



A Dialectical Reading of David Hare's *Plenty*

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Abstract

Exposing the concealed truth beneath the ideological appearance lies at the heart of the anti-capitalist plays written in the 20th century. Hare (1978) aspired to fulfil this social function by writing one of his masterpieces, *Plenty*. In this play, Hare creates a milieu of the clash between the main rebellious female characters and the overwhelming stains of a patriarchal context. He shows the interaction of the characters and the repressive context which changes the characters' consciousness and identity. The present article offers a dialectical analysis to delineate the changes that occur both in the characters and the context in three successive decades (1943-1962). It is argued that such developments are viewed both as positive and negative because the rebellious characters of this play exhibit progression and degradation simultaneously. This paper aims to demonstrate how, as a social critique and committed writer, Hare reveals the true state of post-war England. The writer's goal is to change the audience's consciousness. He dispels the illusion of post-war peace and abundance which was believed by conservative, idealistic, and reactionary men. To do so, Hare contrasts male figures with rebellious and progressive women who act as history makers and represent the future of England.

Keywords: ideological appearance, truth, rebellious women, consciousness, change

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Introduction

Born two years after the conclusion of World War II and influenced by the “angry young men,” Hare (1978) witnessed the postwar disillusionment and alienation in England. As a member of the second wave of dramatists who were deeply engaged with political realities during the 1970s, he stated that he began writing plays “to advance political ends” (Hare, 2005, p. 140).

In all the plays that Hare wrote in the 1970s, his primary concern was to expose the truth that was concealed by illusory and hypocritical ideologies. The social and political function of his plays, which involved presenting a truthful portrayal of life as it really is, explains why he asserted, “What influences me in my writing is not literature but life” (Hare, 2013, p. 3). In these plays, Hare used scorn to criticize moral indecency, decadence, hypocrisy, the failure of institutions, and the government. The theme of scorn found its way in his writings as he gradually grew weary of the bygone golden era of England, which had evidently come to an end but continued to have a lasting negative impact on the mindset and feelings of his fellow countrymen and women. Scorn and laughter were the playwright’s tools to challenge those illusory perceptions and expectations. As Hare asserts, “nothing threatens the ivory tower more than a good laugh” (Hare, 2013, p. 2).

Hare is committed to portraying reality in his plays. As a realist playwright, he never shies away from the truth, no matter how harsh it is. He reckons, “The whole point of writing plays is to express things which cannot be reduced” (Hare, 2013, p. 9). The majority of Hare's plays contain themes he discovers in real life. He critically examines the issues resulting from the system and despises any untruthful depiction of life that is disconnected from social, political, and historical matters because it presents “not just a boring but an untrue view of life” (Hare, 1991, p. xiv). To reveal the truth and expose ideologies, Hare employs an approach that goes against the common beliefs and expectations of the audience.

In his plays, Hare never separates the characters’ identity from the context in which they live in. For him, a person’s identity is shaped by their social environment and is therefore historical and political. He refuses to see psychological factors as the sole determinants of a person’s identity and individuality. Hare states, “I refuse to write dramatic works, in which the interactions are solely based on psychological factors, since I believe that a person’s identity is shaped by their surroundings and the society they inhabit” (as cited in Boon, 2007, p. 173).

Reflecting on the upheavals and problems that beset the UK during the latter part of the twentieth century, Hare uses theater as a tool to raise the audience’s consciousness and a medium to bridge the gap between appearance and reality. To him, theater is a unique place and plays a special role because it engages with politics and is quite appropriate for portraying an era in which people’s ideals and actions are disconnected. The theater, according to Hare (1995), is particularly effective in highlighting the disparity between “what is said and what is seen to be done” (p. 115).

As a social critique, Hare highly values exposing the truth. This has not gone unnoticed by Hare’s critics. For instance, Mayer (2019) delves into Hare’s authorial

persona, portraying him as an artist and political commentator committed to truth-telling within a “a Romantic tradition of strong authorship” (p. 38). The truth that Hare aims to reveal to the audience is the lived experience of his subjects under ideological conditions. He aims for the audience to witness the unadulterated reality, both depicted and critiqued by him. He writes, “I compose works that aim to illustrate the customs and practices of a particular community in this country in this century. I talk of the reasons behind the collapse of the Empire, and how people’s ideals underwent significant changes” (as cited in Bull, 1984, p. 70). By depicting the chaotic and repressive context where everything valuable collapses, Hare seeks to heighten the audience’s class consciousness. He provides a glimpse of the uncensored reality that repressive ideologies attempt to conceal, illustrating how the alienated main characters, who are simultaneously progressive misfits, are in struggle with the ideological and alienating context. It must be added that Hare gives a unique individuality to his main characters; that is, his main characters are not lifeless and passive puppets completely controlled by the forces beyond their control. Hare does not even consider the audience as passive viewers. The audience are for him, active individuals who do not merely see, but think and decide. He sees the theater as a “weapon” that can be used in the class struggle (as cited in Homden 1995, p. 45). The play cannot be reduced to the script itself. It exists in the shared space between the performers and the audience and it involves the interplay between what is put on the stage and viewer’s perceptions.

The present article aims to demonstrate how in *Plenty*, Hare creates a socially, politically, historically, and truthfully authentic production that dialectically reflects how the characters’ lives and consciousness are shaped by their historical context, which in turn they shape. By presenting an accurate portrayal of the repressed reality and criticizing the corrupt system that fosters such a corruptive condition for all, Hare intends to raise the audience’s consciousness regarding the deteriorating context that seeks to resolve everything through destruction. The following section provides a brief overview of the previous studies on this play.

Literature Review

Plenty has been analyzed from multiple perspectives. Coates (1989) probes the themes of alienation and mental breakdown experienced by the subjects who have lost their idealism. He believes that *Plenty* shows the profound disappointment that arose from the shattering of the idealist optimism that emerged during wartime. This, in his opinion, creates a dilemma for the characters as they are torn between holding onto a glimmer of optimism for the future and “turning themselves into zombies, to escape from that future” (p. 65).

Homden (1995) maintains that Hare connects the past to the present to create a post-war disillusioning context where the possibility of doing noble and virtuous acts does not exist any longer. Homden views Hare’s writings as an attempt to make sense of the present via recourse to past events. Moreover, he suggests that the protagonist, Susan, and Hare have one paradoxical quality in common, that is, they are both ethical critics who are simultaneously an integral part of the object of their criticism.

Susan's character has also been analyzed by Reinelt (2007) who draws parallels between her experiences and those of Sylvia Plath. She argues that Susan's unstable mental state and self-destructive tendencies could elicit similar severe criticisms and defensive reactions as those directed towards Sylvia Plath (p. 208). The overlap in their generations indicates a shared experience of the 1950s. In a similar fashion, Taylor (2007) asserts that Susan's struggles in *Plenty* serve as a metaphor for Britain's decline. Through Susan's isolated and depressed character, Hare connects the personal with the political, portraying her as a symbol of repressed women.

Petrovic (2016) highlights the deterministic and naturalist context of Hare's rebel trilogy, emphasizing the inevitability of the system's permanence and indestructibility:

Each play from his "rebel trilogy" from the 1970s (*Knuckle*, *Teeth 'n' Smiles* and *Plenty*) sends a message that the system, although obviously corrupt, is indispensable and indestructible, and every act of rebellion against it has only two possible outcomes: either the rebel's self-destruction or his surrender to the system as it is. (p. 40)

Deeney's (2006) analysis of *Plenty* focuses on classification of Hare's play. He believes that while this play seems like an English version of Brechtian epic theater, it is similar to the works of dramatic realism in its use of recognizable contexts, characters, and dialogues. He also explains how *mise en scène* is used by Hare to convey the sense of loss, despair, and emptiness (Deeney, 2006).

While the studies mentioned in this part are valuable in their own right, none offers a dialectical analysis of *Plenty* which aims to show how the characters' consciousness and identity are historically determined and how the rebellious and realist women, who unlike the conservative and idealist men possess progressive attributes, position themselves as history makers. Also, this study seeks to unveil Hare's commitment to making a truth-telling production that exposes the hidden historical and social reality beneath the misleading ideologies of an impotent government that he criticizes and ridicules. The following section outlines the methodology employed in this research.

Methodology

Subject and the Context

In the beginning of *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, Marx (1907) states:

Humans are the creators of their own history, but they do not have absolute autonomy in doing so; they do not choose the circumstances under which they make their histories. Rather, they are constrained by circumstances that have been passed down from the past and cannot be chosen or altered at will. (p. 10)

According to Marx, man is actively involved in making history, although his actions are shaped and circumscribed by the objective context in which he exists. In

other words, how a man lives and what a man does are the results of his dialectical interaction with objective world. Neither man nor the objective world are constant and solid, but rather a mutable continuation of the past.

In *Herr Eugen Dühring's Revolution in Science*, Engels (1894) states, "Dialectics is nothing more than the science of the general laws of motion and development of nature, human society and thought" (p. 160). According to Engels, change is an inherent part of the mutable world and everything in it. In other words, nothing is absolute. Everything undergoes changes that are driven by dialectical causes.

In the realm of historical materialism, there is a dialectical relationship among base, superstructure, ideology, and subject. According to this philosophical approach, humans are not magical creations with predetermined consciousness, but instead, they are a changing part of the changing objective world. Humans are the creators of the society from which their consciousness and identity are derived. In *German ideology*, Marx and Engels (1998) claim, "circumstances make men just as much as men make circumstances" (p. 62). Thus, man's consciousness is the result of his participation in the external world, that is to say, his communicative social life. In his well-known essay, "On Practice", Tse-Tung (1965) made his case for this standpoint. He believes that active involvement in material production is the primary source through which human knowledge is acquired. As people engage in production, they begin to gain an insight into laws and properties of nature, which ultimately leads to them developing an understanding of the relationships that exist among individuals. Therefore, separating humans and their consciousness from the context is a dogmatic and formalistic mistake that contradicts their real existence. Marx and Engels (1908) assert in their *Manifesto* that people's ideas, beliefs, and outlooks, that is to say, their consciousness, are subject to change as they experience shifts in their material conditions and social interactions.

In "Theses on Feuerbach", Marx (1998) criticizes Feuerbach and the idealist philosophers before him who treated man as "an abstract—*isolated*—human individual. . . which unites the many individuals only *in a natural way*" (p. 573). Marx declares, "the essence of man is no abstraction inherent in each single individual. In its reality it is the ensemble of the social relations" (p. 573). According to dialectical materialism, man is not a universal and isolated abstraction. Man's identity is determined by his social relationships and the context in which he lives. It is a historical, social, and dialectical formation. Therefore, man is shaped by the context, and in turn, the context is shaped by man. This view is accentuated in *The Holy Family*, where it is claimed that "history is *nothing but* the activity of man pursuing his aims" (Marx & Engels, 1956, p. 126).

It can be concluded that man reflects the context while also playing a critical role in changing and forming it. Man is a cog in the wheel of history, without which history cannot move forward. However, this does not mean that Marx rejects the transhistorical nature of man. It is safe to say that, according to Marx, humans possess a transhistorical essence. If a particular epoch or mode of production restricts this essence, it will ultimately result in changing the repressive context.

Dialectical Art and Reality

In "A Letter on Art in Reply to Andre Daspre," Althusser (1971) states, "the peculiarity of art is to 'make us see', 'make us perceive', 'make us feel' something which alludes to reality" (p. 222). He claims, "What art makes us *see*. . . is the *ideology* from which it is born, in which it bathes, from which it detaches itself as art, and to which it *alludes*" (p. 222). For Althusser, ideology is identical to lived experience. He believes, "when we speak of ideology we should know that ideology slides into all human activity, that it is identical with the 'lived' experience of human existence itself" (p. 223). Thus, dialectical art displays the lived experience of a historical era and by doing so, it engages in a social function: making the reality visible to the reader and audience and thus helping to change it.

Dialectical materialism embraces the interconnected contradictions in the objective world in order to justify change. The three tenets of this philosophical approach are: (1) nothing is immutable and a new quality is born out of mutability (2) everything will be negated, and (3) everything is united with its opposite, from which arises change and development. Rejecting this interconnectedness and separating the subject not only from its context but also from other subjects, result in an incomplete and defective understanding of the reality. Lukacs (1996) believed the negation of history and ahistorical man are the features of the modernist literature. Eagleton (1976) extends Lukacs' (1996) approach to the undialectical, formalistic, and ahistorical works of writers such as Camus, Kafka, and Musil. He claims that the alienated heroes of these modernist writers are stripped of their history. Instead of being defined by their actions and experiences, they are characterized by their psychological states. Quite contrary, dialectical art mingles typicality with individuality. In order to show the truth and reality, it portrays a typical historical context that reflects the inner structure of society, which is lived through the experiences of the individualized character.

Dialectical art has its roots in history and reality. It clarifies ideologies and deals with the process of change. In this art, reality and truth are reflected within an ideological system. In other words, dialectical art reflects the mode of production and its ideologies that have made the current state of the society. Hence, this form of art portrays reality as it is and serves to alter the viewer's consciousness in turn. This type of artistic production shows the subject and his needs, and how these needs are repressed in that context.

It is an illusory and unrealistic expectation to think that art can create an all-embracing collectivity in a class society. In such a society, progressive art and artist represent contradictions, mutability as well as decay. Therefore, when critics like Fischer (1963) talk about "truthful" art, they mean a form of art that does not shy away from mirroring decay in a society in decline (p. 48). In order to fulfil its social function, the art must depict the world as mutable and contribute to its transformation.

In order to affect and change the audience and the reader's consciousness, dialectical art reproduces and mirrors the antagonistic conflicts in a corrupt system. It helps bring the lost unity between man and himself, between man and his surrounding

world, and between man and other human beings. By reflecting the truth, it turns the fragmented subject into an integrated being. Fischer (1963) says:

Art has the ability to elevate us from a fragmented existence to a more integrated and complete being. It helps us immerse into reality, making it more bearable and inspiring us to make it more suited to mankind. (p. 46)

Fischer (1963) continues that “individuals will be able to achieve wholeness by identifying with the experiences of others. Art serves as a crucial tool for this integration, as it facilitates the merging of the mankind with the larger whole” (p. 8). This is precisely what Hare believed and depicted in his plays. He states, “I’m convinced we are getting close to what a dramatist can accomplish. By placing people’s suffering in a historical context, the playwright can account for their agonies and pains” (as cited in Homden, 1995, p. 71).

Discussion

Among the plays that Hare wrote in the 70s, *Plenty* is the most historical. In this play, Hare covers a broad scope of time starting in the 1940s, glossing over the historical, social, and moral changes in England over three subsequent decades. By doing so, Hare aims to illustrate how the present historical condition is affected by and is the continuation of the past. In other words, to see how the main character, Susan, acts in the present, the audience must know about her past. Therefore, restricting the play to its contemporary time offers a narrow view of the changes happening in the character and the contemporary context. Hare uses an unchronological order containing flashbacks and flashforwards of Susan’s life and gradual decadence. These techniques remind the audience of who Susan was and who she has become. Once an idealist and committed soldier who fought the Nazis and envisioned a bright future, Susan now engages in relationships with men whom she barely knows, exploits a man to become pregnant out of wedlock, has an affair with a married man who has three children, and marries and then dissolves her marriage with Brock without any definite reason. As she says, “I married him because he reminded me of my father... At that point, of course, I didn’t realize just what a shit my father was” (pp. 54-55). By representing this change and decadence, Hare aims to show that Susan’s new identity and consciousness are products of the changing context.

In *Plenty*, Hare gives a unique individuality to the main female characters, Susan and Alice. Both Susan and Alice are ahead of their time. There is a lesbian attraction between them, and they follow a free hippie style, both of which were not considered normal then. By embracing a hippie lifestyle, unrepressed sexuality, and rejecting the institution of marriage, Hare portrays the main female characters as distinct from their previous generation and ahead of their current societal norms. These misfits symbolize the imminent future of England, specifically the seventies, when the play was written. Alice says, “I had an idea that lust ... that lust was very good. And could be made simple. And cheering. And light. Perhaps I was simply out of my time” (p. 76). This transhistorical existence is also noted by Bull (1984), who believes that Hare’s focus lies in the unique qualities and the individuality of each person, and many of his main characters are social misfits who struggle with disillusionment as they navigate the bleak course of British history following the year 1939.

Hare demonstrates the dialectical relationship in *Plenty* by portraying the historical movement and changes in the context through tracing those changes in the characters. In *Plenty*, everything from the past is completely negated. Similar to Susan, Lazar who was once a committed soldier is now led into alienation and corruption. England, previously the world's supreme power, is humiliated in the Suez Crisis. Brock and Darwin are disillusioned with their jobs and political roles, and the old culture and tradition are also negated by the new concept of women, represented in Alice as well as her circle of friends who include a young prostitute (Louise), an unmarried mother (Dorcas), and a transsexual (Alistair). These queer and gender non-conforming identities were new qualitative changes which were trying to find voice within England, though were still considered taboo. In fact, it was in the 1960s that sexual revolution challenged the traditional codes of relationships and homosexuality was decriminalized for the first time in 1967.

Alice is another key figure through whom Hare shows the process of change. Hare deftly portrays Alice as a new and unsubdued woman whose previous stage of life is negated. Talking to Susan about her past, Alice says: "I had a protected childhood" (p. 29). She was unwilling to indulge in sexual pleasures because she felt guilty for going against societal norms that mandated chastity. She viewed herself and her body as an object whose sole purpose was to serve the men. As a young adolescent, therefore, she used to think of her private parts as a "torch battery" that could "run out" if they were used for self-gratification (p. 29). In scene four, however, she undergoes a major transformation in appearance and no longer has a sense of guilt about who she has become. She is depicted wearing a men's suit and tie, signifying her acquisition of a new identity that is vastly different and in opposition to her previous status. As she enters adulthood, she begins to transgress the traditional moral codes of purity and abstinence. She has intercourse with multiple men and does drugs. In other words, she becomes the new woman that breaks with the class of subjugated and controlled English women. The unsubdued and liberated Alice also claims to have started writing a story about the raping of a woman, in an attempt to become a voice for the oppressed sex.

According to dialectical materialism, all knowledge is attained through experiencing and participating in the objective world. This objective world, which is the realm of experience, is the source of knowledge for Alice. She tells Susan, "The writer must experience everything, every kind of degradation. Nothing is closed to him" (p. 26). It means no repressive ideology can control this rebellious, free, albeit different and isolated woman, who represents the negation of not only her previous life, but also deviation from and breaking of the current and accepted patriarchal norms of England that restricted women to their secondary and periphery social position.

Susan defies the accepted social norms, too. Prior to marrying Brock, she asked Mick to impregnate her in a way that "marriage is not involved" (p. 38). She aspires to be an unmarried mother with a child, finding the traditional marriages within her social circle intolerable. In a conversation with Mick, she questions the institute of marriage by stating, "I don't know why I have to make some unhappy and conventional marriage solely for the purpose of having a child. It seems unfair that

women have to do so” (pp. 38-39). Both Susan and Alice; therefore, challenge and subvert the expectations and values of their era by expressing their sexuality, rejecting the norms of traditional marriage, and adopting a free hippie lifestyle.

Hare’s plays written in the 70s introduced a sense of isolation to the lives of the main female characters. This isolation is the inevitable result of the character's interaction with a hostile condition. Similar to Hare’s other main female characters of this decade, namely Joanne, Elise, and Ann in *Slag*, Maggie in *Teeth ‘n’ Smiles*, and Sarah in *Knuckle*, Alice and Susan are portrayed as isolated and alienated from the antagonistic and repressive context. In *Plenty*, Susan and Alice are depicted as progressive misfits struggling within a repressive and patriarchal atmosphere. Susan recounts how her boss, Mr. Medlicott, attempts to get close to her. Meanwhile, Alice’s story symbolically represents the plight of repressed women in a patriarchal society. This repressive context, which crushes the different, is evident in Alice’s words when she tells Brock and Susan:

I am the only Bohemian in London. People exploit me. Because there are no standards, you see. In Paris or New York, there are plenty of Bohemians, so the kief is rich and sweet and plentiful but here . . . you’d better off to lick the gum from your ration card. (p. 32)

In this repressive and patriarchal context, men are not encumbered with any responsibility. Because of this given freedom, they do not seek settlement. Susan refers to this desire to evade responsibility when she tells Mick, “they would refuse to go in bed with me with me if they discovered that my intention was to conceive a child” (p. 39).

In order to reflect the reality, Hare shows that even the progressive characters, who are historical creations, are affected by their context. The alienated Susan who after the war has lost control over everything does not demand settlement. However, the reasons why she desires to have a child from Mick out of wedlock have to do not only with her desire to break with the responsibilities of a married life but also with her progressive ideas and the new and sweeping changes happening in the country. She highlights these changes when she says, “being a bastard won’t always be so bad” (p. 39) and “England can’t be like this forever” (p. 39). In this scene, set in 1951, a prophecy is made about the increase in the number of illegitimate children in the following decades. As reported by Thane (2010), in the early 1960s, there was a noticeable rise in the number of babies born out of wedlock, which continued to climb at a faster pace in the 1980s. By the year 1993, over a third of all the children born in the Great Britain were illegitimate. The England to which Susan refers is the patriarchal and conservative context that she strongly opposes.

Hare intertwines to women’s progressive attributes a shattered wholeness, reflected through disillusionment and alienation. By doing so, he illustrates the reality of a depressing context, in which achieving wholeness is unattainable. Consequently, the status quo sounds unchangeable for the disillusioned characters. Susan expresses this frustration, saying, “I’d like to change everything but I’m not sure how” (p. 29). In line with this repressive context of Hare’s play, Susan gradually walks down the path of self-destruction, just like Maggie in *Teeth ‘n’ Smiles* and Sarah in *Knuckle*, who

ultimately succumb to the powers they cannot change. However, this does not mean that Susan is merely a puppet without any individuality and freedom and the system is unchangeable. Hare uses immutability of Susan's tragic condition to criticize and reflect the reality of a corrupt system which itself is on decline.

Susan is further depicted as a decaying and bewildered icon who simultaneously is a manipulator. This is evident in her relationship with Mick, which was initiated solely for the purpose of having a child for her. However, their efforts over the span of eighteen months proved unsuccessful. Through their dysfunctional relationship, Hare points to three key aspects. Firstly, Mick's inability to provide Susan with a child shows Hare's stance towards men not only bereft of any progressive attributes (like Brock and Darwin) but also as impotent and useless beings (like Mick). Secondly, Susan's inability to bear a child reflects the harsh reality she faces and lives in post-war England that brings about nothing but failure for her. Thirdly, Susan and Mick's class division illustrates the unfair class structure of England. When Mick, who is from the impoverished East End of England, questions Susan about why she chose him for this endeavor, she replies, "I choose you because. . . I don't see you very much. I barely ever see you. We live at opposite ends of town. Different worlds" (p. 40). After months of searching, Mick finally discovers Susan's address to pay her a visit. However, upon seeing him, Susan exclaims, "I thought we'd agreed. You promised me, Mick. You made a promise. Never to meet again" (p. 45). Mick, feeling hurt, responds, "It feels very bad to be *used*" (p. 45, emphasis in the original). It becomes obvious that, despite Susan's confusion and detachment, she has continued to manipulate and exploit Mick, treating him merely as a means to achieve her own goal. By representing the manipulation and class division, Hare illustrates the degradation and corruption of the post-war England, leaving an indelible mark on his protagonist. The outcome of this relationship is nothing but hatred for Mick, as he tells Susan, "You people are cruel" and refers to her as a "tart" (p. 47). Additionally, the manipulator, Susan, experiences psychological problems and disillusionment, leading her into a deep self-destructive mode after this failure.

By attributing negative qualities to Susan, Hare shows that he desires to give a nuanced representation of the reality. Simply put, he exhibits ambivalence towards the new women, evident in the positive attributes bestowed upon his main character, who is simultaneously a schizophrenic and decaying icon. In depicting the relationship and social class position of Susan and Mick, Hare reveals the true nature of a capitalist society. In this class-based context, the union of opposites is not stable; moreover, living in a middle-class abundance like Susan or in a working-class necessity like Mick leads to hatred and disillusionment for all.

In *Plenty*, David Hare depicts the emergence of anti-establishment and anti-male feminist ideologies, which were gaining momentum during the play's timeframe as women's suppressed voices began to be heard. Homden (1995) states, "within *Plenty* female idealism is anti-establishment only because it is anti-male" (p. 67). Susan is no longer attracted to the opposite sex. This is why she says, "I do like to make a point of sleeping with men I don't know. I do find once you get to know them, you often don't want to go to bed with them any longer" (p. 55). Susan is against the

patriarchal context of England, which is found in Darwin's disparaging remarks about women when he talks to Brock:

In the diplomatic service it isn't as if a mad wife is any kind of professional disadvantage. On the contrary it guarantees promotion.... Some of the senior men their wives are absolutely barking. I take the word 'gouache' to be giveaway. When they start drifting out of rooms saying, 'I think I'll just go and do my gouaches dear,' then you know you've lost them for good and all. (p. 51)

In this context, the isolated Alice and Susan strive to remain as independent, free, though irresponsible as men. This means that in his representation of the concept of the new progressive woman, David Hare adds degradation, decadence, and self-destruction to the mix. Alice desires to experience relationships with different young men. She tells Brock, "I never had time. Too busy relating to various young men. Falling in and out of love turns out to be like any other career" (p. 76). Similarly, Susan is just as free and irresponsible as Alice. She sleeps with different men and goes through various relationships, but in the end, she chooses to remain alone. She tells her warmate, Lazar, "There's only one kind of dignity, that's in living alone" (p. 83). Hare demonstrates this sense of independence, indifference, and isolation early in the play when Susan expresses her desire to leave Brock. She tells Alice, "Let him know I left with none of his belongings. I just walked out on him. Everything to go" (p. 9). Later on, in a flashback, the reader realizes that despite Brock's desire to stay with Susan, she is reluctant and says, "I think we should try a winter apart" (p. 35).

Hare introduces elements of self-destruction, decadence, and contradiction into Susan's life and character not to disparage her but to illustrate the sorrowful and painful fate of a once-committed person. Through Susan, Hare shows how a corrupt and repressive context defiles the subject. He also illustrates the tragic fate of a subject who lives the opposite of what she believed and anticipated. Susan becomes completely disillusioned and transformed as she confronts the harsh and decaying reality.

Hare, for whom women act as history makers, draws a clear line between the progressive women and the reactionary men. In *Plenty*, the rebellious women sharply contrast with the conservative men who embody the impotent policies of England. This is the dichotomy to which Susan refers when she tells Mick that "there's another side to men's nature, and that is they are narrow-minded, they are afraid of the unknown. They also desire a quiet and calm life" (p. 39). Within this framework, only women embody the progressive ideas and reveal the concealed reality in the corrupt context. In other words, women serve as Hare's mouthpieces. Homden (1995) argues,

Hare has crafted his female characters in a specific manner in order to communicate a historical message. These women serve as substitutes for men. In other words, women provide a context for Hare to express his own pain through their characters. (p. 69)

Hare himself admits that the "women's attitudes" give him a considerable sense of comfort (as cited in Homden, 1995, p. 69). While Hare maintains

ambivalence towards women, depicting their potential immorality and irrationality, he ultimately favors them over conservative and hypocritical men in the midst of such an alienating decadence.

In stark contrast to Susan and Alice's perspectives are the idealistic views of Darwin and Brock, who believe that the conditions will improve for the English people once the country overcomes the effects of war. Darwin envisions a New Europe emerging after the devastating war. He shares with Susan his optimistic belief that conditions will soon be perfect. He mentions the huge construction projects that are underway and refers to the jobs that are created, expressing his satisfaction with the status quo in Europe and the brilliant future that awaits them when he expects "Roads to be built. People to be educated. Land to be tilled. Lots to get on with" (p. 24). Similarly, Brock tells Alice, "I think everyone's going to be rich soon. Once we get over the effects of war" (p. 31). This statement highlights the reason behind Hare's choice of the title *Plenty*, written in 1978 amid one of England's darkest decades. It refers ironically to the plenty or abundance that contrasts with the country's myriad economic problems and disasters. Through this, he aims to unveil the true condition beneath deceptive appearances. This reality is initially laid bare by Alice at the beginning of the play when she remarks, "I don't know why anybody lives in this country. . . The wet. The cold. The flu. The food. The loveless English" (p. 7).

The disparity between the title of the play and the actual condition is deliberately employed by the playwright to underscore the contrast between outward appearances and underlying realities. Hare demonstrates that even a thriving financial situation is not a guarantee for the main character's happiness. Despite her lending money to Dorcas and stating, "Don't thank us. We're rotten with cash" (p. 64), Susan is emblematic of the disillusionment pervasive in post-war England. Her prosperous financial state is also highlighted in the symbolic abundance of the dinner Susan has prepared for her guests. She says:

Thank heavens. Now, there was dinner. . . A little pork. And chicken. And some pickles and tomato. And lettuce. And there are a couple of pheasants in the fridge. And I can get twelve bottles of claret from the cellar. Why not? There is plenty. Shall we eat again? (p. 56)

The play presents a contrast between the abundance experienced by Brock and Susan and Brock's perspective on poverty while living in Iran, a colonized third-world country. He shares with Alice, "And of course, the poverty. Living among people who should work hard to make ends meet can make you see life in a different way" (p. 64). Through the simultaneous portrayal of abundance and decadence, Hare aims to make the hidden reality visible—the decay concealed by the misleading veneer of post-war peace, plenty, and prosperity.

In order to show the harsh reality, Hare portrays the sterility of both personal and political idealism. In the final scene, which is a flashback to 1944, Susan goes up a hill to obtain a better vista of the jubilant people celebrating the end of war. This symbolically represents the bright future that she envisioned but never came true. She tells a Frenchman, "Have you seen anything as beautiful as this? . . . There will be days and days and days like this" (pp. 86-87). However, after the war Susan has

become a complete failure. She is unable to maintain a stable relationship with anyone, except for Alice, who is an isolated woman like her. Her relationship with Toney Radley, her marriage with Raymond Brock, her subsequent attempts to conceive a child with another man, whom she does not know well, Mick, her different jobs as a clerk and advertiser, and even her mental condition end up in failure. This is why, in the final dialogue between Susan and Brock, he says, “in the life you have led you have utterly failed, failed in the very, very heart of your life” (p. 79). Not only Susan, but also Lazar, a committed soldier she met in 1943, is now completely disillusioned. Lazar shares his discontent during their 1962 meeting, stating, “I don’t feel I’ve done well. I gave in. Always. All along the line. Suburb. Wife. Hell. . . I hate this life that we lead” (p. 84). Both of these soldiers fought for a good cause that has been betrayed after the war. In other words, Hare portrays how the legacy of the war has given way to decay, and instead of a promising future, there is decay that has prevailed.

This disillusionment is political, too. The Suez Crisis is mentioned in *Plenty* as a way to illustrate England’s failure and loss of control over the canal. Hare shows, how once a conquering country, the Empire is humiliated in the Suez Crisis. How the previous status has changed and been negated can be seen in Brock’s dialogue with his employer, Sir Leonard Darwin:

Eden is weak. . . For years, people have taunted him, why aren’t you strong? Like Churchill? He goes round, he begins to think I must find somebody to be strong on. He finds Nasser. Now he’ll show them. He does it to impress. He does it badly. No one is impressed. (p. 53)

Darwin clings to the idealistic notion that his country is the supreme power of the world, as he tells Brock, “this time we are cowboys and when the English are cowboys, then in truth I fear for the future of the globe” (p. 53). However, Susan, who reflects Hare’s ideas concerning the authority, interrupts and belittlingly says, “They don’t even have the guts to make a war any more” (p. 54). Darwin realizes that he was deceived by the government about the attack (although he was against it from the beginning), and later on, when he voices his disgust in public, he is met with rejection and condemnation from many people to the extent that after his death only a few attend his funeral. Darwin’s idealism is completely shattered before his death. The loss of idealism is experienced by Brock as well, culminating in the breakdown of his marriage and the demise of his ambitious aspirations, leaving him with a menial job.

Conclusion

As a historical being, man is not thrown into existence as a pre-fabricated and absolute creation but as an integral part of an ever-changing world. Man is a creator of history, contributing to the context that, in turn, shapes his identity and consciousness. Hare shows this dialectical concept by delineating the changes that occur both in the characters and the context in *Plenty*. In contrast to conservative and idealist men, the rebellious, progressive, and realist women, who take center stage in Hare’s play, serve as mouthpieces for Hare’s progressive ideas, reflecting the sweeping changes occurring in England. In this play, Hare goes beyond the deceiving

appearance of post-war peace and plenty, offering a dialectical and realist portrayal of the concealed truth in a corrupt society. Alice exemplifies the struggles of isolated and repressed women, Darwin is completely disillusioned with the government despite his optimistic dreams, Brock stagnates in his job and eventually gets relegated to a menial position, Susan experiences different hardships, and by the end of the play, she and Lazar find themselves completely disillusioned, and Mick undergoes objectification in a class society, consisting of two different worlds. This hidden truth of a society in decline, concealed beneath the veneer of ideological abundance, is precisely what the playwright aims to unveil to present an authentic picture of the repressed reality that is mingled with class division, manipulation, decadence, alienation, hypocrisy, disillusionment and a tragic life for the main self-destructive character. In *Plenty*, Hare shows the decline of an alienated nation. Whether reactionary or progressive, realist or idealist, compliant with social norms or rebellious against them, they encounter disillusionment in an alienating, corrupt, and degrading context. By emphasizing the decadence, Hare strives to reveal the truth and criticize the corrupt system in order to instill the proper consciousness in the audience. The main character's narrative therefore serves as a warning, demonstrating that if one does not live according to their beliefs, the outcome will not be good.

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