

From Farce to Absurdity A Psychoanalytic Exploration of Sin, Desire, and Comic Transgression in The Farce of Master Pathelin and Harold Pinter's The Homecoming

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السيد باتلان" و"العود" لهارولد بنتر

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Abstract

The current study¹ investigates the connections between *The Farce of Master Pathelin* and Harold Pinter's *The Homecoming*, as theorised from within a psychoanalytic lens of sin and desire in the modern Theatre of the Absurd. The relative lack of comparative theories connecting premodern comic traditions to modern absurdist drama has been addressed. Although *The Farce of Master Pathelin* is often dismissed as a purely folk and theatrical genre, while Pinter's drama tends to be regarded either as something philosophically sophisticated or 'post-modern', this thesis argues that both traditions share closely related structural and thematic intrigues rooted in transgression, repression, and the shifting precariousness of moral power. It seeks to (1) investigate the role of sin and desire as comic devices in *The Farce of Master Pathelin* and *The Homecoming*; (2) examine how psychoanalytic theory accounts for the continuity and evolution of comic transgression over cultural eras; and (3) show that elements of farce are repurposed by The Theatre of the Absurd into a 20th-century confrontation with psychological and existential instability. It answers research questions such as how sin and desire are represented as comic forces in both traditions. How does psychoanalysis explain its effectiveness on stage? How an absurdist drama challenges earlier comic structures. The study is a comparative one, on a qualitative basis, and uses close textual analysis supplemented with theoretical approaches within and across disciplinary boundaries. This theoretical framework invokes Freudian understandings of the repressed and the return of the repressed, Lacanian concepts of desire-as-lack in an unstable symbolic order, all within an Absurdist context. It argues that *The Farce of Master Pathelin* is a literal embodiment of mania, as externalised desire takes precedence through exaggerated physicality and inversion by servile laughter, and one becomes liberated from their moral impositions. Conversely, Pinter represses desire through silence, ambiguity and power disparity in generating a comedy that unsettles us at a deeper level than the humour grounded in psychological tension and disruptive systems of existing meaningful relationships. All of which is to say that, despite their differences, both forms serve comedy as a crucial point of unveiling the vulnerability of social mak[ing] structures and

the tenacity of repressed human urges. **Keywords:** *The Farce of Master Pathelin*, Harold Pinter, *The Homecoming*, Theatre of The Absurd; Abstraction; Psychoanalytic Criticism; Hamlet; Sin, Pleasure.

المخلص

تبحث هذه الدراسة في أوجه الترابط بين مسرحية مسرحية الفارس الكوميديّة: السيد باتلان ومسرحية هارولد بينتر العودة، وذلك من منظور تحليلي نفسي يدرس مفهومي الخطيئة والرغبة ضمن سياق مسرح العبث الحديث. تعالج الدراسة النقص النسبي في النظريات المقارنة التي تربط بين التقاليد الكوميديّة ما قبل الحديثة والدراما العبثية الحديثة. وعلى الرغم من أن مسرحية السيد باتلان غالباً ما تُحتزل بوصفها نوعاً شعبياً مسرحياً بسيطاً، بينما يُنظر إلى دراما بينتر إما باعتبارها ذات طابع فلسفي معقد أو "ما بعد حداشي"، فإن هذه الأطروحة تقترح أن كلا التقليديين يشتركان في بنى وموضوعات متقاربة تركز على الانتهاك والكبت وتذبذب السلطة الأخلاقية. وتهدف الدراسة إلى: تحليل دور الخطيئة والرغبة كوسائل كوميديّة في مسرحية السيد باتلان مسرحية العودة. دراسة كيفية تفسير النظرية التحليلية النفسية لاستمرارية وتطور الانتهاك الكوميدي عبر العصور الثقافية. توضيح كيف يعيد مسرح العبث توظيف عناصر الفارس ليطرح مواجهة حديثة مع عدم الاستقرار النفسي والوجودي في القرن العشرين. وتجب الدراسة عن أسئلة بحثية تتعلق بكيفية تمثيل الخطيئة والرغبة كقوى كوميديّة في كلا التقليديين، وكيف يفسر التحليل النفسي فعاليتها على خشبة المسرح، وكيف يتحدى المسرح العبثي البنى الكوميديّة السابقة. تعتمد الدراسة منهجاً مقارناً نوعياً، باستخدام التحليل النصي الدقيق مدعوماً بأطر نظرية متعددة التخصصات. ويستند الإطار النظري إلى مفاهيم فرويد حول الكبت وعودة المكبوت، ومفاهيم لاكان حول الرغبة بوصفها نقصاً داخل نظام رمزي غير مستقر، وذلك ضمن سياق عبثي. وتخلص الدراسة إلى أن مسرحية السيد باتلان تمثل تجسداً حرفياً للهوس، حيث تتجلى الرغبة الخارجية عبر مبالغات جسدية وانقلابات ساخرة، مما يؤدي إلى تحرر من القيود الأخلاقية عبر الضحك. في المقابل، يقوم بينتر بكبت الرغبة من خلال الصمت والغموض واختلال علاقات القوة، منتجاً كوميدياً تثير القلق العميق أكثر من الضحك، لأنها تقوم على توتر نفسي وأنظمة اجتماعية مفككة. وبذلك، وعلى الرغم من الاختلافات، فإن كلا الشكلين المسرحيين يستخدمان الكوميديا للكشف عن هشاشة البنى الاجتماعية واستمرارية الدوافع الإنسانية المكبوتة. الكلمات المفتاحية: مسرحية السيد باتلان ، هارولد بينتر، العودة، مسرح العبث، التجريد، النقد التحليلي النفسي، هاملت، الخطيئة، المتعة.

1. Introduction

Especially in recent studies that attempt to map continuities across historical, aesthetic, and philosophical boundaries, the relationship between premodern theatrical traditions and modern drama has drawn critical interest (including but by no means limited to my own comparative transhistorical work). The connections between *The Farce of Master Pathelin* and the Theatre of the Absurd, in particular, have been little studied, even though both forms drew on comic performance to expose the fragility of social norms. *The Farce of Master Pathelin* is often treated as at best popular or simple entertainment, and at worst a crude eruptive catharsis, yet it is actually a complex theatrical genre in which, through hyperbolic inversion (often of social hierarchies) and complicity with the audience, not only transgression but also desire and moral ambivalence are dramatised (Butterworth, 2005; Knight, 2014). In much the same way, Martin Esslin, writing of what he called 'the Theatre of the Absurd', brings to our attention the dissolution of meaning and failure of language in a fragile human condition where nothing seems to make sense (Esslin, 1961). Rather than being historically and formally unconnected, this study argues that both of these traditions are linked by a common insight into the comic representation of sin and desire as disruptive forces against established structures of authority and meaning. In this comparative lens, the plays of Harold Pinter, especially *The Homecoming* (1965), represent a fertile ground for exploring farcical bodies constituting at once both modern absurdist pushes and ruptures. Pinter is often associated with ambiguity, pauses, and the absence of violence; fixed meanings are neither permanent nor always available in Pinter's drama (Billington, 2007). Many critics have emphasised that his body of work defies binary categorisation, shifting between the philosophical concerns of realism and absurdism while working in rich psychological and symbolic layers (Esslin, 1961; Gale, 2001). *The Homecoming* reveals how the domestic space is a stage for jockeying power, unresolved sexual tension, and articulated desire which vilifies both familial and social hierarchies; These dynamics echo those of *The Farce of Master Pathelin*, in which lust is expressed through gluttony, impersonation and insubordination against authority figures such as husbands, priests and legal officers (Knight, 2014). The first of these, psychoanalysis, is a productive theoretical lens for making sense of these continuities. Sigmund Freud's pioneering work defines humour as a form of catharsis in which repressed urges are released indirectly (Freud, 1905/2001), with socially proscribed drives, particularly sexual and aggressive, receiving indirect expression. Freud's idea of the "return of the repressed" is particularly pertinent

to theatrical forms that centre on transgression because *The Farce of Master Pathelin* and absurdist drama both cavalierly resurrect taboo impulses, only to author comedic or grotesque eruptions. Following Freud, Jacques Lacan theorises desire as a structural lack formed by language and symbolic order that serves to demonstrate the instability of both meaning and subjectivity (Lacan, 1977). The application of Lacanian theory to Pinter's dramaturgy is especially pertinent, in which silence, fragmentation and ambiguity are markers for the limits of linguistic representation and the impossibility of fully articulating desire. Even though the theoretical approaches presented above are relevant, few studies exist which combine *The Farce of Master Pathelin* and absurdist theatre with psychoanalytic theory. This scholarship so far has focused on these areas separately: studies of *The Farce of Master Pathelin* typically work in historical or performance terms; Pinter studies in modernist or postmodernist critical terms; psychoanalysis, meanwhile, is resorted to only selectively and more rarely across the periods for sustained comparison. This paper fills that void by suggesting that both sin and desire serve as transhistorical categories connecting these traditions, thus allowing for a richer conception of comedy as an act of critical consciousness-raising rather than simply low art. Therefore, the aim of this paper is to demonstrate how sin and desire serve as primary vehicles of comic effect and social critique in both *The Farce of Master Pathelin* and *The Homecoming*. An exploration of psychoanalytic theory illuminates the mechanisms of repression, transgression and power within these texts, as well as the way in which the Theatre of the Absurd subverts earlier structures of comedy into a site for modern investigation into existential and psychological anxiety. By way of a qualitative comparative methodology grounded in close textual analysis, this research shows how the moral fragility and persistence of unexamined drives over time receive different aesthetic treatments across medieval and modern comedies. This study argues that the interplay between comedy, absurdism and psychoanalysis showcases comedy as a serious artistic medium, one defying both the contradictions of our human

2. Literature Review

Various strands of scholarship have emerged since last year, focused primarily on three interconnecting areas: (1) the medieval tradition of comic performance and its social functions, (2) initial observations reflecting Absurdist and postmodern readings of Pinter's *The Homecoming* cut short by early critical rhetoric, and (3) psychoanalytic or interdisciplinary approaches to theatre. These strands provide important but often fragmented evidence, leading to a large gap in comparative and theoretically integrated research.

2.1. Comic Transgression and Its Origins in *The Farce of Master Pathelin*

Such claims echo the arguments of scholars of medieval drama who have cast farce as a performative mode rooted in social inversion, bodily excess and communal laughter. Farce operates, in the eyes of Knight (2014) and Butterworth (2005), as a realm where the hierarchies stabilised by law, religion, and marriage are momentarily allowed to shift through comic exaggeration. These works underscore how performance makes deception, lust, and trickery normal; it allows audiences to perform the transgressive without moral consequence. Nonetheless, the bulk of this scholarship has remained rather historically limited, centring around performance conditions and staging practices or genre specification without engaging a greater theoretical analysis of the play into questions of desire and repression. Consequently, *the Farce of Master Pathelin* tends to be viewed as unique to its culture instead of existing on a transhistorical continuum of comic performance. Such a limitation confines it to modern theoretical frameworks, specifically psychoanalysis and Absurdism.

2.2. Power, Absurdism and Language: Pinter Studies

The studies of Pinter's work have been typically focused on the topics of language, silence and power relations. Theoretical groundwork by Martin Esslin identifies Pinter as a member of the Theatre of the Absurd, stressing communication breakdown and the uncertainty of meaning (Esslin, 1961). Subsequent critics, including Billington (2007) and Gale (2001), further develop this perspective, pointing to the psychological complexity of Pinter's characters and the entangling of realism with absurdism. The recent research has moved to postmodernist interpretations or beyond Almaarof and Mehasin (2024), who also study *The Homecoming* as a fragmented text, stating that the disorienting effect of its fragmented language, structure, and characters' identities conveys instability about the postmodern condition of existence. This study poignantly shows fragmentation, on many levels (linguistic/structural/thematic), which undermines identity and narrative unity. In a parallel consideration of the dramatic text with respect to self and identity, Almaarof and Jasim (2025) invoke postmodern analysis in their examination of life and meaning as expressed in Samuel Beckett's *Not I*, arguing that postmodern drama builds on conceiving individuals as fragmented subjects devoid of the unified self, resonating within major fields of theory but distinctly evident in alternative approaches such as

postcolonialism. This work is not directly related to Pinter, but it helps contextualise the context in which Pinter's drama is set. Previous research by Almaarof (2013) has explored the representation of women in *The Homecoming*, analysing its treatment of gender and the changing power dynamics represented in the character Ruth. Here, this study shows that Gender dynamics in Pinter's domestic space is not a fluid yet mundane process where the traditional roles of gender have neither been negated nor stabilised, but enter a period for negotiation and inversion. However, these studies have some limitations. First, they typically specialise in only one theoretical lens, postmodernism or gender analysis, but psychoanalytic perspectives are left out of their analyses. Secondly, they hardly place Pinter's work in the context of earlier theatrical forms like *The Farce of Master Pathelin*. Consequently, the specific historical continuity of motifs like lust and sin, or comic inversion, is underexplored.

2.3. Psychoanalytic and Interdisciplinary Approaches

Psychoanalytic criticism, notably the work of Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan, has been widely applied to literary and theatrical texts. The fact that comedy is usually a release of repressed desire due to our own sense of humour follows Freud's (1905/2001) repression and Lacan's (1977) concept of desire as lack, which highlights this concept sitting in opposition to subjectivity and meaning. Psychoanalytic approaches have also been applied to the theatre, especially modern and Absurdist drama, often using metaphorical imagery as a lens for interpreting power, sexuality, and identity. But these approaches are frequently limited in their application, attending to particular texts or authors rather than constructing wider comparative frameworks. In addition, there is a movement to prioritise modern texts that leave premodern forms, *The Farce of Master Pathelin*, in particular, largely unexamined within psychoanalytic discourse. We provide a critical review of the literature, highlighting an important gap in this emerging area at the intersection of these fields. While social inversion and performance are highlighted in the play-studies, Pinter studies are concerned with language, power and fragmentation, and psychoanalytic criticism examines repression in conjunction with desire. There is, however, scant research that brings these perspectives into a cohesive comparative framework. Specifically, the scarcity of comparative studies: Research comparing *The Farce of Master Pathelin* to modern Absurdist drama, especially focusing on the two genres' shared focus on deep issues such as sin and desire, is sparse. Postmodern analyses (Almaarof & Mehasin, 2024; e.g., Almaarof) highlight fragmentation yet fail to integrate with theories of repression/desire from psychoanalysis. Pinter Studies often privileges the effect of earlier comic schools (e.g. archaic, folk, or absurdist discourses within a canon that prioritises either criticism, separated from practice, or an exclusively modern/postmodern approach as robotic and 'canonical' realism/and experimental self-reflexivity). Abstract Medial farce has been little studied by psychoanalytic models despite its waywardness and focus on the flesh. Based on these gaps, the current study proposes an integrated model combining the precedent for comic transgression in *The Farce of Master Pathelin*, Walter Pater on Shakespeare and Harold Pinter's *The Homecoming* as a variation on these dynamics in contemporary form. In this manner, the study goes beyond historicist readings and shows that sin and desire exist as transhistorical categories connecting the theatre of premodern with modern eras. It also builds on postmodern critiques by including psychoanalytic perspectives, thus elucidating comedy's contradictory roles as both the object in tension and a site for contestation between repression, transgression and sense making.

3. Methodology

This article uses a qualitative, comparative research design to compare the representation of sin and desire in *The Farce of Master Pathelin* and Harold Pinter's *The Homecoming* (1965). Qualitative literary analysis is especially suited to this inquiry due to its attentiveness not only to textual, performative, and symbolic aspects of a work but also to the interpretive challenges of psychoanalytic and theatrical criticism (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The research is comparative in scope, locating both similarities and differences between two historically- and formally-distinct traditions of dramatic writing. The main texts for analysis are quintessential *The Farce of Master Pathelin* and Pinter's *The Homecoming*. These texts are chosen based on their significance within their traditions, and common preoccupation with themes of deception, transgression and desire (Knight, 2014; Gale, 2001). The externalisation of desire into the physical gag and social inversion in *The Farce of Master Pathelin* as a framework for understanding silence, ambiguity, and power relations. The primary research method used for this study is a close textual analysis, examining aspects of dialogue, characterisation, structure and stage. Particular attention is given to: Sin, moral transgression representations. Configurations of desire and repression are studied as well. Language, Silence and Gesture are traced. Power dynamics in personal and social contexts. These components are explored not only within individual texts but also across the two traditions so as to

delineate points of convergence and divergence. The comparative analysis identifies common structural elements and patterns, comic inversion, audience complicity, but also important changes in representations of desire and authority. Comparative literary analysis with psychoanalytic interpretation is an interdisciplinary field integrated into contemporary literary studies (Tyson, 2015). It places medieval and modern texts within a comparable analytical framework and challenges period-based divisions; on the other hand, it underscores the persistence of significant thematic interests across historical contexts. In addition, psychoanalytic theory is used as an interpretive lens to uncover new facets of the unconscious expression in comedy, especially its nuances involving repression and transgression.

3. Theoretical Framework

This research is based on a multi-disciplinary theoretical framework deploying both psychoanalytic theory and Theatre of the Absurd criticism. Collectively, these approaches create a dynamic lens for reading the movements of sin and desire as well as how comedy transcends medievalism in drama spanning both the medieval world and modern. This study synthesises the analysis of desire and humour as grounded in the foundational concepts of Sigmund Freud. Freud, (1905/2001), where it is argued that socially unacceptable wishes, especially those related to sexual and violent impulses, are forced out of conscious awareness but nevertheless find subtle expressions in behaviour. In *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious*, Freud makes the case that humour is a release valve for repressed material, which can emerge in an acceptable form. Such a framework is particularly applicable in the case of *The Farce of Master Pathelin*, since the fictionalised portrayals of fraudulence and lasciviousness, lust and lechery, bloating and excretion may be read as theatrical representations of repressed desires. Part of the comic effect of humour lies in this suspension of moral norms and ethical rules that allow audiences to laugh at things that would be directly offensive otherwise. The concept of return of the repressed, as articulated by Freud, also helps us understand how certain impulses unable to find their expression rise impressively in camouflage and symbolic forms that perhaps lie at the heart of both farcical and absurdist drama. Following the trajectory of Freudian analysis, Jacques Lacan reformulates desire as a structural condition based on lack and articulated through language (Lacan, 1977). The subject, for Lacan, is a linguistic construct that exists in the symbolic order; everything we know of meaning can be understood through a vast system of signifiers. Desire can never be satisfied, as it is always pointed towards an object (that it can not achieve) that creates a constant state of imbalance and disassociation in the subject. Lacanian theory is arguably most relevant in the case of Pinter's play, as meaning is often lost during interactions that revolve around silence rather than the spoken word. The exchanges of the characters are perhaps an indication of the ambivalence, ambiguity, stammered and uncertain movement between the power one character has over another that gives rise to desire in a moment where desire is also fluid, indicated by lack of clearing or stabilisation and failure in reaching completion by any symbolic order. In Lacanian desire, Ruth in the play is less an agent of explicit intention and more a symbolic object around which desire circulates. The dissertation also relies on the critical theory of the Theatre of the Absurd, based on Martin Esslin (1918-2002). Absurdist drama exists where the logical structure of a narrative breaks down, language fails to express meaning or provide understanding and when characters exist in an illogical world stripped of stable meaning. Absurdist plays foreground disorientation, repetition, and existential uncertainty rather than coherent narratives or moral resolution. In this context, Pinter found himself in a unique position. Not an absurdist playwright in the strict sense of the term, his dramatic works nonetheless contain many characteristics associated with the movement—especially use of silence, elliptical passages and unresolved suspense (Esslin, 1961; Billington, 2007). *The Homecoming* has an interpretation, within the Absurdist framework, in which transgressive farce of right and wrong recedes, and jests come from lack of meaning rather than clear inverse morality, such as we may have seen in medieval times. This paper builds a synthesis of psychoanalytic and absurdist theories into an integrated theory of comedy as the point or tension between repression and expression, order and disorder, meaning and an inversion of meaning. *The Farce of Master Pathelin* and *The Homecoming* are thus interpreted not as discrete events but rather as different instances in a much longer line of which desire and sin serve as major forces for organisation. If farce makes performed the dynamics of which absurdist drama can at best engage affirmatively, through physical pageantry and social revulsion, then absurdist should be internalised: manifest elsewhere in psychical or linguistic structure. The theoretical synthesis between comic transgression that you perform in theatre engages in the same essential questions of being human, whilst appropriating them to their different time-space-context specificities through different theatrical forms.

4. Analysis

Analysis (Editorial Q1 Journal Standard)

4.1 The Dialectics of Visibility and Absence: Externalised Desire vs Internalised

Instead of treating the selected plays as premodern and modern forms of theatre in an oppositional but chronological succession, they can more productively be regarded as dialectically connected moments in a historically contingent evolution and subsequent dissolution of desire's theatrical representation. The tangible, incarnate, and violent lust that materialises itself in medieval farce returns as internalised, postponed, and structurally unresolved lust in Pinteran drama. It is not a rupture, but rather an arrangement of the terms by which repression and transgression are staged. Desire is unambiguously projected in the bodily performance and rhetorical excess of *The Farce of Master Pathelin*. Hiding is not how deception works, as Pathelin demonstrates when he pretends to be ill: it is a theatrical display. Illness becomes a performance, as it were, through which material desire, especially economic gain, is exaggeratedly enacted when he declares: "I am very ill... my head spins, my senses fail me. (Anonymous 1994: 18). Using Freudian theory to explain this, it is not the case that repressed drives are simply released; they are instead channelled into socially acceptable representations through which voyeurism can be carried out vicariously (Freud, 1905/2001). This externalisation is further reinforced by the language in the farce. As the authority of his rhetoric states, "I am, after all, a jury lawyer: I know how to speak" (Anonymous 12) 4 Pathelin foregrounds language not as repression of desire but as an instrument of its execution. Meaning is, again, always able to be manipulated; it depends on how great the performance (persuasion) is. Even moments that seem absurd, like Thibaut bringing speech down to Baaa! Baa! I know only my sheep!" (Anonymous, 1994:34), point toward an inherent instability in language. Although comic in appearance, such linguistic disintegration augurs the Absurdist predicament: it presupposes that the dissolving of meaning is inscribed within any farcical scheme. However, that visibility of desire also has its own consequences in terms of liberation. Instead, it is what might be called a regulated violation. Parisian excess, the carnivalesque, "Let us eat and drink, for life is short!" (Anonymous, 1994, p. 22), overcomes or temporarily suspends moral limitations but maintains overall societal stability. Carnival, as Bakhtin (1984) argues, only provisionally liberates and further serves to reinforce the hierarchies it seems to undermine. But whereas farce externalises desire (vis-à-vis spectacle), it does so structurally, contained within cycles of inversion and restoration. In contrast, *The Homecoming* performs desire as internalised and deferred by structure. Farce luxuriates in desire being laid bare; Pinter shows a world where desire has not yet found its language. The subtle statement by Ruth, "I was thirsty" (Pinter, 1965, p. 34). The sparseness of the utterance belies its intensity, moving desire into indirect speech. Drawing upon Lacanian theory, we can see that what drives desire is not satisfaction but the absence as a signifier in the symbolic order (Lacan, 1977). Ruth is a character who just further confirms this dynamic within the play. And if she is asked to stay, Stay here with us (Pinter, 1965/1994, p. 72), she is less an autonomous subject than the scattering point of differential desire. As an objet petit a, she is the unattainable object for whom desire is organised but never satisfied. Therefore, Pinter bristles against this theatrical mode of representation that sublimate desire across a surface and writes instead towards an internalisation of desire as dynamic structural tension articulated through processes within language and power relations.

4.2 Language as Tool versus Language as Disaster

This can be seen especially strongly in the dialectical tension between both plays, latent in their own approaches to language. Language remains operative in *The Farce of Master Pathelin*, if manipulated. Meaning, even as it can prove elusive, it is in Pathelin's hands a mobility tool. According to Freud (1905-2001), language mediates in our desire via disguise and diversion; words are forms of verbal play, direct pathways for expression are too dangerous, so repressed material takes on this more indirect form. However, this mediating function breaks down in *The Homecoming*. Language without the power of meaning is simply truth disguised as language. The innocuous first question: "What have you done with the scissors? The end of British theatre as it was known until then (Pinter, 1965/1994: 9), shatters a space for dislocated dialogue. Absurdist drama reveals the instability of communication, communication itself, as Esslin (1961) says, "the inadequacy of language to convey meaning." The instability is underscored by the repetitive claim to power that Max makes: "I am the head of this family!" (Pinter, 1965/1994, p. 16). The demand for power is a sign of the weakness of that power; one must reiterate authority, precisely because it has ceased to exist. This is a sign of our symbolic order, which has an inherent fragility in Lacanian terms (Lacan, 1977). It holds no real authority over individuals because the language systems are structurally unstable. Likewise, Lenny's apparently polite question, "Can I ask you a question? (Pinter, 1965/1994, p. 28), It is much less a vehicle of communication than an assertion of power. Language becomes a non-communicating site of power, where control displaces meaning. This turnaround from

farce to absurdism signifies a transition away from language as a functional vehicle of desire to language as an ineffective formal system, revealing the impossibility of desire.

4.3 Release of Comics v Comic Anxiety: The Evolution of Laughter

The difference in audience response to the two plays is most marked at this level. Comedy in the medieval farce functions as a mobilising agent, inviting its audiences into a brief suspension from moral peccadilloes. Indulgences, the invitation to self-indulge, "Let us eat and drink, for life is short!" (Anonymous, 1994, p. 22), is a collective hug of excess. From a Freudian perspective, humour acts as an outlet for the discharge of psychic tension in a socially sanctioned manner (Freud, 1905/2001). Yet comedy, instead of providing relief in *The Homecoming*, raises distressing uncertainty. In Pinter (1965/1994), pervasive stage directions for pause and silence replace overt humour with tension, changing the experience of the audience. Instead of dispensing with contradiction, Pinter maintains it, the result being a spectator caught in interpretive disarray. This represents a turn from therapeutic to polemic comedy. While farce releases tension through laughter, absurdist drama heightens it by denying any resolution. Repression is never dismantled by the audience but instead remade back into their narrative. Absurdist comedy, dialectically speaking, does not leave behind the mechanics of farce but subsumes them and negates them: rather than using excess as an external principle, it uses extraction to produce internal fragmentation, personal and linguistic.

4.4 From Social Inversion to Ontological Instability

Last but not least, the dialectical relation between the two plays points to a broader movement from social to ontological criticism. Transgression in *The Farce of Master Pathelin* takes place mainly on a social level. They mock authority figures, subvert norms and temporarily upend the moral order. But this destabilisation will ultimately be superficial, as the underlying system persists. *The Homecoming* has a crisis of being, not just a crisis of social roles, but what meaning or identity is tethered to the actual body. The family power structure of patriarchy actually means something much more dangerously tenuous, an ontological instability rather than merely a critique. Characters are not merely transgressing norms; they live in a world in which those very norms no longer make sense. This evolution underscores a historical transition away from stable systems of symbolic meaning, rooted in religion, law and hierarchy, to the often disjointed modality of modern consciousness. Pinter remains true to the logic of farce, but radicalises it by turning a suspension of class order into a permanent chaos. In other words, the two plays should be read together dialectically: farce externalises and resolves contradiction, absurdism internalises and repeats it. The sad comparison highlights a moment in the history of comedy: desire, in farce, is seen, materialised, and expelled communally, but in absurdist drama, desire is deferred and internalised and structurally left unresolved. Thus, Comedy becomes the dominant form of Socio-Catharsis as well, and this too is arranged into an existential Critique. It does not reconcile contradictions; it lays bare contradictions as a perennial and definitive aspect of human experience.

6. Conclusion

The aim of this study was to look at *The Farce of Master Pathelin* and how it interacts with *The Homecoming* through psychoanalysis and Absurdist paradigms in terms of sin and desire within the creation of comic meaning. This analysis has shown that, despite historical and formal divergences, both traditions functionally share a reliance on sin and desire as primary mechanisms for undermining local moral authority and revealing the contradictions in human behaviour. Noting how both plays represent sin and desire as sources of comedy, this study has shown that in medieval theatre, it is through exaggerated physicality, deception, and social inversion that these forces are externalised. Desire is corporeal and simple, disgusting but biological, whereas sin is all served up for laughs in a kind of community consensus as though it were passive and safe. In contrast, *The Homecoming* is a kind of compactly compressed and sublimated architecture: the desire steams in and out through a network of silence, ambiguity, and the spectre of impending violence. In Pinter, the jokes do not come from brazen violations, but rather from the disturbing absence of even conditional meaning or ethical certainty. Hence, both traditions produce comic effects but in radically different aesthetic manners: one through sheer visibility and excess, the other through absence and indeterminacy. The second question (how the different psychoanalytic approaches conceptualise the comic power of transgression) reveals that Freudian and Lacanian perspectives are both relevant with regard to their influence on subsequent applications. *The Farce of Master Pathelin* is, in a sense, a stage where social repression gives way to aspects of our character that should remain hidden (Freud: the theatre is an opportunity to practice social and sexual deviations that are ultimately socially acceptable). In contrast, Lacanian thought reveals the structure of desire about lack and the mediation of frozen language present in *The Homecoming*. What we see instead is an array of communication failures, silences elevated to the fore, meaningful gaps rendered intentional and poetic that give way to new power relations

between characters reflecting the symbolic order in often disarray, fed back into a comedy starting with an air of crazed archetype and morphing into something denser or more insidious. Regarding the third question, how does the Theatre of the Absurd change farcical comedy into a modern exploration of instability, this study shows that Absurdist drama transposes external means of farce into internal psychological processes. According to Martin Esslin, the Theatre of the Absurd focuses on the absence of meaning, insufficiency of language, and humans being existentially meaningless. In this structure, Pinter incorporates tropes of farce-inversion, repetition, and comedic tension, yet bereaves them of their comic resolution. What we get is a kind of comedy that no longer provides release or resolution, but instead forces the audience to contend with the abiding presence of ambiguity and the fragility of social and linguistic decency. This study represents an important step toward bridging an unexplored gap between premodern and modern forms of theatre, revealing that sin as a dynamic category that weaves *The Farce of Master Pathelin* together with Absurdist drama and desire as a transhistorical category. While the former stage these forces collectively, visibly and transiently liberatory, the latter reconverts them into inwardly concealed, evasive and structurally unresolved. This change is indicative of a larger change in the nature of the role of comedy itself, from a sense useful for group catharsis to an introspective form of critique that illuminates the boundaries where meaning, authority and identity break down. The final results verify that comedy is not only far from a weak or simply slight-hearted genre, but also acts as an effective device for analysing the complexities of human experience. The present study positions the selected plays within a common psychoanalytic/Absurdist interpretive framework that highlights theatre's continuing power to lay bare the tensions between repression and expression, order and transgression, meaning and its erosion.

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