture of upper class and lower class figures such as innkeepers, highwaymen and barmaids. There are several memorable characters like Aimwell and Archer, whose implicative names reveal their purpose of fortune hunting, and the Sullen couple, a brute and indifferent husband and a noble and stylish woman who, at the end of the play, will have freedom and divorce. While Archer, who pretends to be the valet of Aimwell yet lives his own adventures, is seen as the manipulator of the action and also the real hero, Aimwell appears to be the romantic hero of the play.

As a very popular conflict of this genre, the concept of “city versus country” is evident in *The Beaux’s Stratagem*; urban values claimed by Mrs Sullen and the small town values adopted by Dorinda are always on the foreground. Another conflict is between the major characters of the play Aimwell and Archer; while Aimwell falls into the romantic world of love, Archer is always a businessman: “There’s nothing in this Tom, without a precedent; but instead of rivetting your eyes to a beauty, try to fix them upon a fortune; that’s our business at present”(II.ii) (327-328). On the other hand, class consciousness is a part of the background motivation of the characters. When the innkeeper’s daughter Cherry offers herself and her reserved money to him, Archer considers the situation as such: “Let me see – two thousand pounds! If the wench would promise to die when the money were spent, i’gad, one would marry her: but the fortune may go off in a year or two, and the wife may live – Lord knows how long! Then an innkeeper’s daughter! Aye, that’s the devil – there my pride brings me off” (II.ii) (332).

The action of the play is based on certain traditional techniques of comedy of manners like intrigue, disguise, mistaken identity, and misunderstandings. There are several intrigues in the major plot and the subplot. The first one, which refers to the title of the play, is disguise with the intention of finding wealthy wives; our male characters, Aimwell who pretends to be a rich gentleman, and Archer who pretends to be his servant, actually two friends equal in status, play their roles in a small town inn. On the other hand, Mrs Sullen pretends to deceive her husband with a French gentleman, Count Bellair, in order to attract Squire Sullen’s attention as a loving husband. And lastly, Foigard, seemingly a priest to the French officers staying in the inn, is actually an Irish man.

The major plot revolves around the young couple of Aimwell and Dorinda and the unhappy marriage of the Sullen couple. The fortune hunting business turns into a romantic affair because of the emotional character of Aimwell. By the help of *deus ex machina*, Aimwell gains a title and fortune and the true love of Dorinda at the end of the play. However, the unhappy couple has a happy ending as well; Charles Freeman, the brother of Mrs Sullen helps his sister and separates them by divorce. At the end, Archer still has a chance to win Mrs Sullen's heart; however, a second marriage is not pronounced by anyone in the play. On the contrary, Mrs Sullen gets her maiden name "Freeman" after the divorce and does not fall into another marriage.

Even though the idea of divorce was not prevalent in England in Farquhar's time, he shows courage in introducing an official separation by mutual consent. At the end of the play, the happiness of the divorced couple is no less than the united lovers Aimwell and Dorinda. For the Restoration rakes of Etherege and Wycherley, matrimony is a trap to be avoided since this institution would threaten the husband by the risk of cuckoldry and degradation. As Squire Sullen says to his wife: "If you can contrive any way of being a whore without making me a cuckold, do it and welcome", infidelity is a force to activate the plot in most of the plays; and its most favourite object is the butt – the cuckold that every husband would avoid to be. As the play reflects via Sullens, happiness in a marriage is a rare thing; and Farquhar finds a solution to free both the wife and the husband from the dangers of social embarrassment. He is also away from the cynical belief in the unnaturalness of an unhappy marriage by showing the young and promising couple of Aimwell and Dorinda. Although he is a part of Restoration sophistication and artificiality, he is also a part of the age of sentiment.

The Beaux's Stratagem can be seen a prototype of *She Stoops to Conquer* by Goldsmith, which hovers on the borders of comedy and farce. Goldsmith later catches the same freshness in his own play. Just like in Shakespeare's *Comedy of Errors*, masters and servants change roles in both Farquhar's and Goldsmith's plays. Therefore, as Charney states, "the humour arises from an ironic repetition of attitudes and remarks from one role to another. The servant is masterfully the master and the master is masterfully the servant. There is a natural appropriateness in the reversal of roles that defies the rights of birth and social position" (86). This reversal of the roles, as a part of

the basic techniques of the comedy of manners is also an important plot mover in Molière's *The Affected Ladies*.

1.4 Molière

At this point, a momentary look at Molière and his understanding of comedy of manners is crucial for a comparison between his and the English Restoration drama. Molière wrote his plays during the reign of Louis XIV, the “Sun King”, whose absolute power was remarkable especially with the idea of “The Divine Rights of Kings”. Louis started his personal rule in 1661, and established a centralized and a powerful monarchy in France while the Restoration period was in progress in England. At that time the French court, just like the Elizabethan counterpart, was the centre of the national values, and Molière reflected the harmonious unity of this national order. On the other hand, Restoration playwrights were the spokesmen of a limited community in a divided society. And, as Cevat Çapan indicates, Restoration playwrights were aggressive and petulant towards the strict moral values and the social forces outside this community. They took the values of the court and aristocracy as their criterion and criticised who did not fit them. But Molière ridiculed only those who violated the general social norms (66).

In the seventeenth century, French language was built on a strong foundation with the intention of organizing the French culture and language in a more coherent, balanced and unified system. French scholars created a unity of language and literature; and the literary artists of the time reached perfection of the Classicism. In theatre, like tragedy, comedy reached its peak point in 1660s and 1670s. The basis of the modern French comedy is the combination of the medieval farces and the classical Roman comedy. While Racine was the best representative of tragedy, Molière characterised comedy in that period. Born as Jean-Baptiste Poquelin (1622-1673), Molière helped comic playwriting to reach a level equalling tragedy without distancing it from the public tastes. As Shakespeare did in the Renaissance period, Molière, unlike the Restoration playwrights, both brought the elements of high culture to the people, and helped the intellectuals and public become closer. By showing people from all sorts of

classes with their own realities and surroundings, he made his characters universal. His best works were character comedies, comedies of manners and farces influenced by *commedia dell'arte*. Like Shakespeare and many other playwrights, he used Plautus and Terence as the sources of his plays.

Molière is accepted as the best observer of manners and character types of his society. He reflected his observations in his works such as *The School for Husbands* (*L'École des Maris*-1661), *The School for Wives* (*L'École des Femmes*-1662), *Tartuffe* (1664-67-69), *The Misanthrope* (*L'Avare*-1668), *The Learned Ladies* (*Les Femmes Savantes*-1672) and *The Imaginary Invalid* (*Le Malade Imaginaire*-1673). Most of his works were attacked by the authorities of the time because of his handling of the subjects with a cruel realism and without hesitation. *Tartuffe* is his best known play that was objected and even banned because of the overt demonstration of religious hypocrisy through its title character. People considered this play to be a “condemnation of all religion” when it was performed at the court of Louis XIV in 1664. After the banning of the play, Molière had to rewrite it twice before the performance was permitted (Brockett 190). *Tartuffe*, by focusing on the difference between the religious people and the hypocrite fanatics, might concern the religious problems between the cavaliers and the puritans in England. However, it is clearly known that the English stage could not tolerate such a political play which harshly criticises the society even though there had been repulsion for Puritanism after the Restoration. The reason is not that the English stage was supporting religious authority but it is because of its indifference to the social problems.

Unlike the Restoration playwrights, Molière saw the comic form as a way to correct social absurdities. His aim in writing comedies is to please and amuse the audience as well as to criticise them by reflecting the well-known social figures of the seventeenth century France who would be easily recognised by the public. His consistency to portray the follies of his generation was highly controversial; and this created an ironical humour and a perplexing laughter. The reason of his success and charm is the realistic representation of the figures of his time as well as his close connections with the public. Unlike the English Restoration playwrights of the court, Molière was the playwright of the common people. Beside their all joyful qualities,

Molière's plays also demonstrate the darker sides of human relationships. Beyond – sometimes an unbelievable – happy endings, a world of tyrannical power-relations is revealed in his plays. Also, his satire of some aspects of polite society in mid-seventeenth century France is so accurate that his contemporaries made efforts to keep some of his plays off the stage (Bradby xiii).

Molière's plays have a polyphonic quality in which every character has their own voices and languages, servants and nobles, peasants and pedants, intellectuals and bourgeois. Rather than the subjects, events and the scenery that the previous comic tradition emphasised, Molière brought the *idea* into the foreground and regarded the social problems as the major ideas of his plays; therefore, most of his plays can be seen as “*pièce à thèse*”, in other words “problem plays”. Molière's central characters are the people who deviated from the social norms and therefore become dangerous both for society and for themselves. The plots develop around the revelations of these characters' eccentricities and society's disapproval of their actions. He was also a part of an ancient satiric tradition which dates back to Aristophanes, Horace, Juvenal and Rabelais (Grawe 114-115). However, in *The Affected Ladies* (*Les Précieuses Ridicules*-1659), which is a comedy of manners as well as a farce, instead of an eccentric individual as the central character, there are several characters at the centre of the action. Unlike the traditional Molière formula, in which the eccentric character is in contrast to and therefore isolated from a “normal” society, this social comedy displays no “normal” society at all. As Grawe points out, Molière wrote this one-act play with a different plot pattern because he wanted to say something that the traditional pattern would not allow him to say (117).

In *The Affected Ladies*, the portrayal of a debased structure of pretentiousness or preciosity is Molière's main aim. He pictures vain and silly people who were ruled by trivial vices and passions while claiming to live for the pleasures of the mind and the soul. The main characters of the play, two young ladies, Magdelon and Cathos, come from a provincial, humble and less polished background. They claim to be too good for and superior to their suitors, La Grange and Du Croisy; yet the modest origins of the cousins are evident in their flirtatious and coarse manners. Although they reject their elegant suitors, they fall in love with the valets of the suitors, Mascarille and Jodelet,

who are in disguise of a marquis and a viscount. Here Molière doubly emphasizes the banal reality and self-love of both women and men. The audience are amused by the mannerisms of pretentious lovers; and also they laugh at the situation that the two ladies find the servants more acceptable company than their masters (Calder 139).

The young ladies, without regarding who they really are, search for a life according to the imaginary rules inspired by fiction. The sharp contrast between their so called spirituality and perpetual preoccupation with the body and bodily matters creates the ironical humour of the play. Their overdressing and excessive use of make-up reveal their fixation on fashion. In order to forget their country origins and to escape from their former selves, the ladies even want to change their names. At the end of the play, the real identities of the valets are revealed by their masters and the affected ladies are left to face the abuse of society which makes them aware of their disgrace and folly (Grawe 116). While the valets are bullied and beaten, the pretentious ladies are punished by mockery in a dénouement that can never be seen on the English Restoration stage. What Molière exactly does in *The Affected Ladies* is to emphasize the subcultures of the society. With the ending of the play, Molière criticises the manners and the obsessions of the middle class after its recent growth.

1.5 Eighteenth Century Comedy of Manners

Under the reign of William and Mary (1689-1702), the special relationship between the theatre and the noble class is lost; therefore, Restoration theatre began to shift into the mode of the eighteenth century dominated by middle class; and its audience started to change. It was obviously because of the social and economic changes occurred in the society. Tradesmen and merchants gained considerable economic power during the eighteenth century. Cities developed; London became a great industrial and commercial as well as a cultural centre. With these changes, members of the middle class demanded a more comfortable life and a respectable, moralistic art which was controlled by common sense and bourgeois worldview. While aristocratic power was declining, rationalism was growing; therefore high tragedy and formalized acting were not relevant to the concerns of the expanding middle-classes.

Writers, including dramatists of the early eighteenth century were aware of the modifications in the social structure, and they reflected their reactions in their works. For example, Congreve showed his acceptance of the social and political assumptions of the aristocratic society in his works; and Lillo portrayed his merchant characters with a dignity in his plays. As John Loftis writes:

Comedy could not record the society of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries without itself undergoing changes so pronounced as to constitute the extinction of the Restoration tradition, if we think of that tradition as concentrating upon wittily ironic social criticism and the interactions of a group of traditional characters, character relationships, and plot situations. The “literary fallacy” implicit in the social judgements of Restoration comedy was eliminated by well-defined stages. During the first years of the eighteenth century, the best dramatists held firmly in their satirical judgements on class relationships to evaluations not unlike those of the first generation after the Restoration. (3)

The change in the language of the theatre from verse to prose at the beginning of the Restoration period was a sign of a significant development for the middle class audience. This change was made in order to apply the tradition of French theatre to the British stage and also to reflect courtly values to the new understanding of the play writing. Yet, in the eighteenth century, this language shift became a necessary tool for the introduction of the middle class values to the theatrical stage. In the time of Shakespeare, people accepted the verse drama as a public activity; and now in the eighteenth century, middle class could only find a place in the theatre of the aristocratic minority by the help of their own rhetorical agility. Besides, prose language’s quality of being more appropriate for the scientific and psychological discussions on stage would become very important for political sense in the following periods.

It is generally acknowledged that the publication of *A Short View of the Immorality and Profaneness of the English Stage* by Jeremy Collier in 1698, which attempted to abolish the Restoration stage, helped to establish a different kind of theatrical form, “weeping comedy”, as the dominant form of the eighteenth century

comedy (Harwood 1). In his essay, Collier examines the language of Congreve, Vanbrugh and others to prove his claim that drama should be moral. His work was one of the many reactions to the corrupted and immoral conception of the Restoration drama and stage. He believed in the moral responsibility of theatre. Harwood quoted his assertion,

“The business of *Plays* is to recommend Virtue, and discountenance Vice; to shew the Uncertainty of Humane greatness, the suddain Turns of Fate, and the Unhappy Conclusions of Violence and Injustice: 'Tis to expose the Singularities of Pride and Fancy, to make Folly and Falsehood contemptible, and to bring every Thing that is Ill Under Infamy, and Neglect.” (2)

Collier also emphasized that the Restoration comedies have forsaken their didactic purpose, and have become infamous for their profaneness in language, rudeness in actions, immorality of female characters, abuse of the “Clergy” and using libertines as their heroes. After the publication of *A Short View*, dozens of pamphlets appeared either to attack or to defend the stage (Brown 256). Though, from the time the theatres reopened in 1660 until a few years before Collier’s attack in 1698, there was almost no open opposition to theatres. As John Loftis concludes, any open public hostility would have been politically dangerous since Charles II and James II were supporting theatres as active patrons at that time. Moreover, everybody remembered that Charles I had been killed by theatre haters in 1649. However, although the opposition have been inarticulate in those years, there was enough disapproval. During the reign of William III, critics who were against theatrical activities started to talk by the help of the opportunity created by William’s political position and indifference to the stage (Loftis 25). As Brown indicates, Collier’s criticism appeared at the right time. He continues that,

Changes in social power, the increasing significance of bourgeois values in opposition to the aristocratic world of the Restoration, found in Collier a suitable champion for a morality that this newly important segment of society wished to see enshrined at the centre of public behaviour. The theatre was the most public forum for such a debate. Apart from anything

else, the Collier controversy pushed theatre into the centre of debate and established writing about the theatre as an energetic field of literary and moral argument (Brown 256).

As Allardayce states, “the comedy of manners, therefore, slowly died away as a creative element in dramatic productivity”; on the other hand, he indicates that “there was one development of the comedy of manners, however, which for a time promised to assume larger proportions, as a type of comedy well fitted to mirror the tendencies of the first half of the eighteenth century” (161). This was the “sentimental comedy” which rapidly flourished with the works of Richard Steele, Colley Cibber, James Miller and Hugh Kelly. The middle class reaction against the immoralities of the upper class and the indecency of the situations in the Restoration theatre resulted in the sentimental comedy of the eighteenth century. The best example of this kind of comedy is Steele’s *The Conscious Lovers* (1722). The play, as a free adaptation of Terence’s comedy *Andria*, was written with the intention of moral teaching by using the emotional tone of the original play. Steele combined sentimental romanticism of the eighteenth century with a witty style of Restoration in this play; and appealed to the tastes of the middle class audience. The aim of “moralizing the stage” became the major motivation of the theatre of the time unlike the previous age in which love, friendship and goodness are “despised in expense of libertinism and corruption” (Hirst 38).

Emphasizing poetic justice, sentimental comedies focus on the middle class protagonists who struggle with certain moral trials and triumph at the end while the wicked characters are punished unlike in the Restoration comedies. Despite plain and shallow characterization and the simple and easy resolutions, the audience accepted those plays as true and realistic representations of human nature and their misfortunes. This kind of comedy aimed at producing not laughter but tears, for this reason they are also called “weeping comedies”. Nicoll Allardayce states that,

A favourite situation in sentimental comedy was the presentation of a pair of lovers one of whom becomes suddenly rich, and the other of whom abandons his or her claim of marriage. A sudden break in fortune reverses their positions and it is the one who abandoned the claim who now renews the protestations and the other who demurs. (164)

Allardyce also states that, in the eighteenth century the true wit of the comedy of manners disappeared, instead action came to take its place. The lack of wit caused the dullness of the sentimental comedy therefore the plays became “thoughtless and absurd and risible” (*A History* 208). Intrigue, the major plot mover of a proper comedy of manners was certainly not suitable for the genteel sentimentality on stage and hence it vanished from the realm of comedy and only appeared in the minor sections of farce (174). There were also escapist comedies as the opposite of the social satires of the late seventeenth century, and certain adaptations of the Restoration comedies such as *The Country Girl* (1766) written by David Garrick, as a clean and bland version of Wycherley’s *The Country Wife*.

It is generally believed that, comedy should present examples intelligible but repulsive in order that the audience should alienate themselves from those negative figures. In other words, comedy exhibits models of folly, not of virtue. Therefore the models should be evidently ridiculous so that the imitation becomes undesirable. As O’Brien puts that, Collier and the other attackers believed that the audience was under the influence of those misbehaving characters of the Restoration comedy; and this argument unexpectedly flatters the theatrical power in terms of mimetic desire. But the fact is that comedy, and also tragedy, are just exaggerated representations of reality, or artificial constructions of art and craft. As Congreve writes in the prologue of *The Double Dealer* (1693) “It is the business of the comic poet to paint the vices and follies of mankind”, the task of representation of reality on stage has always been important for the dramatists; however, there must be a transformation from the ordinary state of things and tendency for the extraordinary face of reality in the theatre so that a critical approach could be possible (O’Brien 189-190). Because, a true representation or a mirror image of the facts could not allow a distance or estrangement which is required for a critical and political perspective. Therefore the distortion on the stage sometimes becomes a strong instrument of criticism used by the dramatists and received by the audience.

It should also be remembered that, when the puritans closed the theatres, as John Morrell indicates, it was mostly because of the dangerous effects of comedies on the spectators. This is also connected with the idea that comedies produce laughter, and the

person who laughs is out of control and moving away from being an ideal Christian. In the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries laughter and comedy were condemned by the religious majority. Morreall points out that Moliere's comedies are accused since laughter was an instrument of devil; besides, Addison insisted laughter should be controlled by reason (86-87). As a result, the insistence on the sentimental "weeping" comedy was understandable in terms of aiming to control the subversive quality of comedy in the eyes of the middle class.

Towards the end of the eighteenth century, Richard Brinsley Sheridan (1751-1816) and Oliver Goldsmith (1730-1774) revived the wit and gaiety of the comedy of manners but deleted the indecency of Restoration comedy in another genre: "laughing comedy". Goldsmith, in "An Essay on the Theatre; or a Comparison between Laughing and Sentimental Comedy" (1773), compares both subgenres and concludes that comedy which denies laughter is betraying itself as a comedy. Both Goldsmith and Sheridan were against the kind of comedy without laughter in it. The major aim of Goldsmith was "to restore comedy to its traditional form", which was before the influence of sentimentalism (Corman xvii). Shakespeare's comedies were not witty enough for the Restoration understanding but they were laughing comedies for Goldsmith. While Sheridan was using the Restoration formula with a new attitude, Goldsmith, in *She Stoops to Conquer* (1773), created a Shakespearean comedy rather than a Restoration model (Novak 164); both attacked sentimentality with their new perception. G. Wilson Knight maintains that "Perhaps Sheridan's most typifying trick is his way of showing people being amused at a situation wherein the audience knows that it is they themselves who are being fooled" (185); and he gives Sheridan's play *The Duenna* (1775) as an example of this situation.

Goldsmith wrote *She Stoops to Conquer* to satirize the sentimentality of the day, and it overshadows the examples of the contemporary stage. The plot depends mostly upon mistaken identity and dramatic irony; additionally, the second title of the play, *The Mistakes of a Night*, emphasizes the theme of misunderstanding. Mr. Hardcastle wants his daughter Kate to marry the son of his old friend Charles Marlow. Young Marlow, misinformed by Tony Lumpkin, the stepson of Mr. Hardcastle, mistakes the house of Hardcastles as an inn and he behaves like a customer rather than a guest in the house.

He acts as a sentimental man towards the women of high rank such as Kate Hardcastle, and tries to speak to her with a philosophical and serious manner. On the other hand, he treats lower class women with a witty and flirtatious way like a Restoration hero. During his formal conversations with Kate he never looks at her eyes, keeps his head down with a shy attitude. After realising his problem, Kate, in order to know Marlow closely, pretends to be a barmaid and establishes a bond with him causing Marlow to reveal his flirtatious character in a series of comic and romantic situations.

There is a variety of comic and lovable characters from late eighteenth century Britain; Mrs. Hardcastle, for example, pretends to be fashionable like Londoners although she has never been in a big city; she becomes the “butt” of the play and is ridiculed for imitating the manners of the town. She complains that “We country persons have no manners at all”. Her husband, Mr. Hardcastle, a man who loves “old friends, old times, old manners, old books, old wine” is a representative of good breeding and country values. The difference between the attitudes of the couple also underlines the conflict between the old-fashioned and the new-fashioned. Another lovable character who is a half fool half wit is Tony Lumpkin, whose name reminds a country bumpkin but actually belongs to Falstaff’s company. There are also groups like peasants whom Mr. Hardcastle tries to train them to be appropriate servants, and the people in the tavern. Besides, the title of the play focuses on class issues while Kate pretends to be a lower class woman by “stooping” below her social status in order to “conquer” Marlow’s heart. The other conflicts of the play, such as the older generation versus the young one, the town versus country, and the higher class versus lower class provide another conflict of the appearance versus reality created by deception and misunderstandings.

The conflict between the major romantic couple of the play Marlow and Kate is totally internal; however, the second couple, Hastings and Constance Neville must overcome Mrs. Hardcastle’s plan to marry her son Tony Lumpkin to Constance. Fortunately Tony has no such desire and thus the obstacles for the couple are insignificant. This confusion helps Goldsmith to create successful farcical scenes. Unlike the Restoration comedy of manners, Goldsmith’s play highlights the superiority of the country values over those of the metropolis. With a combination of sentiment,

wit, satire and farce, *She Stoops to Conquer* is an example of “traditional comedy in the age of sentiment” (Corman xvii). In this sense, the prologue of the play is highly important in terms of stating the situation of the British stage and the difference between the sentimental and laughing comedies. At the beginning of the prologue, Mr. Woodward, an actor of the time, remarks that the comic muse is about to die because of the tearful comedies. And he suggests that the only remedy for this illness is a real comedy written by the “doctor” Goldsmith. After the polished but crude eighteenth century comedy, the laughing comedy of Goldsmith created a humanized, cultivated comedy with a gentle humour without vicious or sentimental manners of the previous eras.

1.6 Nineteenth Century Comedy of Manners

After the time of Sheridan and Goldsmith, drama experienced a sudden decline. The playhouses changed and transformed because of financial problems. Allardyce states that, while Drury Lane was trying to restore solvency with shilling concerts, Covent Garden had been turned into an opera house (*British Drama* 203). The development of the novel and spreading poetry, the popularity of the moralizing sentimental comedy and melodrama occupied the first half of the nineteenth century Britain. As Hirst marks, “if the comedy of manners became more and more anaemic in the eighteenth century, by the beginning of the nineteenth it was effectively dead” (47). The time between the beginning and the end of the century, until Oscar Wilde (1854-1900) appeared in theatrical circles, was actually ineffective in terms of comedy of manners. The names of Dion Boucicault with his melodramas, Thomas William Robertson with his realistic and naturalistic plays, Arthur Pinero and Henry Arthur Jones with their social comedies can be listed among the important people of the theatrical world; however, the comedy of manners reappeared in 1870s with the subversive dramas of W.S. Gilbert and later Oscar Wilde. Gilbert, both in his verse plays and prose dramas attacked Victorian hypocrisy and religious values, and used parody with a sharp satire which would influence Wilde’s plays. A few decades later, Wilde combined his own genius in language and the inversion of values that Gilbert had

introduced, in order to create the best examples of comedy of manners in the late nineteenth century (Hirst 49-50).

At the end of the nineteenth century, under the influence of the European drama, realist and naturalist plays were very effective in the theatrical world. Ibsen, Strindberg and Chekhov had been producing realist and naturalist dramas in continental Europe. But Wilde did not choose this style; and he decided to revise the English comedy of manners of the Restoration period with a subversive attitude, merging it with melodramatic and farcical elements. While the Restoration dramatists aimed their sarcastic remarks at the society's false wits, fops and butts, Wilde's target is the society in general, "whose authority needed to be challenged in a manner that would subtly win over audiences without shocking them too far" (Roston 191). Consequently, Wilde produced such plays to provide relief from the social norms, but never made his Victorian audience to feel that their moral principles were being weakened too seriously (191).

Except his first works *Vera; or the Nihilists*, *The Duchess of Padua*, and *Salome*, there are four comedies of manners of great significance that Wilde wrote at the end of the nineteenth century: *Lady Windermere's Fan* (1892), *A Woman of No Importance* (1893), *An Ideal Husband* (1895) and *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895). The first three plays seem to be the extensions of the sentimental tradition and melodrama; and their plots are based on pathetic and sentimental situations. Nevertheless, he uses melodramatic backgrounds in these plays without choosing a melodramatic presentation; as Allardyce remarks, Oscar Wilde's style which is full of paradoxes and epigrams enables his plays to shape sentimental situations with a spirit of Restoration gaiety (*British Drama* 242). For instance, in *Lady Windermere's Fan* he presents one of his famous paradoxes: "In this world there are only two tragedies. One is not getting what one wants, and the other is getting it. The last is much the worst; the last is a real tragedy!" (Act III).

His plays are about the upper class British and there is hardly a working class character in his plays. Even the servants use the same epigrammatic language and they act like they belong to aristocracy. In *The Importance of Being Earnest*, Algernon's manservant Lane comments on his experience of marriage: "I believe it is a very

pleasant state, sir. I have had very little experience of it myself up to the present. I have only been married once. That was in consequence of a misunderstanding between myself and a young person” (46). These plays generally present his aesthetic understanding and the attitude of *art for art's sake*. According to aestheticism, art has no moral, social or political purpose. It does not serve for any greater reality other than itself; it has nothing to do with everyday life. In this movement, the style, decorum, beauty and elaborate language become the major focus of a literary work. Just like the former examples of comedy of manners, the most important thing in Wilde's comedies is not what people say but how they say it. The superiority of appearance over moral character, which is an important emphasis of the genre, connects the aesthetic elements in Wilde's plays and creates a perfect combination. In other words, the aesthetic movement supports the genre up to the end. Therefore, however satiric or subversive the plays are, they serve only one purpose; to entertain their audience, the ones they are portrayed in the plays.

Lady Windermere's Fan is a part of the tradition of English comedy of manners which dates back to the Restoration period and the eighteenth century. For instance, the third act of the play reminds the “screen scene” from Sheridan's *The School for Scandal*. Its plot is based on reversed versions of familiar themes and motifs such as, instead of a child, a long lost mother who is thought to be dead, mistaken identity which is never revealed, and a woman with a past who is actually a golden hearted caring mother. Wilde's portrayal of Mrs. Erlynn as the fallen woman is different from the previous sentimental or melodramatic examples since he depicts her as the victim of the society which hypocritically excludes this woman while exculpating the men who are responsible for her situation (Hirst 51). When she blackmails Windermere, Victorian society's double standards are challenged with an equal weapon.

The play also includes masquerades, drawing room conversations and a dramatic surprise at the end. However, there is no recognition in the play; Lady Windermere never learns about the real identity of Mrs Erlynn as her mother, because this ending could create an unwanted melodramatic effect. Besides, even though she has blackmailed Windermere and is presented as a fallen woman, Mrs. Erlynn is awarded by marrying Lord Augustus at the end of the play. Among the characters of the play

there are a group of dandies who overestimate their existence in a society in which they play verbal games and wit contests. In the third act, Victorian dandies, the evolved version of Restoration libertines and the members of the non-working class show off and perform their skills.

CECIL GRAHAM: What is a cynic? [*Sitting on the back of the sofa.*]

LORD DARLINGTON: A man who knows the price of everything and the value of nothing.

CECIL GRAHAM: And a sentimentalist, my dear Darlington, is a man who sees an absurd value in everything, and doesn't know the market price of any single thing.

Another example is about the descriptions that reveal the difference between crucial concepts, in other words their occupation, scandal and gossip:

LORD WINDERMERE: What is the difference between scandal and gossip?

CECIL GRAHAM: Oh! gossip is charming! History is merely gossip. But scandal is gossip made tedious by morality. Now, I never moralise. A man who moralises is usually a hypocrite, and a woman who moralises is invariably plain. There is nothing in the whole world so unbecoming to a woman as a Nonconformist conscience. And most women know it, I'm glad to say.

With these conversations, Wilde portrays the “rituals of a decadent and dying class” (Raby 198). He creates a wonderful language for all his characters full of paradoxes, sallies, ironical remarks and puns; in this world, everyone speaks one language that is Wilde's. It is a kind of representation of upper class dialogue ranging from the wit of dandies such as Lord Darlington, Cecil Graham and Mrs. Erlynne – actually she is a female dandy, to the Duchess of Berwick and Lord Augustus. With his language, Wilde portrays a society which he creates from his imagination, fictitious but extremely genuine.

The subtitle of the play is *A Good Woman* which reveals the dichotomy of good and evil in the Victorian society. However, the reversal of values in accordance with the

Victorian morality guarantees that there is no evil character in a completely evil society. As Peter Raby points out:

This was the playground, or stage, of the wealthy and well-connected, the power structure of English society well-known at first-hand to Alexander's audiences, and through the newspapers and popular literature to everyone else; and on to it step the portentous men and the brilliantly dressed women, at whose center stands the "good" Lady Windermere and the "wicked" but by association socially acceptable Mrs. Erlynne: the world will now apply its double standard, and pretend to overlook the "fact" that she is, was, Windermere's supposed mistress. (197)

In *A Woman of No Importance*, Wilde becomes a critic of British social life using an American young girl Hester, however he emphasizes her innocence as an immature, not so much sophisticated, attitude compared to the British women around her.

MRS. ALLENBY: Don't you find yourself longing for a London dinner party?

HESTER: I dislike London dinner parties.

MRS. ALLENBY: I adore them. The clever people never listen, and the stupid people never talk.

HESTER: I think the stupid people talk a great deal.

MRS. ALLENBY: Ah! I never listen.

After his three society dramas, a radical play appeared, *The Importance of Being Earnest: A Trivial Comedy for Serious People* in which he created an effect by adopting the concept of triviality, and mocked English life by using an intellectual farce. His unique style is so apparent in this play that he redefines the descriptions of the comedy of manners. As Raby observes, "It is to this work and style that the English playwrights of the twentieth century variously returned, pervasively (Noel Coward), explicitly (Joe Orton and Tom Stoppard and Mark Ravenhill), but also with discernible traces in writers as contrasting as Edward Bond and Harold Pinter" (198).

His last play *The Importance of Being Earnest* is a perfect combination of comedy of manners and farce. There is nothing sentimental about the play even though there are characters who could be such; however, Miss Prism and Dr. Chasuble become only the figures of the parody of a sentimental subplot. By using the term “Bunburying”, Wilde pictures the double standards of the Victorian morality, hypocrisy and promiscuity; and he emphasizes snobbery of the characters and triviality of serious matters in an ironical and paradoxical way. Just like Cecily’s ironical statement to Algernon: “I hope you have not been leading a double life, pretending to be wicked and being really good all the time. That would be hypocrisy” (87). All the conventions and institutions of the Victorian England become his target.

Wilde creates the comic effect by using a nonsense logic and absurdity almost everywhere and with every character. David Hirst writes about the “interrogation scene” and states that in that scene, comic effect is produced by the “contrast between the gravity of Lady Bracknell’s tone and the apparent triviality of the issues discussed, culminating in the outraged cry when she discovers Jack was found ‘in a handbag’” (56). The polite society becomes a labyrinth created by misunderstandings and mistaken identities. The complication formed by the popularity of the name Ernest as well as its connotative meanings causes the pun in the title and reveals the real face of the members of the society under the mask of earnestness.

George Bernard Shaw (1856-1950) was not only a playwright but also a music critic, linguist, socialist pamphleteer and a lecturer. His plays struggled to find audience in the 1890s, not only because of the licence issues about the plays but because like Pinero, Jones and Wilde, Shaw wrote most of his plays for the West End theatres and audience with the intention of conforming them to the popular theatrical forms of the time such as farce, melodrama and social comedy. Yet, as Cary M. Mazer claims, the mainstream theatre was not ready to carry the weight of the political messages of these plays, nor could they understand Shaw’s effort to play with the dramatic and generic formulae of these works (214). For instance, the theatres could not accept his ideas like dream fantasy, political scolding and philosophical preaches in *Man and Superman* (1900) either. Therefore, instead of waiting for an appropriate stage for his plays, he decided to print them in order to reach his audience (214).

Shaw, as a socialist thinker, designed his plays to be an outlet to discuss the social and political problems of his time. He thinks that great literary works can function as propaganda, not only as entertainment. He saw himself as a reformer and not an aesthete. He had an idea about the function of the art, the theatre and playwriting. Unlike Wilde, he insisted on the discussion of the problems of society and significant matters rather than the trivial. He puts his characters in a situation in which they are challenged in such a way that they have an opportunity to learn something. Abbott states that Shaw believed in the possibility of the improvement of society, and therefore the purpose of Shavian drama is to elicit change. Shaw says that “all institutions, all beliefs must be examined critically and that if they are no longer useful, applicable to the needs of society, then they should be discarded” (Abbott 46).

Shaw’s basic formula for his plays is just the reversed version of Molière’s. In his comedies, Molière places the leading character in the centre of action as an eccentric, irrational figure who threatens the order of society and an antagonist of social constructions. At the end of the play, the irrational, antagonistic character is driven away and the order is restored. This is, actually, the basic formula of the New Comedy of Greece and Rome. Yet, in a Shavian play, the central character who is trying to change the world is rational and superior whereas the society is irrational. If the plays end happily, it means that the protagonist is successful in his or her aim; if the end is not happy, then it means that he or she failed (Abbott 47).

His tragedies or semi-tragedies could be the subject of another study; but in his comedies he chooses to use the techniques and certain elements of comedy of manners. Gareth Griffith states that in Shavian drama, there is a conflict between form and content. While he writes the most challenging examples of “drama of ideas” and uses radical and political dialogues in his plays, he chooses the traditional form of comedy of manners. The ideological conversations which occur in the drawing rooms of bourgeois houses, as Griffith remarks, “created an aura of stability, even permanence, which effectively undermined the presumed radicalism of the dialogue” (15). Griffith quotes Edmund Wilson about Shavian comedy that “for all its greater freedom in dealing with social conditions, [it] is almost as much dependant on a cultivated and stable society as the comedy of Molière” (qtd in Griffith 15); and adds that, at the end, Shaw realises that

he must speak the same language as his audience, and must follow the same conventions of manners as Molière did (15).

Although he was very interested in realism and studied it, Shaw did not write realistic comedies. His plays are full of dream sequences, fantastic scenes including philosophical debates, and idealistic characters who, like Shaw himself, dream about an ideal society. In *Major Barbara* (1905), Barbara is drawn as an idealist Christian figure and Cusins, a Greek professor who represents the philosopher king of the future munitions factory, is her perfect companion. However the most realistic figure of the play, Andrew Undershaft, becomes a symbol of the devil that manipulates and tempts the idealist couple. Besides, his characters speak in order to delineate Shaw's own ideologies and thoughts; therefore they become the spokesmen of these ideas rather than free individuals. On the other hand, in contrast to Wilde, he depicts the members of different classes as his minor characters, like Rummy Mitchens, Peter Shirley and Bill Walker in *Major Barbara*, or Eliza Doolittle and her father Alfred Doolittle in *Pygmalion*, who speak various dialects and idiolects. So, they become the most realistic characters of his plays.

If we compare Wilde and Shaw in terms of formulating their dramas and putting their ideas about society and its problems into their works, one can easily say that although their understandings of the function of art and theatre were completely different, they chose rather a similar technique while forming their plays. Both dramatists used parallel characterizations and relationships between the members of the society. For example, in *Major Barbara*, Lady Britomart echoes Lady Bracknell of *The Importance of Being Earnest* whose authority cannot be questioned while controlling the actions of their children and acting like an oppressor mother. Moreover, both in *Lady Windermere's Fan* (1892) and *Mrs. Warren's Profession* (1893), there is a conflict between fallen mothers and their innocent daughters. Besides,

Each dramatist found ways to puncture the hypocrisy and false idealisms of the age, including the idealism of the Victorian happy family.

Wounded families and isolated orphans inhabit their scenes, serious and trivial, unpleasant and pleasant, alike. This was not, perhaps, the "frankly doctrinal theatre" that Shaw advocated in *The Quintessence of Ibsenism*,

his impassioned argument for the right of drama to take scriptural rank, and for Ibsen's own right to canonical rank "as one of the major prophets of the modern Bible". (Raby 203)

And lastly, it can be said that both Irishmen dominated the comic dramatic productions of the late nineteenth century and formalised the expectations of the genre of comedy of manners. After the death of Wilde in 1900, Shaw lived fifty more years and produced several other plays. The last remark for both dramatists is from Peter Raby who says that:

Pinero and Jones stretched existing dramatic form to make way for contemporary issues. But it was the more drastic and playful handling of Wilde and Shaw, with their verbal fireworks and love of paradox, their cunning exploitation of reversal and surprise, that shook the drama into life. Disarmingly, they trapped the audience within the action by their unsettling use of comedy, and their polished and misleadingly innocent technique formed a collective bequest, gift-wrapped for the playwrights of the next century. (Raby 203)

CHAPTER TWO: POLITICAL THEATRE AND POLITICAL COMEDY

2.1 Political Theatre

“Those who try to separate theater from politics try to lead us into error – and this is a political attitude” (Augusto Boal xxiii).

Politics is a part of the way we experience our lives; it starts from our daily responsibilities in our society and follows us to our schools, offices and entertainment venues. As Edward Bond clearly explains, “an individual only exists through society; outside society he is a monster. Man cannot escape from social self” (xi). Furthermore, Bond believes that as the active creators of history and even of our consciousness, people will need art as long as they are human. At this point the art of theatre and drama gains importance because, in Bond’s words, “dramatists cannot treat their experiments as scientists treat theirs because the experimentation – as much as the struggle and effort outside the theatre – is an event in human life and history. Society is a surgeon operating on himself and art is part of that operation” (xv). Whenever art gains a social concern or an ideological viewpoint, it becomes directly political.

Political art tries to shape the culture in which it was produced; it creates an awareness and receptivity on people’s social/political consciousness. Political artists are aware of their function and role in society and they are also interested in using art to promote thinking and stimulate dialogue through asking questions. Those questions could be about the politics of a state, the institutions of a society in which characters live and are forced to confront, the class structure by which the lives of characters are defined, the gender roles or the problems of being a woman and a man in a society. Political artists also present questions and debates about certain issues such as education, economics, war, peace, violence, sex, family, marriage, parenthood, and so forth. Therefore, to elicit critical questions related to these issues, to discuss conflicting ideas and/or ideologies, to offer solutions, eventually leads to a heightened awareness which make the audience politically more informed and active; and theatre which aims to reach this point is called political theatre.

Renewal is in the nature of theatre. As Arnold P. Hinchcliffe indicates in the preface of his book *British Theatre 1950-70*, the institution of theatre is so unstable that it has to renew itself continually; otherwise it would die. This renewal has to be in accordance with the social and political happenings of the time. As it is known, society is a political construction; therefore all theatre – which is a social phenomenon – is political. In *An Anatomy of Drama*, Martin Esslin states that “all drama is . . . a political event” because “it either reasserts or undermines the code of conduct of a given society” (29). He explains that “in theatre a human community directly experiences its own identity and reaffirms it. This makes theatre an extremely political, because pre-eminently social, form of art” (29). Esslin also marks that in dramatic situations and in the solutions of dramatic conflicts there are always social, therefore political implications. Moreover, drama can become an instrument of thought, as Esslin suggests, and it provides a cognitive process in which people think about and discuss human situations and social problems (*Anatomy* 21).

To support Esslin’s idea, Michael Patterson asserts in *Strategies of Political Theatre* that all theatre is political because it is public and communal. He also states that the aim of playwrights is to help to change the way society is structured as well as to create a new way of thinking, to challenge old modes of thought, and to question economics as the fundamental organisation of society instead of social morality (1). He also mentions that the Catholic Church used drama as propaganda for spreading Christian religion. To put it differently, theatre establishes connections between societies, individuals and also ideologies. It creates a unique way of communication between these forces and makes the invisible visible and the unheard heard. Patterson refers to John Arden’s ideas about political action in theatre, and claims that propaganda or protest on stage is a sort of futile activity; it would be non-realistic, even nonsensical to expect politicians, after watching a play on stage, suddenly to come to a point of recognition or repentance and decide to stop wars, genocide, or exploitation. Yet, this should not stop dramatists to keep on saying what they do not like about society in which they live. Even the least radical writers would expect their audience to leave theatre somehow changed and their political understanding heightened (5).

Another important characteristic of theatre, Patterson points out, is juxtaposition. By putting contradictory images side by side, it presents opposite situations and conflicting information, therefore motivates its audience to react (3). Thus, in order to heighten our understanding, plays create challenging images, situations and characters on stage. Theatre stage has also an advantage to offer different, even contradicting ideas in divided spaces/scenes synchronically so that it reflects a non-realistic but convenient outlet for a polyphonic world of ideas. Patterson lastly underlines transcendence as another characteristic of theatre. He explains that theatre depends on transcendence in two different aspects; one is actor, the other is audience:

On the one hand, the actors must transcend their own individuality in order to assume the role of a stranger. On the other, the audience must escape from their own self-centred preoccupations in order to become involved with the events on stage. And this process, which occurs both in the empathetic playing of realism and in the social emphases of Brechtian theatre, is an inherently political act, for the origin of political thought is in the willingness to identify with others, to share their problems, to experience transcendence. (2-3)

The major functions of political theatre, or theatre as a political medium, are to disturb, to make the audience aware of, to lead people to act or react internally or externally in order to change things. As Tim Prentki and Jan Selman write in *Popular Theatre in Political Culture*,

When a play is directly relevant to audience members' lives and concerns, a process begins which can lead to deeper understanding and change. Observers recognise the character(s) and their dilemmas and identify with the people portrayed. And because they can watch rather than live the experience, they also objectify the problems, and in so doing begin to be able to think about possible solutions or alternative actions. The combining of empathetic involvement with the opportunity to observe, analyse and form opinions regarding the characters' actions creates a condition where an audience both wants to think and has the opportunity to problem solve in a safe but vital environment. (8)

W.B. Worthen indicates that political theatre is a side effect of the thematic content of the drama (146). Here drama is emphasised as the textual structure of a theatrical work; on the other hand theatre is something broader and more complex than a literary text. It involves not only words, but also actors, audiences, lights, colours and most importantly action on stage, which makes something more than the literary quality of a play. In the times of depression, change, or struggle, the themes of the plays that were produced in that period reveal the sensibility and significance of certain concepts such as war, peace, democracy, resistance, human rights or class consciousness. As Worthen explains, the politics of political theatre “emerge not only in the themes of the drama but more searchingly in the disclosure of the working of ideology in the making of meaning in the theatre, in the formation of the audience’s experience and so, in a manner of speaking, in the formation of the audience itself” (146). In other words, theatre forms our viewpoints, our “interpretive activity” and it shapes who we really are as audience (147). On the other hand, political subject matters in plays do not directly make them political plays. Plays can deal with political issues like racism, gender problems or war; however, if they choose a realistic or naturalistic style in order to portray these subjects, the audience is left without proper means to deal with these problems. Realism does not always lead the audience to react; on the contrary it leads them to accept the current situations, and thus restrict and control their perception.

Even though it cannot be limited to a certain political ideology, political theatre was first recognised as leftist theatre, or propaganda theatre with a socialist-realist ideology. Michael Patterson remarks that political theatre “not only depicts social interaction and political events but implies the possibility of radical change on socialist lines: the removal of injustice and autocracy and their replacement by the fairer distribution of wealth and more democratic systems” (4). Furthermore, Edward Bond suggests that

There can be no modern art which is not socialist. Art in the society which had good government would be socialist art which had inherited its kingdom. Till then socialist art is a weapon in the struggle to create good government. It’s not true that a socialist society would not need art, because all social ills would then be dealt with by social engineering.

There will never be a time when sentient, conscious beings can look at the world without needing to sing or weep . . . The art of socialist society will have a dignity and lucidity we can't imagine. But we're able, forced, to help to make this art – so that the generations that come after us will live in peace. (xiv)

In the first decades of the twentieth century, one of the types of political drama was melodrama in which the virtue is always rewarded and the evil is always punished. This type of drama was very popular within the conventions of worker's theatre since, in the final scenes, the plays point out that those virtuous workers will win against the capitalist evil employer and the victory is near. However, this artificial and propagandist style which worked as a weapon in the fight against social injustice was not enough to awaken the consciousness of working people; instead of a discussion of problems, it was only able to offer an illusion of victory as a cathartic moment at the end of the plays.

Especially after the First World War, the political role and mission of theatre gained importance. In *Reconstruction of the Theatre* (1929), the famous Russian producer and director Vsevolod Meyerhold asserted that the new task of theatre was firstly to release the audience from personal delusions, daydreaming and apathy so as to carry them to a revolutionary new system. Therefore, as Meyerhold maintains, "the theatre must work on the spectator in order to awaken and strengthen in him a militancy strong enough to help him conquer the oblomovism, manilovism, hypocrisy, erotomania and pessimism within himself" (qtd in Drain 100). According to Meyerhold, the theatre has the power to stimulate the emotions as well as the intellect. In this sense, the dramatic conflict which reflects the struggles of the characters becomes more functional than the exposition of the argument of the play (98). Moreover,

Meyerhold was acutely conscious of the power that can be generated in a mass audience by a carefully constructed ritual or dramatic performance. In order to carry the masses to a world of new revolutionary creative effort, he believed it was necessary to draw on the devices of popular entertainment, and he shared with Capeau the conviction that the approach and techniques of *commedia dell'arte*, if they could be

rediscovered, would answer the problems facing the theatre of the twentieth century. (Bradby 456)

When theatre becomes a political instrument, it presents individual in his or her relationships to society. The individual portrayed in a play cannot be separated from his social status and class. Even moral, sexual or spiritual conflicts which the individual experiences are always the conflicts with society. After the First World War, political consciousness and interest in political problems increased in Europe. There were a number of political propaganda plays which aimed to impress and guide their audience. The old social order of the pre-war era disappeared, and hence, the distance between art and actuality is revealed. Theatrical activities like productions of classics and conventional comedies ignored reality and concealed human beings' tendency to violence. As Christopher Innes denotes, after the catastrophe of war, brutality and inhumanity uncovered the insufficiency of traditional artistic responses (*Erwin Piscator* 10). Then, people started to look for new and fresh forms in which to speak to the audience. German producer and dramatist Erwin Piscator made significant changes in the theatrical form and technique in this sense. The function and aim of theatre, its form and technique as well as the concepts of time and space used in theatre were redefined by his new and keenly political perception.

The impact of Marxism in German theatre was apparent on the people who were suffering from unemployment and inflation. Thus, propaganda plays presented a criticism of capitalist economy with a Marxist point of view. At that time, the realist and naturalist plays were very effective in this sense. The drama of the 1920s was mainly about socio-political problems of the time. Piscator indicates in *Basic Principles of a Theory of Sociological Drama* (1929) that “the theatre as an institution, as a piece of apparatus, as a house had never been in the hands of the oppressed class, and because that class had never been in a position to liberate the theatre structurally as well as intellectually” (qtd in Drain 104). Therefore, in the new century, theatre became a different force for the “oppressed class” with new socio-political approaches and techniques. As Piscator remarks, “The play on the stage should act as an advance-guard action in the proletarian war of liberation . . . The theatre of the proletariat must be a theatre of class – of class-warfare” (qtd in Innes *Erwin Piscator* 25). According to the

new understanding of theatre, people were inseparably tied to the political and economic factors of their times. Hence, the subject matters and the issues of a dramatic work should be related to these factors and the reactions of the people who struggle to survive under the oppression.

According to Piscator, culture can be defined with politics not aesthetics; hence, he anticipated an ideological theatre to reflect the culture of a society. Furthermore, the theatre must also be a propaganda theatre since propaganda is a kind of elucidation. From this point of view, the intention of a political play is to guide its audience to a state in which they consider their social environment critically. As Innes states, the major objective of a political work, therefore, should be consciousness-raising and providing proof, clarity and recognition for the audience to reach that consciousness (*Erwin Piscator* 30).

Agitprop, as the short term for Agitation and Propaganda, is a primitive kind of theatre. This form of political theatre first began in the USSR after the 1917 revolution to address an illiterate population. It was not a dramatic form, but was equipped with basic elements of theatre such as a speaker and an audience. At the beginning, one speaker was reading the news from papers to the audience and making political comments. Then, the players started to put short sketches on stage. There were no three-dimensional characters or emotional involvement in these plays. Agitprop style did not require an elaborate stage but only a platform with simple scenery; thus, casual costumes and basic properties reflect the target audience, in other words, the working class people. Later, music was added to emphasize the important dramatic points and speakers started to use some bodily movements; hence the plays became more formal performances. Christopher Innes denotes that the first regular Agitprop troupe, the Blue Shirts, was founded by the National Institute of Journalists in Moscow in 1923. They started to tour the country and dramatized texts taken from newspapers and to perform certain plays with a satiric caricature style; yet they later returned to traditional dramatic themes (*Erwin Piscator* 23).

Agitprop, even though it is not a form of Realism, was one of the dominant theatrical styles of post-war period in Britain as well. As David Edgar specifies, many revolutionary artists considered Realism as an insufficient tool and an inadequate form

of drama in radical eras or sensitive periods of class struggle. They thought that realism and naturalism presents the actions, behaviours and decisions of people within a framework in which these actions are determined by their class or society. Therefore, in realistic and naturalistic plays, all the actions and behaviours of the characters are connected with the incidents happening around them; they are not independent of the structure of the society. For that reason, playwrights chose agitprop plays rather than realist drama for political purposes in order to emphasize the characters' freedom of choice. Edgar exemplifies this situation with Bertolt Brecht's choice of Expressionism and Dadaism rather than Realism in exposing capitalism in a more courageous and aggressive style. The approach of agitprop plays is to ignore the surface appearance of the situation they presents, and to depict the political reality underneath. In order to lay emphasis on the fundamental problems such as exploitation of the workers by capitalist employers, these plays use caricatures and archetypes (26-27). Nonetheless, Edgar emphasizes that agitprop is naturally "unable to fulfil the artistic task of portraying and interpreting the way people operate, and why they operate in a particular way, revealing the contradictions as they grow out of the social, economic conditions of society itself" (29). Above all, agitprop techniques are unable to deal with the questions of consciousness since they portray only the supposed objective of a situation rather than the "dynamic between how people subjectively perceive that situation and the underlying reality" (29).

In the 1920s, German Marxist dramatist and producer Bertolt Brecht started to work on a new form of theatre. For Brecht, current theatrical forms supported conservative ideas since they encouraged audience to passively perceive theatrical productions. His ideas, not only about political power but also about the function of theatre as a social institution, were shaped mostly by Piscator. However, while Piscator depended mainly on modern stage technology – such as films, slides and graphics – to offer a political commentary on social issues and extend the capacity of his productions, Brecht developed new dramatic and theatrical forms. Brecht's main concern was to create a scientific and political theatre for a scientific spectator. This scientific audience, in his view, would like to understand what is happening on the stage rather than, without a conscious and critical point of view, simply empathising with the characters.

In order to provide this critical attitude, this new theatre requires different sorts of performances and techniques. Brecht was convinced that there had to be ways to analyse plays and to perform them so as to entertain the audience as well as to instruct them scientifically (Hamilton 6-7). As Iris Smith points out, Brecht imagined his theatre as a particularly political but not dogmatic project; instead he wanted a theatre like “a cabaret for the mind” (492).

Like Bernard Shaw’s theatre of ideas, Brecht intended a drama and a theatre to perturb his audience and take them out of the illusion created on the stage since empathy might prevent the audience from thinking. By the help of his dramatic techniques, acting methods and staging devices, he created an “epic” theatre to represent “the contradictions in social reality and depict society as an ever-changing process, not a fixed state” (Bradley 4). The primary intention of this epic theatre is actually to challenge reality, not to reflect it. He believed that reality should be turned into art so that it can be seen as alterable. All his methods operate in order to challenge our perception of reality; so that in this non-dramatic theatre, spectators are encouraged to question and make choices and enter into a critical dialogue with the stage action. While their responses are active and emotions are aroused, Brecht believed that the most appropriate conditions would appear in order to generate political awareness (Patterson 19).

As one of his methods, Brecht removed the natural development of a play and broke it up into episodes. Therefore, drama becomes a montage in which each scene becomes independent from the rest of the play. It foregrounds the process rather than the final product; hence, it helps the audience to observe the mechanism of the events and to concentrate on how things happen. Accordingly, Brecht wanted to call his theatre “dialectical” because it presented a situation dialectically for discussion and judgement (Leach 117). The other method was to historicise the events in a play and to put them in a distant past as something that had already happened. By this way, the issues in the plays are to be judged from a distance. Also, as a Marxist artist, Brecht thought that a theatrical work should not end in equilibrium or repose. On the contrary, a play should depict the ways in which society loses its equilibrium and toward which way it is moving (Boal 86).

The essential method of Brecht's epic theatre is "alienation" or "estrangement" which reminds "defamiliarization", the Russian Formalist idea of seeing the world afresh. As Laura Bradley states, although *Verfremdung* is often translated misleadingly as "alienation", it does not suggest the rejection of emotions. On the contrary, the characters in epic plays experience all kinds of emotions; yet, Brecht simply expects spectators to keep their critical detachment in order to analyse these emotions (7). By adding songs and music outside the action, showing placards on which the summary of the next scene is written, demanding actors to detach themselves from their roles, and showing the technical equipments of the backstage can be listed as some of the examples of this *Verfremdungseffekt*. Bradley explains that Brechtian epic theatre destroys the illusory fourth wall, "the convention that the audience is eavesdropping on the action, unbeknown to the characters" (4), and she continues that Brechtian theatre displays the stage apparatus, such as the lights, in full view of the audience and introduces narrative elements into the performance. Songs interrupt the dramatic action; projected images provide a visual commentary, as in Piscator's productions; and captions summarize the play's political arguments and the content of individual scenes. The juxtaposition of these narrative or "epic" elements with the dramatic action forces the spectator to adopt an active, critical role by comparing and evaluating the different pieces of information. So whereas the epic and the dramatic constitute separate genres in Aristotle's *Poetics*, Brecht combined them to form his "epic" or "non-Aristotelian" theatre. (5)

The major characteristic of the dramatic theatre rejected by Brecht is, in Aristotelian terms, catharsis. In Brechtian ideology, the identification with characters on stage which causes catharsis means unquestionably accepting a certain view of life. As it is obvious, there is nothing critical or political in this situation. Dramatic plays generally offer a restoration of order at the very end; or at least there is a sense of order that can be restored. Where catharsis occurs, purgation would be possible; however, catharsis does not cause questioning that Brechtian idea of theatre requires for (Hinchliffe 5).

The avant-garde movements at the beginning of the twentieth century provided a variety of theatrical forms as well. Dadaism, Futurism, Expressionism, Surrealism and

The Theatre of the Absurd can be the examples of avant-garde styles which influenced the European theatre before and after the Second World War. They are all perceived as literary and political endeavours which had impacts on theatrical stage for a short time except the Absurd. The Theatre of the Absurd survived, and became one of the most important theatrical styles in the post-war period in Europe. Dealing with existentialism and the disillusionment of the post-war era, Absurd theatre rejected the traditional techniques in theatre and offered a nonlinear, circular plot construction, and displayed the disharmonious relationship of human beings with the universe. In Absurd plays, the world is an incomprehensible place in which communication is impossible since the language does not convey any meaning. The dramatists of this movement also called their art as Anti-Theatre. One of the major elements of this anti-theatre is the comedy which is mingled with tragedy of humanity. The existence of humanity becomes an absurd and therefore comic state in which characters are never able to escape.

2.2 Political Comedy

Humour, therefore comedy, is a liberating force not only in terms of social mores but also in political constraints. First of all, the person who has a sense of humour, who can see life through a humorous lens and laugh at it, cannot be completely dominated “even by a government which imprisons him, for his ability to laugh at what is incongruous in the political situation will put him above it to some extent, and will preserve a measure of his freedom – if not of movement, at least of thought” (Morreall 101). This is also one of the reasons that humorists and artists of comedy have generally been *persona non grata* under strictly controlled political regimes.

Humour brings freedom to minds by breaking the rational order of things and by violating unchallengeable logic and reason. It works as an estrangement factor as well by forcing us to question the things that we often take for granted (103). Identical to *Verfremdungseffekt*, it destroys the illusion of reality which is imposed upon us by social and political authorities and provides critical objectivity. As a social phenomenon, humour functions best in theatres; particularly with the contagious nature of laughter, it unites people against the strain and tension. As John Morreall points out,

humour can even be directed to the people who laugh, but this does not destroy its unifying effect (115).

Comedy has always been a serious genre even though it was accused of being trivial and lower by the early critics. For example, Wendy Lesser emphasizes the serious nature of comedy; and she points out that “comedies do not necessarily make you laugh, and even when they do, the laugh may stick in your throat a bit. Some are hilariously sad” (661). Comedy has also been a more political genre than tragedy because of its distinguishing character which attacks the conservatism and stability of ideologies. Maggie Andrews states in *Because I Tell a Joke or Two: Comedy, Politics and Social Difference* that “Comedy has potentially a unique ability to be political in that it operates so frequently by transgressing boundaries. . . Much of the comedy. . . owes its existence to saying the unsayable and doing the undoable of the hegemonic culture” (51). Furthermore, comedy produces laughter that works as a social corrective; it creates conditions for thinking not feeling. It also disturbs people as Bernard Shaw writes in his preface of *Man and Superman* that “It annoys me to see people comfortable when they ought to be uncomfortable; and I insist on making them think in order to bring them to conviction of sin” (10).

As it is known, theories about comedy and humour dates back to ancient times beginning with Plato and Aristotle; also the ideas and theories of philosophers on humour vary in different ways throughout history. When major theories of comedy are taken into consideration, one can observe that they generally reflect cultural, social and political dispositions. While comedy had a notorious character in the ancient times, it was not supported by the philosophers of the eighteenth century like Hobbes and Descartes either. However, with their contributions, a theory developed in which laughter is described as a factor which expresses the feelings of superiority. When this “superiority” theory started to be weakened, a new theory that focuses on the relieving effects of comedy emerged. According to “relief” theory, laughter works as a safety valve in our nervous system and relieves us from the oppressions which would be harmful for us. As another theory supports, people laugh because they recognize something which violates our expectations and mental patterns. Therefore, the

inconsistency of the situation becomes apparent and thus terms the “incongruity theory”.

Roger B. Henkle, in his essay “The Social Dynamics of Comedy”, indicates that some critics, such as Henri Bergson, George Meredith and Northrop Frye who support that comedy is conservative and reformatory, share a commitment to liberalism. However, Susan Langer, George Santayana, and in certain points Sigmund Freud can be called as romantic critics in this sense (201). Beside the well-known theories about the function of the comedy, Henkle also reminds that comedy was once accepted as “an instrument of social correction” (200), especially when the writers share common cultural values. Thus, comedy becomes a tool for shaping these values; by amusing its audience, it offers a strong bond with the social order. Moreover, Henkle mentions the observations of Robert Heilman by referring to his essay, “Comedy and the World”, in which Heilman offers that comedy is a civilizing force – an idea whose roots date back to Meredith. According to the idea, comedy performs a socializing function by referring to our shared “good sense and common sense” (Heilman 50), and also it tolerates all sorts of antisocial behaviour and rebellion. Combining several theories in one, Henkle suggests that “correcting”, “socializing” and “civilizing” functions of comedy are actually the ways that dominant ideology can maintain and sustain itself and its institutions. On the surface, these definitions seem reasonable and tolerant; however, they disregard any individualistic and subversive or alternative elements. Therefore, Henkle claims that

If all good comedy really does affirm the liberal society’s common sense, and if it is merely a means by which the social body accepts and absorbs deviations back into a broadened norm, then the established social order has in a sense coopted the possibilities for radical change through comedy. Such a view accords neither with our impression of the way comedy has on occasion displayed shocking disrespect for our institutions and mores, nor with our recollection of the outrage, the vitriol, with which Puritan elements censored and banned comic writing. But then, the liberal position essentially developed as a counter to Puritan hysterics over comedy’s effects. (202)

Therefore, the correcting, socializing and civilizing functions of comedy cannot be applied to the understanding of comedy as a political dramatic form since these functions do not operate as the functions of the political theatre which intends to make the audience critical about what they see and hear on stage.

The major theme of comedy, in general, is the belief that human race will survive. The conditions, mechanisms or even the possibility of this survival can be the subject matters of comedies. The heroes are generally couples and they struggle together in this battle of survival. At the very end, after overcoming all the obstacles, they succeed and the play promises a healthy regeneration for the future with a joyful gathering. In the New Comedy of Greece and Rome, the couples receive a series of help from their friends, servants and most importantly from fate for their success. In Restoration comedies, even though the couples or the individuals, who are the leading figures of the plays, are unsympathetic and artificial characters, the audience expect their union at the end against all odds. At the core of their survival lies good sense and adaptability rather than unquestioning devotion to the social resources or rules. The hero or heroes triumph over the impossible obstacles of wealth, class, status and so forth; and in this manner, they imply that common sense, elegance and stylish behaviour are the inevitable qualities ensuring their survival (Grawe 33-35).

However, the sense of survival achieved at the end of the plays is actually something more than adaptability to the existing standards. It appears to be a change in the play's society; in another saying, not an adaptability of the characters to their society but adaptability of the society itself to the choices of characters. Thus, the couple or the protagonists form a new society around them. This idea also supports Henkle's claim about the "correcting" or "socializing" qualities of comedies suggested by Heilmann since the individual triumphs over the society and its expectations and demands. In the light of this suggestion, the plays which will be under examination in this study will also be expected to portray such a change not in the characters but in the societies in the end.

Undoubtedly, the claim that a comedy should make you laugh is not a strong argument. Either a social corrector or a safety valve, a comedy which contains incongruity is not necessarily laughable. There are a large number of comedies which

end in questions or uncertainties rather than merry gatherings. Even merry gatherings can be questionable in certain conditions. Comedies, like the other literary forms which deal with social and political matters, do not weaken the importance of the subject matter by laughter; they only create a distance between the audience and the subject. J.L. Styan denotes that classical methods of comedy “whether broad or low, romantic and pastoral, or high and mannered, have always been anti-naturalistic” (46), in other words stylized in theatrical sense. As an example, the plays of comedy of manners are generally artificial and stylized comedies, such as *The Way of the World* by Congreve, *School for Scandal* by Sheridan, *The Importance of Being Earnest* by Wilde and *Man and Superman* by Shaw. In these plays, the playwrights created an artificial world in order to make us compare it with our own. The artificiality in characters and in situations provides playwrights with more force for dramatic effect, so that they are able to create comic situations and make us laugh. Only after we laugh, Styan states, we comprehend that “the laugh has rebounded upon us, and that the artificiality was all a snare” (46). Therefore, the comic method could help to create an imaginative but unemotional attitude and not only that this teases the audience but also troubles them.

Laughter as the fundamental part of humour and comedy causes a kind of detachment, and this detachment is a significant part of the freedom in comedy which is the central value of it. As William I Thompson notes, “The comic hero recognizes a restraint upon his freedom, but he is no reforming philosopher. The restraint here is a metaphysical one in the sense that evil is in the very nature of things, and the closest evil thing to the comic hero is his own impotent and limited body. What then should the comic hero do? Obviously, create a new and better universe” (218). This creation is generally done by a marriage which celebrates the sexual joy of a new body in a better universe. However, this is the point where farce appears because farce does not teach anything; it only celebrates the new mechanism and curses the old one (219).

Farce is one of the most important forms of comedy which is mostly associated with buffoonery, physical activity, slapstick elements and exaggerations. It is also very popular with its violent images and attitudes. Farce is accepted as the purest form of comedy since it presents nothing artificial or synthetic. While comedy, as a distinct form, belongs to the civilized and polite society, farce is the style of the uncivilized and

common people. Eric Bentley puts that farce seems to be simple because it is always direct and less elaborate unlike melodrama or comedy of intrigue. Another reason for its simplicity is its acceptance of everyday reality and everyday interpretations of this reality. In other words, as Bentley indicates, “Farce brings together the direct and wild fantasies and the everyday and drab realities. The interplay between the two is the very essence of this art – the farcical dialectic” (241). Besides, in terms of content, even the least expected and the most foolish farce can be political because they reflect an ideology convenient to their purpose of being written. In this sense, Arnold P. Hinchliffe indicates that the divisions between genres or the mixture of them are always possible. Hence, he reminds that the Absurdist playwright Eugene Ionesco writes extremely serious farces; or he writes drawing room comedies but the drawing rooms are turned into dungeons, prisons or torture chambers (16). So, a deliberate addition of farce into a drawing room comedy might make a multi-layered play with a political perspective.

Actually, there is certainly a difference between high comedy and low comedy. Thompson elaborates on the issue claiming that high comedies teach lessons. They show that the world is basically good; but the evil is brought to the world by human beings who have no social control. As he writes, “These comedies affirm the wisdom of human authority as opposed to the barbaric folly of primitive, anti-social behaviour” (224). On the other hand, low comedies, such as farces or farcical comedies, “affirm the vitality of human activity when it is free of restraint. Here the restraint is a metaphysical one, a restraint inherent in that small, but crucial piece of universe, the body, with all its threats of sterility, old age, impotence and death. Farce is a strike for freedom, a strike against gods” (224), in other words, against authority and order.

Political point of view or political approach in drama does not necessarily require realistic representations. As it was pointed out before, realistic representations provide a slice of life through a particular ideology or viewpoint. They create an illusion of one dimensional ideology or reality. However, when farce comes into question, the audience moves away from reality and enters another realm, a distorted one which was created for them. Yet this distorted realm does not have ground rules; it can be altered by our laughter and freedom, so that a change in the point of view, in ideology or

understanding can be possible. Hinchliffe mentions Brecht's observations about comedy and its political forms and he emphasizes that a drawing room comedy could not be that much political, however putting farce or farcical elements in a drawing room comedy makes it political because farce is the extreme exaggeration of parody. With farce and burlesque – another form of parody – the comic effects are firm, broad and outrageous. Therefore we achieve a theatre of violence with violently comic and violently dramatic scenes (15).

CHAPTER THREE: BRITISH DRAMA IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

3.1 British Drama in the Early Twentieth Century

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the largely prevalent idea suggested that, the world had come to a point of relief that everything, at least on the surface, was continuously getting better. There was a balance of power between European countries so that commerce, social reform, industrial development and so forth were well processed. In the first decades of the new century, while Lenin and Trotsky were meeting in London in 1902 to prepare a revolution for Russia, Freud had been working on the unconscious and psychoanalysis, and he had already published *The Interpretation of Dreams* in 1900 (its publication in English is in 1913). While Max Planck's quantum theory was published in 1900 and Einstein had published his theories on special relativity in 1905 and general relativity in 1916, James George Frazer had been working on folklore, religion and anthropology. Early twentieth century writers were perfectly aware of these new concepts and contributions to human culture and started to reflect and examine these alterations in perceptions and understandings in their works.

The twentieth century brought an eagerness for reform and change in several sections of social life such as education, science, politics, social welfare, and theatre. The growing awareness among intellectuals about individual's responsibility to and for society was one of them (McDonald 437). As a result of the Education Act in 1870, public education in England grew and caused increase in the literate population; therefore production of literature and journalism increased. However, there was a discrepancy between the popular art and the sophisticated art; and the new century helped widen this gap by modernist and avant-garde contributions to visual art, literature, and theatre. Traditional conceptions of religion, culture, and society started to be weakened; instead, rapid social and technological change came into view. By the emergence of experimental endeavours, several cultural movements started to produce artistic, musical, literary and theatrical works in order to adapt to the time. The artists of these works wanted to create new literary and theatrical forms to record these alterations

in human experience. In the theatrical world, the avant-garde contributions started with Expressionism and Symbolism in late nineteenth century, and were followed by the twentieth century movements of Futurism, Dadaism, Brechtian Epic theatre and the theatre of the Absurd.

Britain entered the twentieth century with the Second Anglo-Boer War, which was an imperial war for establishing economic and political control over South African Boer republics; and it was heavily protested by the British intellectuals. In the first decade of the new century, Britain also experienced the death of Queen Victoria in 1901 and the Edwardian era between 1901 and 1910. At the beginning of the century, Britain was still a worldwide empire. As it is stated in the *Norton Anthology of English Literature*, “The Twentieth Century and After”, by the beginning of the First World War, practically a quarter of the earth’s surface and more than a quarter of the world’s population were under British domination (1830). However, the next war was worst than anything. During the First World War, nearly eight-and-a-half million people had died between the years 1914 and 1918. Human and material destruction caused great economic problems; afterwards, uncontrolled inflation in the 1920s was followed by extreme economic depression in the 1930s. In some countries like Italy, Russia, Germany and Spain, conditions became so chaotic that dictators gained control over these countries. However, despite terrible human loss, the war had some positive effects on moral standards, codes of behaviour, women’s and worker’s rights and artistic experimentation (Brockett 396).

Although the modernist and avant-garde examples were influential in Europe, the first decades of the twentieth century were neither productive nor creative for British theatre in this sense. As Roger Cornish and Violet Ketels point out in *The Plays of the Sixties*, British drama was totally conservative, waning, lifeless, cut off from the great drama of the past, and “unaffected by the adventurous drama of the Western Europe, especially its lively inclination to political relevance” in those years (viii-ix). There was an undeniable domination of the Realist and Naturalist drama in theatres under Ibsen’s influence; moreover, the artistic standards were raised and changed with the plays for the tastes of the leisured and upper-middle class audience instead of the post-industrial revolution working class audience (MacDonald 436). Actually, there were a small

number of West End impresarios who controlled theatres and productions according to their commercial success. As Cornish and Ketels mention, there was a model for profitable plays, especially designed for the tastes of the West End audience, who were socially allied with the ruling class, contended with their lives, and hostile to new ideas (*The Plays of the Sixties* viii).

Beside Bernard Shaw and his drama of ideas, one of the important names of the British drama in the early twentieth century was John Galsworthy and his social problem plays, such as *Strife* (1909), *Justice* (1910) and *Loyalties* (1922). The other dramatist of the period, Harley Granville Barker, was similar to Shaw in his interests although he lacked his sense of humour. On the other hand, there was a strict prohibition in Britain which targeted some of the dramatists of the period, including Shaw, Barker and Edward Garnett. Garnett, in the Preface of his play *The Breaking Point* (1907), summarized the concerned dramatists' reaction to the government's control of the theatres. Later, as Jan MacDonald indicates, seventy one playwrights wrote a letter to be published in *The Times* criticising the autocratic procedure which was "contrary to public justice and commonsense" (445). The censorship of theatrical works which had been in practice since the eighteenth century by the Lord Chamberlain and the prohibition of certain words such as abortion, miscarriage, impotent, syphilis, as well as queer and fairy, was finally abolished in 1968.

During the First World War, British drama was mostly insignificant compared with the novel and poetry of the period. In those years, The Old Vic theatre company started to produce Shakespeare's plays instead of operas and musicals, and became one of the most important theatrical centres of Britain. Alongside classical works, there were revues, musicals and farces, in other words, somehow escapist shows to entertain the audience consisted of soldiers and women of all classes. The new plays of the time were mostly patriotic propaganda plays which were against the realistic representation of the suffering and fear experienced by people (Luckhurst 302-303). In the 1920s and 1930s, a working class theatre developed under the name of The Workers' Theatre Movement. This was an association of amateur, communist theatre troupes which was officially formed in 1928; yet it did not survive long. The main theatrical style of this movement

was agitprop plays with the intention of spreading socialist/communist politics by using plays as weapon for the ongoing class struggle.

Although a number of older dramatists such as Shaw, Galsworthy and Pinero continued to write, there were only a few major dramatists who emerged between the World Wars. Somerset Maugham (1874-1965) started to write his first plays in the first decade of the twentieth century. The main genre of his plays such as *Our Betters* (1917), *The Circle* (1921), *The Constant Wife* (1927) and *The Breadwinner* (1930) were comedy of manners. Frederick Lonsdale (1881-1954) was another playwright who produced comedy of manners in the same years. Among his plays *The Last of Mrs. Cheyney* (1925), *On Approval* (1927) and *The High Road* (1929) are the memorable ones with a heightened epigrammatic style reminding Oscar Wilde. As David Hirst states, both Maugham and Lonsdale, who dealt with high society and their polite manners in their works, were the representatives of an old fashioned comedy of manners, “essentially nineteenth century – in style and subject matter” (59). In other words, they brought something new neither to the British theatre nor to the genre of comedy of manners.

The most important dramatist of the time was Noël Coward (1899-1973), who was also an actor. As Frances Gray mentions, the origin of Coward’s comedies lies in the unstable relationship between “his image and his public” (227). In his comedies, such as *Hay Fever* (1925), *Private Lives* (1930), *Design for Living* (1933), *Blithe Spirit* (1941) and *Present Laughter* (1943) he portrayed the social manners of the “gay” 1920s and “turbulent” 1930s, as Hirst underlined; and he continued writing in the following years so that he became an important influence for the styles of the later playwrights like Alan Ayckbourn and Harold Pinter (59). Nevertheless, he did not write any important plays after the Second World War, and fell out of favour. Coward was one of the artists who did not adjust to the realities of the time; and he did not regard the theatre as an outlet for discovering inner or social realities (Elsom 33). In his early plays, he mocked the conventions of fashionable society in a brilliant style as Oscar Wilde once did. On the other hand, there was no real damage or subversion of the social norms that these plays provide. As Gray puts, in Coward’s comedies, “marriage was still the logical conclusion of courtship and divorce meant ostracism; a writer might

show the economic basis of these facts, but no real alternatives were considered” (229). Anthony Sutcliffe also states that the entertaining stories of Coward were entirely about the rich and the idle; these plays showed concern for neither the issues of the day nor the problems of ordinary people (490). His characters have unexceptionally a notorious past; yet, they do not try to conceal their situations. This righteousness prevents these characters from being complex personalities. Without the complexity of characters, the plots become rather thin and simple, as Gray asserts (229). Even though Noël Coward’s contribution to British drama in general and particularly to comedy of manners should not be underestimated, his understanding of theatre was thoroughly different from the political approach of Bernard Shaw. Even so, with his more modern plays he prepared British stage for an utterly different handling of comedy in the post-war period.

3.2 British Drama in the Post-War Period

Second World War created an enormous break from the older ideologies, understandings and perceptions; and these changes were observed directly in the lives of the people and in the literary and theatrical world. Because of the individual and national disillusionment experienced after the war, the value systems were shattered and a paradigm shift occurred in terms of literary, artistic, and theatrical production. The war ended in 1945; in the same year, after the general elections in Britain, the Labour Party came to power in opposition to Winston Churchill’s Conservative Party. However, the economic hardships could not be overcome during the time of the Labour Government; and in the general elections of 1951 Labour Party lost to the Conservatives. Conservative Government ruled the country consecutively for thirteen years. Only in 1964, the Labour Party was re-elected for six more years. During the early post-war years, Socialist Labour government, as a victor of the world war, was planning a “welfare state” by setting up a system of social security and providing benefits for unemployment, sickness, and pensions. The government created a National Health Service; funded a new school system; provided opportunities for the poor people to attend universities; and encouraged plans for housing. When the Conservatives

returned to power in 1951, they mostly kept the changes and worked for the welfare state (Davies 51).

However, this period became one of the biggest disappointments of the British post-war era. The disappointment was also experienced because of the decline of Britain as a world power after the war. The Second World War made United States the new world power in opposition to the Soviet Union. Britain, which had been maintaining her strong position as a leading colonial and imperial figure for more than two hundred years, was losing blood because her colonies gained independence one after another. India achieved independence right after the war in 1947, and Ceylon and Burma in the following years. As Alistair Davies states, Indian independence was a priority for the Labour Party partly because Britain lacked the resources to hold India (2). In 1952, a new Elizabethan age has begun in British monarchy. Queen Elizabeth II came to the throne after her father King George VI's death. The decline of Britain continued in the 1950s; especially the loss of Suez in 1956 signified an important turning point in the history of British Empire. The political depression revealed itself with the protests and riots against Suez policy. As a result, Britain's loss of imperial status and confidence in the post-war period was the essential cause of the anger, disillusionment and anxiety observed in contemporary British writers' works (Davies 3).

As Edward Royle indicates, in the post-war years, there were several changes in social life of the British. First of all, a significant shift in the nature, function and expectation of the concept of family occurred at that time. The birth-rate began to increase after the war which culminated in a "baby boom" starting in 1947. However, in 1950s, the methods of contraception started to be the major regulator of population; the more professional methods of birth control came later in the 1960s. Ironically, while the contraceptive devices were popular, the illegitimate childbirth and the rates of abortion increased as well as divorces and remarriages (10-11). The position and role of women in the society as well as family had been changing since the early years of the century; and the change had been accelerated by the war. Yet, the essential principle of the division of roles between husband as the breadwinner and wife as the homemaker and child-raiser remained relatively unchanged. Although the problems of housing was severe during and right after the war, the technical and scientific developments in the

1950s, such as detergents, disinfectants, refrigerators, washing machines, dishwashers or TV sets made women's lives at home easier. On the other hand, women gradually started to work outside their home and pursued a career besides being a wife and mother. As a result, in the early 1950s, especially in the working class families, husbands started to share some domestic chores formerly thought of as the wives' responsibilities alone. In middle class families, the situation did not change significantly; husbands dedicated themselves to their careers and "depended very heavily upon their wives providing them with the comforts and security of domesticity" (Marwick 68-69).

During the Second World War, most of the theatres were destroyed and the rest of them were under the threat of bombing. Before the war, London was the centre of theatre and drama. Then, at the beginning of the war, when the theatres of London were closed, suburban or small town theatres continued their productions; and this caused a stimulation of a theatrical revival in the provinces (Marwick 84). In the late 1940s and early 1950s, there was an escapist and nostalgic theatre, aiming to reach a middle class audience. There were only a few plays dealing with working class characters and issues. Yet the plays of the time were lively and colourful in order to escape from the depression felt after the war. Theatres staged mostly melodramas, farces, detective stories and musicals which did not touch any kind of social problems of the time.

Early in the war, The Council for the Entertainment of Music and the Arts (CEMA) had been established in order to ensure the continuation of the cultural activities even through the most traumatic and difficult times of the war. After the war, CEMA was renamed as the Arts Council and continued to make the arts in general available for a wider audience. On the other hand, as Colin Chambers and Mike Prior point out, the National Theatre Act of 1949 certified the Treasury to work with the London County Council to finance, build and supply a new theatre as a part of Labour Party's nationalisation programme. The immediate post-war period brought some developments in this sense. New theatres were opened all through the country; and The Old Vic became a centre that would combine productions of classical drama and the young people's touring theatres (11-12). In 1963 the Old Vic company was dissolved and the building became the first home of the National Theatre (Brockett 450).

Bernard Shaw died in 1950, but the Irish Sean O'Casey continued to write plays. Noël Coward was still active along with the other playwrights like Terence Rattigan, Ben Travers, J.B. Priestley and Christopher Fry. Rattigan was the leading successful dramatist of the time with the drawing room atmosphere of his plays such as *The Winslow Boy* (1946), *The Browning Version* (1948), and *Separate Tables* (1955). He was against the drama of ideas or political plays, and, as he claimed, he wrote plays suitable for "Aunt Edna", in other words, average middle-class, middle-aged audience bored by propaganda (Milne 176). On the other hand, although he was writing comedies, Fry was actually famous with his poetic drama such as *The Lady's Not for Burning* (1948).

1956 is known as the beginning of a new era for the British theatre. To begin with, the English Stage Company was founded in this year with the intention of encouraging productions of new English plays as well as foreign plays not seen yet in England. Then, a kind of turning point and a breakthrough were experienced after the first production of *Look Back in Anger* written by John Osborne. Even though the play did not bring any novelty in terms of form and style, its language, setting and the characterization was highly controversial for the middle class audience as well as critics. Stephen Lacey observes that "The success of the play was an indication that the social and political expectations of the theatre had altered – that the space that theatre occupied in the general culture was now different" (4). The play, as Ossia Trilling denotes in his essay, affected self-satisfied British middle class theatregoer and changed the face of the post-war British realist theatre. Trilling sees this new realism as a combination of two elements:

The first represents an involuntary and instinctive resistance to the irksome class structure of British society and the other, in one form or another, the universal dilemma which has split the world down the middle in an age of threatening nuclear destruction and exacerbated the rivalries inherent in class, in nation, or in industrial or commercial power (184)

Alan Sinfield also defines the play's function as an attack on the concepts of taste and decorum that conventional theatre was trying to preserve in the post-war world. The

working class protagonist of the play, Jimmy Porter, who lives in an attic room in the Midlands with his upper-middle class wife Alison and their lodger Cliff, immediately became the new face of the Angry Young Men of the 1950s. The play changed the traditional setting of the theatre from a drawing room to an attic, offered a leftist point of view through a harsh criticism of the Establishment and the class problems, used a dynamic language providing an emotional engagement, and attacked contemporary social and political issues (Sinfield 479). However, the play's real importance is not in its technical or dramatic structure, but in its pioneering quality which paves the way for a new, young, political and dissident theatre. Ironically, John Osborne became relatively conservative and pessimistic about the working class and its materialistic attitudes in his later plays; and he also revealed an anxiety towards the social freedom gained later in the 1960s (Harrop 12).

Look Back in Anger is a realist play nourished by the Kitchen Sink realist movement which was popular among the working class novelists, artists and dramatists of the 1950s. After a long period, theatre started to portray the quality of life lived by the working class majority rather than the elite minority; the setting of the play was the ordinary accommodation of a family with its kitchen sinks, gas stoves, ironing boards and wooden chairs instead of velvet curtains, fashionable furniture and stylistic paintings. The play's attack upon class distinction along with the satisfaction and inertia of the members of all classes is the reason of its break with the older theatrical traditions on stage. Although realism is apparent in *Look Back in Anger*, as Innes indicates, there is a symbolic structure underneath.

The four main characters are clearly divided on class lines, in which sex equals status. Honest and male proletarians are set against beautiful, but repressed or immoral – and female – gentry, with social conflict represented by the sexual battleground of Jimmy Porter's marriage to the upper-class Alison, and his seduction of her more self-assured counterpart, Helena. Society is characterized by Alison's apparent avoidance of commitment, which in Jimmy's view equals an inability to feel emotion, being "Pusillanimous. Adjective. Wanting of firmness of mind, of small courage". Epitomized by her symbolically absent Brother

Nigel, this vacuum of insensitivity is what enables the Establishment to continue their traditional exploitation of the working classes. (*Modern British Drama* 99-100)

Aleks Sierz, while mentioning Jimmy Porter's language and tirades, states that Osborne had created a myth of authentic feeling which contains another symbolic motif:

“Undergraduate in style, aggressively witty, revelling in their wordiness, repetition and exaggeration, Jimmy's fulminations are symbolic of the wider cultural conflict between idealized passion and repressive conformity” (137). Unfortunately, it can be observed in the negative tone of the play that Jimmy Porter is not capable of producing any solution for the moral, social or political problems he drastically and successfully criticizes.

The Berliner Ensemble's visit of London in 1956 made a dramatic impact on British theatrical circles as well. Brecht's epic theatre dominated much of British left wing theatre in 1960s and 1970s with its alienation effect especially with the works of playwrights like John Osborne, John Arden, Edward Bond, Caryl Churchill and Howard Brenton who benefited from Brecht's understanding of theatre (Leach 142). Osborne used the Brechtian historicising technique in *Luther* (1961) and *A Patriot for Me* (1965). However the plays did not show any concern for the social, cultural or the political background of the period. Yet, Brecht inspired many young dramatists to examine the politics of the time; therefore politics became a current subject matter for drama. Moreover, epic theatre provided an alternative for the realist/naturalist drama of the British stage.

The Cold War and its threat of nuclear destruction, civil rights movement which started at that time in the United States, the Korean War and the Vietnam War were among the several upsetting events that caused uncertainties about the directions in which the governments of these countries were going. By the late 1950s, the British theatre had begun to reflect all those international uncertainties besides the general anxiety about the future of humanity, meaning of life, and the unstable psychology of intellectuals (Brockett 449). Especially after the revolutionary entrance of Osborne and his *Look Back in Anger* into the British theatrical arena, the new and young generation of playwrights with working class origins started to show up everywhere and paved the way for a new wave of theatre reflecting the changing realities of the post-war era. Their

plays were so different in tone, form and theme that they provided a fresh viewpoint regarding the function of theatre other than a mere entertainment under the oppression of capitalist economy. As Cevat Çapan emphasized, the persistence on a political and conscious attitude in both playwriting and productions also meant to educate their own audience and to alter their expectations (113). The dramatists like Joan Littlewood, Shelagh Delaney and Brendan Behan who believed that theatre is not an elite upper-class art form, moved theatre to the working class neighbourhoods and formed a public theatre that Shakespeare had once effectively maintained (114).

Joan Littlewood's Theatre Workshop, which was formed by a group of actors in 1945, had continued a socialist policy in those years. The aim of the group was to involve dramatists and audience in drama as a living event. In 1953, under the direction of Littlewood, they took over the Theatre Royal in Stratford, London. As Hinchliffe states, Littlewood's belief in getting the theatre to the people by rejecting scripts, by the use of improvisations and by ensemble directing was much more significant than Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* for the British theatre because "she [suggested] a kind of theatre in which the producer is more important than the text, action than the word" (53-54). Theatre Workshop presented several new plays by new dramatists such as *The Quare Fellow* (1957) and *The Hostage* (1958) by Brendan Behan, *A Taste of Honey* (1958) by Shelagh Delaney, *Fings Ain't Wot They Used T'Be* (1959) by Frank Norman and *Oh, What a Lovely War!* (1963) which is an epic musical developed by Joan Littlewood. *Oh, What a Lovely War!* which contributed to the political thought at that time, and *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance* (1959) by John Arden surveyed the themes of war, pacifism, resistance and reckoning in the framework of imperial and class exploitation (Sinfield 480).

Another significant and prolific name of the period was Arnold Wesker who depicts "the humiliating class system which bludgeons them into blind submissiveness and instils a mindless, virtually fascistic, discipline in its attempt to ensure its self-perpetuation" (Trilling 185). He is best known for his trilogy – *Chicken Soup with Barley* (1958), *Roots* (1959) and *I'm Talking about Jerusalem* (1960) – in which he exposes the disillusionment of British people and the declining sense of purpose in the socialist movement (Brockett 452). Wesker was a devoted political activist of his time;

and he dealt with the cultural isolation of the working classes in most of his plays. He also believed that art should play a productive role in people's lives and should make people politically conscious. In an interview he describes their generation which offered a new attitude to British theatre:

The extraordinary thing is that we all happened about the same time, and Osborne having Jimmy Porter say, "there are no more brave causes left", found a response in so many of us. We were all somehow absorbing the same kind of atmosphere: the war had been a formative part of our lives, followed by the hope of 1945, and the general decline from then on. So that we were the generation at the end of that decline, desperately wanting to find something, being tired of pessimism and the mediocrity. (Trussler 195)

1960s were totally a different period for British theatre and drama. Patterson indicates that Britain, which had been regarded as the home of traditions and conservative values, now became the home of outrageous fashion and music. Young people had greater freedom than ever before with widespread accessibility of contraceptive pills and recent decriminalisation of marijuana and other hallucinogenic drugs. They enjoyed their spiritual and sexual liberation, and started to experience different states of consciousness and limitless sexual freedom which was encouraged by these drugs and devices. Most of the young people were protesting capitalist system and military civilisation which reveals itself with the war in Vietnam (11-13). On the other hand, in the world of theatre, political point of view started to influence the acting and directing business in the companies as well depending on the changing demands of the drama. Until the mid-1950s, when the new theatre of Brecht, Littlewood and Beckett appeared, actors' acting styles were limited with the production styles. But now, the actors are given more exciting things to say or do on the stage and more motivating texts to read and think about. The extension of repertoire of the plays was also motivating for the actors and directors especially in the 1960s. Their work became more political thanks to not only the new and colourful texts of the new playwrights but also the abolition of censorship of theatre in the late 1960s. The most significant alteration of all was the shifting roles of actor-managers and director-producers in controlling power

over the productions. The new theatre had become a theatre of directors and producers instead of actors in those years (Chambers *Development* 383).

There were several liberal laws in the 1960s such as Race Relations Act (1965) which prevents racial discrimination, Abortion Act (1967) which allows legalized abortion, Sexual Offences Act (1967) which decriminalises homosexual acts, Theatres Act (1968) which removes the censorship by the Lord Chamberlain's Office, and Divorce Reform Act (1969) which makes divorces easier to actualise. As Marwick explains, British society seemed to have had an independence in so many ways from the monotony and orthodoxy which immobilized it since the Victorian times. He also remarks that although the changes in society should not be overstated, there was a new hedonism in Britain that "life was lived with greater gusto than ever it had been since the evangelicals set their stamp upon the mores of the middle class (156). Even though this era was generally called as "classless", the British people were strongly aware of the boundaries between classes. All these changes in the functioning of society manifested itself in the theatrical world. The newly acquired identity of the British political theatre was maintained during the early years of the 1960s. The voices of working class young men were stronger than before on the stage with Harold Pinter, Joe Orton and Edward Bond.

When we look at the comedies written after the war, it can be concluded that, as John Elsom argues, these plays portrayed the decline of the middle class. In these plays, middle class families experience difficulties related to generation gaps, financial or marital problems; and in the finale, all the problems are solved without challenging the basis of middle class life. These comedies did not attack middle class society from a political point of view; they only offered "a picture of seedy snobbery, of sexual hypocrisy and of social failure unredeemed by idealism" (90). In the late 1950s and early 1960s, these comedies began to change slightly and acquired enough toughness and capacity to be more critical and satirical. Radio and television dramas of John Mortimer, *Everything in the Garden* (1962) by Giles Cooper and *The Formation Dancers* (1964) by Frank Marcus, who both deal with sexual hypocrisies in their plays, are some of the examples of this comedy at that time. Later, Joe Orton will completely

change the face of the comedies of middle class decline and will start to shock his audience with farcical approach. Elsom also indicates that as a genre,

the comedies of middle-class decline had both the merits and defects of some Restoration comedies of manners. The characters were often rigidly conceived, often as sexual stock-types: they were lesbians, poofs, sadists, masochists, knicker-lovers or pederasts, with the result of that there was little capacity for internal change and the fun (and drama) eventually derived from the surface wit. (94)

In conclusion, comedies in the 1960s differ from those of the 1950s in rejecting insincerity and conservatism which concealed the real troubles of family life. These early plays were for the tastes of the middle class audience who resist changing. However, plays like *The Rattle of a Simple Man* (1962) and *Staircase* (1967) by Charles Dyer, which depict the stories of a man who visits a prostitute, and two gay barbers, highlight the rigidity with which middle class marginal people were usually treated (95). Using a well-made play formula with tightly constructed plots, three unities and single room sets, playwrights who wrote these comedies satirised the life of the middle class people.

CHAPTER FOUR: POSTWAR COMEDY OF MANNERS

4.1. Harold Pinter

When he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature, Harold Pinter delivered a speech on 7 December 2005 titled as “Art, Truth & Politics”. At the beginning of his speech he said:

In 1958 I wrote the following: “There are no hard distinctions between what is real and what is unreal, nor between what is true and what is false. A thing is not necessarily either true or false; it can be both true and false.” I believe that these assertions still make sense and do still apply to the exploration of reality through art. So as a writer I stand by them but as a citizen I cannot. As a citizen I must ask: What is true? What is false? (811)

He then continues his speech with a comment on the concept of truth in dramatic art.

But the real truth is that there never is any such thing as one truth to be found in dramatic art. There are many. These truths challenge each other, recoil from each other, reflect each other, ignore each other, tease each other, are blind to each other. Sometimes you feel you have the truth of a moment in your hand, then it slips through your fingers and is lost. (811)

Afterwards, he gives examples from the opening lines of his two significant plays; *The Homecoming* and *Old Times*. Then he moves to his ideas about political theatre.

Political theatre presents an entirely different set of problems.

Sermonising has to be avoided at all cost. Objectivity is essential. The characters must be allowed to breathe their own air. The author cannot confine and constrict them to satisfy his own taste or disposition or prejudice. He must be prepared to approach them from a variety of angles, from a full and uninhibited range of perspectives, take them by surprise, perhaps, occasionally, but nevertheless give them the freedom to go which way they will. (812)

The rest of his speech generally consists of his personal opinions and perspectives about U.S. foreign policy and actions he is opposed to. At the end of the speech, he concludes that

I believe that despite the enormous odds which exist, unflinching, unswerving, fierce intellectual determination, as citizens, to define the *real* truth of our lives and our societies is a crucial obligation which devolves upon us all. It is in fact mandatory. If such a determination is not embodied in our political vision we have no hope of restoring what is so nearly lost to us - the dignity of man. (818)

With such political statements and such conclusion, Pinter reminds artists and writers of the new century of their own function and duty, which is preserving the dignity of man by being a responsible artist, citizen and human being. Ironically, in an interview given to Lawrence M. Bensky in 1966, Pinter claimed that “politics do bore” him and he “disgusts ideological statements of any kind” (qtd in Smith 58). As it can be seen in his career, his political attitude and approach to theatre and drama had changed throughout the years. While he was rejecting being overtly political on stage in the early years of his career, in the last period he wrote political plays; and even after he stopped writing, he continued to be a political activist.

Pinter was born and raised in Hackney, East London in 1930 as the son of a working class Jewish family of the East European immigrants. His birthplace provided some kind of literary source for him, and he used this working-class area of London as the setting of some of his early plays. William Baker and Stephen E. Tabachnick indicate that “the speech idioms of Pinter’s plays, especially *The Birthday Party* and *The Homecoming* owe much to that particular milieu. The characters too, with their particularly neurotic overtones, grow out of this social area” (7). During the 1930s, the growth of threat, disturbance and civil unrest caused violent conflicts between the fascists and the leftists particularly at the time of the bombardments of the Second World War. The menace and horror of the war was part of Pinter’s everyday life. The other important issue in his youth was that the East London was receiving Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe at that time; so the threat of Fascism was becoming more real for the Jewish people of that era. Accordingly, being and suffering as a Jewish

child in a Nazi era was something important that could leave indelible impressions on a person soon to be a writer. After the war, he started to write poems and was interested in acting. He studied at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts in 1948 for two terms and attended the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama. Afterwards, he worked as a professional actor and toured the country; he also played in some of the performances of his own plays.

In 1950, he published his first poems and started to write stage plays. Pinter's first one-act play is *The Room* which was written in 1957. In the same year, he wrote his first full-length play, *The Birthday Party*; however, initially it was a disappointment. Later, the play became one of the prominent dramatic works of its time. Then he wrote his successful and well-known plays such as *The Dumb Waiter* (1957), *The Hothouse* (1958), and *The Caretaker* (1959). His early plays are mostly known as "comedies of menace" in which an outside threat occupies the lives of the people in a room; and in a deadly battle for power and survival, people defend themselves against an intrusion which is embodied by a character or characters. The witty combination of comedy and menace in the title of the genre is significant since comedy offers something predictable and menace offers unpredictable threat or violence in the plays. The origin of the term comes from David Compton's 1958 play *The Lunatic View: A Comedy of Menace*; but the theatre reviewer Irving Wardle was the person who linked the phrase to Pinter while describing *The Birthday Party*. As Wardle asserts, language is the most important thing in Pinter's play; so "it is impossible to detach what is said from the way in which it is said" (30). Wardle also detects Beckett and Kafka as the literary influences on Pinter's work; and he describes *The Birthday Party* as a type of comic menace where menace is a "meretricious and easily manufactured fictional device, stand for something more substantial: destiny" (33). He also explains comedy as a factor which "enables the committed agents and victims of destruction to come on and off duty; to joke about the situation while oiling a revolver; to display absurd or endearing features behind their masks of implacable resolution; to meet as Mr. Pinter allows them to do, in paper hats for a game of blind man's buff" (33). However, Wardle approaches comedy and menace as if they are separable things which is actually not true. Basil Chiasson quotes Pinter himself: "Menace is everywhere. There is plenty of menace in this very room, at this

very moment, you know. You can't avoid it; you can't get away from it" (32). Chiasson argues that it is impossible to identify where the comedy starts or the menace begins and ends in Pinter's works; therefore it would be problematic to deal with both concepts as distinct and separate units (48). Penelope Prentice also cites Pinter on the issue: "There is comedy in life and there is menace in life, and I think the two things go together – to a certain extent" (xxxix).

Stephen Gale identifies menace and dominance as major concerns of Pinter's comedy. He describes the situation with an example and illustrates a room about to be invaded.

The person in the room understands that there is a menace outside the room, and in spite of loneliness and fear tries to communicate with the intruder in an attempt to verify whether it is friendly. Unfortunately, a vicious cycle develops. The room's inhabitant needs to communicate with the invader in order to determine whether he or she is friendly. However, because the inhabitant of the room, the protagonist, is afraid that some point of personal vulnerability will be revealed to the intruder, the character is so wary that communication is impossible. The result is that menace is increased, which in turn increases the need for verification and communication, which is not satisfied and thereby leads to additional menace, and so on. (316)

It is obvious that the menace is a real threat of physical violence, Elsom indicates; not an indefinite or general fear of unknown disaster. Perhaps, this issue is the one which distinguishes Pinter's theatre from the Theatre of the Absurd. According to Elsom, Pinter's menace operates on three different levels: physical violence, intricate problems set by the outside world, and the loss of emotional security. Essentially, Pinter takes the popular theme of social alienation and presents it in emotional terms (109). Even though the plays are frightening, they are also very funny; as John Russell Taylor asserts, they create

an atmosphere of nameless, undefined terror and at the same time shocking us into laughter, shocking us sometimes by the very amiability, jollity even with which the most alarmingly destructive attacks on the

human mind are launched, which creates something very like complicity between audience and menace, as well as imaginative identification between audience and menaced. (*Harold Pinter* 7)

Besides, as Pinter states in the interview with Bensky, “the world is a pretty violent place, it’s as simple as that, so any violence in the plays comes out quite naturally. It seems to me an essential and inevitable factor” (qtd in Smith 59).

The Homecoming (1964) is the last play of his early dramas; however, its generic quality will be discussed in the following section of this work. After his early plays, Pinter did not remain in the mode of menace and he turned his attention to the source of the menace and this led him a series of transitional plays. His middle plays such as *Old Times* (1970), *No Man’s Land* (1974) and *Betrayal* (1978) are also referred to as memory plays where attention to the private level slightly moves toward public level. Finally, his latest works change the focus from individual to communal level. These overtly political plays which were written after 1980 were *One for the Road* (1984), *Mountain Language* (1988), *The New World Order* (1991), *Party Time* (1991), *Ashes to Ashes* (1996), *Moonlight* (1993) and *Celebration* (2000) in which interrogation and abuse affect not only onstage characters but also the audience. Until he died of cancer in 2008, Pinter wrote twenty nine plays, twenty one screenplays, directed twenty seven theatre productions, received honorary degrees from eighteen universities and was awarded by several prizes including Nobel Prize for Literature in 2005 and Legion d’Honneur in 2007.

The adjective “Pinteresque,” although Pinter himself did not like the term, describes the characteristics of his works in terms of language and a particular atmosphere and environment established by the existing menace. As McFadyen remarks, the term has become a part of everyday vocabulary to describe the conversations heard around us which are “superficially, even comically banal yet loaded with significance, perhaps screaming silently with anguish and desperation” (3). The language of his plays is simple, direct and exceptionally commonplace. Robert Corrigan defines Pinter’s major dramatic means as trivial remarks and small gesture which together create inconsequence and therefore hide deeper meanings. However, they ultimately reveal the truth about people in a given situation (311). Corrigan quotes

Pinter's comments about this issue in an interview given in 1962: "The speech we hear is an indication of what we don't hear. It is a necessary avoidance, a violent, sly, anguished, or mocking smokescreen which keeps the other in its place" (312).

Some critics think that Pinter's characters fail to communicate in their dialogues; in other words, by staying at the surface they miss the deeper intent. As Prentice claims, Pinter rejects this idea of inability to communicate and insists that there is a deliberate evasion of communication because "communication itself between people is so frightening that characters will do what they can to avoid it" (qtd in Prentice lx); however, his characters do communicate on a deeper level. That deeper level is the subtext where "below the word spoken, is the thing known and unspoken, where under what is said, actually another thing is being said" (lx). The confusion of the situation is caused by silences and pauses which are the most significant manifestations of the term Pinteresque. All the silences and pauses in Pinter's plays have different meanings and importance. Michael Billington cites director Peter Hall's explanation about these notions: The longest break is silence; the character's state of mind changes throughout this silence which implies a crisis. The other is a pause which is a mundane crisis moment, filled with unsaid words. The shortest one is marked with three dots which is a simple hesitation. The actors have to understand the differences and apply them in their acting in order to emphasize the subtext and unsaid words. As Pinter himself suggests, what was not said often speaks as powerfully as the words themselves (Billington 176). Therefore, the silence and pause "can function to either empower or dismantle statements and entire conversations, rendering speech suggestive, ironic, suspect, and so on" (Chiasson 30). This precision, economy and control in the language of his plays which are full of irrelevance and repetition, as Hinchliffe indicates, aligns Pinter with English high comedy represented by Oscar Wilde and Noël Coward (129).

The following example is taken from *The Collection* (1961) in which two men having breakfast together.

BILL: What time did you get in?

HARRY: Four.

BILL: Good party?

Pause

HARRY: You didn't make any toast this morning.

BILL: No. Do you want some?

HARRY: No. I don't.

BILL: I can if you like.

HARRY: It's all right. Don't bother. (*Pause*) How are you spending your day today?

BILL: Go and see a film I think.

HARRY: Wonderful life you lead. (*Pause*) Do you know some maniac telephoned you last night?

Bill looks at him.

Just as I got in. Four o'clock. Walked in the door and the telephone was ringing.

BILL: Who was it?

HARRY: I've no idea.

BILL: What did he want?

HARRY: You. He was shy, wouldn't tell me his name.

BILL: Huh.

Pause.

HARRY: Who could it have been?

BILL: I've no idea. . .

In this conversation the everyday, banal reality is emphasized by short sentences, unanswered questions, deliberate silences, pauses and three dots. The triviality of the dialogue is provided by parties, toasts, films and telephones which depict the simplicity of urban life. However, the tension of the dialogue is lightly heightened at the end of the speech by the news about the mysterious caller; we observe the hesitation of Bill about this person. In another dialogue from *The Birthday Party*, the comedy of menace is illustrated by the one-liners and repetitions in a torture-like interrogation.

GOLDBERG: What have you done with your wife?

MCCANN: He's killed his wife!

GOLDBERG: Why did you kill your wife?

STANLEY (*sitting, his back to the audience*): What wife?

MCCANN: How did he kill her?

GOLDBERG: How did you kill her?

MCCANN: You throttled her.

GOLDBERG: With arsenic.

MCCANN: There's your man!

GOLDBERG: Where's your old mum?

STANLEY: In the sanatorium.

MCCANN: Yes!

GOLDBERG: Why did you never get married?

MCCANN: She was waiting at the porch.

GOLDBERG: You skedaddled from the wedding.

MCCANN: He left her in the lurch.

GOLDBERG: You left her in the pudding club.

MCCANN: She was waiting at the church.

...

GOLDBERG: Why did the chicken cross the road?

STANLEY: He wanted...

MCCANN: He doesn't know. He doesn't know which came first!

GOLDBERG. Which came first?

MCCANN: Chicken? Egg? Which came first?

GOLDBERG and MCCANN: Which came first? Which came first?

Which came first?

STANLEY screams. (49-52)

The rapid change of words, illogical contradictions and unexpected improvisations create the typical Pinteresque atmosphere in which the audiences laugh at first, and then remember that this is a frightening interrogation for Stanley. The comedy does not last long since the audience realises the gravity of the scene; and then they think that this should not be funny at all.

As David Ian Rabey claims, there are certain similarities between Pinter's drama and the popular drama of the 1950s (52). His plays are realistic plays, but not in the sense of Ibsen's realism. Pinter's characters "behave in a believable manner, but they

are shrouded in a twilight of mystery. Their motives and backgrounds are vague or unknown. We recognize there is a motivation, but we are unsure what it is” (Dukore 43-44). Unlike Beckett’s or any other absurdist dramatist’s “abstracted theatrical extremities” (Rabey 52), Pinter used familiar situations like investigative interrogations in detective thrillers, love triangles and stratagems in cocktail parties of the drawing room comedies, which are easily recognised by the audience of 1950s. However this recognisability is only an initial impression because his situations and characters resist rationalisation (52). Maurice Charney emphasises that Pinter uses an idiomatic and everyday language in his plays; he brings scenes of daily life to stage but he teases his audience by removing meaningful context from conversations. As Charney states, “The humour arises from a farcical shock of recognition, by which we become aware of a terrifying absurdity in our ordinary existence” (114). Moreover, the language of Pinter’s plays faithfully represents the language of our everyday life which is essentially ungrammatical, illogical or incoherent. In this respect, as Taylor suggests, “Pinter, far from being the least realistic dramatist of his generation, is arguably the most realistic” (*Anger* 325). Pinter himself explains his realism in “Writing for Myself”: “I’m convinced that what happens in my plays could happen anywhere, at any time, in any place, although the events may seem unfamiliar at first glance. If you press me for a definition, I’d say that what goes on in my plays is realistic, but what I’m doing is not realism” (174).

In her 1962 article, Ruby Cohn claims that Pinter is not only close to Samuel Beckett but also to John Osborne and his Angry Young Generation since Pinter portrays characters who search for a place in the hierarchy of the system. Yet, Pinter’s understanding of system cannot be represented by welfare state anxieties or situations like marriage above one’s class as in the system that Osborne’s angry generation represent. In spite of his working class background and his preoccupation with lower class characters, Pinter cannot be called a working class dramatists like John Osborne, Arnold Wesker or Edward Bond. There are no onstage discussions of class, unemployment, or war in his plays; and he never uses the stage as a political platform in his early plays. Yet, as Cohn asserts, the function of a dramatist is to “humanize” the society in which he lives; in this sense, Pinter has a drama of “dehumanization”

however it implies the importance of humanity anyway. Especially in his early plays, religion and society which traditionally form human morality are depicted as immoral agents that destroy the individual. Therefore, as Cohn signifies, “Like Osborne, Pinter looks back in anger; like Beckett, Pinter looks forward to nothing (not even Godot). Pinter has created his own distinctive and dramatic version of Man vs. the System” (56). Ian Smith also thinks that there is a connection between Pinter and the Angry Young Men since they form an important part of the context of his works by describing some of the essential political and intellectual conditions of society which can be observed in Pinter’s early works. According to Smith, “because their prominence and success illustrate some of the rapid changes in British arts at the time, and the popularity of the term shows that the social conditions to which it was linked were very much part of the fifties and early sixties’ *zeitgeist*” (23). Pinter, even though he was not a sociologist and not an overtly political dramatist in the early period of his career, was well aware of the social changes of his country and wrote his plays accordingly. His primary political concern does not represent a belief that stage can change the world, but rather, as Christopher Innes argues, a “moral commitment” (*Modern British Drama* 280); in other words, it represents not class but power politics.

As Ian Smith indicates, Pinter’s drama was never an avant-garde work. Unlike the former idea of his being a part of the absurd theatre which depends upon his early comedies of menace, Pinter’s drama, although the tone and settings of those plays are utterly different, has a likeness in dialogue as well as structure with the works of earlier playwrights like Noël Coward, Terence Rattigan and Oscar Wilde (Smith 26), who were the successful writers of comedy of manners. Essentially, Pinter’s drama relies on the theory of realistic stage; his characters are subject to both language and social environment. Albeit sometimes they fail in communicating and expressing themselves, his characters are decentred or depthless only on the surface (Worthen 84). Martin Esslin summarises Pinter’s drama in terms of his difference from the traditional dramatists of the time:

He has shown that it is possible to combine the poetic imagery, the “open” construction of the Theatre of the Absurd with techniques which do not deviate too much from the mainstream of the traditional drama.

Pinter's plays do away with lengthy exposition, they leave the action and the characters unmotivated and unexplained, they reach no neat solution or conclusion, they raise questions rather than answer them, they force the audience to find their own interpretations, and yet, simultaneously, these plays are perfectly acceptable as representations of life, as observations of ordinary human behaviour. ("Godot" 68)

Since menace and ambiguity occupy his plays and overshadow everything else, Pinter's humour is often disregarded. One of his close friends, actor Robert Shaw, called Pinter "a mixture of Groucho Marx and T.S. Eliot" (qtd in Prentice xxxix). Pinter's characters neither overcome nor even acknowledge their own weaknesses; therefore, Pinter's expression becomes comic. Underneath the deadly seriousness in his plays, there is an essential comic spirit. Although he occupies his audience with pain or suffering, his comedy leads the audience to a point in which they acknowledge that there would be worse circumstances (Prentice xlviii). Without doubt, comedy serves as a weapon in Pinter's drama. Sometimes it becomes merciless, because while the mockery of the characters amuses audiences it also underlies the destructiveness of it and shocks them. As Francesca Coppa argues, in comedies, the audience is forced "to take sides in the conflict between the joke-teller and the victim: to laugh is to ally oneself with the aggressor, to refuse to laugh is to ally oneself with the victim" (43). In Pinter's early comedies, the major jokes are the ones which make the audience stop laughing and question themselves. Therefore, as Coppa concludes, in Pinter's plays, jokes create a dramatic crisis for the audience which reveal hidden alliances or antagonisms; in this sense, his comedy is best described as a subversion of traditional comedy (54). Penelope Prentice underlines Pinter's own words by asserting that "Pinter acknowledges that his comedy, informed by terror, links the comic and tragic through the horror and absurdity beneath" (x1):

I think what I try to do in my plays is get to this recognisable reality of the absurdity of what we do and how we behave and how we speak. The point is people laugh at absurdity, because it is recognisable and secondly it verges on the unknown. We don't quite know where this absurdity is fixed. Of course it isn't fixe anywhere. The fact that it's verging on the

unknown leads us to the next step which seems to occur in my plays; there's a kind of horror about it and I think that this horror and absurdity go together. (qtd in Prentice xl)

4.2 *The Homecoming*

The Homecoming was written in 1964 as the last play of Pinter's early dramas and was accepted as his best and the most successful play after its first production in 1965. The play is somehow different from his comedies of menace and is closer to comedy of manners instead. In *The Homecoming*, Max is a seventy-year-old widower and a retired butcher who lives with two of his three sons Lenny and Joey, and his sixty-three-year-old brother Sam. Sam is a chauffeur who drives limousines. Joey is Max's, not very bright, youngest son who works for a demolition company during the day and fights as a boxer at night. Lenny, the middle brother, is an intelligent man; even though his occupation is not mentioned clearly it can be assumed that he is a pimp. Teddy, the eldest son of the family who lives in the U.S. with his wife and three sons, is a doctor of philosophy in an American university. He and his wife Ruth, who was a "photographic model for the body" before her marriage, visit Teddy's family unexpectedly for the first time after their wedding. Since Teddy and Ruth have left the country as soon as they got married six years ago, the family does not know her. After a series of meeting with the family, first with Lenny in the early hours of the morning and then with the others a few hours later, the identity of Ruth becomes clear. In each meeting, the reception of Ruth is very annoying. Until Teddy assures that she is his wife, they treat Ruth as a whore who keeps company with Teddy. Max calls her "tart", "smelly scrubber" and "stinking pox-ridden slut" and says "I've never had a whore under this roof before. Ever since your mother died" (42). This is a kind of mistaken identity problem that the play portrays. Yet when her position in the family is set, they treat her better. Just before the couple leave the house, Lenny asks Ruth to dance, kisses her; then Joey takes over Ruth and they roll onto the floor with an erotic clinch. However, although she has been silent and cool until now, she takes control over men and asks them to bring drink and food. A few hours later, after Ruth and Joey spend some time together upstairs, they offer Ruth to

stay with them, to look after the family and also to work as a prostitute in another house, so that she could support the family financially. After negotiations, Ruth decides to stay in London while Teddy leaves home and returns to his children and his job in the U.S.

Like his previous plays, *The Homecoming*'s setting is a room, the living room of a working class – most probably Jewish – family from North London; but unlike the other plays the room is relatively a clean and secure place, if security is ever possible in the play. When we look at the setting, it represents an urban context, a modernised interior of an old house of the 1960s. Even though there is not a mother in the house the father is apparently “obsessed with order and clarity. He doesn't like mess” (33). We see the family gatherings in the living room; it is not a proper drawing room of the early comedies of manners, but the family meet in the morning, chat after lunch, drink coffee, smoke cigars, and even play some music and dance in this very room. When Teddy and Ruth first enter the house, Teddy's anxiety about the condition of the house and the room is obvious; he honestly wants Ruth to like the house. “What do you think of the room? Big, isn't it? It's a big house. I mean, it's a fine room, don't you think? Actually there was a wall, across there . . . with a door. We knocked it down . . . years ago . . . to make an open living area” (21). But Max hates this room and says “It's the kitchen I like. It's nice in there. It's cosy”, “I don't want to bring my tea in here. I hate it here. I want to drink my tea in there” (37). The daily chores of the house are also mentioned by Max who addresses Sam, “You resent making my breakfast, that's what it is, isn't it? That's why you bang round the kitchen like that, scraping the frying-pan, scraping all the leavings into the bin, scraping all the plates, scraping all the tea out of the teapot . . . that's why you do that, every single stinking morning” (39). The polite behaviours of social gatherings, like compliments about the lunch and coffee, or the stories about the good old days when the boys were young is mentioned as part of a typical comedy of manners. Lenny complains about his father's cooking skills, but when Ruth praises Max about the lunch, Max says “I put my heart and soul into it” (45). Throughout the play we hear about cooking, having breakfast, having lunch, drinking tea, coffee, water or whiskey, postprandial smoking and so on which are all patterns of social behaviour or rituals. In one scene, Ruth asks Lenny to change the glass of her whiskey because she thinks that this is not the proper glass. These daily rituals represent both comic and

ineffectual parts of their life, as well as show their emptiness and insignificance.

Katherine H. Burkman mentions them as “secular, everyday ceremonies of social activity that have become formalised or frozen into patterns of social behaviour,” which are “automatic way[s] of coping with life” (10).

Regarding the reflections of social life outside the house, we also hear the men talking about gyms, butcher’s shops, horse races in Epsom, rich customers travelling in Sam’s cab, the bar in Ritz Hotel and “urinal” swimming baths which compose the urban life around the house and certainly the relationships of the people with these places. All these places surround the house with a vivid social life and also complete the picture of it. This creates the reality and tangibility of the setting and the story, making it different from the barren wastelands of the Absurd drama. It also lessens the effect of possible menace wherever its source is, for the house is not a closed space. Therefore the play depicts the characters living in a dynamic society implying that their life outside the house is full and active.

There are also two offstage characters who have an enormous impact on the motivation of the others: Jessie, Max’s deceased wife and MacGregor, Max’s old friend who died a few years ago. As Max describes, the boys’ mother Jessie was once the “backbone” of the family who had a “will of iron” and “a heart of gold” (46). On the other hand, MacGregor was the best driver and the best fighter in town in Max’s esteem. As Emil Roy claims, these offstage characters “occupy an archetypal position. These characters all appear sharply bifurcated, joining power and passivity, eliciting both idealization and fearful contempt from onstage figures” (336-337). Max reminisces about his friendship with MacGregor with an idealization, and mentions MacGregor and Jessie together at the beginning of the play.

MAX: His family were all MacGregors, they came all the way from Aberdeen, but he was the only one they called Mac. (*Pause*) He was very fond of your mother, Mac was. Very fond. He always had a good word for her. (*Pause*) Mind you, she wasn’t such a bad woman. Even though it made me sick just to look at her rotten stinking face, she wasn’t such a bad bitch. I gave her the best bleeding years of my life, anyway. (8-9)

Sam remembers MacGregor and Jessie together as well but with another point of view:

SAM: Never get a bride like you had, anyway. Nothing like your bride . . . going about these days. Like Jessie. *(Pause)* After all, I escorted her once or twice, didn't I? Drove her round once or twice in my cab. She was a charming woman. *(Pause)* All the same, she was your wife. But still . . . they were some of the most delightful evenings I've ever had. Used to just drive her about. It was my pleasure.

. . .

You wouldn't have trusted any of your other brothers. You wouldn't have trusted Mac, would you? But you trusted me. I want to remind you. *(Pause)* Old Mac died a few years ago, didn't he? Isn't he dead? *(Pause)* He was a lousy stinking rotten loudmouth. A bastard uncouth sodding runt. Mind you, he was a good friend of yours. (18)

These different viewpoints of Max and Sam about both MacGregor and Jessie create a conflict between two brothers; however, at the end of the play, Sam reveals a long kept secret about these characters by saying "MacGregor had Jessie in the back of my cab as I drove them along" (78), then he "*croaks and collapses*". Everybody thinks that he dies of a heart attack, but "He's not even dead!" as Max protests. The relationship of Jessie and MacGregor is a clue about the unknown realities of the family. This information makes the audience to think about Jessie's contradictory images in the eyes of Max, and MacGregor's possible fathering of one or more of the sons.

The exposition part of the play does not provide a proper psychological background of the characters, yet it reflects vicious but funny conflicts between father and son, and later between the brothers.

MAX: What have you done with the scissors? *(Pause)* I said I'm looking for the scissors. What have you done with them? *(Pause)* Did you hear me? I want to cut something out of paper.

LENNY: I'm reading the paper.

MAX: Not that paper. I haven't read that paper. I'm talking about last Sunday's paper. I was just having a look at it in the kitchen. *(Pause.)* Do you hear what I'm saying? I'm talking to you! Where's the scissors?

LENNY: *(Looking up, quietly)* Why don't you shut up, you daft prat?

MAX lifts his stick and points it at him.

MAX: Don't you talk to me like that. I'm warning you. (7)

When Max mentions MacGregor and Jessie, Lenny reacts.

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

MAX: Listen! I'll chop your spine off, you talk to me like that! You understand? Talking to your lousy filthy father like that! (9)

The conflict between Max and Sam has a long history.

MAX: Why do I keep you here? You're just an old grub.

SAM: Am I?

MAX: You're a maggot.

SAM: Oh yes?

MAX: As soon as you stop paying your way here, I mean when you're too old to pay your way, you know what I'm going to do? I'm going to give you the boot.

SAM: You are, eh?

MAX: Sure. I mean, bring in the money and I'll put up with you. But when the firm gets rid of you – you can flake off.

SAM: This is my house as well, you know. This was our mother's house.

MAX: One lot after the other. One mess after the other.

SAM: Our father's house.

MAX: Look what I'm lumbered with. One cast-iron bunch of crap after another. One flow of stinking pus after another. (18-19)

When Joey comes home from training, another conflict occurs between the men.

JOEY: Feel a bit hungry.

SAM: Me too,

MAX: Who do you think I am, your mother? Eh? Honest. They walk in here every time of the day and night like bloody animals. Go and find yourself a mother.

The language of the play which is full of threat, hostility and insult creates a realistic atmosphere of a working class life. When the professions of the men in the family are taken into consideration, it would not be difficult to see the reason of this violence in

their language. Max is a butcher who works with a chopper and the slab; Joey is a demolition worker and a boxer at the same time; and Lenny is a popular pimp who continuously beats and uses violence against women; he confesses this in two long stories that he told Ruth when they first met. However, the violence in their language is a comic violence which is felt everywhere in the play. In other words, all those insults and abuse are a kind of mockery and joke between a father and his sons. This mockery causes the audience laugh at first; then they think that it is not that funny. The dialogues of the characters provide a realistic satisfaction; and the dynamics of the conversation are generally defined by one character at a time. For example, Max is always the one who defines the conditions of a conversation; he wants to control the emotional level of the dialogues, but although he talks abundantly, he does not understand everything equally. Lenny is the most articulate character of the play. When he talks, he always determines the spirit of the conversation, yet Ruth, after their first meeting, figures out his weakness and humiliates him. Even though Teddy is an academic and thus an educated man, he never defines the conditions of the conversations; he is too theoretical for this realistic stage. The language of the characters also defines their desire for power and dominance in the house. This becomes a battle for supremacy; and at the end of the play, only Ruth gains authority without being chatty or outspoken.

When we look at Max's remarks such as "I gave birth to three grown men" (40) or "don't talk to me about the pain of childbirth – I suffered the pain, I've still got the pangs" (47), it becomes apparent that he has been not only the father but also the mother of the family for a long time; but he doesn't like this role although he has been boasting about it. When we look at the characters, each has a dream and a desire to be part of the upper class. Even though they tease Teddy's academic growth and his better lifestyle in the U.S., they long for a higher status for themselves. Lenny talks about his "very distinguished clientèle" (73) and sitting "round the Ritz Bar" (52). Sam tries to create a successful self-image as "the best chauffeur in the firm" so his customers give him "first-class cigar" (13). Similarly, Max has a dream of having a bourgeois life and he tries to create an image of a man who has connections with aristocracy. He says,

MAX: I used to live on the course. One of the loves of my life. Epsom? I knew it like the back of my hand. I was one of the best-known faces

down at the paddock. What a marvellous open-air life. (*Pause*) He talks to me about horses. You only read their names in the papers. But I've stroked their manes. I've held them, I've calmed them down before a big race. I was the one they used to call for. Max, they'd say, there's a horse here, he's highly strung, you're the only man on the course who can calm him. It was true. I had a . . . I had an instinctive understanding of animals. I should have been a trainer. Many times I was offered the job – you know, a proper post, by the Duke of . . . I forgot his name . . . one of the Dukes. (9-10)

Besides, there are several references to clothing in the play. When Lenny first sees Ruth in the early hours of the day he says: "I've got my pyjamas on and you're fully dressed" (29). When Teddy and Ruth are first seen by the family together, they were wearing dressing-gowns. While Max talks about the good old days with his wife and little children he says he told Jessie: "I'm going to buy you a dress in pale corded blue silk, heavily encrusted in pearls, and for casual wear, a pair of pantaloons in lilac flowered taffeta. Then I gave her a drop of cherry brandy" (46). When they are alone in the room, Ruth and Lenny talk about clothes and shoes. Lenny tells her another story about a girl for whom he bought a hat which "had a bunch of daffodils on it, tied with a black satin bow, and then it was covered with a cloche of black veiling" (57); and this reminds Ruth her modelling days. Even though the men of the house are from lower class, they all have an understanding of fashion and clothing.

Moreover, there is a dialogue that can be interpreted as the battle of sexes in the play which is an important part of a typical comedy of manners. When Lenny and Ruth first met in the early hours of the morning, Ruth explains that she is Teddy's wife; but Lenny implicitly rejects to believe it for a while. All of a sudden he wants to hold Ruth's hand; when she asks the reason, probably with the intention of making her uncomfortable, he tells her two different stories in which he uses violence against women. The first woman is a diseased prostitute; the other is an old lady. Then he takes the ashtray from the table claiming that it is in Ruth's way; when she lets him do it, he wants to take her glass half full of water.

LENNY: And now perhaps I'll relieve you of your glass.

RUTH: I haven't quite finished.

LENNY: You've consumed quite enough, in my opinion.

RUTH: No, I haven't.

LENNY: Quite sufficient, in my opinion.

RUTH: Not in mine, Leonard.

(Pause)

LENNY: Don't call me that, please.

RUTH: Why not?

LENNY: That's the name my mother gave me. *(Pause)* Just give me the glass.

RUTH: No.

(Pause)

LENNY: I'll take it then.

RUTH: If you take the glass . . . I'll take you.

(Pause)

LENNY: How about me taking the glass without you taking me.

RUTH: Why don't I just take you?

(Pause)

LENNY: You're joking. *(Pause)* You're in love, anyway, with another man. You've had a secret liaison with another man. His family didn't even know. Then you come here without a word of warning and start to make trouble.

(She picks up the glass and lifts it towards him)

RUTH: Have a sip. Go on. Have a sip from my glass. *(He is still)*. Sit on my lap. Take a long cool sip. *(She pats her lap. Pause. She stands, moves to him with the glass.)* Put your head back and open your mouth.

LENNY: Take that glass away from me.

RUTH: Lie on the floor. Go on. I'll pour it down your throat.

LENNY: What are you doing, making me some kind of proposal?

(She laughs shortly, drains the glass)

RUTH: Oh, I was thirsty.

(She smiles at him, puts the glass down, goes into the hall and up the stairs. He follows into the hall and shouts up the stairs)

LENNY: What was that supposed to be? Some kind of proposal? (33-35)

Lenny deliberately gives Ruth mixed signals; by telling violent stories, he implies hidden threats which also signify sexual challenge. However, Ruth realises his masked cowardice and possible impotence; she accepts the challenge and defends herself by uncovering Lenny's weakness and by offering herself as a mother figure. In the conversation we observe a conflict of wills as David Hirst claims (74). He also calls attention to the pauses inside the dialogue and states that "every move is carefully countered, every challenge met. The tension increased pointedly until Ruth wins the round by forcing Lenny to shout at her and thus disturbs his father" (75). Likewise, Prentice indicates that "Ruth is the only witty character in the play who scores off the others, they are merely sarcastic or threatening or unintentionally comic, while she is intentionally so" (130). This conversation is not only an example for the battle of sexes in a comedy of manners but also is the point where the conflict for authority between Lenny and Ruth starts. Another importance of this dialogue is its farcical quality. Lenny performs a role-playing here by narrating those stories and therefore the serious and the comic are combined. Whereas the seriousness comes from his narratives, the comic is provided by his helplessness at the end of the dialogue. Ruth, after being calm and silent during the storytelling, successfully manipulates and controls the tension of the scene when Lenny decides to attack.

The name of the female character of the play, Ruth, has several meanings such as pity, compassion, charity and humanity. Moreover, Ruth is a Biblical character, a gentile woman who is married to a Jewish man. According to the story, after her husband dies, she decides to stay with his family and adopts them as her own people. In this respect, one can conclude that Ruth, who decides to stay with her husband's presumably Jewish family is not a Jewish bride, and therefore, Max's remarks about their marriage become clear: "Listen, you think I don't know why you didn't tell me you were married? I know why. You were ashamed. You thought I'd be annoyed because you married a woman beneath you. You should have known me better. I'm broadminded. I'm a broadminded man" (59). In this respect, a woman beneath Teddy

could be a woman who does not belong to their religion; in other words, a non-Jewish woman. In addition to that, this insinuation contains certain political remarks; Ruth's previous job of modelling somehow connects her to prostitution in their eyes, which makes her beneath Teddy again. She states that,

RUTH: I'm sure Teddy's very happy . . . to know that you're pleased with me. *(Pause)* I think he wondered whether you would be pleased with me.

MAX: But you're a charming woman.

(Pause)

RUTH: I was . . .

MAX: What? *(Pause)* What she say?

They all look at her.

RUTH: I was . . . different . . . when I met Teddy . . . first.

TEDDY: No you weren't. You were the same.

RUTH: I wasn't.

MAX: Who cares? Listen, live in the present, what are you worrying about? I mean, don't forget the earth's about five thousand million years old, at least. Who can afford to live in the past? (49-50)

As it can be seen, Max, thinking that she had a disgraceful life when she was single, tries to comfort her. Her image in their eyes is shaped by Max's consoling words, and when she tells Lenny that she was a "photographic model for the body" (57), by the help of the association of nude models the image gets stronger. This reminds us a very popular motive in a melodrama or comedy of manners: a woman with a past who is rejected by her lover's family. However, there is no verbal or physical evidence about her supposed prostitution; so that Pinter deliberately plays with the conventions of the genre. Thus, her assumed situation could be a terrible misunderstanding and misjudgement, even a mistaken identity problem which is another popular element of the comedy of manners. Ruth was already misunderstood when she first met the family and accused to be a whore; so, this is the second time family mistakes her for a prostitute. Ruth says that she was a model for the body, but "That was before I had . . . all my children" (57). When we look at her speech, there is only her longing and

nostalgia about her young and beautiful days while she was modelling. She only implies that after three childbirths her body does not look good enough; she is not a young girl anymore. Likewise, she remembers her last day in England when she visited the lake and the house around which they did modelling and had a good time. The only possible meaning of all these is that Ruth is unhappy in her marriage and she wants to be free from all the obligations of being a wife and a mother in America. She does not like the life they have been leading in the campus, or in the U.S. where “there’s lots of insects there . . . And there’s lots of insects there” (53). Clearly there is stress and imbalance in their relationship. When they first enter the house, Teddy wants her to go to sleep but she wants to take a walk outside. He insists but she goes out anyway. There is also evidence that Teddy, in some points, acts as a domineering husband who decides to visit his family, who decides to end this visit whenever he wants; and he is the one who describes Ruth’s life in America which seems not very attractive at all,

TEDDY: She’s a great help to me over there. She’s a wonderful wife and mother. She’s a very popular woman. She’s got lots of friends. It’s a great life, at the University . . . you know . . . it’s a very good life. We’ve got a lovely house . . . we’ve got all . . . we’ve got everything we want. It’s a very stimulating environment. *(Pause)* My department . . . is highly successful. *(Pause)* We’ve got three boys, you know. (50)

Therefore, it would be reasonable to conclude that Ruth actually did not accept the family’s offer of being a prostitute; but she only kept her silence and let Teddy leave. If we look at the play, after the negotiation with Lenny she does not shake hands, and “leave[s] it till later” (79). She only says that “it sounds a very attractive idea” (79). Even Max is not convinced that she understands or accepts the idea. He says that “I’ve got a funny idea she’ll do the dirty on us, you want to bet? She’ll use us, she’ll make use of us, I can tell you! I can smell it! You want to bet? *(Pause)* She won’t . . . be adaptable!” (81). At this point, Max could be right because as he claimed before, he has a special understanding of animals, especially mares:

MAX: But I was always able to tell a good filly by one particular trick. I’d look her in the eye. You see? I’d stand in front of her and look her straight in the eye, it was a kind of hypnotism, and by the look deep

down in her eye I could tell whether she was a stayer or not. It was a gift.
I had a gift. (10)

Hence, even though Ruth's agreement looks positive on the surface, deep down there is a strong possibility that she will leave the family soon and turn them adrift.

The moment when Teddy comes in with suitcases to depart, Lenny puts a record on the radiogram and asks Ruth to dance. Ruth accepts his offer and they start to dance while the others are watching them. Lenny kisses Ruth and she responds him. When Joey takes Ruth's arm, she does not resist; she even lets him to lie on top of her as Lenny caresses her hair. While an erotic mime is taking place on the sofa and then on the floor, Max talks to Teddy politely as if he is a friendly father and mentions Ruth's motherhood and quality: "You've made a happy woman out of her. It's something to be proud of. I mean, we're talking about a woman of quality. We're talking about a woman of feeling" (60). This is the turning point of the play where Pinter breaks the patterns of conventional family drama and creates a disturbing tension. The serious and the comic create a farcical and an absurd situation again; while Ruth's wordless sexual play is going on under the eye of Teddy the welcoming father flatters the virtues of his daughter-in-law.

The other important part of the play is the negotiation scene. The family wants Ruth to stay with them and serve them both as a mother and a mistress; in other words, they want her to be their family whore. In the meantime, she has to support the family financially. Then a great idea occurs to Lenny; "Why don't I take her up with me to Greek Street?" in order to "put her on the game" (72). For a long and detailed conversation in the absence of Ruth, the men of the house, including Teddy, discuss the possibilities and aspects of this plan. To listen to this long conversation which is made to arrange the conditions of the agreement with different solutions or personal objections, generosities and limitations is hilarious for the audience. Yet, after every line, the laughter is stuck into their throat because there is a terrible plan going on in the name of a woman and laughing is offensive. When Ruth enters, her husband Teddy delivers the family's proposal to Ruth. She does not answer immediately until Lenny offers her a flat in the town.

RUTH: How many rooms would this flat have?

LENNY: Not many.

RUTH: I would want at least three rooms and a bathroom.

LENNY: You wouldn't need three rooms and a bathroom.

MAX: She'd need a bathroom.

LENNY: But not three rooms.

(Pause)

RUTH: Oh I would. Really.

LENNY: Two would do.

RUTH: No. Two wouldn't be enough. *(Pause)* I'd want a dressing room, a rest-room, and a bedroom.

(Pause)

LENNY: All right, we'll get you a flat with three rooms and a bathroom.

RUTH: What kind of conveniences?

LENNY: All conveniences.

RUTH: A personal maid?

LENNY: Of course. *(Pause)* We'd finance you, to begin with, and then, when you were established, you could pay us back, in instalments.

RUTH: Oh, no, I wouldn't agree that.

LENNY: Oh, why not?

RUTH: You would have to regard your original outlay simply as a capital investment.

(Pause)

LENNY: I see. All right.

RUTH: You'd supply my wardrobe, of course?

LENNY: We'd supply everything. Everything you need.

RUTH: I'd need an awful lot. Otherwise I wouldn't be content.

LENNY: You'd have everything.

RUTH: I would naturally want to draw up an inventory of everything I would need, which would require your signatures in the presence of witnesses.

LENNY: Naturally.

RUTH: All aspects of the agreement and conditions of employment would have to be clarified to our mutual satisfaction before we finalized the contract.

LENNY: Of course.

(Pause)

RUTH: Well, it might prove a workable arrangement. (76-78)

This scene of bargain or contract reminds the famous “proviso” scene in *The Way of the World* which is a landmark of the Restoration comedy of manners. In *The Way of the World*, in Act IV Scene v, Mirabell and Millamant set conditions of their marriage in a joyful and loving manner; and this scene becomes one of the comic conventions of the genre. In Pinter’s modern comedy of manners, Ruth as a modern woman sets her conditions in an unshakable manner against the primitive men of the household who seek control over her. She discusses her prerogatives and more importantly her status, and defines her own terms. This also signifies her freedom from her bourgeois marriage and her independence as a matriarch in another family. Her victory is displayed by a last tableau at the very end of the play. While Ruth sits relaxed in her chair, Joey kneels and puts his head on her lap; then she starts to caress his head. Max first falls on his knees, then crawls to the other side of her with moaning. He looks at her face and begs her to kiss him while Lenny stands still and watches the scene. In this scene, Max is no longer the patriarch of the family; as a matter of fact, there is a newly founded family and she is the sovereign of it. She resists all the sexual hunger and hostility throughout *The Homecoming* and therefore she deserves to be the only victor of the play replacing Jessie as the whore/mother in the eyes of men. Ironically enough, after lunch, Max talks about such a scene, years ago, when he gave the boys a bath, put Jessie’s feet on a pouffe. He says “I remember the boys came down, in their pyjamas, all their hair shining, their faces pink, it was before they started shaving, and they knelt down at our feet, Jessie’s and mine. I tell you, it was like Christmas” (46). The last tableau of *The Homecoming* is a revival of this picture of a happy family which was shattered by the death of their beloved/bitch mother.

Richard Schechner denotes that “the essential characteristic of Pinter’s work is its conceptual incompleteness” (177). He means that Pinter’s plays are structurally

complete; they begin, develop and end; yet, the conceptual world of the plays which creates their framework is thin and fragmented. If we apply this idea to *The Homecoming*, we observe that the play, even though it ends “happily,” in other words, with the unity of the family, the conceptual framework does not provide a satisfactory ending. It leaves unanswered questions. We see an ending which gathers Max, Lenny and Joey together around the “matriarch” Ruth as a wife, a mother, a sex object, and a slave; however the meaning of this scene cannot be easily analysed. The ending of the play contains gaps and Pinter provides no textual explanations. Thus this forces the audience to complete the play by themselves. However, the motivation of the characters is not clarified by the playwright; spectators do not know why Ruth decides to live with her husband’s family as a prostitute; or, more importantly, whether she really accepts to stay. Moreover, they do not know why Teddy does not defend his wife against his father and brothers and returns to America without her. Lastly, they wonder whether Teddy will become another Max, a father of three little boys whose mother is absent. Therefore, the meaning of the actions, scenes, and lines is left to the audience to be interpreted.

Sex, for Pinter is reduced to a power struggle and, as Stokes asserts, it is a “mind-game in which there is no certain victor and no end in sight” (36). Even though one can infer that Ruth has different plans for herself other than being a mistress in the house and a prostitute outside as the family offers, the ending suggests a vision of her where she embraces and enjoys her ultimate authoritative situation in the family. The homecoming is actually her homecoming in order to join her new family where she belongs to and where she would rule. That is why Teddy, who is not a member of the family any more, returns to his own home in America. In this respect, *The Homecoming* appears to be a detailed study of family systems where the expectations of society are subverted by the comic representation of an unusual, atypical family reunion. Instead of the institution of marriage, the new family is constructed out of wedlock and on amoral terms. Pinter treats marriage comically, like a parody of a unity of reluctant people. In this sense, he mocks the traditional happy endings of comedy of manners by creating such an unusual gathering in the finale.

As a comedy of manners, *The Homecoming* demonstrates a working class family life with its details, language, manners, patterns of behaviour as well as its focus on sexual and erotic fantasies and vulgarities. The play also presents the power relations between the family members and between sexes. Comedy helps to challenge social taboos and domestic bourgeois values during the course of the events; while the play makes people laugh at the detailed plans about Ruth's position in the family, it also leads people to ask fundamental questions about the nature of family structure. Kelly Morris suggests that "Pinter is a poet of the surface" (185) and "his manipulation of performance conventions suggests the 'comedy of manners' in its dependence on standard theatrical devices and tightly constructed exploitation of speech and gesture patterns, disabused of conscious causality and motivation data" (185). In this respect, one can say that the play focuses on social behaviour rather than deep psychological motivation of the individuals. Rather than giving emphasis to the characters' inner motivations, by revealing the lack of an objective correlative, Pinter places the reflections of the effects derived by the characters' actions and dialogues within centre as the major focus point. Furthermore, the gaps between generations and sexes are revealed in long and challenging conversations which create a tennis match effect on the audience; the attention shifts from one character to the other. Morris concludes that "[t]he action in Pinter is always 'dressed' and often elaborately, always affords glimpses of its 'underwear', but clothing is not the core. The pertinent facts are the ones you see onstage; you should 'restrict . . . your observations' to the simple movement" (190). Moreover, Morris states that the indirect connotations of the dialogue do not matter; instead "the pattern of speech – how it sounds, and how it is made, and the response it provokes" (190) is at core in Pinter's language. Without feeling the necessity to provide the audience with complex scenes that create uneasiness, simple actions that result in simple but impressive effects create the Pinteresque comedy of manners.

While *The Homecoming* disrupts the peaceful world of English comedy of manners which reflects the artistic expression of the upper-middle class, it parodies the manners and the concerns of the previous periods. Pinter shifts the attention from upper-middle to working class matters, so that he would express more realistic problems of the society. He apparently uses many popular elements and techniques of the genre, such as

mistaken identity, courtship with sexual implications, battle of sexes, fashion and focus on social behaviour in this play; however, what he does underneath the lines is to adapt the genre of comedy of manners to the period in which he lives. By undermining the conventions of the genre as well as the expectations of the audience, and putting an unnerving and morally questionable solution for the union of the family, the play disturbs its audience and makes them sensitive as well as critical towards the things they saw on stage. Pinter creates a type of comedy of manners different from those of Coward, Rattigan or Wilde, who hide sex behind realism; and he draws a darker side of human beings blatantly exposed on stage. As Roy indicates, Pinter “expresses a deep uneasiness with all of society’s ways of controlling and channelling the sex drive: marriage, prostitution, platonic attachments, and celibacy, among others. [The] men and women fight out the ‘war of the sexes’ on traditional grounds, using sex, love and money as pawns in their quest for unhampered power” (337). In Pinter’s comedy of manners, people are forced to think about and question whether the different categories of being a mother, a sex object and a wife could coexist in the same woman. This occurs as a political question which makes the play subversive. The fixed identities of mothers and whores are flexible and perfectly compatible as it is suggested in the final scene of the play. To the extent that it impels people to question established traditions, rules, and identities, the play enhances its political stance; by the help of a carefully structured plot, the audience is moved to a point where they recognize and tolerate unconventional identities and lives.

4.3 Joe Orton

John Kingsley “Joe” Orton was born in Leicester in 1933 as the eldest son of a working class family. He started to work as a clerk and tried other poor-paying jobs. Later on, he became interested in acting and attended several societies including Leicester Dramatic Society. In 1951, his scholarship application was accepted by Royal Academy of Dramatic Art and he moved to London. In RADA, Orton met Kenneth Halliwell, his lifelong companion and lover, and they moved in together. Halliwell was known as a highly educated person who is credited with nurturing Orton’s writing style through his suggestions for reading ranging from classical works to contemporary ones. On the other hand, Orton’s education, as indicated by Greenberg, came from his enthusiasm for reading, “listening to radio drama, attending theatre and eavesdropping on life on the street and in the gutter” (133). Orton and Halliwell started to write novels; however, those novels were never published, at least during their lifetime. For three years, from 1959 until 1962, Orton and Halliwell stole books from certain libraries, mostly from Islington library; they created collages on the dust jackets by pasting pornographic photographs of nude men or certain irrelevant objects in surreal positions on those books. They also changed the blurbs of the books before placing them back to the shelves and watched the reactions of browsers. In 1962, they were discovered and found guilty; after prosecution they were charged with vandalism and malicious damage involving nearly ninety books and sentenced to prison for six-month.

For Orton, prison became a place to create dramas and it played a significant role in his becoming a well-known playwright. Halliwell continued to create artwork with further collages; however, he could not find enough audience to follow his art to match Orton’s quick theatrical success. When he talked about the imprisonment, Orton said that “Before, I had been vaguely conscious of something rotten somewhere; prison crystallized this. The old whore society lifted up her skirts, and the stench was pretty foul. Not that the actual prison treatment was bad; but it was a revelation of what really lies under the surface of our industrialized society” (qtd in Lahr 15). Orton enjoyed being a famous and fashionable playwright and a social outcast in the 1960s London, but his companion remained unsuccessful and became jealous of him. Eventually, in

1967, Halliwell bludgeoned Orton to death by a hammer and then committed suicide; thus, the short but brilliant career and life of Orton were suddenly and tragically ended. During his lifetime, Orton won the Evening Standard and Plays and Players Awards for the best play for *Loot* in 1966. He died almost a month after the declaration of the Sexual Offences Act which decriminalizes private homosexual actions. Although he did not see the abolition of Lord Chamberlain's theatrical censorship which declared in 1968, the first production of *What the Butler Saw* in 1969 benefited from the advantages of the new theatrical freedom.

In his short career, Joe Orton wrote three full-length plays, four shorter plays, a brief dramatic sketch, three novels, a diary and an unproduced screenplay for the rock band The Beatles. *Entertaining Mr. Sloane* (first produced in 1964) is his first full-length play. The others are *Loot* (1964) and *What the Butler Saw* (written in 1967, first produced in 1969). Orton was productive only for three years, but he had a unique voice and an extraordinary language consciousness. John Lahr, who wrote Orton's biography, identifies the term "Ortonesque" which entered the critical vocabulary to describe the scenes of "macabre outrageousness" (11). Don Lawson quotes Maurice Charney who defines the term Ortonesque as "a peculiar mixture of farce and viciousness, especially as it expresses itself in the greed, lust and aggression that lie just beneath the surface of British middle-class properties" ("Joe Orton" 272); and Lawson continues to explain the term that Ortonesque is a combination of "hilarity and seriousness, of wild violence or transgressive sexuality" which is discussed by the characters who speak in a very polite and socially correct discourse ("Joe Orton" 271). Therefore the term Ortonesque appears to be a blending of polite language and farcical actions on stage which is a unique brand of high comedy that Joe Orton used in his plays in order to mock the social values in a violent, anarchic and sexually offensive way.

In Orton's comedy, the ridiculous is created by incongruity by the help of a combination of elegance and vulgarity; when Orton's characters speak, they rarely utter words appropriate to the situations in which they find themselves. When they act, they behave inappropriately to the circumstances. Orton builds his comedy on a sharp irony where the expectations of the audience about language and actions suitable for the situation on stage are not satisfied by the characters. Hence, although Orton uses the

elements of high comedy and comedy of manners formula usually at the beginning of his plays, he refuses to follow the rules of this formula in the rest of the works, and subverts the expectations of the audience again. As Lawson illustrates, “the incongruity between what the audience expects to happen and what actually does happen on stage is the very heart of the plays” (“The Creation” 15). Hence, the key to Orton’s dramatic world can be found in the eccentric relationship between the happenings of his plays and the manner in which the characters talk about them. The happenings may be disgraceful in terms of morality or accepted conventions, but the decorum and mannerism of what is said never collapses. With his intricate and inventive euphemism, Orton appears to be the master of verbal style. Martin Esslin righteously calls Orton’s comedy as “high comedy of ill-manners” (“Joe Orton” 102) since his comedies represent a chaotic world with taboo topics such as homosexuality, incest, rape, necrophilia, seduction, abuse of power, hypocrisy of religion, insolence of public officials and the collapse of family values.

When the concept of high comedy becomes the focus of attention, the playwrights of Restoration comedy come to mind. The most striking thing about Restoration comedy was its passionate reliance on language over action; and this constitutes Orton’s chief inspiration. The other most valued trait of that period considered by Orton was the courage of putting sex on stage as it had not been done before. As Greenberg remarks, while the freedom of vulgar speech and carnal thoughts had been experienced with the emergence of female players, scenes suggesting sexual act on stage “created a balance of heightened language and emphatic self-adoration” in the Restoration period (133). Besides, innuendo was a popular and principal component of Restoration comedy which stimulates the expected reactions of the audience. Orton maintained a similar device and created a unique stage language with well-chosen phrases, epigrams and paradoxes; however, unlike Restoration playwrights, he did not focus on high society; he chose his characters from diverse social levels. As David Hirst expresses, while Orton’s style changes throughout his short career, the dramatic structures of his plays develop as well. The social settings and social classes of his plays upgrade; *The Ruffian on the Stair*, an early short play originally written for radio, has a vicious and criminal atmosphere with its lower class characters; however, *Entertaining*

Mr. Sloane presents lower middle class situations. It is followed by *Loot* which shows the incidents after the death of a woman who leaves almost twenty thousand pounds including bond and jewels (Hirst 97).

Orton's linguistic creativity, his accurate ear for language and bravely used witty epigrams remind the style of Oscar Wilde. As an ardent admirer of Wilde's rhetorical skills, Orton noted that in his plays Wilde portrayed a variety of characters whose verbal aptitude and repartee creates a situation where what they said was more valuable and entertaining than who they were or what they did (Greenberg 134). Therefore, in his plays, Orton created such an atmosphere in which he foregrounds the rhetoric more than the plot. A number of critics name Oscar Wilde as the primary precursor of Orton's unique theatrical sensibility; in a famous formulation, Lawson cites Ronald Bryden who called Orton "the Oscar Wilde of Welfare State gentility" ("The Creation" 271). Orton understood and appreciated Wilde's professional mastery; yet, while he borrowed from him as he experimented with his own comic action, he satirized social norms vividly and directly, without concealing any shameful trait unlike Wilde who did this indirectly. Another important difference between the two dramatists is the sexual matters which they deal with. There is no sexual intercourse in Wilde's plays, excluding past events in characters' lives but in Orton, although there is no actual sex on stage, the sexual matters occupy the actions and language of all characters.

Joe Orton was aware of what he was doing; moreover, he was also ready for the consequences of his creativity and novelty. Lahr cites his remarks which were made in 1967:

Oh, the public will accept me. They've given me a licence, you see. What they'll do is say 'Joe Orton can do these things' if I'm a success. But I'm a success because I've taken a hatchet to them and hacked my way in. I mean it wasn't easy. *Sloane* wasn't easy. . . It's always a fight for an original writer because any original writer will always force the world to see the world his way. The people who don't want to see the world your way will always be angry. (8)

In his posthumously published novel *Head to Toe* (1971), originally written in 1961, Orton mentions a kind of fight plan practised by his plays: "To be destructive, words

must be irrefutable. Print was less effective than the spoken word because the blast was greater; eyes could ignore, slide past, dangerous verbs and nouns. But if you could lock the enemy into a room somewhere, and fire the sentence at them you could get a sort of seismic disturbance” (qtd in Lahr 8-9). The enemy he is talking about is the people who do not see the world as he did. Therefore he armed himself long before he was successful and relatively acceptable. The most powerful weapon for him was his language and style. Style, for Orton, is an expression of a certain reality even though it is a non-realistic or non-naturalistic one. In a quotation taken from the introduction of his complete works, he explains his ideas about style:

The style isn't superimposed. It's me. You can't write stylised comedy in inverted commas, because the style must ring true to the man. If you think in a certain way and you write true to yourself, which I hope I am, then you will get a style, a style will come out . . . I don't like the discrimination against style that some people have. Every serious writer has a style. I mean Arnold Wesker has a style, but people don't normally think of him as a stylist, in the same way they think of Wilde, Firbank or Sheridan. Style isn't camp or chi-chi. I write in a certain way because I can express things that I couldn't express in naturalistic terms. In naturalistic drama you can't do anything except discuss teacup things, you know – Mavis' new hat. In a naturalistic style I couldn't make any comment on the kind of policeman Truscott is, or on the laws of the Establishment without style. Oscar Wilde's style is much more earthy and colloquial than most people notice. When we look at Lady Bracknell, she's the most ordinary, common, direct woman. She's not an affected woman at all. People are taken in by the “glittering style”. It's not glitter. It's just that the author can express more things by style. Sheridan is the same. *The Rivals*. If you read *The Rivals*, it's most real. Congreve too. It's a slice of life. But it's perfectly believable. There's nothing incredible about it. (qtd in Lahr 9).

It is also possible to see Noel Coward and Harold Pinter in Orton's plays. In his book *Joe Orton*, C.W.E Bigsby compares Orton even to postmodern painters in the

sense that both Orton and several noted visual artists present “a world in which the surface is the reality, a post-moral world” (qtd in “Joe Orton” 272). Orton created a visual as well as a verbal anarchy with his plays. He was not only trying to make his audience laugh at the situations in his plays but he also wanted to frighten them and lead them into panic. By acting as an enemy of social order, he adopted several disguises for his anarchic fun including the pseudonym of Edna Welthorpe – a reference to Terence Rattigan’s fictional middle class audience “Aunt Edna,” who represents conservative values. Under the name of Mrs. Edna Welthorpe, he encouraged the humiliation of his plays by condemning them in the press, and he used another pseudonym, Donald H. Hartley, to praise himself.

Sex is always in the centre of events in Orton’s comedy. He brings sexual matters onto stage in all their energetic, amoral and ruthless excess; and he did not care about sexual categories. When Dr. Prentice protests against Dr. Rance’s accusations by saying that he is heterosexual, Dr. Rance responds in Orton’s voice: “I wish you wouldn’t use these Chaucerian words. It’s most confusing” (55). In his published diaries, Orton reveals his sexual life and actions in detail, with references to his support of the liberation of sexual identities. In most of his plays, these references are made by way of innuendo in order to increase sexual tension and sexual awareness as well as to produce laughter in audience. Orton depicts sexual desire and desire for power in his works with the intention of shocking his audience at all cost, allied with extreme violence that runs through his all works. His rage is totally negative, as Esslin argues, and “it is unrelated to any positive creed, philosophy or programme of social reform” (“Joe Orton” 96). His works are significant to understand the social situation of Britain, because he articulates in an elegant and eloquent form a common rage and bitterness which can be seen in the streets of 1960s. In order to speak for them, Orton gives the inarticulate members of the lower class a polished form of Wildean aphorisms in his plays (96).

Apart from sexuality, Orton was generally preoccupied with vulgarity in his plays. For this reason, the characters that populate Orton’s plays are not of the genteel society. They are generally vulgar not only because they are driven to such crimes like murder, rape, and blackmail, but their vulgarity extends to the more ordinary desires of

polite society which are “primarily motivated by the lower-to middle-class situation of the characters who aspire to and pretend higher class status” (Stirling 48). The characters pretend to have sophistication, sensitivity and gentility that certainly they do not have in reality. They imitate an empty politeness decorated with conventional rhetorical skills such as slogans, mottos, proverbs and the other verbal toys of a sophisticated and fashionable society. Their mannerisms are not only a deception of a higher social status, but a moral one. Therefore, the Ortonesque style profits from this difference between deception and reality and between surface and essence (49).

Orton’s world was both comic and dark. He had a talent for merging the ordinary things with the gruesome ones; and he created laughter from this combination. In this way, his style resembles that of Pinter and his influence on Orton is clearly seen in the plays. The opening of the original radio version of *The Ruffian on the Stair* is an obvious imitation of the breakfast scenes in *The Room* and *The Birthday Party*. Just like in Pinter’s plays, there is a visitor who claims that there is a room to rent, but the woman in the house has no such room nor does she want to rent one. It is the exact formula of the “comedy of menace” which can be observed in Pinter’s early dramas. However, Martin Esslin reminds that the stage version of *The Ruffian on the Stair* starts differently. The last part of the dialogue is a typical Ortonesque remark which proves Orton’s version of the Wildean paradoxical epigram (“Joe Orton” 98).

JOYCE: Have you got an appointment today?

MIKE: Yes. I’m to be at Kings Cross station at eleven. I’m meeting a man in the toilet.

JOYCE: You always go to such interesting places (31).

In the beginning of *Entertaining Mr. Sloane*, Orton’s first full-length play, the tension is created by irrelevant and disconnected pauses as Pinter did in his early plays.

KATH: This is my lounge.

SLOANE: Would I be able to use the room? Is it included?

KATH: Oh, yes. (*Pause*) You mustn’t imagine it’s always like this.

SLOANE: The bedroom was perfect.

KATH: I never showed you the toilet.

SLOANE: I'm sure it will be satisfactory. (*Walks around the room examining the furniture. Stops by the window.*)

KATH: I should change them curtains. Those are our winter ones. The summer ones are more of a chintz. (*Laughs*) The walls need re-doing. The Dadda has trouble with his eyes. I can't ask him to do any work involving ladders. It stands to reason. (*Pause*)

SLOANE: I can't give you a decision right away.

KATH: I don't want to rush you. (*Pause*) What do you think? I'd be happy to have you.

Silence.

SLOANE: Are you married?

KATH: (*Pause*) I was. I had a boy . . . killed in very sad circumstances. It broke my heart at the time. I got over it though. You do, don't you?

(*Pause*)

SLOANE: A son?

KATH: Yes.

SLOANE: You don't look old enough.

(*Pause*)

KATH: I don't let myself go like some of them you may have noticed.

I'm just over . . . As a matter of fact I'm forty-one. (*Pause*)

SLOANE: (*Briskly*) I'll take the room. (65-66)

As it can be seen from the dialogue, Orton relies on language; with the words and silences between them, he creates a curious opening atmosphere for his comedy. In this play the Pinter influence can also be observed in the basic situation. Like in a Pinteresque comedy of menace, there is an intruder who enters a household and disrupts it. However, Orton changes this basic situation in the course of the action. In *Entertaining Mr. Sloane*, the title character is a young man who comes to stay in Kath's house as a tenant. Throughout the play he first becomes middle-aged Kath's reluctant lover and then impregnates her. Afterwards, when Kath's father recognizes him as the murderer of an old case, Sloane kills father Kemp and somehow offers himself willingly to Kath and her homosexual brother Ed who both want to share Sloane sexually as a

part of the contract which will cover up Sloane's murders. Pinter's formula changes when the intruder Sloane, who, at first, seems to dominate two members of the household, becomes a victim of both insiders, and eventually is dominated by them. Despite having common dramatic qualities, the languages and subject matters of the plays of Pinter and Orton are essentially very different. Orton generally uses a Wildean, polite and allusive language for his characters; however his subjects are indisputably iconoclast. On the other hand, Pinter uses a more realistic and naturalistic language, but the portrayal of his subjects become threatening and disturbing for the audience.

When we focus on *Entertaining Mr. Sloane*, the style of comedy of manners is recognizable from the very beginning of the play. The triviality of the subject matters in the dialogues manifests itself as one of the most significant characteristics of comedy of manners. Especially, at the end of Act I, we see Kath seducing Sloane in Orton's comic style:

KATH: Isn't this room gorgeous?

SLOANE: Yes.

KATH: That vase over there comes from Bombay. Do you have any interest in that part of the world?

SLOANE: I like Dieppe.

KATH: Ah . . . it's all the same. I don't suppose they know the difference themselves. Are you comfortable? Let me plump your cushion. (*She plumps a cushion behind his head. Laughs lightly.*) I really by rights should ask you to change places. This light is showing me up. (*Pause*) I blame it on the manufacturers. They make garments so thin nowadays you'd think they intended to provoke a rape. (93)

She hides her passion and real intentions behind the small talk about the room, the furniture and then her transparent clothes for a while; but soon she seizes control over the situation and molests him by saying "I'll be your mamma" (95). As the play develops, the speech of the characters, which are full of wit and epigrams, as Hirst claims, become more refined and polished; hence Orton's style reveals the hypocrisy and corruption of the characters. After the murder of Kemp, Sloane starts to realise that in order to survive, he has to play according to the rules of Kath and Ed; so he adopts

their style of seduction which is full of innuendo and euphemism. Hirst considers this change in the character's language as the sign of Orton's wit in which he "captures the essence of this new understanding in the relation" (100). Furthermore, the implications of homosexuality in the play increase the sexual tension as the way Orton wanted.

SLOANE: What an opportunity I lost, Ed. If you were to make the same demands I'd answer loudly in the affirmative.

ED: You mean that?

SLOANE: In future you'd have nothing to complain of.

ED: You really mean what you say?

SLOANE: Let me live with you. I'd wear my jeans out in your service. Cook for you.

ED: I eat out.

SLOANE: Bring you your tea in bed.

ED: Only women drink tea in bed.

SLOANE: You bring me my tea in bed then. Any arrangement you fancy. (135)

The carefully designed dialogues of the play which combine tension, mystery and double entendre create a shocking effect. Leslie Smith quotes Orton's comments about the play: "What I wanted to do . . . was break down all the sexual compartments that people have" (qtd in Smith 125). Apparently he materializes this intention with the ending of the play; Kath and Ed share Sloane as a sexual partner for six month periods at a time. Additionally, throughout the play, we see Sloane is stabbed by his leg and lost blood, and then kills Kath's father on the stage. However, as Hirst points out, the play is very disturbing not only because of its violent action but also its language and style (98). *Entertaining Mr. Sloane* partly uses the elements of comedy of manners by satirizing the hypocrisies and harshness of the British middle-class manners; on the other hand, the play departs from the conventional structure of the comedy of manners and presents a collapse of social values and civilizing qualities of human beings in the inconsistency between the language of the characters and their actions.

In *Loot*, Orton finds his own voice and style. He creates a farcical universe in which death, religion, the police, law, order, and human emotion are under attack. The

social order is broken by an anarchic situation caused by a homosexual couple in the play, and, as Hirst claims, Orton portrays a comedy from the juxtaposition of different moral standards represented by different characters (101). In the play, the lovers Hal and Dennis rob a bank and try to conceal the money in the coffin of Hal's recently deceased mother. When a police inspector Truscott comes to investigate the robbery in disguise of an inspector from the metropolitan water board, the situation becomes more complicated. Although he claimed that his real profession is something else, Truscott insists to carry on the activities of a police inspector and creates a comic effect with his rigidity. After putting the stolen money in the coffin, Hal removes his mother's body, wraps it in bandages, places it in a closet and claims that it is a tailor's dummy. During all the action, he treats his mother's corpse with a shameful, disrespectful and outrageous manner. Moreover, while moving the body, the glass eye of the deceased lady falls out; Hal carries it around with him indifferently. After the loot has been exposed, Truscott agrees to take a bribe and arrests the only innocent person in the household. As Esslin emphasizes about this play, "what Orton is saying is that behind a façade of respectability there is literally *nothing*" ("Joe Orton" 101). Orton's own words about *Loot* are also remarkable in the sense that they remind Pinter's views of his own comedy. Orton says that "the dramatist must have the right to change formal gear at any time. There's supposed to be a healthy shock, for instance, at those moments in *Loot* when an audience suddenly stops laughing" (qtd in Leslie Smith 133).

In the play, Orton uses a parody of detective fiction but the verbal wit provides a shocking attack on British justice. The Catholic nurse Fay, who is also the murderer of Hal's mother and the ex-lover of Dennis, talks to Truscott.

FAY: You must prove me guilty. That is the law.

TRUSCOTT: You know nothing about the law. I know nothing about the law. That makes us equal in the sight of law.

FAY: I'm innocent till I'm proved guilty. This is a free country. The law is impartial.

TRUSCOTT: Who's been filling your head with that rubbish? (66)

While Orton uses a detective and suspense plot as the frame of *Loot*, he also inverts traditional stereotypes in order to demolish the genre's respectability. He portrays a

corrupt detective, a killer nurse and a bank robber who cannot tell lies in a play decorated with the same delicate repartee of high comedy.

HAL: If I had the money, I wouldn't be here. I'd go away.

FAY: You're going away.

HAL: I'd go away quicker.

FAY: Where would you go?

HAL: Spain. The playground of international crime.

FAY: Where are you going?

HAL: Portugal. (13-14)

In another scene, Truscott questions Hal about his possible crime:

TRUSCOTT: Why do you make such stupid remarks?

HAL: I'm a stupid person. That's what I'm trying to say.

TRUSCOTT: What proof have I that you're stupid. Give me an example of your stupidity.

HAL: I can't.

TRUSCOTT: Why not? I don't believe you're stupid at all.

HAL: I am. I had a hand in the bank job.

FAY draws a sharp breath. HAL sits frozen. TRUSCOTT takes his pipe from his mouth.

(With a nervous laugh) There, that's stupid, isn't it? Telling you that.

TRUSCOTT: *(also laughing)*. You must be stupid if you expect me to believe you. Why, if you had a hand in the bank job, you wouldn't tell me.

FAY: Not unless he was stupid. (45)

Beside the elements of comedy of manners, the most significant characteristic of Orton's drama is its farcical quality. Orton is accepted as one of the best farceurs of the twentieth century. His style of farce has been described by several attributions; it is called Quotidian, Anarchic or Dionysian Farce. However, Stirling argues that Orton's drama invokes the conventions of farce only to violate those conventions; thus Orton creates the genre of farce anew. This new Ortonesque farce is formed by the doubly transgressive elements of Orton's dramas: their dark comic vision and their undeniable

political nature. Both of these elements violate the traditional definition of farce as a “light entertainment designed solely to provoke laughter” (Stirling 42). K.M. Lea illustrates another definition of farce that “Farce is comedy reduced to commercialism. The best farce is what gives the maximum of amusement for the minimum of intellectual efforts” (qtd in Dean 481). From the ancient times, farce has been linked with the lower class, rustic characters and their unpleasant actions and buffoonery, along with slapstick humour and violence. Even in the works of Shakespeare, Moliere or Wilde, the members of the best families behave primitively, even impolitely; therefore they subvert the idea of the inferiority of the farcical characters. However, as Dean argues, in the modern drama, “farce frequently crosses economic lines to acknowledge the mechanistic or animalistic nature potential in all men. Especially in the twentieth century, farce cuts across class barriers to show that any one might act barbarically” (Dean 482).

As Dean suggests, the setting and atmosphere of Orton’s plays generally suggest a kind of claustrophobia and entrapment since the characters find themselves shut in their own living rooms, or confined in a straight-jacket in a mental institution. The living rooms or the mental institutions are Orton’s portrayal of contemporary society which imprisons its own members. In these places, the characters are obsessed with their own private fantasies and desires that can never be pursued in a polite society. Yet, for Orton, polite society is itself a deception (486). His depiction of human nature in comedy of manners becomes neither attractive nor optimistic; but by embodying it with farce, Orton offers a sense of boundlessness and freedom. Therefore, he redefines the genres of farce and comedy of manners in order to provide a proper place for the unbound desires and energies of human beings (492). The sense of equality, boundlessness and freedom echo in his plays. Dr. Rance speaks in *What the Butler Saw*: “We’ve no privileged class here. It’s a democratic lunacy we practice” (56); or McCorquodale states: “All classes are criminal today. We live in an age of equality” in *Funeral Games* (333). In his plays, there are common themes that all traditional farces include such as violence, selfishness, lust, and greed. However, Orton takes farce further by using incest instead of sexual accidents, rape instead of flirtation, or drug use instead of drunkenness. While the characters in traditional farce are driven to comic

desperation, Orton's characters are driven to madness or death. With all these extremities, Orton disrupts apolitical nature of traditional farce and creates a political one (Stirling 42).

4.4 *What the Butler Saw*

Orton's last play, *What the Butler Saw*, was finished by him a week before he was murdered. For this reason, he did not see the play's first production which was performed in 1969. The play has an epigraph from *The Revenger's Tragedy*, a Jacobean black comedy that was rediscovered and appreciated in the twentieth century. "Surely we're all mad people, and they / Whom we think are, are not" is the quotation which summarizes one of the major themes of the play: the perception of madness. The title of the play comes from a famous Edwardian tool of entertainment, a machine of an erotic peepshow with which people see pornographic pictures. With its title, the play focuses on voyeurism, the sexual interest of spying on people; therefore, it turns the audience into the people who are peeping through a keyhole and watching the private lives of others. The play's setting is the private mental clinic of Dr. Prentice, decorated with numerous doors which open to different other rooms. The abundance of doors provides play's one of the most significant characteristics of untimely entrances and exits. Especially in the second act, the characters chase each other or conceal themselves from their chasers by using these doors. One of the first remarks of Dr. Rance, a government inspector who visits the clinic, is about the room and its design: "Why are there so many doors. Was the house designed by a lunatic?" (20). There is also a skylight in the room whose function is not more than letting the light in; yet at the very end of the play, the skylight provides an important exit point for the characters.

The play starts with the psychiatrist Dr. Prentice's interview of Geraldine Barclay for a secretarial position. The interview suddenly turns into a physical examination, and Dr. Prentice, in order to seduce her, asks her to undress. Thinking this order is a part of her interview, naive and innocent Geraldine takes her clothes off; and this starts a chain of events which will culminate in the unexpected revelations at the very end of the play. While Geraldine is lying naked on the couch behind a curtain, Mrs.

Prentice enters with Nicholas Beckett, a bell-boy from Station Hotel who is blackmailing her with pornographic photos he took the previous night. Nick needs a job and some place to hide because he assaulted a group of schoolgirls in the hotel and is chased by the police. He thus blackmails Mrs. Prentice to find him a position in the clinic. When Mrs. Prentice confesses that she is naked under her fur coat and takes the dress left by Geraldine, the dressing problem starts for the girl. In the rest of the play, Dr. Prentice first tries to hide the naked Geraldine behind the curtain and find her some clothes, and then to explain the sexual confusion caused by the male and female clothes worn by the characters. On the other side, he tries to maintain his own respectability both as a man and a psychiatrist.

In the middle of this confusion, Dr. Rance arrives in order to investigate the clinic. He is an official in charge of psychiatric facilities who represents “Her Majesty’s Government”. Although he represents order and authority, he is the reason for the chaos and misjudgement surrounding the whole play. He immediately spots naked Geraldine; believing that she is a psychiatric patient, he certifies her insane and cuts her hair. Dr. Prentice convinces Geraldine and Nick separately to switch into each other’s clothes as a strategy for escaping the clinic and returning to the outside world safely. However, this results in other complications regarding sexual preferences of Dr. Prentice himself, especially while he is trying to hide Geraldine’s clothes and undress Nick. The last figure who enters the chaotic mental clinic near the end of the first act is the police officer Sergeant Match who investigates both Nick’s assault of the schoolgirls and Geraldine’s lately deceased step-mother who has been killed by a recent explosion which also destroyed a statue of Sir Winston Churchill. The death of the woman is caused by some parts of the statue “embedded in” her body. The statue has almost been reconstructed but the vital part is still missing; thus, Sergeant Match, in order to find the missing parts, searches for Geraldine. The missing part is certainly the phallus of the statue, which, according to Orton, is one of the major jokes of the play. Although there was no Lord Chamberlain to censor it in 1969 production of the play, Orton’s phallic joke was edited by the actor Sir Ralph Richardson who played Dr. Rance, by turning the missing part of Sir Winston Churchill’s statue into a cigar. The change soon found its place in the script, but it was restored in the 1975 production by Lindsay Anderson.

Either way, Orton ridicules the reputation and power of Winston Churchill, the famous leader of the Conservative Party and the father figure of Britain who died in 1965, by symbolically castrating him. As Innes asserts, the father figure is actually one of the most important elements of middle class moral standards. They are the conventional symbols of authority. Hence, “their removal, clearing the way for a celebration of a new (dis)order, projects the destruction of restrictive social norms that Orton hoped to achieve through his drama” (*Modern British Drama* 272).

In the second act, the confusion reaches extreme points, including drug use, shootings, and several cross-dressings. By the final moment, the audience has already faced with numerous extraordinary events like rape, double incest, transvestism and fetishism. The anarchic situation reaches its peak point when the two psychiatrists, Prentice and Rance, attempt to certify each other insane at gun point. People are put in straight-jackets, undress and run about the stage naked, are shot by a pistol and bleed, and are unconsciously drugged. Finally, at the moment of recognition, an old brooch solves the problems and reveals the true identities of both Geraldine and Nick. They are the twin children of Mrs. and Dr. Prentice, the offspring of a rape which had taken place during a power-cut in the linen cupboard at the Station Hotel some time before they got married. After the happy union of the family, stage directions prepare the last tableau of the play when Dr. Rance says “Let us put our clothes and face the world”. All the characters “*pick up their clothes and weary, bleeding, drugged and drunk, climb the rope ladder into the blazing light*” (92).

The elements of comedy of manners in the play involve mistaken identities and misunderstandings which were caused by the cross-dressings and misguidance. The major engine of the plot and of the action of the play is the popular element of mistaken identity; it causes not only personal but also sexual identity crises, especially for Geraldine. All through the play, Geraldine runs between the identities of a secretary, patient, Nick, and a fictional character Gerald Barclay – female, neutral, and male – but still insists that she is Geraldine Barclay. She becomes the innocent victim of the identity crisis who, at the end, proves her legitimate sexuality and identity. Nick changes his identity and sexuality as well; however he never becomes a victim of this situation since he uses the cross-dressing as a weapon to conceal himself from the

police. Unlike Geraldine who is stripped, gets a haircut, put in a hospital night gown, then a straight-jacket, then a bell-boy uniform and gets naked again, Nick protects himself from being noticed by the police, first disguised with a leopard-spotted dress and a wig, later with Sergeant Match's uniform. Sergeant Match undresses and changes his attire in the play; but he is drugged and is dressed with a leopard-spotted dress which he wears until the end. Yet his situation is more symbolic and satirical. As the representative of law and order, his emergence as drugged, stumbling across the stage in a leopard-spotted dress represents his move from the symbol of discipline and order to a picture of anarchy and disorder. Therefore Orton hilariously satirizes the state police by humiliating him in the hands of a criminal and a pervert doctor. Moreover, Orton portrays the insufficiency of the authoritative control of the state over the joyful subversions of marginal characters.

The long lost twin siblings are a very popular element in the Plautine comedy. Orton's classical knowledge reveals itself in the ultimately united children and parents after almost twenty years of absence. The classical formula, which is also used by Oscar Wilde in *The Importance of Being Earnest*, is one of the basic plot movements of comedy of manners. However, Joe Orton's treatment of such an element is certainly different from that of Wilde; Orton's references to post-war social changes and government policies are not only ludicrous but also irrelevant.

MRS. PRENTICE: (*Weeping, hugging NICK and GERALDINE.*) Oh children! I am your mother! Can you ever forgive me for what I did?

NICK: What kind of a mother must you have been to stay alone at the Station Hotel?

MRS. PRENTICE: I was employed as a chambermaid. I did it for a joke shortly after the war. The effect of a Labour Government on the middle-classes had to be seen to be believed. (89)

The resemblance between Orton's and Wilde's plays continues with some of the important comic scenes. The interview scene with Prentice and Geraldine echoes the interrogation scene between Lady Bracknell and Jack in Wilde's play. With an ironical approach, Dr. Prentice first asks Geraldine about her parents and receives a familiar answer.

PRENTICE: I'm going to ask you a few questions. (*He hands her a notebook and pencil*). Write them down. In English, please. (*He turns to his desk, sits, smiles.*) Who was your father? Put that at the head of the page.

GERALDINE: I've no idea who my father was.

DR. PRENTICE *is perturbed by her reply although he gives no evidence of this. He gives her a kindly smile.*

PRENTICE: I'd better be frank, Miss Barclay. I can't employ you if you're in a way miraculous. It would be contrary to established practice. You did have a father?

GERALDINE: Oh, I'm sure I did. My mother was frugal in her habits, but she'd never economize unwisely. (7-8)

In their remarks, the linguistic convention of comedy of manners foregrounds the nonsense logic and the irrelevant replies. Especially when Prentice emphasizes the importance of a trivial subject, the resemblance between both plays enhances.

PRENTICE: Now I have to ask a question which may cause you embarrassment. Please remember that I'm a doctor. (*Pause.*) What is your shorthand speed? (9)

While Geraldine is naked, Prentice orders her to "lie on the couch with your hands behind your head and think of the closing chapters of your favourite work of fiction" (12). It is a subverted version of a well-known phrase used in the Edwardian period; "Lie back and think of England" or "Close your eyes and think of England". This was an advice generally given by mothers prior to their daughters' first sexual experience on their wedding nights. The phrase is also a reference among unwilling wives to unwanted sexual intercourse; it basically means that think of the benefits your children could do for the country and endure the hardship. The contrast between the intentions in both situations is enhanced when Prentice assumes the sexual action between him and Geraldine is for the benefit of the country. Uttering such a phrase, he thinks he would prevent Geraldine's resistance to sex; or, worse than that, he tries to claim that sex is the mandatory part of their business agreement. Ironically, he repeats the same phrase to Sergeant Match when he stripped and drugged him; the recurrence of the same scene

suggests audience the idea that sexual intention is not a thing directed only to the opposite sex.

Another resemblance occurs when the linen cupboard at the Station Hotel is revealed; the place fulfils the role of Miss Prism's handbag and helps Mrs. and Dr. Prentice to discover their connection. Also, the elephant brooch which was broken into two and shared by Geraldine and Nick provides the evidence for their real identities. As a very popular plot element from the New Comedy of Greece and Rome, the last minute discovery of the token guarantees establishing proper connections between the long lost characters and helps misunderstandings and mistaken identities to unravel. Moreover, close to the end of the play, "*The skylight opens, a rope ladder is lowered and, in a great blaze of glory, SERGEANT MATCH, the leopard-spotted dress torn from one shoulder and streaming with blood, descends*" (90). Here Sergeant Match descends from the sky like a "deus ex machina" which brings the solution to a classical tragedy. Yet, he is far from being a god who brings fate or solution since he has been drugged and stripped in front of the public.

One of the major resemblances between the styles of Orton and Wilde is the paradoxical and epigrammatic language which covertly (or overtly) satirizes social norms and institutions. Orton's characters speak in a very sophisticated way regardless of their upbringings; hence, they establish witty dialogues and repartee full of surprises. When Dr. Prentice claims that he is "a rationalist", Dr. Rance answers "You can't be a rationalist in an irrational world. It isn't rational" (72). While Prentice first asks Geraldine to undress, Geraldine reacts:

GERALDINE: I've never undressed in front of a man before.

PRENTICE: I shall take account of your inexperience in these matters.

GERALDINE: I couldn't allow a man to touch me while I was unclothed.

PRENTICE: I shall wear rubber gloves. (10-11)

When Nick blackmails Mrs. Prentice with her nude photographs and asks her to find a job for him, she protests, "You put me in an impossible position"; Nick's response is striking: "No position is impossible when you're young and healthy" (14). Whereupon, she insists that her husband should hire Nick as his secretary and she mentions the

adventures she lived the previous night. Dr. Prentice complains with a typical Wildean manner: “Do you realize what would happen if your adventures became public? I’d be ruined. The doors of London society would be slammed in my face” (18).

Among the play’s major targets are the mental institutions, the perception of insanity or madness and the authorities who decide on sanity or insanity. Orton plays with the conception of authority using the figure of Dr. Rance, who creates a real chaos as soon as he enters the play. He presents himself as the most able psychiatrist and the only authorised person in the clinic. However, he appears to be the most insane of all the characters. Actually, no real patient appears on stage; yet all the characters are somehow mad or thrown to madness. Rance has a unique way of perceiving the incidents and explanations by interpreting them conversely. When Prentice states that “I don’t approve of scientists who publicize their theories” Rance agrees, “I must say I agree with you. I wish more scientists would keep their ideas to themselves” (21); but he has a wish to write a “documentary type novelette” in which he tells the scandals he experienced, and he dreams about making a fortune out of the book. When he sees Geraldine, he believes that she is without doubt a mentally ill patient. Therefore Geraldine is not able to convince Rance that she is not mad.

RANCE: You’ve had a nervous breakdown.

GERALDINE: I’m quite sane!

RANCE: Pull yourself together. Why have you been certified if you’re sane? Even for a madwoman you’re unusually dense. (23)

...

RANCE: Who was the first man in your life?

GERALDINE: My father.

RANCE: Did he assault you?

GERALDINE: No!

RANCE: (*to DR. PRENTICE*) She may mean “Yes” when she says “No”. It’s elementary feminine psychology. (*To GERALDINE*) Was your step-mother aware of your love for your father?

GERALDINE: I lived in a normal family. I had no love for my father.

RANCE: (*to DR. PRENTICE*) I'd take a bet that she was the victim of an incestuous attack.

...

RANCE: Answer me, please! Were you molested by your father?

GERALDINE: (*with a scream of horror*) No, no, no!

RANCE: The vehemence of her denials is proof positive of guilt. It's a text-book case! (26-27)

His insistence on the guilt and denial of Geraldine's answers show that he is a rigid and troubled figure who mistakes everything in the clinic. Ironically, his conclusions are somehow correct because Geraldine is attacked by her birth father, Dr. Prentice, a few minutes ago. Hence, this becomes one of the joyous dramatic ironies of the play.

Both Prentice and Rance utilize their powers as psychiatrists in order to manipulate others, and instead of bringing mental health to the people around them, they cause them to experience identity crises. Mrs. Prentice perfectly describes her husband's function in the institution: "The purpose of my husband's clinic isn't to cure, but to liberate and exploit madness" (32). However, she easily believes her husband's mental imbalance and reacts in a Wildean manner, "A woman doesn't like facing the fact that the man she loves is insane. It makes her look such a fool" (35). Rance reminds Dr. Prentice who does not accept that he is insane, "No madman ever accepts madness. Only the sane do that" (59). In the second act, Sergeant Match finds the methods of Rance unusual. Dr. Rance reminds him: "You're in a madhouse. Unusual behaviour is the order of the day". When Match claims that it is "Only for patients," Dr. Rance utters one of the most accurate conclusions of the play: "We've no privileged class here. It's democratic lunacy we practice" (56). In order to prove this assertion, most of the characters start to believe that they are insane at the end of this hectic day:

NICK: Why are you tied up?

GERALDINE: Dr. Rance did it. He says I'm mad.

NICK: He's a psychiatrist, he must know. He wouldn't put you in a strait-jacket if you were sane. He'd have to be mad.

GERALDINE: He is mad!

NICK *supports himself on the desk and stares at the sobbing* MRS.

PRENTICE.

NICK: (*to* GERALDINE) Is she mad?

GERALDINE: She thinks she is. She imagines you're a figment of her imagination.

NICK: (*to* MRS. PRENTICE, *nodding to* GERALDINE) She can see me. Doesn't that prove I'm real?

MRS. PRENTICE: No. She's mad.

NICK: If you think I'm a phantom of your subconscious you must be mad.

MRS. PRENTICE: (*with a hysterical shriek*) I am mad! (84)

...

PRENTICE: My wife has shot at me. She thinks I'm mad!

NICK: You are mad! I've been told to put you into a straight-jacket. (85)

Orton's disrespect and politically incorrect treatment of the delicate matter of mental illness turns our assumptions upside down. Orton shows no respect or mercy for the authority in this field; he essentially accuses the authority of creating such an irrational society. As Rabey concludes, "The play suggests that guardians of the normality are the most circuitous and hypocritical in the face of the disarmingly forthright anarchy of human appetites" (90).

The movement in the play from sanity to insanity, from illusion to reality and from perversion to normality provides absurdity in Orton's farce. With the subversive and anarchic energy of farce, naked people are seen running in and out of the numerous doors, convincing the onlookers that the reality they see is a hallucination (Esslin 105). The effect of hallucination is also provided by the excessive use of alcohol and drugs during the action of the play; while Mrs. Prentice and Dr. Prentice continuously drink whiskey, Geraldine, Sergeant Match and even Dr. Rance are drugged. Therefore, it gives the audience access to the unconscious mind and sexual fantasies easily. As Leslie Smith maintains, "Orton's achievement is to take us more deeply into the dreaming areas of the mind than is the case in traditional farce, but to use the tight control of the farcical structure to explore that area. An uninhibited sexuality, then, is central to the

play” (129). Indeed, the most serious attack of the play is directed to sexual matters. The dressing/ undressing/cross-dressing both creates and resolves sexual confusions.

First, the marriage institution is held under the microscope and is ridiculed in various ways. The marriage of Mrs. and Dr. Prentice represents a modern attitude in the sexual life of a married couple. The wife and husband deceive each other at the beginning of the play with younger partners. Besides, they accuse each other for incompetence or excessiveness in sexual action. For Dr. Prentice his wife is a nymphomaniac.

MRS. PRENTICE: (*quietly*) I hardly ever have sexual intercourse.

PRENTICE: You were born your legs apart. They’ll send you to the grave in a Y-shaped coffin.

MRS. PRENTICE: (*with a brittle laugh*) My trouble stems from your inadequacy as a lover! It’s embarrassing. You must’ve learned your technique from a Christmas cracker. (*Her mouth twists into a sneer*) Rejuvenation pills have no effect on you.

PRENTICE: (*stiffly*) I never take pills.

MRS. PRENTICE: You take them all the time during our love-making. The deafening sound of your chewing is the reason for my never having an orgasm. (15)

Additionally, she attends a club of lesbians; yet, although she is married to a man, Mrs. Prentice is exempt from the club rule because her husband “count[s] as a woman” (13). Moreover, when she gets angry, she threatens her husband:

MRS. PRENTICE: Whose fault is it if our marriage is on the rocks? You’re selfish and inconsiderate. Don’t push me too far. (*With a toss of her head*) I might sleep with someone else.

PRENTICE: Who?

MRS. PRENTICE: An Indian student.

PRENTICE: You don’t know any.

MRS. PRENTICE: New Delhi is full of them.

PRENTICE: (*staring, aghast*) You can’t take lovers in Asia! The air fare would be crippling. (37)

Yet, when Dr. Rance offers her to find a young man whom she could call in times of stress, she protests heartily: “I’m a married woman, doctor! Your suggestion is in the worst of taste” (75). The humour comes from the inconsistency of her attitude as an ignored and mistreated woman, especially when she threatens her husband with a gun: “Unless you make love to me I shall shoot you” (80); and then she fires the gun, but misses her target. The marriage presented by Orton is nothing like the marriages that respectable families embody and support in a conservative society. This is the marriage of a new era, 1960s, when sexual consciousness was heightened by the crucial social changes in Britain. Yet it is difficult to say that the middle class society is ready to adopt these changes; therefore the marriage depicted on Orton’s stage was attacked and condemned by its first spectators. Nevertheless, Orton challenges the expectations of his audience and subverts the current conceptions about the nature of a family and marriage. The double incest which is revealed by the help of the recognition scene does not bother or disturb any of the characters; therefore Orton seems to suggest his audience with a cheerful and happy ending to accept those seeming anomalies as the normalities of the time.

The second sexual discussion in the play is the perception of sexual identities and their unclear nature. This creates the most important challenge to sexual norms and normative values. By means of undressing and cross-dressing, the gender confusion is unleashed which also causes a deceptive blurring of sexual distinctions. *What the Butler Saw* does not provide an answer to the discussion about the true sexual identity. As a matter of fact, this is the major point of the play. Orton rekindles the discussion about sexual identities by presenting the issue as an ordinary situation. When the characters disguise as the opposite sex, their assumed sexual identities are taken for granted. The incongruity which is created by this effortless acceptance is one of the most farcical elements of the play. The interchangeability of gender is first provided by Nick’s wearing a leopard-spotted dress and a blonde wig, impersonating Geraldine. Even Mrs. Prentice, who knows him from the previous night, does not recognize Nick’s real identity. Yet, Dr. Rance realises an important detail:

RANCE: Dou you realize the woman uses a razor?

PRENTICE: I see nothing remarkable in that. Mrs. Prentice has occasion sometimes to remove unwanted hair.

RANCE: From her chin? (*He flings the rubber gloves aside*) There are two sexes. The unpalatable truth must be faced. Your attempts at a merger can end only in heartbreak. (59)

Then, Geraldine appears disguised as Nick by wearing his uniform. In order to hide their own identities, both Nick and Geraldine try to lie and adapt to the conversations. The gender confusion and their suffering in order to act normal creates comic scenes.

RANCE: Do you think of yourself as a girl?

GERALDINE: No.

RANCE: Why not?

GERALDINE: I'm a boy.

RANCE: (*kindly*) Do you have the evidence about you?

GERALDINE: (*her eyes flashing an appeal to DR. PRENTICE*) I must be a boy. I like girls.

DR. RANCE *stops and wrinkles his brows, puzzled.*

RANCE: (*aside, to DR. PRENTICE*) I can't quite follow the reasoning there.

PRENTICE: Many men imagine that a preference for women, is *ipso facto*, a proof of virility.

RANCE: (*nodding, sagely*) Someone should really write a book on these folk-myths. (*To GERALDINE*) Take your trousers down. I'll tell you which sex you belong to. (57)

Dr. Rance's reactions to both situations are remarkable; in the first conversation he emphasizes that, even though the idea would be revolting, there are only two sexes and the merging of them causes trouble. However, in the second one he could not understand the assertions about manhood and implies that preference for women as the sexual partner does not guarantee masculinity. There is only one option to decide on the sex of a person which is the physical data. Therefore, the inclination for the opposite sex does not confirm the sexual identity, since it is normal to desire a person of the same

sex. Orton, through his rhetoric which is full of innuendo, double entendre and euphemism, portrays sexual freedom never presented onstage before.

When Dr. Prentice is found with female clothes and shoes in his possession, he is accused of being a transvestite. In order to conceal Geraldine's clothes that would reveal her own identity, he admits of having a habit of wearing women's clothes, and says "[m]y private life is my own. Society must not be too harsh in its judgements" (36). In another instance, Dr. Rance questions Nick, in disguise as Geraldine, about an "unnatural treatment", a supposed homoerotic bond between Dr. Prentice and Nick, actually Geraldine in disguise, and forces the audience to confront any prejudice toward homosexuality. When Nick asks "What is unnatural?" Dr. Rance answers: "a gross violation of the order of things" (60). However, throughout the play, the order is never preserved and the audience never observes "normality" from the beginning until the end. The one that responsibility for this disorder falls upon is actually Dr. Rance himself. His insistence on preserving assumptions defined by conventional morality seems absurd and irrelevant in the joyful carnival on Orton's stage.

When one looks at the play, one sees that Orton does not draw his characters as immoral in a conventional sense; they rather seem to be unaware of the moral codes and remain ignorant of the certain limitations on their actions. They offer the most shameful proposals as if they are ordinary and socially accepted. Orton deals with transvestism, incest, homosexuality, bisexuality, adultery and other forms of illegitimate sex, expecting his audience to laugh and appreciate him. Otherwise, the audience would become a part of the rigid and authoritarian culture that is being ridiculed and satirized by Orton. Therefore, when the clinic becomes a bedlam of mistaken identity, undressing, cross-dressing and sexual chaos; the audience who is cornered having no chance but to spy on the action on stage takes part in it by an appreciative laughter. The mental institution becomes a microcosm of Britain in which madness is liberated and exploited.

Consequently, *What the Butler Saw* exposes and ridicules the irrationality of British life with its absurdity, hypocrisy, and disorder. With the integration of Ortonesque farce and comedy of manners, Joe Orton creates an artificial yet antiauthoritarian atmosphere in which he delineates a critique of conventional values

and the language of the high class. By using farce, he challenges and subverts the expectations of the audience with delicate subjects and taboos like family structures, sexuality, incest and marriage. Notwithstanding, he parodies the genre of comedy of manners by adding and using farce as a tool within the structure of the play in the name of creating subversion and sexual anarchy that diminishes the values of each and every class among which his core audience also exists. At the very end of the play, Dr. Rance's suggestion of characters putting their clothes on to face the outside world may seem like a revelation that awakens the characters and puts an end to the dream vision. Nevertheless, this return to the public arena has nothing to do with purification, but rather indicates that the hypocrisy in their identities will remain the same. Yet the fact that the characters still manage to accomplish the mission of questioning and thus subverting the society's perspective of cultural constructions of gender, along with the dominant ideologies about sexual, domestic or institutional issues. The audience who are shocked and shaken by the extraordinary application of rhetorical devices and the unusual appearance of the established conceptions and taboos become inescapably responsive to the issues portrayed on the stage.

CONCLUSION

Andrew Wyllie rightly asserts that “a political play may be one which is self-consciously and openly aimed at exposing or analyzing a state of affairs, and which has a clear intention as regards its effect on the audience” (8). Having analysed this quotation, one can infer that, the major functions of theatre as a political medium are to disturb the audience, to increase their awareness and to lead them to act in order to change things. Only with political awareness solutions for social and political problems can be offered and a step can be taken. Theatre can directly and simultaneously address more people than written literature. It has never been an individual art; therefore, it could stimulate crowds to potential changes even if those changes only happen in their own minds and lives. While describing political theatre, R. G. Davis claims that “political plays are ‘whole plays’ discussing people’s problems within the fabric of society where social relations are part of everyone’s psyche” (qtd in Cornish and Ketels xxxiv). People who see, listen, feel and react together create a potential for further change. Another aim of theatre is to increase the number of individuals who perceive the external world in full awareness. This awareness does not necessarily result in immediate action or radical changes; however, it heralds possible alterations and evolutions in the future. Furthermore, in order to reach that point of change, theatre uses individual himself or herself in the form of actors. The persuasiveness achieved by witnessing the action of an actor, to sense their breath or sweat for instance proves to be stronger than pages of political propaganda.

Theatrical works which provide political awareness through comedy and humour are catchier; and the messages they contain are easily transferred. People would be more likely to share things they laugh at. Moreover, as Stott claims, when aggressively transmitted, laughter can be an extremely powerful tool. The types of comedy such as parody and satire are beneficial in diminishing dogma “but not for constructively offering alternatives to it” (118). Likewise, the traditional comedy of manners does not offer any alternative to heal or mend social problems since it deals only with social manners in order to produce laughter. For this reason, the genre of comedy of manners has certain limitations; yet, like any other literary genre, it has been subjected to change

and development throughout history. If one considers that it is essentially a social form of drama, then it can be said that this type of comedy is modified according to the expectations of the society. As a consequence, by examining the plays by Harold Pinter and Joe Orton, this work aims to portray possible changes in the genre of comedy of manners and their political significance in the post-war British theatre.

In the 1960s, post-war dramatists found a new way of expression to question and critique social hypocrisy and corruption on stage. Comedy was the most useful medium and a convenient way to challenge social institutions and conventions, the most effective means of which was to write comedy of manners. Yet the classical formula of the genre was not effective to make political comments or to disturb the audience. Therefore, Pinter and Orton changed the genre and transformed it into a more direct and disturbing type of comedy. Humour was not a safety valve anymore for the dramatists who wanted to challenge the authority; comedy became a sharp and startling type of drama by not only portraying the follies and corruption of society but also being anarchic and destructive in terms of drawing reaction from the audience. Through this attitude, the function of comedy of manners turns into a kind of instrument to alter the public opinion, to offer new ways of perception as well as to create awareness and sensibility for social and political problems.

The politics of comedy stems from its capability of mocking and subverting the power structures and prevailing institutional authority. Laughter is a powerful tool and it may enhance the political quality of the play. In Pinter's and Orton's comedy of manners, the political stance can only be achieved via disturbance during the display of social situations on stage. Ever since the Restoration period, the genre which tends to reflect a particular class of society has never undertaken the function of criticism, raising awareness or creating disturbance. The aim of comedy of manners has always been to release the tension caused by the depiction of the follies of people. Instead of transgressing the social norms, the reconciliation provided at the end of the plays eases the distress of the audience by preserving the system. Throughout the play, the corruption or the immorality of the members of the given society is depicted as the everyday reality of that society. Hence, when the finale of the play presents a return to the previous norms of the society, the play does not offer a new order for the

compensation of the corruption; this reconciliation is not corrective, therefore not political at all.

However, in Pinter's and Orton's plays, the new order which is established at the end of the plays is not an outcome of the reconciliation with the society. On the contrary, the new order offered by the playwrights suggests unusual gatherings which could be rejected by the prevailing ideology. While Pinter offers an unusual and unconventional family structure depending on material and sexual connections, Orton offers a problematic family bond implying incest and adultery. Since they are comedies, both plays present somehow happy endings; yet these endings do not relieve the audience. The new order presented at the end of the plays, even though approved by the act of laughter, still distresses the audience. This is the function of laughter: By laughing at them, people normalize the things that they would theoretically never approve.

The traditional comedy of manners uses certain elements and stock characters in order to convey its messages or to produce laughter. Yet, the new comedy of manners in the post-war era not only uses traditional elements but also changes and sometimes subverts these elements for their own sakes. For instance, instead of stock characters such as fops, villains and hypocrites of the Restoration stage, the characters are more realistic and diverse in *The Homecoming* and *What the Butler Saw*. The characters in the plays, just like their audience, are not aristocrats or courtiers anymore; they are mostly middle-class or lower class characters of the 1960s. The most important part of comedy of manners that did not change throughout centuries is the sophisticated and elaborate language. However, in Pinter's and Orton's drama, the language has a unique quality although both writers have their own style; yet it is still a language which still reserves a place for witty conversations and repartees.

As Stott maintains, comedy is used as a form of criticism, "a means of imposing normative values on those who deviate from agreed standards of citizenship within communities whose membership is well defined" (140). Traditional endings like marriage or reunions suggest conventional roots of comedy, supporting the homogeneity of the community after a period of confusion. Stott believes that marriages are the practical ways of restoring reason and ending nonsense. They also prevent

potential radical alternatives that comedy would offer; moreover, they provide a kind of compromise with the official values. The traditional comedy of manners generally ensures such endings in order to emphasize the newly established order after a series of complications in the plot. The difference of Pinter's and Orton's comedy of manners is exactly revealed at this point. None of the plays offer such reconciliation with their finale. In *The Homecoming*, the ending does not portray a normal, ordinary happy marriage; instead, it changes the conventional values of family structure and puzzles the audience. In *What the Butler Saw*, the ending is seemingly more traditional, since the nuclear family reunites after long years. However, it is still perplexing because of the previous attempts of adultery and double incest experienced on stage. The audience is inevitably concerned about the future of this family whose members effortlessly ignore the shameful facts about their recent past. In the light of this information, it can be concluded that Pinter and Orton experiment with a new kind of comedy of manners which does not let the audience forget the corruption and shame prevailing the society. This change in the genre seems to be reasonable since in the post-war era, all the traditional values are subverted and altered in order to enable the audience to gain awareness of the power of theatrical art and allow them to use this opportunity to change their lives.

Realism was not considered as adequate enough to express social and political situations, particularly in the post-war period. Therefore, dramatists who would like to treat social and political subject matters preferred avant-garde or non-realistic techniques for their plays. When one looks at Orton's play, it can be stated that it is far from being a realistic and plausible comedy because of its farcical elements. Pinter's play also has an improbable finale since it presents an ambiguous and surprising ending which does not satisfy the expectations of the audience and also appals them with its comic violence. In this sense, these playwrights use comedy as an alternative for the avant-garde in order to convey political messages.

Sex is one of the major components of comedy. Sexual matters and themes are treated with great freedom by means of festivity and Dionysian structure of the comedy as a genre. Moreover, comedy provides a clear area for taboos to be discussed without restrictions and fear. It also deals with politely manifested or latent sexuality as the

battle of sexes in comedy of manners simultaneously staging its physical activity and complexity overtly depicted in farce. The Restoration obscenity on stage has undergone a change throughout the history of comedy of manners; while in the previous age of the eighteenth century sexuality became a taboo, in the latter of the nineteenth, it was ignored exquisitely. Yet, in Pinter's and Orton's plays, sexuality is depicted as a natural force and one of the most important mechanisms which controls the lives of people. There are no more well-mannered latent sexual tensions depicted on stage; instead both playwrights reveal a wild and intricate world of sex where each character plays a part one way or another. With the new sexual revolution and freedom experienced in the 1960s, Pinter and Orton foreground the ill-mannered and complex sexuality as the new liberty in theatre.

As Andrew Wyllie claims, "whatever is done with it, and whether indoors or outdoors, the theatre is essentially a public space, and is subject to masculine dominance. As a public arena, then, the stage has conventionally been a space in which male actors have performed under the aegis of male directors working with scripts written by male playwrights" (12). However, when both plays are taken into consideration in terms of gender dominance, there is no all-male space on stage in neither of them. Even though in *The Homecoming* Ruth enters a male dominated house, she manages to be the centre of attention and action from the moment she steps onto the stage; and in the finale, she guarantees her position as the authority of the place. In *What the Butler Saw*, the setting is a private clinic run by a man; even the government representative is a man. Yet the stage never becomes a representative of one gender; on the contrary, it becomes a liberating place to provide an ambiguity about and interchangeability of sexes.

One of the integral parts of comedy of manners is its farcical elements. The contribution of farce to the genre which initiated with the plays of Plautus continued with Shakespeare and some of the Restoration comedies. In the post-war period, the use of farce and farcical elements in comedy of manners helps the plays to reflect the lower class audience and to appeal to them. Therefore it helps to add a critical attitude in the plays. Orton's combination of high and low comedy, farce and comedy of manners in *What the Butler Saw* is one of the best examples of this blend. On the other hand,

Pinter's play is unquestionably funny; its additional frightening characteristic does not make it less so. On stage, the lines of the characters get positive reactions and the audience laughs at the situations and the conversations. The only problem is that their laughter does not last long. People eventually think that the things they laugh at are not funny at all; because the following image, situation, line or action would definitely create another state of mind in the audience. What makes Pinter's plays funny and laughable is their controversial and absurdist quality. Whenever realism heightens its volume the play does not make people laugh and ceases to be funny.

As examples of political comedy, *The Homecoming* and *What the Butler Saw* present alternating world orders as possible options to "normality". Orton's world is metaphorically an amusement park where everyone lives an alternative reality. The characters live a life with ups and downs like in a roller coaster. This explicit dynamism and the assertion of "normalized" anomalies in the play somehow widen the perceptions and understandings of the audience. There are certainly severe and expected reactions to these plays; however, the laughter which is produced by Ortonesque humour neutralises and stabilises these reactions. On the other hand, Pinter uses another method for this; he proceeds slowly and unfolds his alternative reality. Rather than a roller coaster, he prefers a dramatic climax with a crescendo, therefore he diffuses stealthily. Both playwrights shape the perception of their audience by presenting a new definition to the concepts of "home", "family" and "normality".

As John Lahr claims, the comedian is a marginal man, "someone who lives outside the boundaries of conventional life and acquires power (and danger) precisely because he can't be controlled by society. Laughter is the message sent back from his cultivated isolation" (11). Harold Pinter and Joe Orton appear to be perfect comedians who represent different forms of comedy in the post-war British theatre. The works of Pinter and Orton are characterized by unprecedented style of comedy against the conventional expectations of the British audience; these dramatists both horrified and agitated them by their plays. By changing and subverting the traditional comedy of manners, they presented their political standpoints with controversial subject matters like sexual orientation, adultery, incest and prostitution; furthermore, they called the essential definitions of the traditional concepts of family and home into question. Their

plays symbolize a new perception in the genre of comedy of manners and they provide a serious political viewpoint in the post-war British theatre. As the last remark for this work, Lahr quotes Joe Orton who writes about the significance of comedy with a critical approach toward English society:

In a world run by fools, the writer can only chronicle the doings of fools or their victims. And because the world is a cruel and heartless place, he will be accused of not taking his subject seriously. . . . But laughter is a serious business, and comedy a weapon more dangerous than tragedy. Which is why tyrants treat it with caution. The actual material of tragedy is equally viable in comedy – unless you happen to be writing in English, when the question of taste occurs. The English are the most tasteless nation on earth, which is why they set such store by it. (qtd in Lahr 7)

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ÖZGEÇMİŞ :

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TÜRKÇE ABSTRAKT

Bu çalışmanın amacı, “töre komedisi” türünün İngiliz tiyatrosu içindeki tarihsel gelişimini antik dönemden İkinci Dünya Savaşı sonuna kadar olan süreçte incelemek ve Harold Pinter’ın *The Homecoming* ve Joe Orton’un *What the Butler Saw* oyunlarına bakarak, bu türün savaş sonrası dönemdeki politik tavrı ve duruşunu analiz etmektir. Töre komedisi, temelde, üst sınıfın kültürlü ve yapmacık tavır, davranış, gelenek ve yaşam biçimlerini gösteren bir komedi türüdür. Ancak bu tür, ele aldığı toplumun yozlaşmış ve ahlak dışı yanlarını düzeltmeyi değil, sadece bu durumu sahneleyip güldürmeyi amaçlar. Bu sebeple de töre komedisi, savaş sonrası döneme kadar politik tiyatronun bir temsilcisi olarak görülmemiştir. Fakat, İkinci Dünya Savaşı’nı izleyen dönemde, adı geçen İngiliz oyun yazarları türün geleneksel yapısını ve hedeflerini değiştirmiş, böylelikle, türün önceki örneklerinden farklı olarak, alt ve orta sınıfın yaşam biçimlerini ön plana alarak daha politik oyunlar üretmişlerdir. Bu çalışma, töre komedisi türünün yüzyıllar boyunca yaşadığı değişimi ve gelişimi gözden geçirdikten sonra, son bölümde, Harold Pinter’ın *The Homecoming* ve Joe Orton’un *What the Butler Saw* oyunlarını, İkinci Dünya Savaşı sonrası İngilteresinde aile değerleri, toplumsal cinsiyet rolleri, cinsel kimlikler ve tercihler açısından inceleyecektir. Böylelikle bu çalışma, bu tür politik konuları ele alarak, töre komedisinin İngiliz toplumu ve İngiliz tiyatrosu içindeki değişen politik değerleri nasıl yansıttığını değerlendirip inceleyecektir.

İNGİLİZCE ABSTRAKT

The aim of this work is to examine the history and the development of “comedy of manners” in British theatre throughout centuries, from the ancient world to the post-war Britain, and to analyse its political position and attitude in the post-war period by analysing *The Homecoming* by Harold Pinter and *What the Butler Saw* by Joe Orton. Comedy of manners principally is a style of comedy that reflects the life, manners and customs of sophisticated upper class; yet the genre does not aim to correct the follies and corruption in a given society but just to demonstrate it to produce laughter. For that reason, comedy of manners was not considered as a representative of political theatre until the post-war period. However, after the Second World War, mentioned British playwrights changed the conventional structure and the aim of the genre, and produced more political plays by foregrounding the lower and middle class life distinct from the previous examples. After examining the development of comedy of manners throughout centuries, in the final chapter, *The Homecoming* by Harold Pinter and *What the Butler Saw* by Joe Orton will be analyzed in terms of reflecting family values, gender roles, sexual identities and sexual orientation in the post-war Britain. Therefore, by focusing on such political issues, this work will review and scrutinize the ways that comedy of manners reflect the changing political values in the post-war British society and theatre.