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Nature and Latent Content in Harold Pinter's A Slight Ache

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ABSTRACT

Pinter's fourth play entitled A Slight Ache can be considered one of Pinter's most different works. In this play, which Pinter wrote in 1958 and published in 1961, the marital relationship of an elderly and relatively wealthy couple from the middle class takes place in a garden full of flowers. In A Slight Ache, while Pinter still trying to apply minimalism to the description of the scene, he includes images that are rarely seen in his work: behind the house a tidy and large garden exists, the flowers of which are frequently noticed by the characters in the story. Considering the recurrent manifestation of the relationship between man and nature in literature, the questions that needs to be asked is what role nature plays in Pinter's work and what opportunities it provides to the playwright in characterization. To answer these questions, the present article refers to the theoretical foundations of ecocriticism in order to measure the dominant approach to nature in A Slight Ache and the extent of its alignment with the concerns regarding nature in recent decades, to examine the implicit meanings in the relationship between man and nature in the play, and to explain the potential role of nature in characterization. Also, because a group of ecological concerns sees human exploitation of the earth in the context of genderization and metaphorization of the earth as a sign of the female body and sees the explorer of the earth as a trespasser, this research applies to the play the concepts of "manifest content" and "latent content" proposed by Sigmund Freud to explain the causes of the aforementioned metaphorization. The purpose of combining these two theoretical frameworks is to analyze the concerns and psychological complexities of the male character of the play against the background of his marital relationship with Flora. It is concluded that the environment that Pinter depicts in A Slight Ache is a place for exploiting and exercising power. In this background, the male character of the play has a typically traditional view of nature and of his wife, because he considers them as a tool for domination. This patriarchal cultural view is also expressed in Flora's language, which shows the institutionalization of this view in the female character of the story. Even if we consider all the events in the play as Edward's fantasy, Flora's desire to be dominated is a sign of the man's expectation from his wife. With these words, it can be said that in the environmental background of the play, a patriarchal culture is going on, both towards nature and towards women. While A Slight Ache contains the qualities of Pinter's theater of the absurd, there is a deep meaning hidden behind its apparently meaningless events. Therefore, like a dream or a fantasy, the true meaning of this play is obtained through the comparison of "manifest content" and "latent content."

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