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The American University in Cairo
School of Humanities and Social Sciences

**THE DYNAMICS OF OPPRESSION PORTRAYED IN HAROLD
PINTER'S *ONE FOR THE ROAD* AND SALAH ABDUL-
SABOOR'S *NIGHT TRAVELLER***

A Thesis Submitted to
The Department of
English and Comparative Literature
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
For the Degree of Master of Arts

By
Salma S. Zohdi

Under the supervision of **Dr. Ira Dworkin**

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ABSTRACT

This thesis comparatively analyzes the dynamics of oppression portrayed in Harold Pinter's *One for the Road*, and Salah Abdul-Saboor's *Night Traveller*, using Augusto Boal's *Theatre of the Oppressed*, Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*, and "Theater of the Absurd" for the critical framework. With oppressive regimes regenerating themselves, and morphing into new types of practices, the power of art remains an essential motivation for the masses to resist those regimes. This applies particularly to theater, due its vitality. Whilst one may utilize a theatrical performance to entertain, others may utilize it to either inspire resistance, or chronicle and criticize a community's state. With works like *One for the Road* and *Night Traveller* that chronicle oppression through a theatrical political platform, oppressed audience members could be inspired to resort to resistance rather than to submission, and become empowered to be part of a positive change. My thesis argues that these two plays are necessarily oppressive, with an intense oppressor-oppressed dynamic, where the former exerts all available resources to silence the latter. However if both plays are performed to oppressed subjects in a "Theater of the Oppressed" technique, they may function as an empowering tool of resistance.

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INTRODUCTION

From ancient to modern times, oppression is a recurrent theme in various literary works. Poetry, narrative, and drama have variably depicted different forms of oppression with particular emphasis on their political and psychological manifestations. These particular emphases depicted the power that oppressors expended in order to exert all means of pressure whether psychological, political, economic or social, and to utilize it to silence the voice of the victim in a manner that will stop the oppressed from demanding and acknowledging their basic rights and voices.

Some literary works focus on the exposure and study of the psychological human conditions within an oppressive system. Accordingly, these works can be studied in the light of Frantz Fanon's theory on the "colonized" as being victims of psychological colonization as elaborated in his book *The Wretched of the Earth* (1-64). Though Fanon's work studies the psychological state of the "colonized," and the practices taken to overcome the "colonist," the oppression dynamic between the colonized and the colonist is similar in various ways to many oppressor-oppressed dynamics.

The colonist or oppressor is an individual or entity that uses their power to crush the morale and national identity of the colonized or oppressed. In this frame of thought, the colonists are using to their own benefit the land and resources of the oppressed colonized natives. Fanon hypothesizes that for this type of colonization to be achieved, it is imperative that the oppressor strip the oppressed of any humane quality and identity:

The "native" is declared impervious to ethics, representing not only absence of values but also the negation of values. He is, dare we say,

the enemy of values. In other words; absolute evil. A corrosive element, destroying everything which involves aesthetics or morals, an agent of malevolent powers, an unconscious and incurable instrument of blind forces [...] In plain talk, he is reduced to the state of an animal. And consequently, when the colonist speaks of the colonized he uses zoological terms. (6-7)

Moreover, Fanon adds that the colonist usually exhibits his powers and flaunts them in the face of the colonized, aiming to instill more fear and inferiority into the latter's psyche. The colonist does so by constantly insulting and degrading the colonized, and constantly reminding the latter that he is the sole master of this land and its people. The colonist knows that such acts will leave the colonized in a state of rage, which he relentlessly controls and prevents from boiling over (Fanon 17). As a result of the previously mentioned practices, the oppressor's ultimate objective is to disconnect the oppressed from the outside world, making it difficult for outsiders to identify with the oppressed, let alone support them. In extreme cases, even the oppressed stop identifying with themselves and no longer portray themselves as individuals worthy of resisting or fighting for their rights. In other words, the oppressed are alienated from the outside world, and from themselves.

In a dramatic context, Augusto Boal's theory in *Theatre of the Oppressed* helps expose different means where the oppressed can actively overcome those psychologically oppressive conditions by being active participants in their resolution. In his book, he introduces different theater techniques, one of which is to have audience members step into the performed play, replace the actors, shift the course of the action, and become part of a performance that showcases an oppressive script, so that they can feel empowered enough to be part of the problem's solution. Andre Bertoni discusses Boal's techniques by saying that the solution becomes effective therapeutically: "The underlying idea is that the characteristics of psychosis or

psychological uneasiness are the complete or partial loss of one's sense of one's own proper limits and the inability to relate to others or communicate with reality. Theatre, on the other hand, is a relational and symbolic form of communication that structures personal experience in relation to a particular context and the world” (qtd. in Schininà 20-21). In other words, theater becomes a channel for the oppressed to express their inner resistance, which they may be unable to do in their own communities, by providing a safe space where they can push past the limitations set by the outside community.

Boal depicts resistance in an unconventional manner, which isn't necessarily aggressively radical, yet it encourages people to be active towards matters that shape their future and paths. In the article “Minority Theater and Literature of the Oppressed: Cherrie Moraga's *Watsonville*,” scholar Areeg Ibrahim defines Boal's technique in a positive context by saying: “Boal's theory is based on positive resistance [...] Boal deals with a dynamic force that is a by product of oppression, and transforms it into an action that breaks down the state of submission, in order to push the oppressed to stand up to the tyranny of the oppressor” (117).¹ In other words, Boal's *Theatre of the Oppressed* utilizes the passive force of anger, submission, and fear that are present in the psyche of the oppressed, and channels it into a positive force that is necessarily productive by making the audience—who are necessarily oppressed—play a part in the performed script and shift the course of the drama into a less oppressive resolution. The aim of utilizing such techniques is to ultimately allow oppressed subjects to become active members in their community by placing them in a

¹My translation from Arabic.

setting where they can freely and safely express themselves with no prohibitions. The goal is to empower the oppressed against oppressive regimes, acts, and norms.

However, prior to Boal, another revolutionary theatrical movement was emerging, which spoke to the socio-political oppressed masses. Starting with the 1940s, “Theater of the Absurd” was a form of dramatic representation of oppression. According to Robert Geller in “Theater of the Absurd: No Taste of Honey, but—“ absurd plays are defined as, “Plays in which verisimilitude is unessential; in which settings are abstract representations of reality; in which dialogues and words are exploited in order to re-shape new forms of language and explode the clichéd attempts we make to talk at each other; in which audiences are compelled to react to ritualism with primary-like emotions devoid of any recognizable framework of logic and order” (702). Though often ambiguous in their nature, such works addressed many oppressive and political dynamics, as in Samuel Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot*, where the relationship between Pozzo and Lucky is summed up by Elin Diamond as political, not for:

The real suffering it mirrors but the oppressive effects of identification's mirror relations and the impossibility of a politics that necessarily derives from them [...] they signify master-slave reflection/abjection through their music-hall canters, but this is not to dislodge the law of meaning and being to which they are ‘tied.’ Their failure to achieve the norm of meaning constitutes a resistance to that norm. (40-41)

Theater of the Absurd is an existentialist movement that emerged in France. Peter J. Sheehan in his article “Theater of the Absurd: A Child Studies Himself” comments: “Theater of the Absurd is a form of drama which originated in the French theater of Alfred Jarry and Antonin Artaud in which the thesis that the human condition is absurd is presented by means which reflect that absurdity” (563).

Fundamentally, many absurdist plays tend to tackle and address issues that are prohibited in the socio-political sphere, and accordingly, this genre of work resists limitations of the traditional mindset, that are in one way or the other oppressive due to their dictation of what should and should not be normative. Consequently, absurdist literary works concerned with oppression can be analyzed and studied through three main criteria: dynamics of oppressive practices from the oppressor's perspective, effects of oppression on its subjects, and means of expression and overcoming oppressive practices.

Absurdist works are recognized through their existentialist thought, ambiguous settings, undefined characters, and non-traditional dramatic plot structure. Those works aim at stimulating the audience into exercising self-doubt and questing for self-identification, which traditional dramatic works do not. In some cases, the traditional dramatic works aim to achieve the exact opposite by maintaining the status quo of the society, hindering it from any aspiration to change, so "that the range and freedom of stimuli presented in Absurdist Theater put pressure on the student [audience] to examine his own nature and to respect the nature and expressions of others" (Sheehan 564). Fundamentally, Theater of the Absurd contradicts traditional theater and drama, which tend to enforce a certain political and social order on its audience, leaving them with no room for exploring the realm beyond that being performed on stage. Hence, one can claim that absurdist works in one way or the other resist oppressive mainstream ideas, while traditional/classical works enforce mainstream notions. Absurdist works resist by breaking the norm of what is traditional and proper, and secondly by addressing issues that are considered to be taboo by the society and the ruling system aiming to expand the society's mental limitations.

Some scholars argue that being exposed to Theater of the Absurd is rather

therapeutic because it presents a wide stream of possibilities and realms, where the audiences are given the chance to let their imaginations run free and explore various outcomes and possibilities². Those who get in touch with such works tend to not know what's coming next in the dramatic work, and get surprised by the unexpected events, which could be rather shocking. According to Robert Geller, this element of surprise and evasiveness is considered to be one of the values most inherent in absurdist works:

I'm convinced that there is unmistakable therapeutic value to be mined from the best of the Theater of the Absurd (although few of its playwrights would admit to such overt intentions). Nevertheless, the lives of rootless tramps and hoboes without clear origin and motivation, inhabiting strange worlds of barren deserts and cluttered rooms, provides at first for the reader a universe barely recognizable and quite remote from the challenges of his own daily routines. (704)

This allows and forces the audience to identify with an unfamiliar setting in a way that slowly stretches the dynamics into becoming acceptable and applicable to their conventional lifestyles.

In addition to their indefinite nature, Theater of the Absurd plays may be considered constantly contemporary, for they can be performed at any age or time, and their often unspecified era “possesses the fascination of the contemporary” (Sheehan 563). The structure and setting of those works gives them the advantage of being flexible and applicable to any culture, and performed at any time. They set the grounds to allow the audience to forcibly make the effort of thinking for themselves. It is usually a work that does not impose its values on the audience, nor invade their mindsets and lives. On the contrary, it welcomes the audience to be part of the world it exposes in a creative manner, through the abstruse tools and elements the playwright provides:

²See, for example, Robert Geller in his paper “The Absurd Theater: No Taste of Honey, but-” (704).

Another advantage inherent in the plays of the Theater of the Absurd is that, to understand any of these plays, the audience is forced to react creatively to the stimuli presented on the stage. The Absurdist playwright supplies the elements in a confusing manner, thus leaving the beholder the task of making sense out of them. The audience must create a meaning for the play. (Sheehan 563)

In other words, Theater of the Absurd works are mostly ambiguous.

“Absurd” is defined as “against or without reason or propriety; incongruous, unreasonable, illogical” (“Absurd”). Accordingly this genre of theater expects no explanations, and demands no resolutions. To the audience, it is a new experience, where they anticipate nothing, due to the intensive confusion and chaos the dramatic work projects:

He [the audience member] reacts and interplays, unable to hide behind secure considerations of Aristotelian magnitudes, ironies, rising actions, denouements or tragic flaws. He need fear no wrong answers, no right or wrong comments, since the play is a series of questions asked but unresolved, and confusions pyramided into minor catastrophes. (Geller 704)

Being exposed to an unconventional dramatic text, and gradually relating to it, allows audience members to break through their notions of the traditional, express themselves, and act freely.

Modern literary English plays, like Harold Pinter’s *One for the Road* (1984), deal with oppressive rulers and regimes from an existential and absurdist point of view. Pinter himself is considered “One of the major figures in the theater of the absurd” (Palmer 287). Some may even name him the spiritual son of Beckett, “However, Pinter is not only Beckett's spiritual son. He is at least a cousin of the Angry Young Englishmen of his generation, for Pinter's anger, like theirs, is directed vitriolically against the System” (Cohn 55). Criticizing contemporary societies and rejecting unfair laws, Pinter’s plays advocate freedom for men, women, and children alike. *One for the Road* is a play set in a room, where one of the characters (Nicholas)

interrogates a family in an oppressive torturing manner.

Comparatively, modern Egyptian plays, like Salah Abdul-Saboor's *Night Traveller* (1969), where the practice of oppression is presented in its most conceptually purest forms, where the oppressed are subjugated to the suppression of their own identity.³ This play is set in a train – with the audience not knowing its destination – with three main characters: Narrator, Passenger, and Conductor. Throughout the whole play, the Conductor plays mind games and exerts oppressive practices on the Passenger, by manipulating the Passenger's identity. The Conductor here is the authority enforcer, and would be considered an "Agent" based on Fanon's description that "The agent does not alleviate oppression or mask domination. He displays and demonstrates them with the clear conscience of the law enforcer, and brings violence into the homes and minds of the colonized" (4). This kind of oppression mainly results in the internalized psychological colonization that is directly caused by what is considered to be external oppressive practices.

The Theater of the Absurd movement was influential in Abdul-Saboor's plays during the 1960s, where many works were inspired by Eugene Ionesco's "Absurd" (Salama 145). However, Salah Abdul-Saboor chose to define "Absurd" in a different manner than the western scholars before him: "Salah Abdul-Saboor regrets the impossibility of translating the word 'Absurd' into Arabic using words such as: unreasonable, frivolous, or reckless. To his dismay, those words did not seem satisfactory. He then provides his own definition by stating: It is the tendency to break the bonds of 'logical mindsets,' looking for new ways and fresh inspirations from the

³Though standard transliteration should read as *Salah'Abd al-Sabur*, I have elected to follow the spelling used in the published translation for the purpose of consistency.

‘spirit of the mind’” (Salama 145).⁴ Abdul-Saboor himself considered works of the absurd to be resistant to the traditional and the normative, and imperatively resistant to any oppressive thought process.

Therefore, one must not overlook the fact that both plays --*One for the Road* and *Night Traveller*-- are considered to be works of the “Theater of the Absurd,” especially in relation to the character profiles represented in each play. From a philosophical perspective, Enoch Brater describes the absurd character in his paper “The ‘Absurd’ Actor in the Theatre of Samuel Beckett” by saying that,

Man is defeated in advance: he wants unity, yet meets diversity everywhere; he longs for happiness and for reason, but confronts the unreasonable silence of the world; he wants to know, but he cannot know; he yearns to communicate, but there are no avenues of communication; he wants truth, but discovers merely a succession of truths; he wants life, but his fate brings him closer every moment to death and dissolution. (197)

The characters in both plays fall under the absurdist philosophical description. Also, considering their ambiguous settings, plots, and development, both plays are absurd works exposing the reality and experience of being a victim in an oppressive environment.

⁴My translation from Arabic.

CHAPTER I: DYNAMICS OF OPPRESSIVE PRACTICES FROM THE OPPRESSOR'S PERSPECTIVE

While oppression is destructive and immoral by nature, the psyches of those who inflict it are deserving of study. This may aid in acquiring full knowledge of who the oppressors might be, which will eventually facilitate the process of resistance for the oppressed. The different acts and tactics that oppressors undertake on their victims are necessarily external (political) and eventually lead to internal (psychological) oppression. These tactics are the different ways where the oppressor's pattern of thought and psyche reflect on how he treats his subjects, and most importantly what he aims to achieve through those practices. Susan Wendell's essay "Oppression and Victimization; Choice and Responsibility" examines those dynamics as "the perspective of oppressors":

The perspective of the oppressor always assigns responsibility and blame to the victims of oppression. It always involves mystification of the oppressor's responsibility and of the distribution of power. I call it the perspective of the oppressor because it tends to work to the benefit of oppressors and because members of oppressing groups and perpetrators of violent or coercive actions against others often (perhaps usually) take this perspective. Nevertheless, people not directly involved in oppressive situations and even victims of oppression can take the perspective of the oppressor. (23)

Wendell also emphasizes that one of the main goals of oppressors is to use their own power as means to crush any opportunities that may benefit the oppressed, "Oppression reaches into our psyches and undermines our ability and our very desire to oppose it. It can blind us to the choices that remain to us and to our own strength to make them" (18). That kind of destructive impact can only be achieved through certain external factors that directly and indirectly influence the inner psyches of the oppressed, "External forces deprive individuals or groups of the benefit of self-

determination, distributive justice, and democratic participation [...] Frequently, these restrictions are internalized and operate at a psychological level as well” (Prilleltensky and Gonick 130).

Accordingly, the oppressor is a figure that owns absolute power, which is to him unquestionable. Hence, the oppressors only feed on the “learned helplessness” and ignorance of their subjects (Prilleltensky and Gonick 127). They are fully aware that the oppressed are people who would be willing to execute any action, or embrace any ideology for the sole reason of pleasing the ones with absolute power. In addition to this, if the oppressed show any sign of resistance, or question the power and authority, they are often arrested, interrogated, tortured, and undergo other practices that will eventually crush their morale, maybe even crush their identity as a whole. The oppressor aims at giving his subjects a chance to re-evaluate their own convictions, their individuality, and in some cases their existence.

This perspective can then be applied to various literary characters. Harold Pinter seemed to be very much aware of the “perspective of the oppressor” when creating Nicholas as an ambiguous political investigator who uses various tools of interrogation with his victims. In an interview, Pinter clearly describes the nature of the relationship between oppressor and oppressed by stating that to the oppressor the mere existence of his subjects is their sole offence rather than any other action they might have undertaken: “There is no such thing as an offence, apart from the fact that everything is --their very life is an offence, as far as the authorities go” (Pinter and Hern 16).

In Pinter’s *One for the Road*, Nicholas is an overtly political oppressor who torments, degrades, tortures, and attempts to break his family of victims (Victor, Gila, and Nicky). Nicholas exerts physical, psychological, and sexual oppression on his

subjects. This political genre does not stand out from the rest of Pinter's plays. However, *One for the Road* --even though short-- is a textbook example of a work about political oppression. In the play, this political oppression is represented in power that is fed with unsettling ambiguity, and is apparent from the first scene where the play opens with Nicholas addressing Victor: "Hello, Good morning. How are you? Let's not beat about the bush. Anything but that. D'accord? You're a civilized man. So am I. sit down" (Pinter, *One for the Road* 33). From the very first interaction between Nicholas and Victor, the former flaunts his absolute power over the latter, with no further explanation on who he is or what his occupation is, and yet, his evasiveness instills fear into the heart of his victim.

The play mainly takes the audience through the interrogation process that the family of the three protagonists is exposed to. The play is divided into four scenes, where Nicholas is the common character in all. In scene one, Nicholas interrogates Victor, who is clueless, weak, submissive, and vulnerable. In scene two, Nicholas interrogates Victor's seven-year-old son, Nicky, who challenges Nicholas more than his father did in the first scene. In scene three, Nicholas violently scrutinizes Gila -- Victor's wife and Nicky's mother-- by exerting immensely degrading verbal practices on her: "How many times have you been raped?" (Pinter, *One for the Road* 70). In the fourth and final scene, Nicholas hosts Victor and informs him that he and his wife are free to go. The play then ends with Victor asking Nicholas about his son, Nicky. Nicholas responds by saying: "Your son? Oh, don't worry about him. He was a little prick" (Pinter, *One For the Road* 79). Throughout the whole play, from beginning to end, the family of protagonists is not aware of the reasons why they are under arrest, nor is the audience.

From the instant the play starts, the oppression is signified in the power that is

fed with unsettling ambiguity. In the first scene Nicholas says: “What do you think this is? It’s my finger. And this is my little finger in front of your eyes. Like this. And now I do the same with my little finger. I can also use both...at the same time. Like this. I can do absolutely anything I like. Do you think I’m mad? My mother did” (Pinter, *One For the Road* 33). With this specific opening line, Pinter uses a tone that creates tension amongst the audience. The tone aims at instilling fear in Victor, and in the audience. In the interview, Pinter describes the way that Nicholas functions as a politician who is very much aware of his power, and is not afraid to utilize it in order to control his victims: “He has all the power within those walls. He knows this is the case, he believes that it is right, for him, to possess this power, because as far as he’s concerned, he’s acting for his country legitimately and properly. When he refers to the country’s values, those are his values. And because of those values, he will kill; allow rape, everything he can think of. And torture” (Pinter and Hern 16–17).

As for Abdul-Saboor’s *Night Traveller*, the play includes three characters, the Passenger, the Conductor, and the Narrator. The Passenger represents the everyday man who is victimized by the powerful Conductor. The Conductor is the oppressive antagonist who tortures his victim (Passenger) in a psychological manner. Throughout the whole play, the Conductor is exerting all possible means in order to psychologically break his victim. However, the Conductor uses his power in an invasive, imposing, yet mysterious manner by introducing himself to the Passenger as “Alexander the Great!” (Abdul-Saboor 21). Simultaneously, the Narrator addresses the audience and explains the dramatic events. The play opens with the Narrator describing the setting and the other characters. With the Passenger on stage, the Conductor then makes a sudden vocal, then physical appearance to the audience and the Passenger. Throughout the whole play the Conductor manipulates, degrades, and

dominates the Passenger, who is terrified of the former and complies with all of his demands. The Conductor's oppressive conduct doesn't end at using the Passenger, but leads to the former killing the latter for a false accusation: killing god and stealing his identity.

A very strong intimidating attitude can also be found in Salah Abdul-Saboor's *Night Traveller*. In this absurd play, the Conductor vocally expresses his annoyance by the Passenger's presence. In addition to this, the Conductor vanishes and destroys the Passenger's identity card, which symbolizes his existence. In other words, in order for the Conductor to have absolute power, he had to demolish the Passenger's identity, i.e. his existence (Abdul-Saboor 47). In his introduction to *Night Traveller*, Samir Sarhan comments,

History, as paper usually devoured, or usurped by such despots represented by the conductor, is a process in which both moral law and human identity are lost. If the flux of history is supposed to impose an ordered pattern on human existence, it becomes in Salah Abdul-Saboor's play a tool in the hands of the conductor-dictator to dehumanize the common run of people. (9)

It is inherent that oppressors exercise certain practices on the oppressed, which are necessarily degrading and dehumanizing, in order to achieve such a forceful level of control over subjects. They are what were referred to earlier as external factors. Nicholas in *One for the Road* exerts all means of those practices to crush his subjects. Psychologically, he destroys their inner strength to resist or revolt. Physically, he deprives them from sleep, tortures them, and resorts to rape and taking their lives with no sign of hesitation. To Nicholas, there is nothing that he has done or said that entails remorse or guilt. The Conductor uses his power over the Passenger to keep on manipulating the latter's logic and mental process by claiming to be different historical characters. To an oppressor, those tactics represent what he is obligated to

do in order to keep peace or balance in the community, for the sake of preserving his own authority. In the words of Pinter, the oppressor “knows this is the case, he believes this is right, for him, to possess this power, because, as far as he’s concerned he’s acting for his country’s values, those are his values [...] In order to protect the realm, anything is justified. It is also, however, true that many of the natural sadistic qualities, which we all possess, are given free reign in the play” (Pinter and Hern 17). To the oppressor, it is his patriotic duty and responsibility to exert all means possible to keep the status quo of the ruling system.

Demeaning psychological strategies and tactics are necessarily vital for oppression, where the oppressors seek to rid themselves from any guilt, accountability, or responsibility for victimizing their subjects. Wendell --in reference to Alice Miller-- adds that in order for the oppressor to be exerting that much power and authority, blaming the victim is a crucial ingredient: “Blaming the victims can be an important psychological strategy for violent and coercive individuals who were themselves victimized in the past. They are afraid of seeing that they were not responsible for the victimization they suffered; if they saw their past innocence clearly, they would have to experience the rage, grief and humiliation they felt at being victimized” (24). While talking about his audience’s reaction to the play, Pinter himself mentioned that most of them were in shock and overwhelmed with fear by the end. However, it was not only fear of being in the place of the victims, but also mainly fear of recognizing themselves as the interrogator, while identifying with Nicholas (Pinter and Hern 17).

Even though Nicholas’s occupation was never revealed throughout the whole play, it is clear to the audience that he holds some sort of political/authoritative position, because he used soldiers to arrest his family of victims. Hence, Pinter gave him that sense of ambiguity and mystery, as his identity and position was never

revealed to his victims. Meanwhile, on the other hand, he had a detailed knowledge of the past, present, and also the future of his victims. He knew their entire family history, and details about Gila's father. He was the main source and figure of authority, power, and control in the interrogation room (whose location we also don't know). Nicholas is the only source of information to both the audience and the characters he interrogates.

According to Pinter's description of politicians in his 2005 Nobel Prize acceptance speech, one may conclude that Nicholas is ultimately the tyrannical politician. In his speech, Pinter said that politicians are mainly interested in power rather than truth; hence they maintain the state of ignorance the people are in:

Political language, as used by politicians, does not venture into any of this territory since the majority of politicians, on the evidence available to us, are interested not in the truth but in the power and in the maintenance of that power. To maintain that power, it is essential that people remain in ignorance, that they live in ignorance of the truth, even the truth of their own lives. (Pinter and Hern 3)

In this light, Nicholas becomes the politician who feeds on the ignorance of his oppressed subjects, allowing him to have absolute power and control over their fates. Collectively, Pinter's works highly depend on that knowledge-ignorance relationship between the antagonist and the protagonist. It creates a dynamic that allows the antagonist to ultimately destroy the protagonist in all ways possible. In "The World of Harold Pinter," Ruby Cohn asks who the characters in Pinter's plays really are, and answers: "these nondescript villains and victims, acting out their drama in dilapidated rooms? Victims emerge from a vague past to go to their ineluctable destruction. Villains are messengers from mysterious organization-- as in the works of Kafka or Beckett" (55).

Similarly, the Conductor utilizes his knowledge in opposition to the

Passenger's ignorance. He keeps his identity ambiguous to the Passenger and the audience till the very last minute of the play. Consequently, he uses different names, positions, and stances for his identity, which keeps on shifting and changing. Samir Sarhan analyzes that approach:

The frustrating emptiness of the passenger's life is suddenly filled with the invocation of historical despots; Alexander, Hannibal, Tamerlane, Hitler, and Lyndon Johnson, who can be summoned from the memory of history to impose their greatness to dominate the humble. (8-7)

This kind of mysterious setting that is imposed on the Passenger facilitates the process of control and power, which eventually turns the Passenger into a blindly obedient servant.

Furthermore, in both plays, the themes of God and death are used by the oppressors to exert more oppression on their subjects. The reference to God is utilized for the sole purpose of attaining blind obedience. In Pinter's *One for the Road*, Nicholas represents himself as a medium of God, "I run the place, God speaks through me. I'm referring to the Old Testament God, by the way, although I'm a long way from being Jewish. Everyone respects me here. Including you, I take it? I think that is the correct stance" (36). In this manner, his correlation with the divine automatically allows him to exert that ultimate power on Victor. Likewise, the Conductor in *Night Traveller* asserts his authority by associating with the divine: "The play showcases the dictator, all of his attempts to impersonate God, and robbing the identity of the masses, since it is the masses who created history, and the revolution. Driving them to becoming guilty beings who are trapped in an imaginary crime that was committed by the dictator himself" (Abu-Sinna A1).⁵

⁵My translation from Arabic.

Death is also a recurring theme in both dramatic works. In Pinter's *One for the Road*, Nicholas expresses to Victor that he loves death, not his, but that of others (45). Nicholas hammers on that in a repetitive manner as to insert fear into the heart of his victim, which he aims to dictate: "Death. Death. Death. Death. As has been noted by the most respected authorities, it is beautiful. The purest, most harmonious thing there is" (45–46).

Comparatively, Abdul-Saboor's Narrator at first mentions death when linking the color of the Conductor's coat --yellow-- to death, "Some believe it is the color of glittering gold; others believe it is the color of sickness, of a swallow complexion, the color of death" (31). The Conductor, along with the Passenger's fear of dying psychologically breaks the victim. The Conductor uses death in order to invade the existence of the Passenger with an occupational pretense, while turning him into a submissive slave. He makes it obvious to the Passenger that in order for him to keep his life he must succumb to all of the Conductor's dominating practices. "Passenger: Let me heat the water for your bath. Let me take care of your rosy towels. Let me carry your golden slippers around for you. But don't kill me... please!" (Abdul-Saboor 25). Moreover, at the beginning of the play, the Conductor showcases all the weapons he possesses, as to exhibit to the Passenger the source of his powers (Abdul-Saboor 26). The play ends with death being inflicted on the victim, after the Conductor flaunts his power in weapons in the face of the Passenger for the second time, giving the latter various options for death (Abdul-Saboor 52). As hypothesized by Fanon earlier, the "colonist"--oppressor--always exhibits his powers in the face of his victims and subjects of oppression.

Furthermore, the language used --whether verbal or non-verbal-- by the antagonists in both plays is necessarily oppressive. Verbally, Nicholas and the

Conductor dictate absolute obedience onto their victims; they both impose the stance that should be taken by Victor and the Passenger with no questions asked. Nicholas dictates to Victor that he has to respect him:

NICHOLAS. You do respect me, I take it?
He stands in front of Victor and looks down at him. Victor looks up.
I would be right in assuming that?
Silence
VICTOR. (*quietly*) I don't know you.
NICHOLAS. But you respect me.
VICTOR. I don't know you.
NICHOLAS. Are you saying you don't respect me?
Pause. (Pinter, One for the Road 37–38)

The Conductor also enforces a similar kind of obedience on the Passenger: “Nobody dares disobey my orders, do you?” (Abdul-Saboor 23). Both Nicholas and the Conductor make a point that they should be inherently respected and obeyed with no questions asked, conveying it as a fact that isn't negotiable by their subjects.

With the mention of verbal oppression, Fanon's theory of dehumanizing the oppressed comes to mind, especially when he hypothesizes that “colonists” achieve so by comparing the “colonized” to animals. In both plays, the oppressors manage to find a way to talk down to their victims. Nicholas resorted to a degrading zoology term when addressing Gila and referring to her as a “Fuckpig” (Pinter, *One for the Road* 65). In most of his works Pinter tends to make his antagonists address his protagonists with this dehumanizing language: “In the Pinter play, the messengers of the System glibly mouth its pat phrases--increasingly pointed as the dehumanization of the victim progresses. In the quoted excerpt [from *One for the Road*] which occurs towards the end of the drama, the seemingly irrelevant conclusion, ‘Animals’, corrosively climaxes the process” (Cohn 59). On the other hand, the Conductor talks down at the Passenger, “Why do you cower like a frightened mouse?” (Abdul-Saboor

25). Just like any oppressor, the Conductor is using a dehumanizing style of address that makes the Passenger seem as less human.

Simultaneously, the non-verbal language like long silences, hand gestures, postures, and costumes used by the oppressors (Nicholas and the Conductor) to communicate with their subjects (Victor and the Passenger) is essentially oppressive. Though infiltrated with many silent moments and pauses, the entire atmosphere projects a certain power dynamic among the characters. Nicholas pauses to either drink or pour a drink (Pinter, *One for the Road* 34-41), while the Conductor pauses while taking off layers of coats at different moments throughout the whole play. Such pauses ultimately build anticipation and tension that necessarily drive the oppressed subjects to fear the unknown. It is the ambiguity and evasiveness that may eventually force the oppressed subjects to reach a breaking point and obey the oppressors.

CHAPTER II: EFFECTS OF OPPRESSION ON ITS SUBJECTS

Now that the oppressors in both plays manage to dominate their subjects, the oppressed are left with no choice but to surrender to that state of dictatorship and oppression. Both the Passenger and Victor cave in and succumb to the tyrannical and domineering acts of their oppressors. However, as indicated earlier, the external forces are not adequate enough to achieve the required oppression. Those factors lead oppressed subjects to internally oppress themselves, as critic Nanci Salama argues:

The Passenger is a doomed victim. No matter how desperately he strives to please the dictator, and to clear his name; the dictator takes pleasure in humiliating him, strips his identity away, and then kills him. However, he only does so after he inflicts fear into the heart of his victim, while degrading him and his people. He does that by watching him suffer from torture, until the victim reaches a state of “existential denial.” (146)⁶

The victims dehumanize themselves just as their oppressors did to them, which takes us to closely study the perspective of the oppressed.

Oppressive practices tend to generate intense allusions in the psyche of the oppressed victims. As a result of oppression, victims of domination tend to lack self-determination, as oppression leads to “misery,” “inequality,” “exploitation,” “marginalization,” and “social injustices” (Prilleltensky and Gonick 129). According to Issac Prilleltensky and Lev Gonick, the writers of “Politics Change, Oppression Remains: On the Psychology of Oppression,” the individuals exposed to oppression eventually develop “surplus powerlessness” in conjunction with “learned helplessness” (132). They also add that oppression is by default the anti-thesis of “reciprocal empowerment,” and “curtails self determination,” “perpetuates social injustices,” and “suppresses the voice of vulnerable individuals,” where they can no

⁶My translation from Arabic.

longer have the ability or the means or even the right to express themselves, their thoughts, values, and will (129).

That internalized oppression is translated in terms of psychological oppression that is directly caused by the external factors and political oppressive acts previously mentioned, "Psychological and political oppression co-exist and are mutually determined" (Prilleltensky and Gonick 129). One can look at the external factors as a means to an end; that is the internalized oppression, or in other words internalized colonization, where the oppressors deprive the oppressed of their basic rights, starting from legal rights, and ending with silencing their inner thoughts (Prilleltensky and Gonick 129).

Furthermore, the effect of oppressive practices does not solely rely on the silencing of the oppressed, but also on turning the oppressed into oppressors against themselves, where they subconsciously suppress their own rights to speak or even think. Whereas in extreme cases of domination, the oppressed tend to exert internalized and interpersonal oppression, namely "Psychological Oppression" in which "the internalized view of self as negative and as not deserving more resources or increased participation in societal affairs, resulting from the use of affective, behavioral, cognitive, linguistic and cultural mechanisms designed to solidify political domination" (Prilleltensky and Gonick 130).

When the oppressive agenda is exerted in such dictatorial manner, like it was shown in Pinter's *One for the Road*, the oppressed start embracing a feeling of worthlessness and self-loathing, that is mainly caused by identification with the oppressor in a manner that leads the victims to see themselves as guilty and deserving to be treated in such a degrading manner. Such degradation may in some cases pave the path for suicidal tendencies, just like when Victor told Nicholas to kill him with

victims, believing that they do not deserve to live due to the shortcomings reflected by the oppressors (Pinter, *One for the Road* 51). Conversely, the oppressed believe themselves to be in this dynamic, rather than blaming those who inflict the oppressive practices, “The victim with this perspective usually feels guilty for her/his victimization and takes all or most of the responsibility for it. ‘I must have done something wrong’” (Wendell 24).

In an analysis of Lisa Tessman’s book *Burdened Virtues*, Marilyn Friedman explores the notion that oppressed persons do not bear any accountability for their conditions, and hence have no control over their fate, “Tessman’s theory of personal responsibility seems to hold that oppressed persons do not bear individual responsibility for their circumstances but privileged persons do bear individual responsibility for the circumstances of oppressed persons (through their intentionally unjust or cruel acts, or their failures to change unjust institutions)” (Friedman 194). However, one can claim that in some circumstances these oppressive practices may push the victims towards revolting rather than giving in, which is depicted by Pinter’s *One for the Road* through the characters of Gila and Nicky.

The absurd theater is often recognized for representing oppressive situations with that dynamic of submission, especially by the oppressed characters. The absurd victim is a broken man who strives to exist; yet the conditions and people surrounding him don’t give him the means or the channels to do so. The oppressors in the absurd theater tend to drive the oppressed into losing their voice --metaphorically-- where they have no ability, means, or rights to express themselves and eventually become silent. Bernard Dukore describes the characters in Pinter’s plays as “wrecked individuals, who are beaten down, Pinter paints a variety of pictures of modern man beaten down by the world around him, of man reduced and of man in the process of

being reduced to a cipher in the vast social structure. He shows people reduced to nonentities, and he shows people fighting in vain against being so reduced. It will doubtless be said that Pinter's plays are variations of the familiar modern drama of man's failure to communicate with other men" (47).

Harold Pinter himself implied that the oppressive practices exerted worldwide could lead the oppressed individual into breaking down. In his interview with Hern, he stated that when working on *One for the Road*, the actors playing the roles of the victims couldn't tolerate the state of humiliation and degradation that their characters were undergoing to the extent that they refrained from playing those roles again after the season came to an end. As Pinter put it:

It was a damned difficult play for the actors to do. To a certain extent they found themselves in danger of being taken over by the characters. Because there's no escape once you're in there [...] Certainly, all three actors, having done it, couldn't face the idea of doing the play again for anything but a very short run. They found the experience too oppressive. (Pinter and Hern 17)

Oppressive practices in general lead to the complete meltdown of the inner psyche of its subjects such that they are incapable of becoming active or functional members in their own communities. Consequentially, this meltdown leads to preserving the status quo, as aspired by the oppressors.

Abdul-Saboor also reflected the condition of oppression through his characters. The Passenger is being exposed to severe psychological torment through symbolism of the names and language. His choice for the Passenger's name and that of his family members symbolize slavery. The names given --Abduh, Abdullah, Abed, Abbad, and Abdoon-- were different forms of the name "Abd" in Arabic, which is defined as slave or a servant of god (Abdul-Saboor 30-33). As the play comes to an end, the audience reaches the conclusion that the Passenger becomes the slave of the

Conductor, based on the way he addresses the Conductor, which is in a glorified and majestic manner (Salama 148). Also, the historical characters and names used in Abdul-Saboor's *Night Traveller*, and the ones chosen by the Conductor to use when introducing himself to the Passenger, scream out Master-hood and grandeur. Starting with "Alexander the Great," then using the name "Zahwan," which literally means vainglorious, and finally ending with the name "Sultan" (Abdul-Saboor 21, 26, 32). The symbolism of the names inherently dictates the relationship between both characters, that of a Master and his obedient servant.

As Abdul-Saboor's *Night Traveller* starts, the Passenger projects the state and feel of worthlessness and degradation by offering himself as a slave to the Conductor. He shows no doubt that he should serve his "Lord" (Abdul-Saboor 24). He wills to be at the Conductor's service just to have his life spared; he even resorts to begging and pleading not to be killed, even though the Conductor shows no signs of sparing his life. By adopting and embracing such obsequious demeanor, the Passenger projects the inferior image that he has of himself and allows the Conductor to utilize it for his benefit.

On the other hand, in Pinter's *One for the Road*, Victor doesn't project that guilt paradigm like the Passenger does. Both Nicholas and Victor have vivid perspectives on the superior-inferior dynamic that is taking place. Nicholas degrades the intellectual masses by referring to them as "Shit-bags" (Pinter 66), while Victor conforms to Nicholas by stating "What I like...has no bearing on the matter" (Pinter, *One for the Road* 66; 38). Both Victor and the Passenger have an "internalization of negative conceptions of the self, on the intrapersonal level" (Prilleltensky and Gonick 132). Such kind of surrender is not far from Pinter's typical characters,

Pinter's people [characters] isolate themselves. They live in a closed, womblike environment. They keep to themselves as if they are afraid

to go outside their little world, afraid that their ordinariness, ineptness, or sheer emptiness will be seen and exposed in all of its nakedness. (Dukore 47)

One would perceive that Victor's tendency to be killed rather than face the tortures of the interrogation is an isolating mechanism that shields him from Nicholas.

The behavior of Victor and the Passenger could be identified with the "surplus powerlessness" and "learned helplessness" described by Prilleltensky and Gonick. Both identifications complement each other. "Surplus powerlessness" is the state of passivity that the oppressed undergo as a reaction to their own failures and shortcomings, while "learned helplessness" is when the oppressed start feeling impotent, which results from the limitations surrounding them (Prilleltensky and Gonick 134). Namely, this can be reflected in Victor's attitude towards death; he welcomes it, believing it will put his suffering to an end (Pinter, *One for the Road* 52). He succumbs to Nicholas, without exhibiting any willingness to negotiate.

Furthermore, as much as the process of oppression requires domination, silencing, and degradation; it also requires traumatization. Victims must suffer from a severe case of trauma that is inflicted on them, whether physically or psychologically. Physical trauma would be considered the easy way out, if the dictator cannot control the actions of his subjects, then torturing, raping, or killing them would necessarily make them fear him, which is what *One for the Road's* Nicholas did to Gila (rape) and Nicky (murder). However, psychological torture demands a manipulative intelligence that can enslave its subjects, and most specifically enslave their minds.

On the other hand, Wendell discusses the idea of internalized oppression as "the perspective of the victim," where she proposes that by recognizing the oppressor's responsibility, the blame will be eventually assigned to him (Wendell 26).

This process can lead the oppressed to develop feelings of anger that may effectively

be transformed to oppose the situation of domination, and eventually to resist and overcome those oppressive practices.

CHAPTER III: MEANS OF EXPRESSION AND OVERCOMING OPPRESSIVE PRACTICES

Overcoming and resisting oppression can be achieved either directly or indirectly. Regardless of the nature of the resisting act, whether active or passive, overcoming oppression derives from the necessity of breaking free. As mentioned earlier, victims of oppression sometimes tend to identify with their oppressor and conform to the state of guilt projected on them. Yet, at other times, being exposed to brutal oppressive rule may lead the victims to rebel and resist through every means they possess. It is imperative to say that fear is a major factor that effects the decision of the oppressed as whether to resist or not. However, the initial and possibly hardest step to overcoming oppression and powerlessness is overcoming fear.

One technique to overcome fear may be found in Boal's *Theatre of the Oppressed* which is created for audiences to not only interact with but also change the course of a performed play:

Educators [Performers] first perform a play once without interruption. The second time around, members of the audience are invited to stop the action when they see an act of oppression, substitute themselves for members of the cast, and start the action again with the intent to find a way to deal with the situation effectively. Cast and audience members improvise the new situation as it develops. (LaFrance and Abu Shakrah 52)

Ultimately, this technique allows the audience to express freely their own ideologies regarding oppressive situations, in addition to raising political awareness, and proving to them that they can always be part of the solution.

“Theater of the Oppressed” is a political theatrical forum originally used in radical popular education movements. The movement created by Brazilian scholar, Augusto Boal aimed to erase the aristocratic form of theater, while introducing the

theatrical techniques that will stimulate the spectators to transform their society and engage in revolutionary action. Boal believed that theater is neither entertaining nor educational, but rather a means of expression and revolutionary outburst, especially in the case of oppressed societies (Boal 1-50).

The problem with theater at the time Boal was creating his technique was its separation from society. Theater was often perceived as a vehicle of entertainment for the elite, or as a societal showcase, but not necessarily as an active political agent that can stir socio-political trends. Boal opposed that notion in his book's foreword by stating that:

All theater is necessarily political, because all the activities of man are political and theater is one of them. Those who try to separate theater from politics try to lead us into error – and this is a political attitude. In this book I also offer some proof that the theater is a weapon. A very efficient weapon [...] For this reason the ruling classes strive to take permanent hold of the theater and utilize it as a tool for domination. In so doing, they change the very concept of what “theater” is. But the theater can also be a weapon for liberation. For that, it is necessary to create appropriate theatrical forms. Change is imperative. (ix)

Boal believed that Aristotle's theory of Tragedy led to the rise of repressed societies, where such works as Greek tragedies and Shakespearean theater enforced the existence of the structural hierarchy of an oppressive system that would not aspire to development. He argued against Aristotle's aim for Tragedy: which is Catharsis (Purification and Correction). The audience and the protagonist experience Catharsis at the end of the tragedy, after overcoming the conflict, which was caused by external elements. According to Boal, this type of traditional theater was a social inadequacy and a political deficiency, due to the fact that the drama imposes its own set of values on its audience, with complete disregard to their backgrounds and issues (26–27).

As a result of Boal's rejection of the norms of conventional theater and

tragedy, he created a module that was tailored in order to inspire those who are oppressed. He introduced the need for the oppressors to be liberated from traditional tragedy, and make the theater their own. According to his theory, this could be achieved through two main approaches, first by tearing down the walls of spectatorship where the oppressors can act as “Spect-actors,” and secondly by eliminating the private isolated property of the characters by introducing the system of the “Joker” (Boal 119). During performances, the actors don’t have characters, but rather functions, where the “Joker/Facilitator” detaches the audience from any emotional connection with the actors; taking them through a logical experience. Due to the idea of breaking the normative, such interactive dynamics enable the elimination of fear within the oppressed, which is achievable through Boal’s methods.

In addition, “Theater of the Oppressed” was later used in “Theater Therapy,” where Gulielmo Schininà, one of Boal’s students, used it as a form of therapy that aims at empowering those exposed to it. The therapeutic advantages of Boal’s module according to Schininà were the following: building relationships through creative communication, perceiving theater as an activity which can involve everyone within its purview without seeking catharsis, and ultimately aiming at empowering differences and creating solidarity. Consequently, he added that this type of theater is “aware,” where it becomes committed and ready to use its powers for social aims and the well being of communities (Schininà 24).

Oppressors and politicians aim at spreading ignorance within the people they want to dominate. Hence, in addition to overcoming fear, the oppressed have to be enriched with knowledge and information that will allow them to resist vicariously. The nature of such knowledge is necessarily psychological and political. In other words, “Theater of the Oppressed” delivers an informative type of education to its

subjects. Psychologically, it prepares the audience to be open and susceptible to getting involved in the world of the performance. Politically, it gives them the tools and means to be accountable and responsible for the end result of the performance, and how a scene unravels:

Consequently, the task of overcoming oppression should start with a process of psychopolitical education. It is through this kind of education that those subjected to conditions of injustice and inequality uncover the sources of their diminished quality of life [...] people experiencing powerlessness use information about their oppressed state as an impetus to empowerment. Some participants in their study indicated that new information was meaningful to their initial process of change. (Prilleltensky and Gonick 140)

Ultimately, Boal's module is applicable to any performance or play that is established within an oppressive context. However, between Harold Pinter's *One for the Road* and Salah Abdul-Saboor's *Night Traveller*, one would be able to implement Boal's theory more comprehensively on Abdul-Saboor's *Night Traveller*. Although both works are unmistakably dramatic works of oppression, Abdul-Saboor's play lacks resistance, which is strongly present in Pinter's play. Pinter's characters in *One for the Road* allow the audience to explore a diverse spectrum of reactions towards oppression. While Victor is represented as docile or succumbing, Gila's and Nick's reactions emerge as resisting to Nicholas's domination. On the other hand, Saboor's antagonist exhibits all signs of absolute submission; hence Boal's theory becomes more useful. This is mainly due to the fact that the moments of submission in the play are spread out from beginning to end, giving the audience members a vast set of moments to contribute, and shift the course of the play. Moreover, Abdul-Saboor's Narrator would be considered the most suitable one to take the role of the Joker / Facilitator, while in Pinter's *One for the Road*, the Joker would not be easily determined.

It is imperative to note that the techniques used in “Theater of the Oppressed” were not new to Egyptian theatrical culture in the 1960s. Playwright Yusuf Idris led the call for an interactive Egyptian theater. In his plays, he introduced the character of Al Samer (The Entertainer,)

Al Samer, Idris argued, always achieved theatricality, meaning the active participation in the action of all the people present, actors and audience alike. ‘If the action involves dancing, all must dance; if it involves singing, all must sing. Sender and receiver, actor and audience, must become one; both sending and receiving.’ The performance should be based on text but should allow for much improvisation on the part of both cast and audience, breaking through barrier between stage and audience. (Maleh 31)

With that said, it is clear that Al Samer in Egyptian theater possesses the same roles and responsibilities of Boal’s Joker. As matter of fact, Al Samer was created almost a decade prior to the creation of Boal’s Joker, which signifies an Egyptian play as necessarily revolutionary due to its absurd nature and its “Theater of the Oppressed” forum presentation.

Furthermore, Abdul-Saboor’s play was created at a period of an agonizing dictatorship:

The first time the play became public was at ‘Al Masrah’ magazine, July 1969. It was published at the times of distress of Gamal Abdul-Nasser’s late days of ruling; with Abdul-Saboor exhibiting extraordinary literary courage [...] This play was an account where he orchestrated an eloquent defense of humanity. He strictly condemned tyrannical rules for obstructing justice, and twisting facts and truths to their benefits. (Farid 121)⁷

Subsequently, a work that expressed and criticized all the flaws within the military regime may have inspired many of its audience to stand for themselves, for the only alternative they will face is to become another version of the Passenger.

As mentioned earlier, within the world of Abdul-Saboor’s *Night Traveller*, and according to Boal’s module, the most suitable “Joker” or “Facilitator” in the

⁷My translation from Arabic

performance would be the character of the Narrator. By default, Abdul-Saboor created him in order to give the audience explanations, reasonings, backgrounds, and analysis of the played scenes. The “Joker” within Boal’s module inherently executes all those functions. The “Joker” is always a neutral party at the center of the activity who guides the flow of the proceedings, for example: by pausing at the moments where there is an opportunity for the drama. Although known as the “Facilitator,” his neutrality is similar to that of a Joker in a deck of playing cards. In addition to this, Abdul-Saboor used the Narrator as the inner voice of the Passenger that may allow him to facilitate the events of the play. Also, he is the only character who addresses the audience from beginning to end, which ultimately transforms the audience from regular passive spectators into involved “Spect-actors.” One of the key moments where the Narrator would be used as a “Joker” is when the Conductor throws away the identity card of the Passenger on the floor: “Narrator: There’s a mystery somewhere, There is a mystery somewhere, The Conductor has thrown away the card on the floor. Panicking, or, apparently in panic!” (Abdul-Saboor 37). At this moment, the Narrator could alert the audience members that they may interrupt the drama, take over the role of the Passenger, and resist the Conductor.

Therefore, reading the play within the context of Boal’s *Theatre of the Oppressed*, one may find many situations where the Narrator can act as a Joker or Facilitator. By doing so, the entire course of the play will shift from merely being oppressive-submissive to becoming oppressive-resistant. One cannot determine the exact course of each scene with the participation and involvement of the audience, yet there are vivid dramatic moments that will alternate the dynamics of the performance. Those moments present themselves throughout the whole play. For example, two moments that specifically shift the course of the play are when the Conductor negates

that anyone can disobey him (Abdul-Saboor 23), and the final scene where the Passenger argues with the Conductor regarding the decision of his death (Abdul-Saboor 53-54).

Having Boal's module applied to one work that represents oppression allows it to be applicable to Harold Pinter's *One for the Road*. Similar to *Night Traveller*, *One for the Road* produces so many moments and scenes where the spect-actor can interrupt the scene, and take the dramatic work to a different path than the original script did. This play, due to its flexibility and ambiguity, has many moments that can be utilized as a dramatic turning point. However, since the play does not include a narrator like *Night Traveller* does, the real challenge would come from determining who the Joker may be. One may propose Nicholas to be a good fit, since he appears in all the scenes. Yet, this may be hard to achieve since the character is the main catalyst of the events in the play, and with him as the Joker, the audience may get continuously disconnected when he interrupts the drama. The second option may be Nicky; since he is innocent and young, he can be utilized as the Joker. He has no definitive background like his parents, and according to how the play ends, no future either. Regardless of his parent's accusations, he cannot have any, and his arrest is merely circumstantial. As a result, Nicky may be the most suitable Joker for the play.

On another note, one can claim that Boal's theory for resisting oppression is a middle ground between active and passive resistance. It is active for allowing the audience to take matters in their own hands, and passive because it might not have an effect on its audience outside the realm and the walls of the theater. However, it is imperative to say that in any oppressive situation, resistance is essential if the oppressed ever aspire to flourish and prosper. Hence, resisting and combating oppression, even though dangerous, is still a better choice than succumbing and giving

in to oppression (Friedman 194–196). Boal was a leader of a revolutionary movement, which digs deeply into the psyche of the oppressed, and allows the people to utilize theater and drama within a socio-political context, rather than a recreational one. It is an expressive tool, through which theater is considered to be a means of asserting and enforcing one's own cultural and national identity. Both Pinter and Abdul-Saboor exposed sociopolitical issues that were prohibited by society, and this made them contribute to revolutionary theatrical moments.

CONCLUSION

Both works of Pinter and Abdul-Saboor have many common features, specifically in the oppressors' use and exertion of their power, and secondly with the lack of knowledge the oppressed possess due to the evasive atmosphere the oppressors aim to create. Literature, and specifically theater, envisions a society where people should be in charge of their actions while they are allowed to shape their own history and decide their future, free from any form of subjugation and totalitarian rule. In other words, the alternative of a free willed community lead to nothing but the domination of the masses by institutions that strive and feed on the people's powerlessness and ignorance. Both Pinter and Abdul-Saboor created absurdist works, which represented oppression, injustice, fear, ignorance, power, and victimization. The works are necessarily absurdist due the undefined and individualized characters, ambiguous and nonrestrictive settings, and unjustified and unpredictable plot developments.

In addition, many vivid factors make the plays work as oppressive representations. However, the element of oppression that is intensely present in both plays is ignorance. All the protagonists throughout the entire dramatic performances, and even when the plays came to end, remained in a state of oblivion. On the other hand, the antagonists were very vocal and expressive about the knowledge they possess, specifically information that concerns their victims. As mentioned in the first chapter, Nicholas knew the detailed history of the family he was interrogating, and the Conductor knew that the Passenger was an innocent and a good man, who could not have done the crime he was accused of. Their knowledge of their victims' histories wasn't realized during the plays, but rather was known prior to the opening of the

script, and produced outside its realm. Moreover, the protagonists of both works didn't resort to violence to resist; as a matter of fact, they barely resisted. As a result, the fate of death was set out to two of them (the Passenger and Nicky), while the others remained powerless in the face of such occurrences.

Due to the absurdist nature of the plays, and the oppressive events they expose, if performed through Augusto Boal's "Theater of the Oppressed," they will potentially influence and inspire the audience to commence a social change, within their internal psyches, external surroundings, and communities. They will break the barriers of the usual, and, with that, achieve the ultimate values and goals of "Theater of the Oppressed" and "Theater of the Absurd," which, according to playwright Eugene Ionesco,

To renew language is to renew our conception, our vision of the world. A revolution means a change of mentality. Every new artistic expression is an enriching experience which corresponds to a need of the spirit, a broadening of the horizons of known reality it is an adventure, it is a risk, therefore it cannot be the repetition of a fixed ideology, it cannot be the servant of any other truth (because any other truth, since it has already been expressed is now outmoded) than its own. Any work, which fulfills this need, may appear unusual or astonishing at first, since it communicates something that has not yet been communicated in this particular way.... (qtd. in Geller 707)

One for the Road and *Night Traveller* both expose different modules of oppression in a critical manner that also depict the voices of both the oppressed and the oppressor. Both works convey oppression as being necessarily absolute, and yet provide sub-textual solutions to the performed oppressive dynamic. As to conclude, one may propose that in order to overcome oppression, one must study and identify with the oppressor, and utilize the knowledge, in a way that will prompt people to take action, and become more active in their own communities. In addition to this, due to the inspirational nature of art, employing this type of knowledge into a

“conscious” theatrical performance would gradually direct the oppressed masses towards resistance, as opposed to submission. If one is knowledgeable and determined, resisting oppressive rule and assisting one’s community isn’t far from being achieved.

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