

# Pillowman

Literature



' The Pillowman', a play composed by Martin McDonagh in some illuminating moments of imagination, is a highly original and universal piece of American literature. The play sets the spirit of horror afoot at the outset itself with a trial scene in a dark cell. Katurian, a writer is being interrogated by two police officers, Ariel and Topolsky for writing some violent stories which are being replicated in their exact soul in real life.

The setting of the play is clearly totalitarian as Topolsky says " I am a high ranking police officer in a totalitarian police state What are you doing.. asking my words about anything? The intensive, awesome and bleak drama continues with retelling or enactment of Katurian's stories. Quite strangely it ends in the same cell with the death of the protagonist. However in its mysterious voyage the play throws some questions at the readers and doesn't allow them to lose focus. But the beauty of the play lies in gradual opening of different aspects like the petals of a flower. The focus of the play is on the preciousness of art.

Ben Brantley also wrote " The Pillowman is celebrating human instinct to invent fantasies" and this instinct is remarkably strong for Martin as " life is short and brutal but stories are fun. Plus, they have the chance of living forever". The play presents a panorama of stories within a story and the way Martin uses these stories to support his 2 philosophy is really effective. ' The writer and writer's brother'(1. ii) is the most autobiographical of all where parents pose to be violent in order to inspire their child to create masterpieces in art; this is the most striking example of preferring art to life.

Unlike the story Katurian killed his parents for ill-treating Michal. During the interrogation for his violent stories when Ariel blamed him for " trying to say

go out and murder children” Katurian can vehemently protest “ I have got no axe to grind...I am not trying to say anything, That is my whole thing”. He can demand “ Fine, let me know what I’ve written that is offensive and I will take it out right away. However he is ready to take the blame on him if his stories are not destroyed. It means he is ready to put not only his reputation but his life too at stake just for the sake of art.

Also in the end he composed a story that pillowman came to Michal when he was young but he refusing to commit suicide chose to live a life full of pain so that Katurian could write good stories taking stimulus from his brother’s ordeal. He told this story to move the interrogators and it helped as Ariel did not burn his stories. The expert comment of Ben Brantley about this also reflects the same idea “ The seductiveness, defensiveness and pure vanity of an artist for whom writing means even more than the brother he has protected for many years.

Katurian’s grim stories about child abuse whether “ The Tale of the Town on the River”, “ The Little Jesus’ or “ The Little Applemen” acquire even more horrible dimensions when are being retold by the heartless interrogators who are themselves victims of child abuse at the hand of parents. Moreover, in the story ‘ Pillowman’ he depicts a tall man who forces people to commit suicide so that they can escape the pain in store for them. But his conviction in this 3 argument was none less than perfect as he murders his own brother Michal again using a pillow after the latter has confessed having killed three children.

He did this so that Michal did not have to undergo the torture of interrogation. So after all Katurian murdered Michal out of love which shows

the psychological distortion of Katurian. Though Michal says “ It was just pages” (2, i) it was none else except he only who killed the children as he thought “ that is what his brother wanted him to do”(2, i). He tells Michal the story of ‘ The Little Green Pig’ who wanted to get rid of its peculiarity but could not. When Michal sleeps he kills him.

Thus violence becomes the stimulus as well as the consequence of Katurian’s stories. Through such stories he wants to Explore and expose the hidden layers of psychological complexities seen in Katurian or Ariel caused not only due to violence and abuse but also due to neglect and indifference. Later when in “ Three Gibbet Crossroads” he writes about an imprisoned man bearing the punishment for the crime he does not know he has committed, perhaps he supports the innocence and ignorance of Michael in murdering children.

So the other areas that the sensitive author seems to touch in the play are bad parenting, damaged children, place of art in repressive society and child abuse. Though Katurian is wrongfully blamed of giving ideas for recent murders he nevertheless gets punishment in the end not for murdering three children but his parents and brother. So the play seems to educate the partial parents who pamper one of their children at the cost of the other ones. They are purposely exposed to the unthinkably horrifying consequences of their discriminative attitude.

Also, we are forced to determine the relationship between life and fiction and the question that 4 disturbs us is if it makes sense to torture the writer if somebody turns violent after reading his works. Some critics think that Katurian, as a writer will have to own the moral responsibility of society.

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Literature does not exist in vacuum and it is true that it reflects life but at the same time we can not undermine its influence on life. Teenagers find their role models in movies and fiction so we entrust an author with moral obligations and always try to get some message from his writings.

It is definitely true to some extent but if we look at the case from other side, we should take art as art only. Mark Twain also warned the readers in the preface of “ Huckleberry Finn” not to read the book for morals but they should only appreciate its fantastic beauty. The same is true about ‘ The Pillowman’ also. But I think that in spite of everything life is in some way related to literature and a writer can not disown the responsibility just by saying “ All I do is write stories”(1, i), however, we can not help appreciating the celebration of art that the play seems to do.

Sometimes the play is blamed of presenting horrible scenes and is considered unfit for the soft ones but if we think carefully we will understand the very purpose violence and pain serve in the book; it actually enhances suffering for art which is the main theme of the play. So Martin McDonagh is not a sadist; he is rather a true artist. The darkest of the dark comedies, “ Pillowman” leaves the audience in thoughtful tension and remedial discomfort. Only the bravest ones can read it through. Still its daring pleasure persists which accounts for different awards it has bagged.