

Characters in Brief: Cartwright's *TWO*

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Abstract

TWO is a play written by Jim Cartwright an English dramatist. Cartwright designs *TWO* such that two actors can play all the characters. This paper is an analytical study which draws inferences based largely on descriptions of the setting and of the characters, and on the dialogues and monologues by the playwright in *TWO*. *TWO* like dramas do, holds up a mirror to life such that as citizens of life we cannot miss our self-semblances in the images that Cartwright so poignantly evokes. The paper concludes that Cartwright's *TWO* is predominated by the theme of love and appears primarily, to be a commentary on the relevance of age, obesity, infidelity, incompatibility, denunciation, abuse and death in consensual, as well as romantic relationships.

Keywords: Cartwright, *TWO*, love, analytical, setting, dialogues, monologues

1. Introduction

TWO, ostensibly is a peek into pub life or pub culture in the North of England but it essentially portrays life and certain of its complexities regarding which citizens of the world's many cultures can find parallels. Basically, *TWO* invites us to view life as you would a pub where you get all sorts coming and going.

In a pre-production note preceding the main text, Cartwright (1994) indicates how the action takes place over one night, in a pub, in the North of England. *TWO* is designed so that two people can play all the characters. The set consists of a pub bar, with all glasses, pumps, till, optics etc., being mimed as are the other people in the pub to whom the actors relate. There are also instances in the play where members of the audience may be directly related to, if it is appropriate to the production. The action should flow from one scene to the next without a break, therefore costumes should be minimal.

The pub Cartwright builds is owned by Landlord and Landlady. Of course, we could have had their names but the playwright gives none. Their titles of ownership are enough, suggestive of their relationship to this joint they own together. "We've been here bloody years. In fact we met outside this pub when we were kids, me and cow. Too young to get in, snotty conked, on tip toes peeking through the frosted windows. We had our first drink in here, we courted in here, we had our twenty first's in here, we had our wedding reception here, and now we own the bloody place" (Landlord speaking, p. 4). In the characters of Landlord and Landlady, owners of a popular pub frequented by mostly couples, we find two people who love each other deeply and yet for the past seven years, have been in the business of sweeping things under the carpet - never mind the professionalism with which they mind their pub business and the passion that goes with it.

It is always possible to theorize issues, to say much and implement little, prefer cynicism to pragmatism, so it would be easy to read *TWO* and dismissively label it as a nicely crafted piece of work and shelve it. However is it not pertinently significant that Cartwright takes us to a pub to take notice of the different shades of persons, especially couples who constitute the clientele of this obviously popular spot in possibly a small community where everybody in all probability knows everyone, yet everyone conveniently minds his or her own business?

Content and appeal wise, *TWO* is laden with adequate universality in theme, language, symbolism and characterization that actors who intend to bring the play to life on stage may pick up from and expand on in interpretation, delivery and performance. Most significantly, Cartwright is perhaps asking that we do not allow minutiae that we are prone to miss to escape our attention. From Landlady and Landlord through the other pairs and singles that patronize their business, he weaves an intricate tapestry of lives paradoxically both intertwined – because they are patrons at this same pub - yet remarkably disconnected somewhat. Calculatedly, Cartwright is not judgmental; he seems to be suggesting that we at least take a closer look.

2. Synopsis

It is seven years to the day since Landlord's and Landlady's then seven-year old son lost his life in an automobile accident. They have each kept mute over the incident for seven years. A cold (though palpable) war has been the result. The nicest things they throw at each other are insults, insinuations and other invectives. She believes he blames her for their son's death – she had been driving; he was not in the car. He is not sure who to blame. In a sense he blames himself. If he had been in the car, things might have been different, he reckons. The very issue they are not addressing confronts them with loud silence. When a visitor to the pub, Smelly Jimmy appears at the pub and wakes them up with his (unheard) question regarding their son's whereabouts, the smell of the past suddenly reeks in their mental and emotional nostrils.

Landlady drops a glass which breaks in shocked answer to Jimmy and says, “Don’t you know?” (p. 23). Apparently the questioner has no idea that their young son is deceased. Landlord, as he always has done for seven years pretends he is not interested and turns to attend to someone. For a moment all seems calm but as Landlady admits, “Bitter’s never off here dear. Never” (Landlady’s line, p. 24); possibly, she interprets her husband’s reaction as an exhibition of his bitterness towards her for getting their son killed. The tone however is set to end a near-decade cold war between an otherwise loving couple who hitherto have hidden behind a façade of spite, blame and guilt to smother their deep love for each other.

3. Theoretical Premise

In a preamble to his thesis entitled “An Analysis of the Objective-Subjective Elements in John Milton's Dramatic Poem *Samson Agonistes*, Kaluzsa (1947) shares that:

Objectivity, unity and a universality of appeal, which transcends time, nationality, and customs, constitute the foundation upon which all great literature has its origin. It is universal and objective in the sense that it portrays not the personal experience of one man, the poet, but the experiences of the human race. Despite established literary canons, however literature, or for that matter, any of the Fine Arts, being an outward manifestation of a man's inward reflections upon life and the world about him, cannot be entirely separated from the personal influence of its creator. It is woven from the experiences which the poet has in common with the human race. Hence, there is in literature also the personal and subjective element, more or less well defined. This objective-subjective materialization reveals itself in any artistic composition, whether it be the artistry of the writer, the painter, the musician, the sculptor, or the architect. (Kaluzsa, 1947, pp. 1 – 2).

Kaluzsa seems to be saying that the prime factor of objectivity in any work of art (plays included) is reposed in the keen connection these works of art commonly share being that life is the main resource base they all mine from. Beyond that there is mass room for subjective individual perspectives to be drawn or inferences made in the quest to appreciate a work of art. In apparent concurrence, Guthrie (1959) comments on subjectivity and write:

The meaning of any work of art is subjective. It is not what not what the author thinks it means. If the objective meaning of a work of art were known, there would be no point in its existence. It exists merely to suggest many ways in which an undefined truth may be approached. (Guthrie, 1959, p. 139).

Cohen (2000: p. 336) reinforces this line of thought and imputes that “Aesthetic judgments ... are necessarily comparative,... and subjective...” . To blend thought from Cohen and Guthrie, one must admit that one’s belief systems over time constitute conventions that a community succumbs to without question. In that regard Tyson (1999), holds a point when he asserts that “the interpretations of literature we produce before we study critical theory may seem personal or natural, but they are based on beliefs ... that permeate our culture and that we therefore take for granted” (p. 4). Consequently, I draw these character sketches from a similar standpoint. Jim Cartwright’s *TWO*, perhaps is a figment of his imagination informed probably by personal encounter, knowledge and experience. Personal experience reflects the flow of thoughts and meanings persons bring to their immediate situations / researchers study the stories people tell one another about the experiences they have had / these stories may be personal experience narratives or self-stories, accounts made up as the person goes along (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Therefore, I draw inferences from what he offers to me in his writing while bringing to it a measure of my own imagination and exposure in relation to the issues he addresses in the world he creates in *TWO*.

4. Character Sketches

Following are brief character sketches of the characters in *TWO* as they sequentially appear in the play, thereby capturing an essence of the play in its entirety.

4.1 Old Woman

Old Woman is the first focal point; she represents disillusionment with the responsibility of love. Of her, Landlord says “I can set the clock by this auld dear” (p. 5) testifying to her sense of precision and timing. She admits in her monologue that her man permits her to come to the pub at a certain time each day for her drink and to return to keep him company and take care of him. She has over the years - decades perhaps - savoured the privilege of love and now the coin’s flipped over. Although in the twilight of her life she bemoans her lot carrying her man up and down the stairs so he can puu and pee and she yearns for the butcher to “fetch his slaughtering kit” and “finish the job” (p. 6), you know that she will stick it out with her crippled man and “his poorly chicken arms” (p. 6). She will stick it out until the author and butcher of life himself raises his “cleavers” and relieves her of this responsibility of love, forever. With a tinge of tragic heroism, she declares “Get me a

Guinness. Stand me a drink. Fetch the butcher with his slaughtering kit; may I ask you all to raise your cleavers now please and finish the job, raise them for the bewildered and pig weary couples that have stuck, stuck it out. Thank you” (p. 6). There is a hint, perhaps of life’s seeming inevitable vicious cycle? – We are born, we live, we die; we are born we live, we die....

4.2 Moth and Maudie

The spotlight turns on Moth and Maudie; he is hollow but smooth talking; she comes across as a gullible lover. He spends her money because she lets him; she pays for his drinks. Her loyalty is admirable; his frivolity is incredible. Even with Maudie around he seeks out a lady who catches his fancy. Maudie knows he will always flit and flirt. He takes her tenacious love for granted. It is a love paradox. Finally, Moth in a crazy dance, probably to show off to other girls in the pub, yelps in pain indicating a lower spinal sprain or dislocation. Initially, Maudie suspects he feigns it to attract her usual sympathy; but this time the pain, apparently is real and excruciating. Ironically, if a back pain would help her keep him to herself it would be the preferable option. Moth and Maudie probably would be better off going their separate ways but whatever binds them, sticks fast – a chronic back pain you learn to live with?

4.3 Old Man

Next port of call is the Old Man. One could call him a dreamer; he is attached to his late wife in his dream life. That is all he appears to have left – his dreams. He must have been a die-hard romantic in his hey days. Something about him still smacks of romance. Landlady refers to him as a “lovely old bugger” (p. 15) and jokes that they could elope! In his monologue he reminisces about his late wife whom he must have adored intensely. He deludes himself with visits he claims he gets from his deceased wife. He eagerly anticipates joining her permanently on “the other side”. For Old Man, “life is just passing in and out” (p. 17). Could this be an expression or indication of love preserved?

4.4 Mr. and Mrs. Iger

Zoom in on Mr. and Mrs. Iger. She definitely prefers them big; “I love big men. Big, quiet, strong men. That’s all I want” (p. 19). Why does she then settle for this little one? It is apparent that she likes to be in control. The bigger men she in all probability truly desires would not let her be herself. With little, timid Mr. Iger, she pretty much has her way though not always. When she drives him to exploding point, he erupts and for a short-lived moment ‘little’ feels ‘big’; big enough to ask that they make love tonight; evidently she starves him of sex. At this point the positions revert to ‘normal’. Mrs. Iger coldly reminds him that she, not he, determines when who can even “sleep in the bed” (p.23). Love in bittersweet measures in this context is portrayed in coldly ironic overtones.

4.5 Roy and Lesley

Close up on Roy and Lesley. Their love does not seem to make sense. If love is supposed to make sense then Roy and Lesley’s kind comes across as insane. Here, love – if it may be referred to as such - rules by inducing fear (Roy) and love succumbs in (petrified) fear (Lesley). In most cases unless the law rips them apart, death for the likes of Lesley is inevitable. She may stand up to Roy occasionally but she is almost always ultimately cowered back and literally beaten back into subservience, like when he slaps her across the face for complaining that he tortures her (p. 32). She is not supposed to even cast a glance at another man and he accuses her of thinking of the male species in the quiet of her thoughts. Even when she has to go to the ladies as pregnant women would do more often than usual, he times her and judges that she stayed to chat with someone, most likely a man. Second after second he wants to know what and especially who she is thinking of. He is embarrassed at the attention she could draw to them when she explodes in exasperation and says “I can’t win. If I said I was thinking of every man in here naked, or I said I was thinking of you and the baby, it wouldn’t make any difference. You’d still find a way of torturing me wouldn’t you? Torturing! Torturing!” (p. 31). One suspects that Roy would take a table in a darkened corner of the pub away from everyone else. Disregard the fact that she carries their baby. The unborn child is as guilty as its mother! In Roy and Lesley, Cartwright captures the stark reality of the tragedy of love bound in insecurity; often presided over by a society sedated by apathy?

4.6 Fred and Alice

“We’re close in our way... We’ve been unlucky in life but luckyish in love...” (p. 38). This is how middle-aged couple Fred and Alice sum-up their relationship. Theirs is a love with a dry sense of humour. Fred has been true to Alice though she has been in and out of a sanatorium. There is a kind of sublime simplicity about their love that binds them intimately together. Their each being obese is only reminiscent or symbolic of their love largesse towards each other. In Fred and Alice, love appears very much uncomplicated.

4.7 *A Woman*

'A Woman' (p. 39) is the accolade Cartwright accords this one. She claims she hasn't come "incognito" to the pub; here to find the married man she is having a fling with. Obviously, she is tired of playing the mistress, the other woman, an afterthought; tonight, he (whoever) must choose between her and his wife. She wants him total or not at all. When it comes to it, she dare not come out of the shadows to face him and he leaves the pub in the company of his wife. It is symbolically significant that this Woman drops her scarf as she chases after the couple. That is what she will probably always be: a chaser of other women's men who goes dropping her values about?

4.8 *Boy*

A little boy saunters in crying and looking for his father (p. 41). Though it isn't stated it is likely Cartwright is thinking the age of Landlady and Landlord's son who died seven years before. This little boy's entry starts to crack the long frozen hard ice that has stood between Landlord and Landlady. The mother in Landlady quickly comes to the fore and we see her vulnerable, sentimental side as she consoles the boy until the lad's father comes to get him. The almost divinely orchestrated entry of the little lad must have gotten to Landlord too and even though he complains about "kids in here" (p. 42), the ice is thawing and they both know it. In an emotional climax we see these two, whose lives since infancy have been built around and inside this pub, bare their very souls to each other again after seven heart-wrenching years of unspoken hurt and nagging numbing pain, camouflaged in vituperative they hurl at each other. As owners and managers of a pub joint that claims to be "strong on couples" (Landlord's line, p.4), they have been long-term witnesses to the tenacious nature of love in its puzzling shades and hues. The water was bound to break. When Landlord suggests that their late son's photograph be brought and displayed in the pub, the healing process has begun. Their ultimate expression of love for each other is in order. The lights in the pub are turned off to signal the close of business for the day, yet the "I love you" and the refrain "I love you too" (p. 49) spoken in the dark is so done in anticipation of the brighter light of a new dawn that already is breaking.

5. Conclusion

One must remember that the foregoing characters are all visiting the pub in one evening period. The reader or audience is the 'camera's eye' picking the actions and reactions of the characters in this *mise-en-scène*. Deftly, Cartwright weaves a tapestry of drama that is profound in its array of the characters whose stories help to shore up the main story-focus on Landlord and Landlady. Old Woman and Old Man reveal the challenges of strength-weakening age and love-separating death in that respective order. But they also typify the courage that results from a decisive commitment to face up to these setbacks. Moth and Maudie symbolize love taking undue advantage of love and paying a dear price in the process. Don't Mr. and Mrs. Iger suggest conflict borne of mismatched choices or is it lovefailing to make room for compromise? Roy and Lesley's is an SOS cry for attention before catastrophe strikes; a culprit-victim paradox of magnetized attraction? Fred and Alice, the 'A Woman', Boy; they each and all make their way to this pub owned by Landlord and Landlady who, business-like, reach out to all yet are saddled with nightmares of their own. They serve drinks to most who momentarily douse their bewilderments in alcohol's tranquillizing power.

Though Cartwright does not categorically say so –yet the explicit enough portraits on his canvas - the pedagogical essence that underlies this work of art is unmistakably prevalent. A subtle yet overt invitation to offer your perspective; you as audience, are left to pick your way and make of it what you must. Indeed Cartwright's *TWO*, courtesy the line-up of all who visit the pub, symbolically parade the phases of love the main characters Landlady and Landlord go through: love disillusioned, love preserved, love denied, love in bittersweet measures, love-in-confusion, love uncomplicated, love rediscovered.

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