



THE PINTERESQUE ELEMENTS IN KAZUO ISHIGURO'S "A FAMILY SUPPER"

KAZUO ISHIGURO'NUN "BİR AİLE YEMEĞİ" BAŞLIKLİ ÖYKÜSÜNDE PİNERESK ÖĞELER

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Abstract

The purpose of this article is to examine the Pinteresque elements in Kazuo Ishiguro's short story titled "A Family Supper" (1982). The emphasis will be on the implications of the Pinteresque as a mood, because today the word is not only a theatrical term but also an adjective in the Online Oxford English Dictionary. As a theatrical term, the Pinteresque can plainly be explained as a set of features which recur in Harold Pinter's plays. Namely, ambiguity of the human condition, uncertainty of the past, use of evasive language, and halting dialogues that are filled with silences and pauses constitute what came to be known as the Pinteresque. The overall feeling in a Pinteresque atmosphere is very tense, strained, and precarious. Additionally, as an adjective, the Pinteresque can perfectly portray such precarious moments in the everyday life of human beings. That is, just as a play or a movie can be Pinteresque, so can a moment in human life. In short, this article treats the term the Pinteresque as an adjective and argues that implicit feeling of menace, ambiguity of the past, present and future, unspoken conflicts and wounds, triviality of the conversation, use of evasive language and frequent silences in Kazuo Ishiguro's "A Family Supper" create a Pinteresque atmosphere.

Öz

Bu makalenin amacı, Kazuo Ishiguro'nun "Bir Aile Yemeği" (1982) başlıklı öyküsündeki Pinteresk öğeleri incelemektir. Bugün sadece bir tiyatro terimi değil aynı zamanda Oxford Çevrimiçi İngilizce Sözlüğü'nde bir sıfat olarak da yerini alan Pinteresk kelimesinin anıstırdıkları makalenin ana eksenini oluşturur. Bir tiyatro terimi olarak, Pinteresk, en basit şekliyle, Harold Pinter oyunlarında tekerrür eden bir dizi ayırt edici özellik olarak açıklanabilir. Şöyle ki, insanın belirsizliklerle dolu kimi halleri, geçmişin muğlaklığı, kaçamaklı, örtük bir dil kullanımı, sessizlik ve duraklamalarla dolu diyaloglar Pinteresk olarak bilinen durumu oluşturur. Pinteresk ambiyans genel olarak oldukça gergin ve tekinsizdir. Ayrıca, bir sıfat olarak, Pinteresk insanların gündelik hayatındaki bu tür tekinsiz ve muğlak anları son derece iyi bir şekilde tasvir edebilir. Yani, bir tiyatro oyunu ya da bir film Pinteresk olabildiği gibi, insan hayatındaki bir an da olabilir. Kısaca, bu makale, Pinteresk ifadesini bir sıfat olarak ele alır ve Kazuo Ishiguro'nun "Bir Aile Yemeği" başlıklı öyküsündeki belli belirsiz korku halinin, geçmiş, bugün ve geleceğin muğlaklığının, dillendirilmeyen aile içi çatışmalar ve yaraların, sıradan diyaloglar ve kaçamaklı dil kullanımının, sessizlik ve duraksamaların Pinteresk bir ambiyans yarattığını ileri sürer.

This article aims to trace the Pinteresque atmosphere in Kazuo Ishiguro's succinct, but very intense short story titled "A Family Supper" (1982). The article does not intend to locate Kazuo Ishiguro's work in a specific stylistic category, but rather argues that implicit feeling of tension and menace, obscurity of the past, present and future, triviality of conversation, use of evasive language and frequent silences in "A Family Supper" evoke what came to be known as 'the Pinteresque.' The focus of the article will be on the term 'the Pinteresque' rather than the plays of Harold Pinter. Therefore, no textual references to specific Pinter plays will be offered

for purposes of comparison. To this end, after briefly explaining “the Pinteresque” both as a theatrical term and an adjective, the article will offer a close reading of Kazuo Ishiguro’s “A Family Supper” to reveal the Pinteresque atmosphere in the story.

In the simplest way, the Pinteresque can be defined as a set of recognizable features reminiscent of a Pinter work. It is characterized by interrupted dialogues, lack of communication, frequent silences, subtlety of meaning, uncertainty of past and present, and feeling of a tense atmosphere. Conflicting situations can be felt but never end in confrontation among characters and a final resolution. Such features may evoke the absurdism in drama. This is no coincidence, because, by many, Harold Pinter has been discussed in the line of the absurd, which is understandable especially when the influence of Samuel Beckett on his early works is considered. Also, Martin Esslin discusses Harold Pinter along with notable absurdists such as Samuel Beckett, Arthur Adamov, Eugène Ionesco, and Jean Genet in his much referred to book *The Theatre of the Absurd* (1961, 2001). Although there are features of the absurd theatre in the works of Harold Pinter, categorizing his works is paradoxically both easy and difficult. For instance, even though feeling of entrapment and menace, dysfunctional dialogue filled with silences and pauses, blurring of meaning, characters finding themselves in ambiguous situations may allude to features of the absurd theatre, in time, Pinter reached a point where his very style became the only reference point to describe some specific features peculiar to his plays alone. For example, no one will object to a statement which plainly goes like ‘Beckett is an absurdist,’ ‘Sartre is an existentialist’; yet even though having both the absurd and existential touch, Pinter is simply just Pinter.

In a word, Harold Pinter resists categorizations and stands on his own: “*He was Pinter from the beginning. As a nameless dramatist once said: I feel sorry for Harold. Other people can choose between comedy and tragedy, Pinter always has to write a Pinter play*” (Hall qtd. in Zarhy-Levo 161). Defining unique features of his works required a need to pay attention to some recurring patterns in the plays. Those are the very patterns which make his works recognizable and create terms which contribute to dramaturgical vocabulary: “*Critics, reviewers and academics constructed a vocabulary to help us deal with the elusive quality in Pinter: Pinteresque, the Pinter pause, comedy of menace*” (Raby 2). It should be noted at this

point that especially the Pinteresque, the focal point of this paper, is not just a theatrical term, so it requires a zoom in as an adjective, too.

It would not be wrong to say that the term is indeed more than a theatrical signifier. It is even placed in the *Online Oxford English Dictionary* as an adjective: “Pinteresque: Of, pertaining to, or characteristic of the British playwright Harold Pinter or his works. Marked especially by halting dialogue, uncertainty of identity, and air of menace” (“Pinteresque”). When referred to as a literary term addressing, say, for example, a movie, play, novel, or short story, the Pinteresque indicates a feeling of subtle, implicit tension, use of ambiguous sometimes even deceptive language, ambiguity of situations, frequent and intentional usage of silences and pauses. Additionally, as an adjective, the term can perfectly describe various moments in everyday life of everyman, when one feels intimidated and uneasy because of reasons difficult to reveal and thus falls into silence. Also, it can very well reflect a moment when what is real and unreal is blurred, past is misty, and memory is misleading and elusive. Simply, just as a play or a movie can be Pinteresque stylistically, so can a moment in everyday life, which is what makes the term a beautiful adjective embracing a variety of human conditions. Kazuo Ishiguro’s “A Family Supper” is one very touching story which is full off such Pinteresque moments.

Before offering a detailed reading of “A Family Supper” in the light of the Pinteresque, it can be helpful to give some brief information about the overall atmosphere in the story. As Brian W. Schaffer rightly puts it, “[m]ore a vignette than a story, ‘A Family Supper’ is Chekhovian in its economy, subtlety, and power” (10). This is a very to-the-point analogy because the story is extremely brief, very powerful and even though it does not have a high-tension plot, it is a page turner because the ambiguous situations, overall uncertainty, and expectation of a possible confrontation scene among the characters or at least a self-revelation make one curious about what is really going on in the story. However, nothing really happens to say the least, and the closing of the story is very sudden. This reading experience can also be true for other works of Kazuo Ishiguro because implicit and subtlety can be considered as two defining features of Ishiguro narratives.

Starting from his first appearance as a novelist, Kazuo Ishiguro is likened to many different acclaimed writers by different critics and readers. Such comparisons gave the author a chance to comment on his own work and writing style. At one time, he himself refers to implicit and subtle nature of his narratives, both of which

are very related to the Pinteresque. In an interview with Allan Vorda and Kim Herzinger, he was asked:

[B]y now in Britain there is a rather large and active community of extremely important and active writers who come from, or often write about, cultures quite different from the English, Irish, Scots, and Welsh. I'm thinking of V. S. Naipaul, Salman Rushdie, William Boyd, Doris Lessing, Ruth Praver Jhabvala, and even transplanted Americans like Paul Therous, David Plante, and Russell Hoban. Do you find yourself grouped with them often? (135).

Ishiguro refuses to be grouped with what he considers an “*eclectic*” (135) group of writers, and he instead says: “*I respect Rushdie’s writing enormously, but as a writer I think I’m almost the antithesis. The language I use tends to be the sort that actually suppresses meaning and tries to hide away meaning rather than chase after something*” (135-136). Ishiguro’s own wording about his writing style backs up the argument about his narratives being implicit, subtle, and thus full of ambiguities. What is more, this very much evokes the Pinteresque language, which is elusive, evasive, and subtle. It hides meaning in ellipsis, silences and pauses. It is so obscure that it intentionally veils what would otherwise be a climactic moment or perhaps a revelation in a narrative. “A Family Supper” exemplifies such use of language that hides away meaning because the story is full of ambiguities, obscurities, unvoiced feelings and thoughts.

Briefly, “A Family Supper” pictures a family reunion when an unnamed son, also the narrator, comes back home from the States. He is welcomed by his father and sister, but one can feel that feelings of detachment, resentment, and heartbreak are at the crux of the narrative. They are not openly stated because the story does not have a confrontation scene. Everyone keeps talking about mundane things to avoid serious family issues that happened in the past. No one in the story openly talks about past and/or present feelings. Still, one can feel the presence of serious issues among the family members as hints are given here and there but nothing is referred to openly. Also, the dialogues never lead to a revelation. On the contrary, halting, or divergent dialogue veils past and present realities surrounding the lives of family members. The story is narrated in the first person, but nowhere in the story does the narrator make a self-revelation either. There are no inner soliloquys and no contemplations. Thus, the story is mostly about what is unsaid rather than a seemingly typical family gathering. Shortly, such narrative features

make the story difficult to summarize but they certainly point to what the Pinteresque alludes to.

Perhaps the only startling part of the story is the opening paragraph. "A Family Supper" opens with a shocking anecdote about the fugu fish, a deadly poisonous Japanese delicacy, which may have fatal consequences if not prepared carefully and attentively. What makes such an opening forceful and intriguing is that information about the fugu fish is intertwined with a devastating personal experience, the death of the narrator's mother:

Fugu is a fish caught off the Pacific shores of Japan. The fish has held a special significance for me ever since my mother died after eating one. The poison resides in the sex glands of the fish, inside two fragile bags. These bags must be removed with caution when preparing the fish, for any clumsiness will result in the poison leaking into the veins. Regrettably, it is not easy to tell whether or not this operation has been carried out successfully. The proof is, as it were, in the eating. (454).

As mentioned earlier, offering a detailed summary is difficult simply because not much happens. "A Family Supper" is full of trivial conversations among the narrator, his father, and his sister, Kikuko. The father is retired from his job after his business collapsed, and he is trying to cope with loneliness, alienation, and parental remorse. He repeatedly invites his son to come live with him, but never gets a clear answer. It seems that the narrator and his father are introvert characters, but the sister sounds livelier, and she is the only one in the story who is at least making plans about the future. On the contrary, the narrator is not sure about what his plans are, he thus avoids talking about the future. In the same way, he rarely talks about the past and never reveals the events that lead to the family's current situation. It is evident that their past is full of regrettable memories caused apparently by parent-child conflicts. Though nothing is crystal clear, this can be understood when, at a later moment in the story the father says: "*You don't see how it is for some parents. Not only must they lose their children, they must lose them to things they don't understand*" (457). This moment in the story serves not only as a kind of cryptic confession but it also reveals how detached and disconnected the father and the son are. It is apparent that they have never understood each other's feelings and thoughts, which is why the father cannot make sense of why his son is distant and perhaps even totally indifferent. "A Family Supper" finishes rather abruptly, leaving readers perplexed and wondering whether they have read an

incomplete version of the story. Even though it is very short and nothing exciting really happens plot-wise, “A Family Supper” is very intense and full of feelings of unexplained tension and menace, just like a Pinter text.

From the beginning of the story, it can be felt that tension among the family members has roots in the past events. Yet, because no one openly talks about what exactly happened in the past, the reader has no idea about the source of the conflict. This evokes Pinter’s style because past events and memories are generally veiled in his works, too. When hints are given about memories, they are by no means reliable. This can very much be related to the narrow boundary between reality and unreality. Harold Pinter refers to this very idea in the opening part of his Nobel Lecture “Art, Truth & Politics” with a reference to an old writing by himself: *“there can be no hard distinctions between what is real and what is unreal, not between what is true and what is false. A thing is not necessarily either true or false; it can be both true or false”* (n.p.). As he himself makes it clear, obscurity of reality is an important marker of Pinter texts as well as of the Pinteresque. That is, Harold Pinter *“blurs the line between the past and the present and displays the past as it is perceived by his characters in the present. Therefore, for Pinter, past experiences shape the present situations of characters”* (Bal 56). This is very true for “A Family Supper” too, because there are inklings that the narrator was going through hard times with his parents and left home most probably due to familial and parental conflicts. Thus, whatever happened in the past has influence on how he behaves when he is back home. Even though the story is told from the voice and perspective of the son, he never discloses his past experiences, and he avoids talking about what he thinks. Rebecca L. Walkowitz rightly states that *“readers learn through dialogue ...not through narration”* in “A Family Supper” (1060). Paradoxically, the Pinteresque nature of the dialogues does not allow explicit revelations but rather scatters cryptic hints for readers to make their own inferences. For instance, from the following dialogue between the narrator and his sister, it can be inferred that parental conflicts, misunderstandings, and a lack of communication caused whatever happened between the narrator and his parents, though nothing is openly stated:

‘Mother never really blamed you, you know,’ she said, in a new voice. I remained silent. ‘She always used to say to me how it was their fault, hers and Father’s, for not bringing you up correctly. She used to tell me how much more careful they’d been with me, and that’s

why I was so good.’ She looked up and the mischievous grin had returned to her face. ‘Poor Mother,’ she said.

‘Yes. Poor Mother.’

‘Are you going back to California?’ (456).

As is evident, important issues from the past have been evaded by changing the subject suddenly. Kikuko starts talking about what their late mother was thinking about their children, but the conversation does not flow to generate a confrontation or an emotional revelation which would have led to a resolution. Though nothing is disclosed or finalized, a sort of subtle tension is always present between the lines.

What create feelings of tension and menace most in the story are the dialogues about death and suicide. As told earlier, the opening paragraph reveals the death of mother after eating fugu fish at a friend’s house. As a matter of fact, there are ambiguities surrounding her death because whether she committed suicide or gambled with death -to say the least- is not clear. This is because she is not the one who prepared the fugu fish for dinner, so it is impossible to claim that she wanted to kill herself with deliberate fugu poisoning. The narrator was in the States when he lost his mother, and he says that his “*relationship with [his] parents had become somewhat strained around that period and consequently [he] did not learn the circumstances of her death until [he] returned to Tokyo two years later*” (454). But still, he remembers that his mother “*had always refused to eat fugu, but on this particular occasion she had made an exception, having been invited to an old school friend whom she was anxious not to offend*” (454). That at one exceptional time she ate fugu and died immediately after makes her death suspicious in the eyes of the father. Whether she wanted to end her life or died accidentally is of course difficult to tell for sure. No one in the story is sure what her intentions really were but the father talks about it openly, albeit very briefly: “*I hadn’t meant to tell you this, but perhaps it’s best that I do. It’s my belief that your mother’s death was no accident. She had many worries. And some disappointments*” (457). This cannot be counted as a confession because he simply tells what he *believes* rather than what he *knows*. It is very Pinteresque that uncertainty prevails even about the most significant event in the story: the death of the mother. What is more, they never refer to what her worries and disappointments were. Instead, they start talking about plastic model of battleship that the father was in the process of making. This not only shows the evasiveness of language used in the story, but also evokes the Pinteresque language which fails revelation of emotions, communication, and

mutual understanding: “Pinter employs language to describe the failure of language; he details in forms abundant the poverty of man’s communication; he assembles words to remind us that we live in the space between words” (Hollis 13). That space is never filled in, it is invisible as the main source of ambiguities.

Such atmosphere can be felt almost all the time in “A Family Supper”, because characters always tend to diverge from the crux of the conversation. The setting also backs up those subject-changing maneuvers because whenever characters find themselves engaging in a serious dialogue about what happened in the past, they are indeed dealing with trivial stuff. In this specific example for instance, the father and son were in a room where the father was just killing time after his business collapsed. So, basically, the father starts talking about his remorse for having been a busy father and about more serious issues like what he really thinks about the mother’s death when they were just passing time until the dinner is ready. Serious family matters were interspersed within what indeed sounds like small talk, and they are not elaborated on. This is done intentionally to make dialogue elusive and blur the past, which is apparently full of severe conflicts among the family members. However, no one wants to confront the other in terms of memories and familial discord, which is why the reader has no idea about past conflicts:

These conflicts are what the characters do not talk about: the father does not want to consider the future; the narrator is reluctant to reopen prior disagreements; the sister has not told her father about her thoughts of leaving Japan. What the family does talk about, in implicit and explicit terms, is suicide: for while the mother may have died by accident, the father's business partner, we learn from the narrator's sister. (Walkowitz 1059).

It is worthy of note that the first time Watanabe appeared in the story is when the father and the narrator were on their way from the airport to home. This is their first encounter after what seems like a long period of time:

‘I’m sorry to hear about the firm,’ I said when neither of us had spoken for some time. He nodded gravely.

‘In fact, the story didn’t end there,’ he said. ‘After the firm’s collapse, Watanabe killed himself. He didn’t wish to live with the disgrace.’ (454).

They do not talk much about Watanabe; the father does not give further details about his death but speaks highly of him as a proud “*man of principle and honor*” (454). Watanabe was the father’s business partner and when the business collapsed, he “*didn’t want to live with the disgrace*” as he prefers to put it (454). It should be noted here that the father says he respects Watanabe a lot. This sounds very strange after the truth about Watanabe’s death is revealed when the narrator is talking with his sister Kikuko before the dinner:

‘Did he tell you about old Watanabe? What he did?’

‘I heard he committed suicide.’

‘Well, that wasn’t all. He took his whole family with him. His wife and his two little girls.’

‘Oh, yes?’

‘Those two beautiful little girls. He turned on the gas while they were all asleep. Then he cut his stomach with a meat knife.’

‘Yes, Father was just telling me how Watanabe was a man of principle.’

‘Sick.’ My sister turned back to the well. (456).

This is another intriguing part, which remains somewhat inconclusive because the father later denies that Watanabe killed his family on purpose. What is interesting here is that Watanabe’s suicide evokes ‘seppuku’ (a.k.a hara-kiri) though he uses just a meat knife and not a sword. Although the word seppuku is not used in the story, that can be the right word to define Watanabe’s death because his suicide was a kind of honor self-killing after the business was ruined. What is unclear about Watanabe’s death is whether he killed his whole family or not. The narrator briefly touches on Watanabe’s story again during the dinner, probably to check what his father really thinks about it:

For a while we sat in silence.

‘Father,’ I said, finally.

‘Yes?’

‘Kikuko tells me Watanabe-san took his whole family with him.’

My father lowered his eyes and nodded. For some moments he seemed deep in thought. ‘Watanabe was very devoted to his work,’ he

said at last. ‘The collapse of the firm was a great blow to him. I fear it must have weakened his judgment.’

‘You think what he did ...it was a mistake?’

‘Why, of course. Do you see it otherwise?’

‘No, no. Of course not.’

‘There are other things beside work,’ my father said.

‘Yes.’

We fell silent again. (459).

This is only one ambiguity in the story, which is never made clear. Here, what is more important than their perspectives about Watanabe’s suicide and his killing of the whole family is that the conversation about him started and ended in silences. As a matter of fact, many moments in “A Family Supper” are backed up with silences, one of the very significant Pinteresque devices. Harold Pinter himself defines silences in his “Writing for the Theatre:” *“There are two silences. One when no word is spoken. The other when perhaps a torrent of language is being employed. This speech is speaking of a language locked beneath it”* (579). The very first type of silence is abundant in “A Family Supper” especially when the economy of language is considered. To be exact, one sentence from the story which would summarize the whole dinner scene would be *“[t]he three of us ate in silence”* (459). That silence prevails the family supper is repeated with alternative wording in different parts of the story (456, 458, 459). This may indicate detachment, lack of communication, and emotional wounds as *“silence between two individuals can also wound, can cut as deeply as words”* (Jensen 251). Apparently, they do not know what to talk about or how to be engaged in a meaningful, connecting conversation. The most striking and touching example to detachment and disconnection is when the late mother’s presence is felt in the story again, this time on a photo frame:

‘Who is that? In that photograph there?’

‘Which photograph?’ My father turned slightly, trying to follow my gaze.

‘The lowest one. The old woman in the white kimono.’

My father put down his chopsticks. He looked first in the photograph, then at me.

‘Your mother.’ His voice had become very hard. ‘Can’t you recognize your own mother?’

‘My mother. You see, it’s dark. I can’t see it well.’

No one spoke for a few seconds, the Kikuko rose to her feet. She took the photograph down from the wall, came back to the table, and gave it to me.

‘She looks a lot older,’ I said.

‘It was taken shortly before her death,’ said my father.

‘It was dark. I couldn’t see very well.’ (458).

This scene seems very Pinteresque because no one further comments on this strange moment. Even though there are important things to talk about, everyone delays or perhaps intentionally avoids bringing them up. Thus, it is felt that the gist of the plot in “A Family Supper” is derived from what is unspoken rather than spoken. This too is clearly a marker of the Pinteresque because the unspoken is at the crux of Pinter plays. Also, his plays are full of halting dialogues interrupted by deliberate silences and pauses: *“the infamous pauses, excruciating silences, and the pro-clivity for tableaux are instances of delay when the forward motion of events is held and something unspoken happens. Such silences create atmosphere and mood ...may indicate something about character”* (Rayner 482). Silences create a subtle tense atmosphere in “A Family Supper” too, because one may expect to see a confrontation scene and perhaps a resolution. Instead, readers only find divergent or halting dialogues and silences, especially at riveting moments. Although they are not as graphic as an external conflict, deliberate silences have the potential to create a high-tension atmosphere because one never knows what would come after a silent moment. Silences do not mean that characters in a narrative do not have anything to say. Instead, as in Pinter plays as well as in “A Family Supper” *“[s]ilence can communicate scorn, hostility, coldness, defiance, sternness, and hate; but it can also communicate respect, kindness, and acceptance”* (Jensen 252). In Ishiguro’s “A Family Supper,” silences communicate coldness, detachment, regret and perhaps acceptance of the past.

That the story is full of ambiguities also evokes a Pinteresque atmosphere. That is, nothing is clear, and no resolutions are given in the text. For example, what happened in the past, why the narrator left home, how long he stayed apart from his family, why he is back, whether he will stay or not are all unknown. The father repeatedly asks if he will stay longer but cannot get a clear answer:

'I'm glad in any case you've decided to come back," my father said. "More than a short visit, I hope.'

'I'm not sure what my plans will be.'

'I, for one, am prepared to forget the past. Your mother, too, was always ready to welcome you back—upset as she was by your behavior.'

'I appreciate your sympathy. As I say, I'm not sure what my plans are.'

'I've come to believe now that there were no evil intentions in your mind,' my father continued. 'You were swayed by certain ...influences. Like so many others.' (455).

Apparently, the father is remorseful and lonely after the death of his wife but his relationship with his son seems very distant and cold. Additionally, the death of the mother is very obscure, too. As it is mentioned briefly earlier, the father thinks that her death was not a coincidental fugu poisoning. He believes that she committed suicide because she was in pain and full of disappointments. However, it is difficult to tell exactly what caused her death. Again, she was simply invited to a dinner at a friends' house, where she ate fugu. Some other people who also had fugu that night must have died due to poisoning. Yet, no details are given about the mother's death or what happened to the other guests. Therefore, it is impossible to make a definite conclusion and the father's feelings about her death may be considered as a reflection of his inner thoughts. When his thoughts about Watanabe's and his wife's deaths are considered, it is highly likely that he sees suicide as the only solution to end a human ordeal. More important and intriguing than all these, whether the family eats fugu or not for dinner is the biggest ambiguity in "A Family Supper". They have fish for dinner but what fish they eat is a puzzle. This is interesting because the story has a brief and very interesting opening part about fugu fish and poisoning, which is later linked to the mother's death or her suicide. Moreover, the Watanabe narrative is tempting readers to think that a similar thing, the dying of the whole family, may recur. However, the ending is very sudden, and it is impossible to make an inference:

For some time my father seemed to be studying the back of his hands. Then he looked up and sighed.

'Kikuko is due to complete her studies next spring,' he said. 'Perhaps she will want to come home then. She is a good girl.'

'Perhaps she will.'

'Things will improve then.'

'Yes, I'm sure they will.'

We fell silent once more, waiting for Kikuko to bring the tea. (459).

To conclude, as the story closes, abruptness, ambiguity, and inconclusiveness can clearly be seen as Pinteresque elements. That is because whether the whole family ate fugu as an attempt to mass suicide remains as an implied possibility. This evokes what As Bernard F. Dukore states for Harold Pinter: "*Apart from the unknown and the known ...there is the partly known: what is hinted but unverified*" (8). In the same vein, in addition to the veiling of emotions, thoughts, and events, "the hinted" also dominates the overall atmosphere in Kazuo Ishiguro's "A Family Supper" as the story plainly ends in silence. Even in the last sentence, the implicit feeling of menace can be felt because whether they will fall in eternal silence or not is impossible to tell. Still, the possibility of a mass suicide or perhaps murder is hard to avoid because themes of death and suicide prevail throughout the whole text. All in all, the story is full of ambiguities, past, present and future are blurred, the characters hide their feelings and thoughts, the dialogues are short, divergent and full of silences, and finally, no conclusive ending is offered. No one will object that all these can perfectly be used as Pinteresque keywords. As the close reading of Kazuo Ishiguro's "A Family Supper" as an example of a Pinteresque narrative reveals, the Pinteresque should be considered more than a theatrical term. This is because, now an adjective in the *Online Oxford English Dictionary*, the term can perfectly be used to describe a human condition or a precarious atmosphere. "A Family Supper" is full of Pinteresque markers as one reads it to see nothing but a disconnected family with unspoken wounds, broken dialogues, silent moments, veiled feelings, and ambiguities.

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Summary

This article offers a reading of Kazuo Ishiguro's short story titled "A Family Supper" (1982) in the light of the term Pinteresque. Derived from recurring stylistic patterns of the plays of Harold Pinter, the Pinteresque embraces a set of features and patterns such as ambiguity of human conditions, uncertainty of past, present and future, feeling of menace, use of subtle, evasive language, and halting dialogues that are filled with silences and pauses. The article argues that the term Pinteresque moved beyond being merely a theatrical signifier after having been

placed in the *Online Oxford English Dictionary* as an adjective. That is to say, the Pinteresque can very well portray some moments in everyday life of everyman, especially when one feels tense and uncomfortable due to reasons that are at the very most implied, if not completely concealed. Kazuo Ishiguro's "A Family Supper" is a perfectly apt example portraying such Pinteresque patterns.

"A Family Supper" is a very succinct short story, which is difficult to summarize simply because not much happens in the story. Simply, it portrays a family reunion following the homecoming of an unnamed son (also the narrator). He returns home from the States, but no information is given as to why he left home in the first place, why he is back, what he will do in the future. His father and sister welcome him, and they seem happy to see him around. Still, even though no antagonism is openly felt among family members, one can sense that they are indeed very detached from each other. Also, feelings of resentment, heartbreak and unspoken wounds can be felt even though no one talks about what caused such negative feelings. That is why, the story does not contain a confrontation scene. Instead, everyone keeps talking about trivial things to avoid getting into serious family issues. Feelings are only implicitly revealed and no outlet for real thoughts and emotions is offered. Hints of past traumas, struggles, conflicts, and resentments can be traced here and there in the text, yet no exposure follows up. The story is full of trivial dialogues, which at times briefly zoom in critical past events but never lead to a confrontation or self-revelation. On the contrary, intentional silences prevail throughout the story. Also, halting, or divergent dialogues conceal what happened in the past. This is important to note because present realities surrounding the lives of family members have apparently been shaped by past experiences. All in all, "A Family Supper" is mostly about veiled realities of a small family rather than an ordinary homecoming of the main character or a seemingly typical family reunion. In short, all these narrative features make the story a difficult one to summarize; but they certainly point to what the Pinteresque alludes to.

It would not be too much to claim that the feelings of menace, threat and precarity stem mainly from the way the themes of death and suicide have been treated in the story. "A Family Supper" opens with an intriguing description of fugu fish and fatal consequences of fugu poisoning. The opening paragraph reveals the cause of death of the narrator's late mother but whether it was an accidental fugu poisoning or a suicide attempt is impossible to tell for sure. In the same way, the

story has a very sudden and inconclusive ending. The family has fish for supper, but again, whether they eat fugu or not is not clear. The story of Watanabe, the late business partner of the narrator's father, gives the impression that mass death of the whole family is a possibility especially if they have fugu for supper. Watanabe's murder of his whole family and his suicide may be thought of as an implicit foreshadowing for a similar ending. Yet, the story ends abruptly as the family falls silent once again while waiting for post-supper tea. So, one cannot tell what really happened to the family.

This article claims that such inconclusiveness of critical moments, especially the opening and the ending, as well as the subtlety and implicitness of the whole narrative create a Pinteresque atmosphere. The story is full of ambiguities and cryptic moments. Even though a confrontation scene is most of the time expected at such times, Pinteresque moments prevent the emergence of a high-tension climax. This is exactly so in "A Family Supper" as everyone delays or perhaps intentionally avoids going deeper into significant past events, present feelings, and future plans. It is such intentional avoidance which creates an ambiguous atmosphere in the story. The use of Pinteresque language is perhaps the most important factor in engendering this ambiguity and inconclusiveness. This is because the language used is utterly elusive, evasive and subtle. It always intends to hide the crux of the matter through interruptions, digressions, silences and pauses. All in all, Kazuo Ishiguro's "A Family Supper" is full of distinctive Pinteresque narrative markers as one reads it to see nothing but a detached family with unspoken traumas, broken dialogues, silent moments, concealed feelings, and obscurities.