CHAPTER FOUR

STRUGGLE BETWEEN INDIVIDUAL AND THE STATE

Pinter in his early plays has never been explicitly political or a self proclaimed propagandist. But his early plays bear the seed of his political inclinations where he silently denounces the political state machinery that always chokes the lives of common people. His early plays like *The Birthday Party*, *The Dumb Waiter* and *The Hothouse* bear the stamp of his silent protest against the state machinery used for the suppression of the individual’s existence and freedom. Pinter, in fact, much before starting his career as a playwright, registered his protest against the state agenda by refusing to enlist in the compulsory military training. His action cost him monetary fine in the court but he refused to join the training during his trial in the court. But he is not a political playwright like his contemporaries in the 1950s and 1960s. His plays from the very beginning only indicate his resent against the state machinery.

The horror of the Second World War and the shrewdness of the political and state leaders in making a scapegoat of the common people in the trenches of the battle field make Pinter realize the futility of any political association as well as its oppressive nature. From the very beginning of the twentieth century, the existence and freedom of the individual has become a focus of philosophical discussion. Pinter keeps himself aloof from such discussion but his resentment for this loss of the individual’s freedom in the hand of repressive state machinery lingers in his mind. The era of 1950s and 1960s in Europe is politically unstable, restless and full of turmoil that affects the life of common people as this political upheaval in Europe demanded the growing involvement of mass. On the other hand people became more concerned about their own rights and freedom for which they raised their voice in different
countries simultaneously. This resulted in a direct conflict between individual and state. In any country, when the state apparatus includes more and more innovative techniques to govern and oppress the individual’s life, common people become more and more aware of their own freedom and right.

Pinter in his early plays remains silent but implicitly shows the impact of this direct conflict in an individual’s life when he fails to meet the growing demands of the state. He shows how an ordinary man’s existence may be endangered in a situation where he fails to conform to the state code which means giving up one’s own freedom in the hands of the state apparatus. Pinter never declares this in his early plays directly but garbs it in a social realism starkly different from that of Osborne or Wesker who openly deal with these political issues in their writings and denounce the state’s complicity in destroying the individual’s existence and freedom.

The change came in 1980s after a brief period of break in his writing. When Pinter returns to writing plays, he touches those themes which he has left in a sprouting condition in his earlier plays. This can be termed as Pinter’s second phase which marks a new beginning. During this time Pinter openly comes up with the political issues dealing with the suppression and oppression of common people, artists, intellectuals and above all the individual’s existence in a society. His plays become a mouthpiece against the colonial attitude of the state machinery that demands a complete surrender of self from the individual. Pinter not only openly denounces the state machinery but also shows the functioning of the state apparatus used for the oppression of individual who fails to conform to it. The politics in Pinter’s plays is not about revealing the truth about the functioning of the State machinery but its impact on an individual’s social life and also how it affects his psyche.
In his Noble Prize acceptance speech Pinter aggressively voiced his views against the political issues, which underlined that he has a strong political point of view and is more than willing to express it whenever possible. This speech, one of the many political protests made by this playwright, focuses on the exploitation of those victimized countries that are unable to fight back against the Supreme power, the United States government. His speech, forty-six minutes long, opens with an address regarding his plays and discusses his particular motivation for writing several of his works. The greater part of his speech is directed at the United States government and its dictating measures that demand compliance from in an extremely manipulative method. His anger against the U. S. Government and the British Government has been expressed in many speeches and articles where he focuses on their foreign policies highlighting and criticizing the colonial nature. He is angry because against odds he is fighting for the victim, for the minority, and for the abused.

The recurring theme of dominance and subservience in Pinter’s Plays reflects, and justifiably so his own Jewish background and his own experiences as a Jew. Pinter’s fascination with the role of the victim and the aggressor recurs in his plays like a haunting experience that he went through during the Second World War, and more than any other dramatist he portrays this in his writings in a compelling and vivid way but without any didactic motive. Steven H. Gale discusses Pinter's themes, suggesting that they are all ultimately intertwined. He refers to Bernard Dukore's analysis of Pinter's work, who describes Pinter's writing as "a picture of contemporary man beaten down by the social forces around him, based on man's failure to communicate with other men" (Gale, Butter’s Going Up 17). The idea suggested by Dukore that Pinter’s plays reflect a type of social oppression, can be traced back to Pinter’s experience in his youth.
In Miriam Gross's interview, "Pinter on Pinter," the playwright talks of his suspicion of political structures and governments and the way that the government manipulates people for its own gain. His political point of view comes from his strong feeling about the war. He states, "I felt very strongly about the war. And still do, if you see what I mean. After all, I wasn't a child by the time it ended; though I was when it began" (Pinter 71). Pinter's reflections on war reveal that perhaps he has buried his childhood memories, only because they were too painful to live with. This repression is important when analyzing Pinter's work, especially since he was victim of anti-Semitism. Pinter recalls, "I was evacuated at the age of nine and that left a deep mark on me, as I think it did on all children who were evacuated. To be suddenly scooped out of one's home and to find oneself hundreds of miles away—as I did, in Cornwall—was very strange" (Esslin, "Theatre of Cruelty" 38). Pinter's childhood, the most formative years of a person's life, has a strong influence on his playwriting.

It was during those years that Pinter received an education that tainted the innocence of his childhood. Pinter explores his awareness of his own mortality in his plays:

When Pinter began his playwriting career in 1957, however, one idea was foremost in his mind as a major theme: fear. As a young Jew living through the early days of World War II, he had gone to bed afraid that he might be awakened in the night by a knock at the door and that he and his parents would be taken forcibly from their home by unknown assailants, a picture vividly impressed on his mind by tales of Hitler's Germany. (Gale, Butter's Going Up 17)

With that fear continually haunting him, Pinter explores various situation that could take place if the authorities did arrive at the door and seize their victims, and each situation takes the form one of Pinter's published plays.
Michael Billington, in his biography on Harold Pinter, elaborated on the personal circumstances in Pinter's life that compelled him to become more vocal about his political opinions. This included his many connections to politically active friends and colleagues, as well as his breakup with actress Vivien Merchant (who had said at the announcement of Kennedy's assassination, "It serves him right for thinking so much of himself") and his new relationship and subsequent marriage to the far more politically minded Antonia Fraser (287-88). One circumstance that Pinter acknowledged which pushed him into political activism came from the "disappearance" of an Argentinean theatre colleague and friend who went missing along with thousands of other "disappeareds" during the 1970s when the democratically elected Socialist government in Chile was overthrown in a military coup by Gen. Augusto Pinochet. Such circumstances led Pinter to later reflect that "I suppose my political conscience—which had always been around—was refined and distilled by experience" (287). As to why he did not engage himself in the political arena much earlier in his career, Pinter speculated in a 1986 interview,

I wouldn't say that my political awareness during those years was dead. Far from it. But I came to view politicians and political structures and political acts with something I can best describe as detached contempt. To engage in politics seemed to me futile. (Pinter, “A Play and its Politics” 12)

Such statements imply that although he was always sensitive to the affairs and issues of state that would later compel him to become more vocal in his political outrage, Pinter's acrimony towards the world of politics was further defined by what he saw as an intrinsically alienating system that produced very little of substance.

Pinter’s reluctance to engage in political activism early in his career stemmed from his discontent over the futility of dialogue with and among politicians. His disillusionment
was particularly reinforced by the often controversial foreign policies of the world’s superpowers, especially those of US and Great Britain. Each of these superpowers was capable of avoiding responsibility for the adverse effects resulting because of the foreign policies which placed strategic advantage over the social welfare, even if the end result of the foreign policies fomented dictatorship and/or internal strife. This troubled Pinter the most. Antonia Fraser explained to Billington regarding Pinter’s political stance:

[.. .] it's more a rage against social injustice; against any injustice or unfairness. Why does he not protest about China, for example, when he does against the United States? I think it's because he sees that China is rightly perceived as a cruel tyranny whereas we turn a blind eye to US foreign policy; and I think it's the unfairness of that whichangers Harold. (qtd. in Billington 288)

This clearly shows that Pinter’s political resentment is defined by the unequal treatment meted out to the governments of superpowers like the U.S. which is capable of avoiding the responsibility and international vigilance for misuse of human rights. This ineffectualness of international scrutiny adds to his frustrations of whether anything of real importance could be done to prevent such systematic injustices inherent in the foreign policies of the superpowers like the U. S. and the Great Britain. He vehemently decries the policies of those countries which have a record of human rights violations and suppression of freedom of speech suppression as in the case of Turkey—a country which caught the attention of Pinter and consumed much of Pinter’s social activism.

The growing acceptance of Turkey within the international community, made all the more legitimate with its inclusion into NATO in 1952, would define much of Pinter's more active engagement with issues of social injustice. As Fraser further explained to Billington,
"[...] his feelings about Turkey stem from the fact that we try to pretend it's a nice holiday spot and a member of NATO and so overlook its internal oppressiveness" (qtd. in Billington 288). Turkey would prove to be an apt example of all that Pinter especially loathed about the foreign affairs of the United States and Great Britain because here was a country whose acceptance into NATO was purely for strategic reasons with a complete disregard for its long-standing record of human rights violations. As Pinter explained, "They're on the frontier of Russia and it's very important to America that Turkey is one of 'us'' (Pinter, "A Play and its Politics" 13). In his estimation, by supporting such nations, the U.S., in effect, became complicit in the injustices performed by the Turkish government against its own people. Further, the insidiousness of such corrosive policies operates within the auspices of an ignorant public. As a case in point, Pinter offered this anecdote about a discussion he attempted to have regarding this terse relationship with Turkey:

I found myself at a party, where I came across two Turkish girls [...] and I asked them what they thought about this trial which had recently taken place, the sentences...and they said, 'Oh, well it was probably deserved.' 'What do you mean by that it was probably deserved?' They said, 'well, they were probably communists. We have to protect ourselves against communism.' I said, "When you say 'probably', what kind of facts do you have?" They of course had no facts at all at their fingertips. They were ignorant, in fact. (Pinter, "A Play and its Politics" 13)

While the myopic obliviousness that he witnessed from these two individuals certainly drew his ire, particularly since the issues he raised concerned their own native country, it would be their apathy that would ultimately be the cause of his greatest derision, which in turn would lead to his next play:
I then asked them whether they knew what Turkish military prisons were like and about torture in Turkey, and they shrugged and said, 'Well, communists are communists, you know.' 'But what do you have to say about torture?' I asked. They looked at me and one of them said, 'Oh you're a man of such imagination.' I said, do you mean it's worse for me than for the victims?' 'Yes, possibly'. Whereupon instead of strangling them, I came back immediately, sat down and, it's true, out of rage started to write *One for the Road*. (Pinter, "A Play and its Politics" 13-14)

Thus, while the support of dictatorial regimes by the international community would upset him the most, it was the blind apathy of an unquestioning public that compelled him to merge his politics with his aesthetics. As he would argue, "I feel very strongly that people should know what's going on in this world, on all levels" (Pinter, "A Play and its Politics" 14). If the public had no knowledge of global affairs, then it was easy to turn a blind eye towards the policies of the world's Anglo-European superpowers. Indeed, this theme would emerge within his drama of the 1980s and 90s, as well as come to represent his most direct appeal for social change. Regarding how his conversation with the two Turkish women at the party inspired the writing of *One for the Road*, he would clarify: "It was a very immediate thing, yes. But, it wasn't only that that caused me to write the play. The subject was on my mind" (Pinter, "A Play and its Politics" 14). Though he was referring more specifically to the human rights crisis in Turkey, it would be fair to say that the same sentiment applied to what concerned him more broadly—social injustice on all levels.
ONE FOR THE ROAD

One for the Road was written in 1984 and was first produced in London’s Hammersmith in the same year. This play marks the beginning of Pinter's political dramas. Until this point, Pinter masks his themes within the domestic life of a middle or lower class London setting. By doing so, Pinter isolates the issue of discrimination to the class struggle. In his plays, the hierarchy of power is set up according to the class system. The men are most often in control and they use that control to dominate the other characters in the plays. This class struggle is not foreign to the Jewish identity, instead, it reinforces it. But One for the Road is the first overtly political plays that Pinter has written. This play not only marks a shift in Pinter's writing style, but also a shift in Pinter's personal agenda; "Pinter remains to his credit, a permanent public nuisance, a questioner of accepted truths, both in life and art. In fact, the two persistently interact" (Billington 134). With this shift, Pinter no longer disguises his political intentions within his plays, but instead creates openly hostile environments as a commentary on the world around him. Martin Esslin in his book Pinter: A Study of his Plays notes that this play was "generally considered to mark a new departure in Pinter's oeuvre—an openly political play, almost a political pamphlet. And yet, these four short scenes between an interrogator and his victims are clearly a direct continuation of Pinter's preoccupation with 'man manipulating man’ (207).

Charles Grimes comments on the theme of the play:

In One for the Road Pinter depicts a confrontation between power and powerlessness, between voice and voicelessness. It culminates in a silence that announces the brute fact of power as domination. The play examines the relationship between individual psychology and power, exploring the notion of
whether there is a type of personality attracted to positions of power and dominance. *One for the Road* also investigates the psychology of a torturer or leader who kills or sacrifices others for his ideals, country, group, or faith, posing the recurrent, but perhaps unanswerable, question of how such a person may reconcile murderous deeds with a positive self-image. (81)

*One for the Road* is set in an unidentified torture chamber of an unidentified state. This unidentified location of the play adds to the universal nature of the torture meted out to the individuals in any state or totalitarian regime that demands the complete surrender of the individual. In very brief four scenes full of incarceration, torture, rape and murder of family members for no specific reason, presumably held for being enemies of the state, Pinter explicitly emphasizes the universal nature of torture and the ideology of the totalitarian states of the twentieth century.

The setting is the blank, vacuous space of an interrogation room that further underscores the ambiguity of the cause of their imprisonment, as well as the contrast of the actual physical display of torture that is kept off stage. Thus, the audience is left to fill in the action of the implied torture via the mother and father's disheveled bruises, crushed body movement, broken speech, and the torturer's dialogue. Consequently, the audience is left to assume the reasons for their status as enemies of the State. Whatever the family has done must have been some form of guilty act in the eyes of their country's regime. As in most plays by Pinter, the specifics of plot detail and characters are not essential to the context of the dramatic narrative. Rather, characters who are simply victims and torturers instead of say, communist rebels and Latin American Sandanistas, convey a more universal context to the predicament. Nicolas the torturer becomes a stand-in for all torturers. Gila and Victor become stand-ins for all political prisoners.
The main character is Nicolas, the interrogator, and we observe him having professional chats with three of his victims: a horribly tortured dissident, Victor; the dissident's wife Gila who has been subjected to all kinds of cruelty, including gang rape; and their eight-year-old son Nicky whom Nicolas finally puts to death, a fact he declares to the father in the last lines of the play. There are other people around the institution, but the names of the soldiers are not revealed.

As the dominant figure of the play, Nicolas's performance as the interrogator is unique in that he also functions as the torturer. His method of persecution is not that of physical torture that we see off stage, but rather through the language and vocabulary of torture. The only instance in which torture is implied physically is through the theatrical gestures of his fingers. As he waves his fingers in Victor's terrified face, he asks:

What do you think this is? It's my finger. And this is my little finger. This is my big finger and this is my little finger. I wave my big finger in front of your eyes. Like this. And now I do the same with my little finger. I can also use both... at the same time. Like this. I can do absolutely anything I like. Do you think I’m mad? My mother did.

Helaughs.

Do you think waving fingers in front of people's eyes is silly? I can see your point ... But would you take the same view if it was my boot—or my penis?

(Pinter, *Plays 4* 223-224)

Pinter addresses the idea that absolute power corrupts absolutely. Nicolas enjoys the fact that he can do anything that he pleases; he takes pleasure in exercising his power over others. His question regarding his madness acts as a sort of self-reflection of his own enjoyment in this
masochistic behavior, yet like Pinter's other abusive characters; he too is unable to change. By making the connection between his finger and his boot, he demonstrates to Victor and perhaps to himself the ideological power that is manifest by his seemingly innocuous gesture. The authority of his boot is further contextualized with the vulgar association of his waving his penis before Victor's eyes. The fact that he emphasizes to Victor that he "can" do this underscores Victor's helplessness and inability to perform such acts of power. Nicolas, on the other hand, possesses the authority and power to move around his prisoner and effortlessly perform any theatrical movement, no matter how nonsensical, he wishes. It is a power that resides in both the physical authority of his power and the ideological authority of his rhetoric. He uses this same gesture when he addresses Victor's wife, Gila, "This is my big finger. And this is my little finger. Look. I wave them in front of your eyes. Like this. How many times have you been raped?" (Pinter, *Plays 4* 243). Here, he once again aligns the image of his finger to a sort of malevolent phallus as if to say, look at 'what I have and what I can do with it' and 'look at what you don't have and look at what you can't do.' And as demonstrated by Nicolas' dialogue, this expression in turn asserts 'look at what I can do to you.' The absurd action is not arbitrary, but rather a gesture that connotes the performative power that he wields over the prison and the prisoners. The eroticisation of the performed gesture compounds the actual torture, rape, and the destruction of the family. We do not need to see the torturing of the family to understand the power inherent in Nicolas's role. Power and authority are implied through the dialogue.

Despite the performance of torture that occurs offstage and is left to the imagination of the audience, it is the language of Nicolas and his theatrical performance that brings up the cruel reality of the torture and what the family suffers. It is this language and gesture through which the audience are voyeuristically privy to the cruelty. The weapons of torture are manifest in words and questions. The family functions, in many ways, in the role of the
audience in that they too must suffer the implication of torture in their minds. Much like the implied horrors that are left offstage that fuel the audience's imagination, so too does Nicolas leave much of the violence markedly offstage within his dialogue. The one specific action that Nicolas does elucidate is, significantly, the continuous raping of Victor's wife, Gila. Nicolas first brings her up by calling Victor's attention to her vulnerability and danger, "You're probably wondering where your wife is. She's in another room. Good-looking woman" (Pinter, *Plays 4* 224). And then later he says, "She is beginning to fall in love with me ... The trouble is, I have rivals. Because everyone here has fallen in love with your wife" (Pinter, *Plays 4* 231). Nicolas further invokes Gila's sexual helplessness by asking Victor, "Does she...fuck? Or does she...? Or does she.. .like.. .you know.. .what? What does she like? I'm talking about your wife. Your wife. You know the old joke? Does she fuck? Does she fuck!" (Pinter, *Plays 4* 230). Implication becomes actualization when Nicolas directly addresses Gila:

Nicolas: Do you think we have nuns upstairs? (pause) What do we have upstairs?

Gila: No nuns.

Nicolas: What do we have?

Gila: Men.

Nicolas: Have they been raping you? (she stares at him) How many times?
How many times have you been raped? (pause) How many times? (Pinter, *Plays 4* 243).
His repeated questioning of how often Gila was raped forces her to revisit the trauma that she has experienced—she is in effect 're-raped.' The inquiry is in no way out of a sense of sympathy and concern, but rather out of a desire to force her, and her husband via implication, to relive and re-imagine the actual details of the sexual violation. The fact that Nicolas asks Gila three times about the number of times she was raped rather than asking whether she was raped at all, underlies his desire to have her continually revisit the violent brutality. In a sense, the dialogue resembles a sort of child-like game. He knows the answer already to the questions that he asks. He knows who is upstairs, and he knows they are not nuns. Nicolas is almost teasing her much like a parent might do to a child. Seen in another way, Nicolas is voyeuristically participating in what happened by essentially casting himself in the role of an objective spectator, oblivious to the actual reality of the prison. By making her answer the obvious, Nicolas, already empowered by his position, further extends his reach by exploiting her memory. Once she has acknowledged who is upstairs and what they did to her, the torture continues to remain real and terrifying. Pinter's choice to have Nicolas focus entirely on Gila's specific violation is especially significant because it emphasizes that what is happening to this family is essentially the theatricalized violation of their own collective identity as a family.

As an agent of a totalitarian regime, Nicolas is in the supreme position of the institution that demands the complete surrender of the individual. Nicolas declares, "You probably think I'm part of a predictable, formal, long established pattern; ... I run this place" (Pinter, Plays 4 224-225). In this place he wields power as he wishes in front of the prisoners who must obey what he commands. In fact before wielding his power he describes in what manner a conversation goes on between him and a prisoner. He continues to explain, "I chat away, friendly, insouciant, I open the batting, as it were, in a light hearted, even carefree
manner, while another waits in the wings, silent, introspective, coiled like a puma” (Pinter, *Plays 4* 224—225).

This formulates one thing about the nature of conversation in the prison of totalitarian regime where a prisoner has no right to speak except to follow the order of the officers. This is what Victor does in the play. Just a few moments later this perfectly exemplifies when Nicolas orders him to stand to make him realize what he says and to show him his helpless condition in the camp:

Nicolas: Stand up.

Victor *stands.*

Sit down.

Victor *sits.* (Pinter, *Plays 4* 225)

In addition to being metaphysically inclined, Nicolas believes that he has a divine connection. He says, “God speaks through me. I’m referring to the Old Testament God, by the way, although I’m a long way from being Jewish” (Pinter, *Plays 4* 225). And a few moments later when he asks Victor that whether he respects him or not, Nicolas says that if Victor does not respect him then he is not a religious man. Because Nicolas says, “Everyone else knows the voice of God speaks through me” (Pinter, *Plays 4* 227).

Nicolas’s frequent addresses to God might imply a non-Communist country formation, yet the mention of the Almighty might also only be ironical mockery. Simon Gray maintains that:
“we can’t simply revel in this moral monster, if we’re also forced to look at the man he’s had tortured, the woman he’s had violated, their child whose murder he announces in the last line of the play […] Perhaps Harold’s channelling of Nicolas’s malevolent exuberance into merely lethal efficiency was the only possible solution.” (71)

By imposing arbitrary demands Nicolas demonstrates his power over him, verbally flaunting his capacity to inflict pain. Issuing commands does not merely satisfy his apparent sadism; it creates an intense secular experience of connection: “I feel a link, you see, a bond. I share a commonwealth of interest. I am not alone! I am not alone!” (Pinter, Plays 4 232). At this Victor asks Nicolas to kill him, a request which leads the latter to discourse upon the ugliness of despair. Nicolas concludes the scene by claiming he can see Victor’s soul which “shines out of (his) eyes” (Pinter, Plays 4 233).

Victor is confronted with brutality in its worst form. The reason is that he seems to be an intellectual and he is always critical of the state’s values, which a dictatorial regime would regard as a threat to the state’s integrity. Having been confronted with this brutality, his despair is natural when he is threatened with the death of his family—a threat that Nicolas executes in its cruelest form to break down the resistance of Victor. As Nicolas states, “I’ve heard so much about you. I’m terribly pleased to meet you. […] I’m intrigued. Firstly because I’ve heard so much about you. Secondly because if you don’t respect me you’re unique” (Pinter, Plays 4 227).

It is obvious that Nicolas, who has heard a lot about Victor whose so called anti-state acts are crime in the eyes of the State, will opt for the harshest measure to eliminate this threat to the state. The most bewildering feature of the play, however, is the fact that the interrogator does not try to obtain either information or a confession from his victim. While
he upsets Victor with clues about the fate of his wife and son, he does not use such threats to blackmail him into any of the significant objectives. What is shown is unalleviated sadism, mental and physical torture and finally the murder of an innocent child. Although there is no concrete clue to accuse Victor of being guilty, he is being interrogated as if the interrogators had some overt clues which are enough to punish. He concentrates on silencing the individuality of Victor by enactment of epistemological violence. For this purpose Nicolas uses and manipulates violent language for silencing the intellectual voice and to destroy the identity of Victor.

Nicolas is slow paced and deliberate in his interrogations and his questions serve to destroy the identity of Victor. Nicolas asks question which are illogical and absurd:

Do you think I'm mad? (223) [...] You do respect me, I take it? (226) [...] Are you saying you don't respect me? (226) [...] Would you like to know me better? (226) [...] Do you drink whiskey? (228) [...] Is your son alright? (228) [...] Are we friends? (229) [...] Are you always so dull? (229) [...] are you beginning to love me? (231) [...] Who would you prefer to be, you or me? (Pinter, Plays 4 232)

On the surface, these questions may seem rather straightforward as rhetorical ramblings meant to taunt Victor and keep him off-balance, but they are particularly notable in that his casual style and calm rhetoric belie the actual violent circumstances of their imprisonment. Again, Nicolas knows the answers to most of these questions; therefore, Victor's responses to these questions do not matter because he does not have the authority to answer or engage in the dialogue. What is key here to Nicolas's interaction with Victor is that he continually establishes himself as the one in control of the dialogue. Rather than getting right to the matter of why they have been imprisoned, Nicolas prefers to essentially dangle the freedom
of his rhetoric in their faces—to drag out their torture. The verbal onslaught is torturous if
only for the fact that they do little to further the release of the family and consequently
prolong their incarceration. The questions and random nonsensical statements are an exercise
of Nicolas's power to navigate meaning and context.

What is also significant about these moments, as well as the general oeuvre of
Pinteresque dialogue, is how the object (the incarcerated) responds to the subject's (the
interrogator) questions. Much like Stanley in The Birthday Party, the only thing the victim-
object can do is sit there in passive silence, with the occasional grunt of pain. The repetition
and delivery of the questions, along with the practically inconsequential subject matter of the
questions, become a performance from which they can never really escape. Therefore, the
painful consequence of this verbal torture that the readers are allowed to witness (and
vicariously participate in) is silence. In One for the Road, this linguistic consequence
continues until the end of the play when Victor can barely offer anything other than the
fragmented words, "yes" (245) and "my son" (Pinter, Plays 4 247). The drink that Nicolas
offers Victor only causes him to cough and choke, suggesting that perhaps offstage he was
tortured orally. Therefore, the physical torture that resulted in his inability to use his own
voice has divested him of the larger ability to even dictate any subjective authoritative
response to the point of silence—a silence that will be encountered again in Mountain
Language.

This verbal torture doesn’t stop here. To further add to the agony of Victor and to
victimize his individuality Nicolas brings his wife and his private life into the interrogation
which undoubtedly enhances the pain of Victor. Victor at this stage is unable to extend any
sort of resistance as he has nothing to say but to remain silent in front of torturous questions.
Nicolas brings their sexual relationship into:
Does she . . . fuck? Or does she . . . ? Or does she . . . like. . . you know . . .
what? What does she like? I’m talking about your wife. Your wife.

Pause.

You know the old joke? Does she fuck?

Heavily, in another voice:

Does she fuck!

He laughs.

It’s ambiguous, of course. It could mean she fucks like a rabbit or she fucks not at all.

Pause.

Well, we’re all God’s creatures. Even your wife. (Pinter, Plays 4 230)

After directing some nettling questions about their private lives Nicolas looks down on Victor’s wife. No matter how resistant he is to accept them as people like him, he, unwillingly, confirms her being God’s creature. By the way, Pinter uses pauses instead of a reply and does this often. As the conversation, goes on it is observed that—the captive Victor—whose house has been ransacked, his books rifled, his rugs pissed on by some of the boys of Nicolas—is shown to be unaware of the things going on. He says that pissing is just a kind of responsibility. Victor does not even know what has happened to his seven or so year-old son, Nicky.
And when Nicolas starts talking about Gila, he goes beyond the boundaries. He says to Victor, “Your wife and I had a very nice chat but I couldn't help noticing she didn’t look her best. She’s probably menstruating” (Pinter, Plays 4 231). The most shocking sentence for Victor comes later in their conversation. Nicolas wants to know if he loves him or not but without waiting for the answer he says: “I think your wife is. Beginning. She is beginning to fall in love with me” (Pinter, Plays 4 231). He adds that he has rivals because his men are also in love with Gila: “We are all patriots, we are as one, we all share a common heritage. Except you, apparently” (Pinter, Plays 4 232).

From this moment the extremity of his anguish and hopelessness can be observed from his spontaneous statement: “Kill me” (Pinter, Plays 4 232). To which Nicolas offers a suggestion to overcome this despair: “Chop the balls off and despair goes out the window” (Pinter, Plays 4 233).

During his interrogation, Victor remains submissive, frightened and helpless, unable to put any sort of resistance in front of Nicolas. Starkly different to this is the interrogation of Gila, Victor’s wife, whose defiance is notable before the stern behavior of Nicolas. Gila enters the room with bruises and torn clothes. The implication is that she has been raped by the men working in the building. Fearless in this circumstance, her answers to Nicolas's probing questions are short but with an air of authority. That is, until she briefly mentions her father, to which Nicolas angrily calls her a "fuckpig" (Pinter, Plays 4 240) and elaborates on his understanding of who her father was to the country and to him:

Your father was a wonderful man. His country is proud of him. He's dead. He was a man of honour. He's dead. Are you prepared to insult the memory of your father?
Pause.

Are you prepared to defame, to debase, the memory of your father? Your father fought for his country. I knew him. I revered him. Everyone did. He believed in God. He didn't think, like you shitbags. He lived. He lived. He was iron and gold. He would die, he would die, he would die, for his country, for his God. And he did die, he died, he died, for his God. (Pinter, *Plays 4* 240)

Nicolas attempts to control the identification of the family imprisoned. Though the audience never comes to know about the family background or the crime for which they have been imprisoned, a few tidbits of facts come out from the interrogation of Gila. What immediately stands out from Nicolas's diatribe is the repetitious reference to her father's death. On the one hand, Nicolas emphasizes that the man she knew as her father is both literally and figuratively dead. She no longer has this man as her father. Also compounding this theme is Nicolas's implication that Gila's father lived because he did not think. Presumably, Nicolas means that her father never questioned authority or thought about matters of the State. Rather, Nicolas's version of Gila's father is an archetypal, unquestioning, honorable soldier of the State. It is unclear in the play just what Gila's father means to her, but to Nicolas her father is a shining representative of the country that he is upholding through these interrogations. Thus, Nicolas uses rhetoric to not only colonize the meaning and story of a character's identity, but also dictate the meaning and history of their family the way he and the State see them. In many ways, his version of what made Gila's father so revered and loved by the powers that be emphasizes what seems to be necessary in order to become a functional part of the larger state; they must die culturally and linguistically. Indeed, this mirrors what seems to be going on for the imprisoned family unit—the colonization of the very context of what construes a family. To push this point further, the definitions, histories and ideologies of each
family union within their regime mean little to the ultimate goal of maintaining the state apparatus. As Nicolas states, "[...] our business. Which is, I remind you, to keep the world clean for God" (Pinter, *Plays 4* 246). Indeed, this would later become a recurring phrase in much of Pinter's politics and art.

Nicolas’s confrontation with Nicky, Victor and Gila’s son, occurs in a much briefer scene but interestingly this scene reveals all the innocence of a child who is oblivious about the fact of his parents. Nicolas quite to his bewilderment finds that he and this child share a common name. Unknown to the fact of prison room torture, Nicky speaks truly what his parents are not able to speak. Nicky is the only character that says how he feels and what he thinks; he possesses a childlike innocence that allows him to express himself, whereas his parents know enough not to speak their minds. In the end, it is the child's innocence that kills him. His honesty allows Nicolas to consider him a 'little prick' (Pinter, *Plays 4* 247) and therefore, decide that he should not live. Nicolas' power to determine who should and should not live reflects the power that the Nazis held over the people; they often killed all the members of a family only because they had the power to. Nicolas has discovered the ultimate means of torture and inflicting pain upon others, that is, to kill one's offspring. Victor's son was the one thing that he and his wife had created together, and according to Nicolas 'he was a little prick' (Pinter, *Plays 4* 247). Therefore, their offspring was not considered fit to live. It is fascinating that children rarely appear in Pinter's plays and when they do, by the end they are murdered. Children represent the future, the hope and possibility of opportunity, and Pinter's lack of child characters suggest a lack of hope in the future. In *One for the Road* Nicolas not only murders Victor and Gila's offspring, but he also ends their prospect of life.
The final scene returns to Nicolas and a now “tidily dressed” Victor. “How have you been? Surviving?” (Pinter, *Plays 4* 244), Nicolas asks sardonically. Nicolas releases Victor from imprisonment. Victor tries to speak but cannot:

Nicolas: I cannot hear you.

Victor: It’s my mouth.

Nicolas: Mouth?

Victor: Tongue.

Nicolas: What’s the matter with it?

*Pause.* (Pinter, *Plays 4* 245)

When Victor asks about his son, Nicolas informs him: “Your son? Oh, don’t worry about him. He was a little prick ((Pinter, *Plays 4* 247).

He uses the past tense here meaning that his son was self-willed and did not obey the rules and has been killed. It shows that Nicolas’s words hold the power to kill by shifting his speech from present tense to past tense which clearly transforms Nicolas into an executioner or terminator. The interesting thing about the murder is that, Nicky is killed although he has not the ability to commit a serious crime as he is just a little boy. On the contrary, it is Nicolas who commits a crime. He is not punished for his action and perhaps is praised by the state since he is thought to be serving the state. Most probably he has the child killed to prevent his educated family from bringing up another potential intellectual who will be a threat to the state in the future. D. Keith Peacock opines that:
One for the Road takes the form of a series of economical images. These are concerned with various facets of the nature of power and powerlessness. Each of these facets is formed around a typically —Pinteresque— tableau made up of various permutations of seated and standing figures. That, after the opening scene, the characters neither enter nor leave the stage produces the effect of shots in a screenplay. In this play the violence remains offstage; its threat and results are, nevertheless, very clearly represented by the physical condition of the detainees, who have evidently undergone torture. (141)

It is important to note that Pinter's depiction of Nicolas is ambiguous. According to Billington, Nicolas in One for the Road finds "in a political system a remedy for his own private deficiencies and believes in the idea of a just cause" (314). Nicolas may not enjoy his role as much as he appears to; he drinks profusely and suffers from a sense of loneliness. He serves the state because he has no one else; his role as a torturer consumes his life. His drinking 'one for the road' is a means to reinforce his power over Victor. Each time he drinks, he raises a toast to his successes as a captor. At the end of the play when both Nicolas and Victor share a drink, it appears as though it is a moment that might equalize the power disparity between the two men, but that is not possible. It is during this drink that Victor is told that he will be free to leave, but his wife is going to remain there longer for the men's pleasure and that his son is dead. Therefore, he is raising a toast to his family's manipulation which further demotes him and emphasizes his powerlessness. Martin Esslin in his book Pinter: A Study of His Plays makes an important comment on the corruption of power in this play. He notes that Nicolas is not trying to obtain any information from Victor. He is, rather, enjoying his role as the interrogator:
While he is tormenting Victor with hints about the fate of his wife and son, he is not even using such threats to blackmail him into any of the meaningful objectives such secret-police interrogations might pursue in a concrete and real case. What is shown is unrelieved sadism, mental and physical torture for their own sake and finally the murder of an innocent child… He and his family are simply tortured for what they are intellectuals, people who are suspected of not liking the great dictator. (209)

Pinter is fascinated by the characters that enjoy the pleasure in power, and indulge in it to the point that it corrupts them. Nicolas, as representative of this hypothetical totalitarian state, occupies an archetypal role within Pinter's ongoing political theater. Figures such as Nicolas are not merely dramatic one-sided antagonists of blind menace. They, like the victims they terrorize, are complex figures that provide an insight into the larger system that they serve under. In a 1996 interview, Pinter speaks of a sort of pity for Nicolas:

I'm not terribly fond of Nicolas; I could do without him. Nevertheless, I recognize the plight he's in. Don't forget Nicolas is a deluded man; he's a man possessed, religiously really. He's enacting a religious and political obsession, and I feel very sorry for him. He's an absolute disaster, but the society he's speaking for is in itself a disaster. (Pinter, Various Voices 223)

Thus, Pinter presents an insight into the mind of a sadistic interrogator as well as an image of a larger cultural system of which the interrogator is a part. Nicolas, as Pinter points out, is almost possessed in a religious sense by the totalitarian state that he serves. Twice he tells the prisoners that "God speaks through me" even though he "run[s] the place" (Pinter, Plays 4 225). The relationship that exists between the prisoners and guards reinforces Nicolas's sense of duty to the State. On the one hand, Nicolas defines his identity through the utility of his
role. He is the interrogator; they are the prisoners. Without them, there is nothing to interrogate (except himself, perhaps). What is most intriguing though about Nicolas are his invocations to a higher, offstage voice of authority. He himself does not speak; it is God that speaks through him. These invocations come about at several moments throughout the play, and only within Nicolas's rhetoric.

One of the first instances comes with the aforementioned acknowledgement of Gila's father. At first he inscribes in his memory the legendary vestments of a war hero to the State. He is a true patriot to the cause. But Nicolas also invokes another role for his memory when he angrily rebukes Gila, "How do you dare speak of your father to me? I loved him, as if he were my own father" (Pinter, *Plays 4* 240-241). Understandably, we have very little information about Nicolas's own history other than a brief reference to his mother who thought he was mad. Yet, his reverence towards a paternal figure, whose story seems undefined, reveals a source of lack of that paternal figure in his life. Presumably he is willing to manipulate the memory of someone else's father, he is also willing to work his way into the family structure by declaring that he is an ideological child of Gila's father. Therefore, with the destruction of one family comes the creation of a new, ideologically political family, and thus in turn, the larger totality of the all-encompassing State apparatus.

Yet, despite this seeming implacable authority that Nicolas wields over the definition of the family, several moments throughout the play hint at the tenuous balance that mediates the authoritarian dialogue between Nicolas and his prisoners. Victor and Gila's son, also imprisoned, happens to be named "Nicky." In the brief dialogue between Nicolas and Nicky that comes in the middle of the play, Nicolas learns the child's name and replies "Really? How odd" (Pinter, *Plays 4* 234). The fact that Nicolas makes a pointed effort to note the oddity of the naming coincidence dispels the notion that this naming is merely for
coincidences sake. The moment would seem to suggest that the polarities of the interrogator-prisoner dialogue are not as clear-cut as Nicolas may want them to be. It is possible then, to further contextualize Nicolas as a sort of ideological prisoner within his own prison. Nicolas's brief moment of self-conscious identification with the son reinforces his seeming desire to occupy the vocabulary and history of the family itself. He loved Gila's father as if he had been his own father. From this it can be understood that Nicolas's function, while rather cut and dry to those he interrogates, is in many ways operating within, and reacting to, his own ideological prison.

Nicolas's desire to belong to a larger, systematized order eventually reveals that it is within this dialogue that he is most vulnerable. At one point as he is performing his interrogative style of questioning without expecting an answer from the prisoners, he asks, "Which side do you think God is on?" His immediate response to himself is interestingly, "I'm going to have a drink" (Pinter, *Plays 4* 224). That he seems flippant in asking such a question at a time like this is not at all surprising given his rhetorical style of interrogation. What forces us to think is that the mention of a higher authority and what side that authority is on brings out the compulsive drinker in him. Further on, we get more instances of Nicolas's insecurity as he describes his relationship to the man who runs the country:

He took me aside the other day, last Wednesday, I think it was, he took me aside, at a reception, visiting dignitaries, he took me aside, me, and he said to me, he said, in what I can only describe as a hoarse whisper, Nic, he said, Nic (that's my name), Nic, if you ever come across anyone whom you have good reason to believe is getting on my tits, tell them one thing, tell them honesty is the best policy. The cheese was superb. Goat. One for the road. (Pinter, *Plays 4* 230-231)
What stands out immediately in this fragment is the constant repetition of the word "me" and his own name. This reveals a need on his part to fully justify and inscribe his presence and role as a functional part of the State. Not only does he inflate his own reputation within the political system, he must emphasize that the leader knows his nickname. Such rhetoric reveals Nicolas's desire to repeatedly establish his role within the system for both the prisoner and himself. Thus, not only is Nicolas enacting the voice and will of the State, he is also performing for his own sake and stability. On another equally revealing level, Nicolas's repetition of the word "me" also seems to reveal a sense of unease and insecurity—a desire for some sort of affirmation of his role by the State itself. As he says later to Victor, "We are all patriots, we are as one, we all share a common heritage. Except you, apparently. (Pause) I feel a link, you see, a bond, I share a commonwealth of interest. I am not alone. I am not alone!" (Pinter, Plays 4 232). Here, he not only emphasizes the isolation that each separated member of Victor's family feels in the prison, he is also emphasizing the privileged position that he occupies as the interrogator—a position that gives his role an active purpose. But his role as an interrogator is not a stable one. When the leader advises Nicolas that in case anyone offends the State leadership then he should simply tell them “honesty is the best policy” (Pinter, Plays 4 231), to which Nicolas merely comments on the quality of the cheese at the reception. He has no insight into the functioning of the larger moral system that justifies what he does or is doing to his prisoners. Nicolas, in his seeming inability to comprehend the leader’s advice for how to serve, glosses over the ambiguity by moving on to what placates him, memories of being at a swanky reception and, of course, alcohol.

These small rhetorical moments reflect the political spaces of the world that Pinter feels is in a state of disaster. While the interrogators or torturers exert power and authority over the prisoners, they are essentially mindless demons unquestioningly serving their particular government’s ideology. Their despair reflected in these moments shows their fear
of being unanswered from the higher authority. Without the assumed acceptance by this larger ideological presence, they cease to have a justifiable function. They are left without a purpose or role in which to perform. And while they may serve this higher power unquestioningly, there are moments of potential lucidity where the communication breaks down, and they are unsure of the reasoning behind their ideological sense of self. Further instability comes with the possibility over whether or not the third higher order really has the defining power, or even more frighteningly, whether or not anyone is even out there to acknowledge their roles. Therefore, what essentially contributes to this Pinter-style angst is the possibility that the ideology itself that they follow, and under which they perform their actions, is suspect and perhaps even flawed. Yet, no matter how ambiguous the advice or leadership may be for those like Nicolas, it means very little when compared to the perceived comfort and authority he receives by being a part of the "commonwealth." As he vehemently repeats twice to Victor, "I am not alone. I am not alone!" Underlying his authority is an anxiety over the stability of the system and for being nothing more than that which is spoken through.

**MOUNTAIN LANGUAGE**

The political situation in Turkey from the 1940s to the 1980s clearly propelled Harold Pinter into a more direct kind of political activism. Not only did he lend his voice more forthrightly for issues pertaining to human rights in Turkey, including going there with Arthur Miller in 1985 to show their support for the rights of dissident writers and argue for an international recognition of human rights (Billington 297), he also wrote *One for the Road* as a response to what he learned about their persecution of political prisoners. What would also distress his sense of political outrage was how such a nation could gain recognition by the Western community and be accepted into NATO primarily for its strategic location on the
border between Europe and the Soviet Union. Despite their well documented record of Human Rights abuses, their strategic location on the border between Europe and the Soviet Union trumped any concerns about any social injustices.

While Turkey was just one nation among others that Pinter took an active political interest in, he was also very much concerned with what he saw as parallels in the injustices committed by the British government, particularly Thatcherism which became the nation's prevailing political mindset. Whereas supporters of Margaret Thatcher saw a new era of modernization and prosperity, critics saw an attack on fundamental liberties and changes to the social fabric of Britain. In 1988 the political commentator, Peter Jenkins, listed many of the issues that he felt reflected the dissolution of civil liberties in Great Britain, including, "the tightening of the Official Secrets Act of 1911,[...] the attempt to suppress or censure BBC programmes touching on matters of national security; the banning of broadcast interviews with members of the IRA, Sinn Fein and extreme loyalist groups; the restrictions on the right to silence when citizens were arrested and questioned by police..." (qtd. in Billington 306-7). Mountain Language, first produced in 1988 at the National Theatre in London, would be his reflection on the political state of affairs in Thatcher's England. Although the play was clearly connected to his outrage over the plight of political dissidents, as well as the oppression of the minority Kurdish population in Turkey, Pinter made clear that he saw the play's focus as even broader:

From my point of view, the play is about suppression of language and the loss of freedom of expression. I feel therefore it is as relevant in England as it is in Turkey. A number of Kurds have said that the play touches them and their lives. But I believe it also reflects what's happening in England today—the suppression of ideas, speech and thought. (qtd. in Billington 309)
As an expression of Pinter's continuing discourse on the nature of political despotism, *Mountain Language* reflects this broader sense of social injustice by engaging with oppression as a matter of policy as opposed to a matter of individual actions, as it was conveyed in *One for the Road*. In so doing, Pinter further synthesizes the blurred distinction between the personal and the political.

Pinter's *Mountain Language* further explores the conflict between victims and their rulers. *Mountain Language* presents a powerful image of the suffering imposed by authoritarian regimes. Pinter examines the threat that the powerful exert over the less powerful. This play depicts the victimization of people through the suppression of language and individuality. The domination of the victimized characters reflects the inability of some people to find their voices during the Holocaust. Carey Perloff discusses *Mountain Language* in his article "Harold Pinter's Mountain Language." He argues that language becomes a tool for oppression and as a result, the voice-overs are the only means of communication. In the hostile landscape of the play, communication is forbidden, and victimization occurs with the suppression of language. The 'owners of language' in this world use words to gain power over those who have threatened them with some form of dissent. The guards threaten the women who are visiting their husbands and sons and tell them that only the language of the capital is to be spoken. The women do not know the language of the capital and when they continue to speak their own language, they are beaten. The women are coerced into silence for fear of what the guards may do to them. When a guard informs an elderly woman that she is permitted to speak her language again, she is too traumatized to speak at all, knowing that when her words are 'granted to her,' they are useless. With that realization, the elderly woman has become a repressed victim of the guards. (Carey Perloff 2)
While *One for the Road* aims to produce a stark, shocking effect, *Mountain Language* is arguably, bleaker, more pessimistic. Charles Grimes in his theses “A Silence Beyond Echo” comments on this perspective:

The oppression *Mountain Language* dramatizes is a matter of governmental policy, not the cruel whims of one individual. The theme, atmosphere, and experience of *Mountain Language* intensify those of *One for the Road*. Pinter indicts abusive power more generally, depicting the bureaucratic machinery of torture. By featuring a wider vision of a repressive regime, Pinter illustrates a wider level of its function; in contrast to *One for the Road*, which centers on the villainy of one extraordinary person, *Mountain Language* illuminates an extensive apparatus of ethnic and political repression. (89)

*Mountain Language* uses the theatrical space of prison in order to examine the dialogue that underlies authoritarian control. The play is made up of four short scenes that depict the stark discourse that takes place between the totalitarian authority and its oppressed civilians. Instead of one malevolent interrogator of *One for the Road*, the focus is on several guards enforcing the collective will of the State. Also, instead of a specific incarcerated family, the focus is on several imprisoned figures, with attention shifting between the prisoners inside and their family members outside the walls attempting to see their loved ones. The play dramatizes two stories—an Elderly Woman from the mountain region trying to visit her son, and a Young Woman trying to visit her husband, both of whom are not from the mountains. Within the action that shifts between the spaces outside the prison wall to the holding rooms inside the prison itself, Pinter dramatizes the rhetoric of state-sponsored oppression. The totalitarian forces govern not only the physical spaces of incarceration but also the ability to communicate beyond those spaces, thus, extending their authority beyond the physical walls.
of the prison. What is central to the State's ability to maintain the status quo of being in power is the ability to legislate a dialogue of subservience within the physical spaces they control as well as the spaces beyond. Thus, while *One for the Road* focuses almost exclusively on the cruelty of state-sponsored torture, *Mountain Language* extends this dialogue by focusing on the role that governmental policies have in perpetuating systemic injustice on a broad scale.

In Scene I, Pinter sets up the State's dialogue that enables totalitarian authority to rule absolutely. The women outside of the prison walls complain that in the eight hours since they have been waiting to see their imprisoned loved ones, one of the guard dogs has viciously bitten an Elderly Woman's hand. As in much of Pinter's drama, while the direct violence of the dog bite occurs offstage, the conceptual violence of their circumstances occurs through the rhetorical transaction between the Guards and the Elderly Woman. As an unsympathetic Sergeant shows more concern for their names, an Officer demands that the Elderly Woman state her complaint. After describing the offence to him, the Officer demands more information from the accusers about the offending dog:

What was his name?

*Pause.*

What was his name?

*Pause*

Every dog has a name! They answer to their name. They are given a name by their parents and that is their name, that is their *name*. Before they bite, they *state* their name. It's formal procedure. They state their name and then they
bite. What was his name? If you tell me one of our dogs bit this woman without giving his name I will have that dog shot! (Pinter, *Plays 4* 253-254)

Such an incredulous question has no reasonable answer, and clearly the Officer does not expect to receive one. Yet, within the authoritarian dialogue of the regime, "formal procedure" dictates that this is a legitimate claim by the soldiers of the State. His response belies the fact that they will do nothing about such complaints levied at the consequences of their authority. Furthermore, they are protected by the legal protocol of "formal procedure." They, nor the dog, could not possibly do anything wrong. By asking an unanswerable question, the women have no chance at any kind of reparation either for the vicious attack much less for their imprisoned family members. Thus, the dialogue of the State, couched within a false air of bureaucratic concern by the Officer, is already stacked up against the citizens outside the prison walls who intrinsically have no claim or validity in the eyes of the Guards. From the perspective of the State, if the attack is not itself a lie, then it is most likely the women themselves who are at fault, since it would be seemingly inconceivable for one of their dogs, and by extension, their entire enterprise, to disobey "formal procedure" and bite her hand without giving its name. It is an absurd logic made reasonable according to the perspective of the State.

This transaction of authoritative control is further defined in Scene I, as the Officer mandate ethnocentrism as an official policy of the Capital-state. They first declare that their husbands, sons, and fathers that have been imprisoned "are enemies of the State. They are shithouses" (Pinter, *Plays 4* 255). The word choice is significant in that the legal and the profane become intertwined within the rhetoric of the Capital-state, effectively making the terms equivalent to one another. Not only are their men traitors in a purely legal sense, they are also socially unacceptable in all regards. The Officer then continues to legislate identity
by declaring to the women: "Now hear this. You are mountain people. You hear me?" (Pinter, *Plays 4* 255). The designation defines the geographical opposition between the guards of the prison building and the inhabitants of the rural mountain community. By making a special effort to designate them as "mountain people," (Pinter, *Plays 4* 255) the officer legislates the polarity between the State and anyone considered to be antithetical to its collective identity.

The women along with their relatives inside are summarily designated as 'Other' to the singular authority of the Capital-state. The Guards and Officers occupy the authorial position whereby in designating the mountain people as a collective Other, their position of authority is, in turn, defined as well.

While the State exercises a physical authority that enables them to imprison who they perceive to be the enemies of the State, also at their disposal is the power to effectively legislate the function of the mountain people's native language and, in effect, colonize their ethnic identity. As the Officer goes on to declare to the Women:

Your language is dead. It is forbidden. It is not permitted to speak your mountain language in this place. You cannot speak your language to your men. It is not permitted. Do you understand? You may not speak it. It is outlawed. You may only speak the language of the capital. That is the only language permitted in this place. You will be badly punished if you attempt to speak your mountain language in this place. This is a military decree. It is the law. Your language is forbidden. It is dead. No one is allowed to speak your language. Your language no longer exists. (Pinter, *Plays 4* 255-256)

Mark Taylor—Batty in his book *Harold Pinter* comments on the above quoted dialogue as follows:
This list of accumulating tautologies reveals the ruthless absolutism of the regime in power, as well as the ironic lifelessness of the language of authority. Depriving a people of their mother tongue is the most effectively suppressive act of control over that people, and indicative of an intolerant, even genocidal logic. Here is the kernel of Pinter’s concern: the state oppression of ethnic identities (or any minorities) that do not conform with the visions of the ruling ideology. The consequences of such brutal logic are played out in the following scenes in which we witness the separation of two couples: the old woman and her son, and the young woman and her husband. (107)

Backed by force of military decree, not only are they not allowed to speak their native tongue "in this place", their language, but by extension their culture, is declared dead (three times). The Capital-state has the self-appointed authority to legislate the ban, to enforce the legislation and, if those were not enough, to declare their identity extinct. Michael Billington, along with many other critics, notes that the Officer's speech is full of contradictions: “The mountain language exists; it is dead. It is banished by military decree; it is banished by law. You may not speak it; you cannot speak it. Through these contradictions, Pinter points up the arbitrary nature of classification (311).

While there may certainly be arbitrariness to the logic of the State apparatus in Mountain Language, the statements that the Officer gives goes well beyond contradiction for the sake of absurdity in that he is forcing equivalence with each declaration. The decree, in effect, carries with it all the force of deified authority, as "to forbid" becomes synonymous with "to extinguish".

Thus, the rules of the prison become the rules of the space outside its walls. The legislation of language is the legislation of space. By denying the use of their native language
"in this place", the Officer further asserts the mountain people's isolation from the larger authoritarian system. While the women may not be labeled "enemies of the State" as their relatives inside have been, their fate is shared as their native identity has been deemed antithetical to the governing collective. If they want the privilege to come inside the prison walls, they must censor their language, and by extension their identities, and subsume their given identities as mandated by the Capital-state. Without the means to use their own language, they have no choice but to submit and effectively have their native identities colonized by the State apparatus because, in effect, if they are not with them, then they do not exist.

The impact of this decree on language can be seen in the "visitor's room" of Scene 2. The Elderly Woman whose hand was earlier bitten by the dog with no name visits her son and says, "I have bread—". The Guard then jabs her with his stick and screams: "Forbidden. Language forbidden. . . . It's forbidden. Tell her to speak the language of the capital". The Prisoner attempts to tell the Guard that "she can't speak it" (Pinter, Plays 4 258). Again, the Elderly Woman tells her son: "I have apples—" (Pinter, Plays 4 259). The Guard again jabs her with his stick and screams: "Forbidden! Forbidden forbidden forbidden! Jesus Christ! (To Prisoner) Does she understand what I'm saying?" (Pinter, Plays 4 259). The imprisoned son replies, "No" (Pinter, Plays 4 259). Without the ability to speak their own native language, they have no way to communicate, other than the silent voice-overs that the theatre audience hears that convey what they are thinking to one another (perhaps an allusion to an inner language that the military cannot subvert entirely). The jabbing with the night-stick correlates with the violence inherent within such authoritarianism that denies the basic expression of their identity. Pinter implies here that to be a part of the State, the mountain people must deny their origin and either learn the language of the totalitarian State, or just keep silent. If they
have no knowledge of the language of the capital, they have no other choice but to be silent—a silence which in effect implies acquiescence, denies dissent and dehumanizes the Other.

What is also intriguing here is that, at least from an audience point of view, there does not seem to be any discernible difference between the language of the "mountain" and of the "capital." Pinter's direction for the Elderly Woman is to "speak in a strong rural accent" (Pinter, Plays 4 258). Since the play is in English, each director is left with intriguing possibilities as to how best to convey this difference. Depending on the production of the play, it is possible that the difference in language could simply be a matter of accents. Yet, this does not resolve its sound to the audience who presumably must assume that the Elderly Woman cannot understand the Guard, even though he is speaking in English—the same language that she attempts to use. Even if the only literal difference is in the accents, she should technically still be able to understand the words.

While it may be easier to just assume that this is an intentional suspension of theatrical disbelief in that audiences must assume she speaks a different language, the lack of a more deliberate difference between the two languages opens up potential meta-theatrical complexities in the relationship between these two peoples. For one, the guards and mountain people seem to be intrinsically connected. The only real division is in the differences between the regional spaces that they inhabit. Therefore, the difference between the two languages is ultimately arbitrary since the only justification provided for the legislation of the language of the capital is that they said so. Having the language literally read the same perhaps implies that the authority invested within the language of the capital is only deemed legitimate due to the mouth of the one who utters it. As a Guard to the singular capital, he has the authority to mediate the context of the language. But because the elderly woman is a representative of the mountain region, by default, she can have no real independent voice within the capital. The
crux of this moment then is not only in the violent censoring of the language itself, but also in the display of the State's ability to control the meaning and context of language to serve its own authoritarian interests.

Conceptually, the decree against their language extends into the personal rhetoric of the family. After ridiculing the Elderly Woman's inability to communicate in the language of the Capital, the Guard tells the Prisoner: "And I'll tell you another thing. I've got a wife and three kids. And you're all a pile of shit" (Pinter, *Plays 4* 260). The random absurdity as well as the timing of the statement itself makes no more sense than the premise that their guard dogs are supposed to state their names before attacking. The content further illustrates the State's performance of the linguistic division between Subject (the State) and Object (the shithouses). To describe them with the same profanity in Scene 1 is certainly not a coincidence. The implication perhaps is that since the State-employed Guard has a sense of family and self, then those who are not a part of the State are antithetically sub-human to the extent that the concept of family has no value in their barbaric, rural lives.

Yet the crux of Scene II comes as the Prisoner responds, "I've got a wife and three kids" (Pinter, *Plays 4* 260), perhaps as an appeal to the Guard's empathy. The Guard takes immediate offence at this insubordination and demands the prisoner repeat himself: “You've what? (Silence). You've got what? (Silence). What did you say to me? You've got what? (Silence). You've got what? (He picks up the telephone and Dials one digit.) Sergeant? I'm in the Blue Room ... yes ... I thought I should report, Sergeant ... I think I've got a joker in here” (Pinter, *Plays 4* 260).

The Sergeant comes in and asks: "What joker?" as the stage goes to blackout (Pinter, *Plays 4* 261). Next in the visitor's room in Scene 4, the aftermath of this can be seen in the bloodied figure of the son sitting as his Mother silently looks on, who presumably had to
witness his beating. While the offstage violence appears to be in response to the Prisoner's perceived insolence, the punishment seems spurred on some level by the Prisoner's suggestion of a common or shared experience between the two. This moment recalls Nicolas's puzzlement in *One for the Road* over sharing the name of the son, Nicky, who would later be executed, as well as his own impassioned offense at Gila's identification with her father—a man that Nicolas saw as his own patriarch. Much like *One for the Road*, the transaction of authoritative control in *Mountain Language* depends upon the perpetuation of a dialogue between the Subject (the authoritarian figures of the State), Object (the prisoners of the State), and the "higher authority" (the State apparatus itself). What generally leads to violence in these plays is when the basis of the relationship is challenged by any implied identification between the subject and object, no matter how justified it may be. In *Mountain Language*, the suggestion that the Guard is in any way connected to the prisoners disrupts the already tenuous balance of identification via the Other. At this conceptual level, to identify with the object to the point of being one in the same implies that the Guards and Officers are in no better position of authority than the prisoners themselves. Although the subject needs the object in order to attain its own sense of self, complete equivalency with the object is a precarious matter.

Also similar to *One for the Road* is Pinter's focus on the impact of State sanctioned oppression on the level of the family. While Scenes II and IV dramatize the violent consequences of disobeying the rules of the Capital-state, the audience witnesses the lasting impact of such policies. In Scene 4, the Guard tells the son that his mother can finally speak in her native tongue to her son: "They've changed the rules. She can speak. She can speak in her own language. Until further notice" (Pinter, *Plays 4* 265). To her son's entreaties, the mother "does not respond. She sits still" (Pinter, *Plays 4* 267). Helpless in her inability to protect her son, her silence and submission comes as perhaps the only act she thinks can do to
prevent further abuse. Even the quiet communication between the two that that audiences heard via voice-over in Scene II is silenced. Conceptually, the decimation of her voice signifies the suppression of her identity as a mother to her son. The imprisoned Son pleads with her:

“Mother, you can speak. (Pause). Mother, I'm speaking to you. You see? We can speak. You can speak to me in our own language. (She is still). You can speak. (Pause). Mother. Can you hear me? I am speaking to you in our own language. (Pause). Do you hear me? (Pause). It's our language. (Pause). Can’t you hear me? Do you hear me? (She does not respond). (Pinter, Plays 4 265-266)

Faced only with her silence the "Prisoner’s trembling grows. He falls from the chair on to his knees, begins to gasp and shake violently (Pinter, Plays 4 267). D. Keith Peacock, in Harold Pinter and the New British Theatre, describes the son losing his voice as "like Stanley after his interrogation by Goldberg and McCann, he is deprived of speech. Both literally and metaphorically the deprivation of language represents the abandonment of individual resistance and conformity to the will of the state" (143). The son's state of shock also recalls the reaction of One for the Road's Victor (whose voice is maimed from having his tongue cut out) to the news of his son's presumed demise at the end of the play. Divesting their ability to communicate with one another has the effect of fracturing the bonds of family itself. The prisoner's convulsive state of shock is his autonomic response to realizing the depth of his isolation and to being completely and utterly alone. As a reflection of the Capital-state's self-righteous disregard for the impact of their policies, the Sergeant responds to the scene between mother and son: "Look at this. You go out of your way to give them a helping hand and they fuck it up. Blackout" (Pinter, Plays 4 267).
The authoritarian dialogue that the State has with the mountain region not only demands submission to the rules of the Capital-state, it also coerces those designated as "Other" to accept their roles within the discourse. The audience sees this expressed in the Elderly Woman's silence as well as in the second narrative between the Young Woman and her imprisoned husband. Although they prove to be not from the mountain and thus not directly impacted by the decree against the use of the regional language, they are still nevertheless, affected by the conceptual oppression embedded within the authoritarian rhetoric of the Capital-state. In Scene I, after the decree against the use of the mountain language is made, the Young Woman approaches the Officer and Sergeant and states, "I do not speak the mountain language" (Pinter, *Plays 4* 256). In a predatorial display of spatial entrapment, the two men surround her as the Sergeant puts his hand on her bottom and asks, "What language do you speak? What language do you speak with your arse?" (Pinter, *Plays 4* 256). Defiantly, the Young Woman removes herself from the Sergeant's hand and states:

Young Woman: My name is Sara Johnson. I have come to see my husband. It is my right. Where is he?

Officer: Show me your papers.

*She gives him a piece of paper. He examines it, turns to Sergeant.*

He doesn't come from the mountains. He's in the wrong batch.

Sergeant: So is she. She looks like a fucking intellectual to me. (Pinter, *Plays 4* 257)

On one level, the scene illustrates the flippant disregard the Capital-state has for any perceived challenge to its position of authority and power. Of particular note in this scene
though, is the allusion to intellectualism as a trait to be subdued. The scene illustrates the shared victimization of anybody deemed outside of the state apparatus, as the intellectual subversives are held in the same regard as the indigenous community. In *One for the Road*, the interrogator Nicolas mocks Victor's presumed intellectualism based on his penchant for debate as well as the many books that ransacking soldiers had found at his house. In both plays, therefore, intellectualism is subversion, and potential dissension to the State. Such sentiments are clearly antithetical to the figures of authority in both plays, and all the more necessary to silence. Thus, whether the husband has been mistakenly imprisoned matters little, since the State sees no difference between the "fucking intellectuals" and the "shithouses" as they are all equally reprehensible.

On a more figurative level, the scene casts the authoritarian discourse of the Capital-state within the conceptual rhetoric of gender. Sara's mere outsider presence, as well as her claims, implies some level of mix up, and thus imperfection, on the part of State policies. Yet, before the prison guards give her audience, she is first demeaned as a submissive female, capable of being violated. This leads to the Sergeant's misogynistic response. The power that is exhorted over her is not only a military-backed authority, it is also a masculinized authority. The fact that Sara looks like an intellectual makes her all the more a reprehensible object to be sexually dominated. Sara, as a female "Other," becomes a victim to be objectified, sexualized and finally conquered. The scene recalls the torture of Victor's family in *One for the Road* where the repeated raping of Gila by many soldiers becomes one signifier for the violation of the family itself. In both plays, Pinter couches the rhetoric of the totalitarian state within the discourse of sexual violence. Submitting to the rules, and thus the roles, demanded by authoritarian power becomes a matter of force and violation.
Sara's assumption of the role placed upon her by the State is evident in Scene 3 as she is placed in a room that contains the hooded figure of her husband. As the Sergeant explains to her that "They've sent you through the wrong door. Unbelievable. Someone'll be done for this" (Pinter, *Plays 4* 262-263), the hooded figure falls prompting Sara to scream as the Guard drags his body away. The Sergeant disregards her reaction, and instead informs her that: "[...] if you want any information on any aspect of life in this place we've got a bloke comes into the office every Tuesday week, except when it rains ... Give him a tinkle one of these days and he'll see you all right" (Pinter, *Plays 4* 264).

She replies, "Can I fuck him? If I fuck him, will everything be all right?" Naturally, the Sergeant informs her, "Sure. No problem" (Pinter, *Plays 4* 264). It is doubtful that her presence in the room was any sort of administrative mistake given that the scene she witnesses seems especially effective as a coercive device to force submission. Depending on how the actor delivers Sara's lines, her final question, "can I fuck him?" as many critics have pointed out, begs further analysis. On the one hand, the question could be interpreted as her desperate attempt to do whatever it takes to prevent more harm done to her husband, as the Elderly Woman may have done for her son in Scene IV. It can be argued that the question indicates her willingness to assume whatever roles necessary in order to gain access into the State. Yet, the bluntness of her question has the capacity to take audiences by surprise given her earlier claims to having rights and proper documentation. This has led some critics to interpret her tone as spiteful and sarcastic. As Peacock argues: "she is adopting the language of the situation in which she finds herself in order to express her contempt for the corruption it engenders" (143). Certainly, this is an apt description for what seems to be her realization of how bad their situation is in facing an impenetrable wall of bureaucracy. Whether or not audiences are meant to think that she is actually willing to go through with the Sergeant's suggestion depends on the actor's delivery of the lines. Regardless of her intention, what
Pinter expresses in this scene, as well as in the concluding scene with the silent Elderly Woman and her son, is the tragic extent to which the oppressed can go to mediate their place within the totalitarian State. While resistance leads to further violation and torture, acceptance ultimately means divesting oneself of any independent identity outside of the collective order. These scenes express, in no uncertain terms, how oppression corrupts absolutely, affecting both oppressor and the oppressed to subsume the roles mandated by authoritarian power.

As representatives of his later politicized drama, One for the Road and Mountain Language not only dramatize the tragic consequences of oppressive rule, they also uncover the familiarity of such systems to audiences regarding their own political realities. Pinter draws audiences closer into the narratives by not placing either play in a specific time period or location, like Turkey or Nicaragua, which could have had the effect of distancing audiences from the circumstances of the play. This way, depending on the manner in which productions designed the sets and costumes, the rhetoric used by the antagonists in the plays would appear more recognizable to audiences. Michael Billington described Pinter's 1991 production of Mountain Language at London's Almeida as self-consciously about the loss of civil liberties in British culture through the casting of the Officer and the Sergeant with actors that had recognizably regional British accents: "The more we sense that the military are ordinary men doing a routine job, the more shocking the play becomes [...] all too clearly us and not them" (313).

In classic Pinteresque style, audiences see the critical and moral scrutiny through the linguistic expressions used by the authoritarian figures to justify their roles and performances under the pretext of a higher cause. This is most apparent with the Sergeant at the end of Mountain Language who upon seeing the final moment between the silent Elderly Woman and her convulsing son says, "Look at this. You go out of your way to give them a helping
hand and they fuck it up" (Pinter, *Plays 4* 267). And it is equally apparent in *One for the Road* where Nicolas subscribes to the proclamation given by his nation's leader that "We are all patriots, we are as one, we all share a common heritage" (Pinter, *Plays 4* 232); thus, his job in interrogating Nicolas's family is in the greater service of keeping "the world clean for God" (Pinter, *Plays 4* 246). Such expressions reflect oppression's self-justifying sustainability. Whereas audiences witness the destructive impact of dictatorial rule, the Sergeant sees unappreciated State-sponsored charity, while Nicolas sees service to a national identity sanctioned by God. As representatives of the state, and self-proclaimed servants of God, their actions and rhetoric reflect the State's belief that its policies are truly in the nation's best interest and for the common good. Thus, while most audiences may not have firsthand knowledge of life in a Turkish prison cell during the 1980s, they can connect to the play through their own understanding of the self-righteous linguistics of patriotism, by witnessing what these characters do in the name of God and nation.

Pinter's intention is to show audiences that not only is such language ultimately a bureaucratic and dogmatic fallacy, it also masks the harsh realities underneath patriotism’s soothing blanket—that such rhetoric has only the best interests in mind of those in power. In this sense, as Pinter would later strenuously argue in his Nobel prize speech, the governments of the world's superpowers, most particularly the United States and the United Kingdom, are no less culpable of crimes against humanity than those of despotic nations that are openly dictatorial. As Pinter explained to Michael Billington in regard to *Mountain Language*:

"...it isn't the them, it's the us. We can all behave in exactly the same way. There isn't a good and a bad - it's preposterous. The complacencies that we inherit are based on nothing, really, except power. I've seen the police here and, by God, they can behave like any other police. I think we should look at
what's happening in our own societies and at the wider idea of democracy. It's used more and more as a fake word and a sham word and it doesn't mean anything.” (qtd. in Billington 309-10)

Pinter wants audiences to become especially sensitive to the oppressive realities of their government's political policies as well as the tragic consequences that are often associated with claims to the nation's best interest. Pinter's later drama reveals the rhetorical blanket of self-righteousness that permits those in power to freely do whatever it takes to maintain their positions of authority. Such rhetoric placates the public with paternalistic claims that no matter how harmful their policies may appear, they are always for their own good. Pinter's political theatre illustrates the capacity of these claims in perpetrating the atrocities on his stage.

While Pinter's later drama reflects his own sensibilities about the way political systems operate and the destructive consequences of State’s policies, many critics have pointed out that what can be difficult to discern in his drama is a space for the performance of direct opposition to such political oppression. In *One for the Road*, the defiance in Gila's tone in answer to Nicolas's questions eventually causes her to be sent back upstairs to be repeatedly raped again, while in *Mountain Language*, Sara's claim to having rights results in her being sexually demeaned. Yet, the strength of these plays lies not in presenting a blueprint for political action but rather in the way that they reflect Pinter's desire to make clear the political hypocrisies embedded in powerful governments that people too often take for granted. While the abuse dramatized in the plays will naturally draw an audience's ire, the rhetorical strategies that the theatrical oppressor's use to bolster their actions forces audiences to examine their own assumptions about their political realities. As Austin Quigley argues:
The source of appeal against the behavior of brutal government agents in plays like *One for the Road*, *Mountain Language*, and *Party Time* is not to one ideology or another, to one brand of political conviction or another, but to local relationships that individuals contract with each other, particularly in small social and family contexts, and to the rights and responsibilities thereby invoked. It is here that the personal becomes the source of appeal against anything political that loses touch with the personal. (Quigley, "Pinter, Politics and Postmodernism (1)" 17)

Through *One for the Road*’s focus on the impact that the political has on interpersonal relationships of families, as well as through *Mountain Language*’s anonymity of characters and location, Pinter's political theatre conveys a sense of universality and shared experience through archetypal characters and situations. By not providing a concrete response to the atrocities audiences witness on stage, Pinter leaves it up to the audience to determine, via their own consciences, the appropriate response to such oppression. Although the victims of *One for the Road* and *Mountain Language* are essentially no more than passive victims, perhaps the call to political awareness and action rests within the position of the audience themselves.

Throughout these plays, victims suffer most at the point where their voices cease to be heard or used. It would seem then that silence is the ultimate goal of the totalitarian state as reflected in *One for the Road*’s portrayal of Victor's inability to speak because his tongue has been cut out, and in *Mountain Language*’s dramatization of the Elderly Woman's speechlessness in the face of her son's suffering. In the theatricality of his universe, Pinter inscribes onto the audience the position of these characters who, though being told that they are free to go or that they may speak their own language, respectively, have no words to
express the depth of their suffering. Like the Elderly Woman's silent shock at watching her son beaten, audiences are also shocked into a compliant silence because they too do not possess the context anymore for linguistic authority. Yet, while silence in Pinter's theatre may be a matter of shocked incredulousness, silence in society is ultimately acquiescence. Matters of public state-sponsored oppression are ultimately the purview of the public's own complicity in engendering oppression through their own complacency.