Chapter VI

Harold Pinter’s Timeless Triumph
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The modern contemporary drama is now grown to full age. Its dense foliage is an image of having matured and ripened, grown full to its acme yet promising much more thought than those of the earlier ages. Contemporary drama revolves round the anguish of characters so much so that life is dissected to every minute details to reveal deep concern for problems in the contemporary life.

Leslie Feedler, the author of *Freaks* suggested

There is a growing interest in “beings who seem to be at the margin of everything called normal”. They seem to be moving into the centre of our imaginations. More and more stories deal with these people. It’s an over-whelming metaphor of our age. (A Semiolinguistic Perspective, 4-5)

Robert Jay Lifton says about the major mode of contemporary drama:

A mode of serious plays recently depicting characters at the edge of despair characters concerned of pain, anguish, and powerlessness; characters concerned, subjugated to the will of an overwhelming social setting. (A Semiolinguistic Perspective, 5-6).

The contemporary drama, therefore, depicted not merely the pain, deformities, wounds, inertia, and drudgery of claustrophobic souls but also the philosophical dilemma—a world of quality in human consciousness and human existence.
Martin Esslin, in his *Excellent survey of Drama Since Beckett* regarded that the ‘Theatre of the Absurd’ focuses on the plight of characters condemned to Camus’ desert of freedom whereby, man must first of all invent himself. These plays which are named as absurd objectify a psychological and social state of entrapment in a world that appears strange and forlorn. The contemporary world presented by Harold Pinter in order to express the emptiness within projects a world of impasse. In the plays of Ibsen, Chekhov, O'Neill and Miller the emptiness within is emptied on stage through symbolic images. For example, ‘Nina’ in the *Sea Gull* identifies herself with the bird after which the play is entitled. Likewise, ‘Ruth’ of *Beyond the Horizon* looks at empty fields in order to depict the emptiness within. But Pinter’s dramatic world is devoid of traditional, social, and moral meaning. The contemporary world has a no exit situation with a focus on the situation engulfing the individual rather than on the individual himself. Life thereby, is painted with documentary exactness and the experience of survival against odds is thereby, intensified. Hence, “what remains is a burning ember of action, a pure image of life at the edge” (*Plays of Impasse, Contemporary Drama*, 9)

Carol Rosen in his book *Plays of Impasse, Contemporary Drama* divides the Contemporary plays into three categories:

1. Plays that strive for objectivity, moving forward literary, but subordinating plot to a depiction of a total institution with naturalistic, almost documentary accuracy as a kinetic object trouvé;

2. Satiric, Parodic treatments of total institutions, using these settings as entertaining and often grimly funny vehicles for social
commentary and for a play of ideas; and

3. Imagistic, reductive, interior plays that suggest the total institution as they focus on the individual lost in a world he did not make and can not control.

(Plays of Impasse, Contemporary Drama, 31)

Pinter’s plays describes inner isolation, a byproduct of society turned awry. The condition of impasse, entrapment and despair sometimes cased and sometimes exacerbated by the memory of unwholesome life is the common theme of Pinter’s plays. Pinter’s world is as baffling as that of Kafka. Where by, the characters are oblique in suggestions. A reader encounters what may be called meticulous phantoms haunting and nagging their own consciousness by the privacy of their world eroded by psychological uphills. For example in No Man’s Land Pinter creates a male world of confrontation where the prey and the predator are locked up in a precarious linguistic world of identity. It is a mysterious realm with truth and self-knowledge around and the dramatic figure battle to comprehend in their own singular ways. There is a striking visual manifestation of both the public and the private domain of character which is complimentary to each other and exemplifies the state of the soul within.

HIRST

Something is depressing me. What is it? It was the dream, yes. Water falls. No, no. a lake. Water. Drowning. Not me. Someone else. How nice to have company. Can you imagine waking up, finding no-one here, just furniture, staring at you? Most unpleasant. I’ve known that condition, I’ve been through
that period-cheers-I came round to human beings in the end. (1.1.44).

This reveals how hesitant are Pinter’s characters in voicing the anguish of their lives. Therefore, there is no adequate amount of meaningful sense in the dialogues articulated. Pinter himself in one of his interviews admitted that the dramatic world is inexpressive because of few content words in the dialogues communicated.

My characters tell me so much and more, with reference to their experience, their history. Between lack of biographical data about them and the ambiguity of what they say there lies a territory which is not only worthy of exploration but which it is compulsory to explore you and I, the characters which grow on page, most of the time were inexpressive giving little away, unreliable, elusive, evasive, obstructive, unwilling. But it is out of these attributes that a language arises. A language where under what is said, another thing is being said.

(Sunday Times, 4 March, 1962).

A dramatic persona is a bundle of what words imply; a shape/identity visualized by the readers by what he speaks and how he speaks for and about himself and others. Apart from this the psychological and ideological dispositions that he reveals is also a qualitative feature in deducing a linguistic and paralinguistic feature. Further, a character also reveals a social or professional background, which may give a linguistic or paralinguistic feature communicated
through speed, stress, accent, pitch, and intonation.

Austin's Speech Acts that constitutes the discourse of situation, therefore, pinpoints the state of mind and the nature of communication, whereby, the two are interrelated. For example, in Ashes to Ashes when Devlin enquires about Rebecca's former love, his hesitation and nervousness during interrogation is well worked up through words and silences:

DEVLIN

*Pause*

Listen. This chap you were just talking about...I mean this chap you and I have been talking about...in a manner of speaking...when exactly did you meet him? I mean when did all this happen exactly? I haven't...how can I put this...quite got it into focus. Was it before you knew me? That's a question of some importance. I'm sure you'll appreciate that. (1.1.31-33).

Labov and Fanshal believe that such meta-action construct a deeper social-psychological level of action whereby a predator may challenge his prey making the prey either resort to defence or retreat. Because of such a level of discourse an emphasis on language is a prerequisite. Such a kind of a verbal confrontation is noticeable in all the plays understudy, whereby, it may be deduced that Pinter's characters may be studied more emphatically as emotive entities delineated through the universe of discourse. The textual cohesion is indelibly a product of surface linguistic form/ speech acts.
Plays like *Betrayal*, and *Ashes to Ashes* rightly substantiates how Pinter achieves dramatic coherence through situational reality and language techniques—silence and repetition as well as co-reference. The dramatic persona are, therefore constituted through linguistic and non-linguistic features. This also makes their mental states and intentions implicit to the readers. If we follow Beckermann’s ‘Three dimensional scale’ to the assessment of Pinter’s plays we find that Pinter’s characters are complex in terms of psychological disposition and are dynamic (to use Foster’s term) to the extent of being fascinating to the readers, Beckermann analyses figures/characters in terms of length, breath and depth.

The tension in Pinter’s plays is commonly a byproduct of the violation of Grice’s Co-operative principle. For example in the *Mountain Language* the elder and the younger woman annoy their predator either by silence (as in the case of elder woman) or by repetition of the interrogation (as in the case of younger woman). The same occurs in a scene in *One For the Road* where Victor, Nicolas, and Gila do not maintain maxim of quality, whereby, the annoyance of the predator is so infuriated that they are physically assaulted and Gila’s son Nicky is put to death. The dramatic core of communication in the case of Pinter is based on a system of closed-structured time and space. Such presentation makes a self content or concentrated structures. The dramatic world of *Ashes to Ashes* or *Betrayal* or *Mountain Language* therefore, leave an impression of suffocation as well as hopelessness. Most of Pinter’s plays are single locale in terms of aesthetic space and there is a very little move from one locale to an-
other. With in a single locale commonly two or at the most three characters are presented to communicate dialogically with one another implying spatial relationship of distance or proximity.

Because Pinter’s characters try to define themselves and affirm their identities by preference to past events, static events of the past and dynamic -static of the present run parallel to each other adding much to the otherwise contextual obscurity. This is further enhanced by Pinter’s use of quasi-natural dialogues—the inadequacies of the language is wisely exploited to imitate the mind in agony. Andrew Kenedy in his book Six Dramatists in Search of a Language comments:

...the seemingly accurate ‘real language’ phrasing is consciously patterned to show up the inadequacies—idioms as idiocies- and the failures of language. The technique of pauses and the elliptical sayings; the repetitions and circumlocutions; the language games and cliché catalogues; further, the play on stress and rhythmic nuances—all these amount to a linguistic naturalism which has, clearly, grown into something else. Here we have, again, a progression from a limited to a critical language.

(Six Dramatists in Search of Language, 21-22).

Further, the spoken action does not help much to place Pinter’s character in a coherent system of space/time. Even though, they are placed in a specific environment, lack of details or purposeful avoidance of details do not provide a historical/ geographical specificity to
the environment. For example, we cannot connect space with Victor, Nicolas, Gila against Officer and Sergeant to any chronicle apart from the verbal rivalry that takes place. They are reduced just to exploit the dramatic feel in a set of relation and to distort the dramatic intensity through inarticulate speech. The inarticulate speech provides a psycho-socio framework to Pinter's plays. This repetitive exploitation of an inarticulate speech also adds to the inner economy of the play. The verbal inexplicitness deliberately created invests the drama with literary articulateness. One can borrow the coinage 'costume speech' (role-speech) for Pinter's dramatist persona. This is described as:

...a language that has many gradations from the tirade—the bombast speeches—to 'the really fine rhetoric... where a character in the play sees himself in a dramatic light.

...If, the metaphor 'costume' suggests something 'put on', then in modern theatricality we move from the hypocrite actor-language of a Jonson or Molière character, to the precarious camouflages of self-expression, when a person's identity is itself a question.

(Six Dramatists in Search of Language, 32)

It can, therefore, be deduced that Pinter is much more than amusing substance of suspense and curtained lines. His characters are, therefore to use Gasten Bachlard's term "simple images revealing a psychic state through disturbance of words"

Pinter's characters escape the context of fixity and predictabil-
ity. They are not a set of principle and traits with noticeable costumes and characteristic phrases. Therefore, they fall short of becoming stereotypes. (It may be noted that this is observed only in the case of the plays understudy that amount to his creativity of the later phase). His characters, are therefore, categorically ‘descriptive’ in nature and not ‘perspective’ as is Vladimir and Estragon of Waiting for Godot. For example in Betrayal the backward movement with flash back technique makes the audience witnesses the aim of the affair between Jerry and Emma and its aftermath as well as the emotiveness of the lovers towards each other in the early phase of the affair. This follows with the forward movement with some revelations as how a husband deals with his friend after he has discovered his wife’s infidelity with him. This is therefore a description of betrayal. As a result one notices what Jack Kroll in one of his observation says, “Betrayal resonates more widely than adultery”.

Pinter is also known for his customary comic devices, which are otherwise sparsely seen. For example, in Betrayal when Emma tells her former lover what she thought of him the other day he unexpectedly respond “Good God Why?” (1.1.12). Further repetition also evokes laughter in Betrayal. When Robert recognizes that Jerry was unaware of the fact that he has discovered her affair with his friend: “I thought you knew”. “Knew what?” “That I knew. That I’ve known for years. I thought you knew that” “You thought I knew”. (1.2.38).

Betrayal also reveals some fresh elements in Pinter’s dramaturgy, which commonly Pinter did not reveal in any of his plays earlier. For example dramatic irony singularly marks Betrayal in the en-
tire creative output of Pinter. Here, the audience/ spectators are made to learn about the affair much earlier than the two characters did about each other. The reader can perceive than maneuver as they mock, despise, and evade each other. For example, when Robert slyly boasts about his physical fitness we associate his assertion to his knowledge of Jerry’s affair. The play is also a change in the respect that here visual dramatization comes next to statement which is commonly not a regular practice with Pinter.

Pinter is also known for not only universalizing his themes but also purposefully avoiding the individual identity of his characters in order to make them represent a human being in a general term. He deliberately avoids clarity of details in terms of context/ spatial details in order to make his message an umbrella theme. For example, One For the Road does not talk about a particular region or country that practices torture. As a result the context is clear and well synchronises with in the action detailed. But the emotiveness remains undistinguishable. For example, here, Victor’s crime was marked or cited and therefore the torture subjected to him remains unjustified.

Structurally, Pinter’s plays contain striking symmetry. One notices perfect harmony in terms of division and also in terms of the spread of action. Here one also notices that his plays do not have commonly a linear movement; either they travel circumtuitously or it has quick start to end movement, for example in Mountain Language and One For the Road. Because Pinter’s plays are verbal-action oriented there are very little details about the environment and stage
directions. One finds the word-power as a regular strategy to combat the ills and the existence of the minors under the sweep of control. Pinter dramatizes the situation in order to highlight the agony of the preys that are not only physically tortured but also mentally and emotionally bruised. The agony is not described in words but marked through pauses and silences in order to conjure the image of the suffering. Such responses of abstractions are left to the ingenuity of the readers; this is how the participation of the reader is called for. This is innovativeness in terms of technique.

Pinter's plays are wide in their scope and perspective. He explores men within family and men on earth; hence, the move is from both between general and particular worlds. *Betrayal* and *Moonlight* are domestic plays / familial dramas whereas *One For the Road*, *Mountain Language*, *No Man's Land*, and *Ashes to Ashes* are socio-political scenarios. Because family is an integral unit of the society, the two merges with each other as completely as a member of a family merges with the folks at a market place or in a work place. The two are, therefore, complementary to each other and Pinter's aim is to maintain the relationship that exists as a truth.

The odd talks in Pinter's plays also invite the readers to scan his plays in terms of 'Communicative Strategies'. What we label as 'Odd talk' turns out to be a non-odd talk once it talks a contextual colour. The seemingly ill formed and non-canonical dramatic discourse contributes to a well-formed canonical discourse that explains the 'intent' and 'mode' of what is being communicated.
The motion of context is divided into three overlapping categories:

(a) **Physical Context**: This is the actual setting or environment in which interaction takes place like a face-to-face conversation. For example, the verbal rivalry between officer and Nicolas in the Mountain Language.

(b) **Personal Context**: This encompasses social and institutional roles of speakers and hearers and the relative status and roles clubbed to it.

(c) **Cognitive Context**: This embodies an interaction process, which extends to a speaker's past experience, cultural knowledge and world-view.

Further discourse exchanges also play an integral role in communicative strategies; repetition predict annoyance and frustration (See study Corpus, Appendix—6.1. and 6.2) and question predict answer and challenges. (See Study Corpus, Appendix—6.3 and 6.4)

The discourse exchanges based on dissimilar structures present how the bizzare sequence are the acknowledgements of mental and physical challenges. Nevertheless that Pinter skillfully aligns his discourse strategies with discourse contexts that makes the conversation inviting and fascinating to the readers. The oddity of Communicative forms contains the Communicative competence of his dramatis persona. This is illustrated through excerpts:

**One For the Road**

NICOLAS

... 

What do you say? Are we friends?
Pause

I'm prepared to be frank, as a true friend should. I love death. What about you?

Pause

What about you? Do you love death? Not necessarily your own. Others. The death of others. Do you love the death of others, or at any rate, do you love the death of others as much as I do?

Pause

Are you always so dull? I understood you enjoyed the cut and thrust of debate.

Pause

Death. Death. Death. As has been noted by the most respected authorities, it is beautiful. The purest, most harmonious thing there is. Sexual intercourse is nothing compared to it. (1.1.13 and 15)

Ashes to Ashes

DEVLIN

When was that? When did you live in Dorset? I've never lived in Dorset.

Pause

REBECCA

Oh by the way somebody told me the other day that there's a condition known as mental elephantiasis.

DEVLIN

What do you mean, 'somebody told you'? What do you
mean, 'the other day'? What are you talking about?

REBECCA

This mental elephantiasis means that when you spill an ounce of gravy, for example, it immediately expands and becomes a vast sea of gravy. It becomes a sea of gravy which surrounds you on all sides and you suffocate in a voluminous sea of gravy. It's terrible. But it's all your own fault. You brought it upon yourself. You are not the victim of it, you are the cause of it. Because it was you who spilt the gravy in the first place, it was you who handed over the bundle. (1.1.49 and 51)

The odd talks gain its oddity from the contextual dimensions also. Vimala Herman in the essay 'Turn Management in Drama' describes drama as horizontal as well as vertical. Horizontal reveals character to character interaction, whereas vertical is interaction with the audience or asides, or the use of just speaking out one's mind aloud. Pinter's concern is purely with the horizontal dimension of character where the performance is measured in terms of channels like voice, pauses, gaps, or simultaneous speech. Further the variables that determine force of interaction is—length of speeches and style and texture of a character's speech. Turn grabs are also used in order to reveal how a character interposes him into an interaction uninvited and thereby asserts her supremacy. This can be seen in Mountain Language.

SERGEANT steps forward

SERGEANT
SIR!

OFFICER

Look at this woman’s hand. I think the thumb is going to come off.

(To ELDERLY WOMAN)

Who did this?

She stares at him.

Who did this?

YOUNG WOMAN

A big dog

OFFICER

What was his name?

Pause

What was his name? (1.1.15-17).

The sergeant and the officer take turn changes in the order of the speech in Pinter’s dramatic texts in order to bully the preys with a collective effort. Further the turn size and texture also varies in the case of the speech of the predators in the above cited excerpt. The officer’s turn is much longer occasionally multiple clause in order to intensify fear, which he intends to deliver to his victim—the Young woman. Further the young woman’s answers/turn is very short, evasive answers to escape the threat that the exploiter intends. The linguistic style, thereby, in both the turns qualitatively appears the same: the prey and the predator use standard language prose in conversational idiom. This could also be noticed that the officer’s speech style is somewhat complex. For example, he is at times indirect; tar-
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geting the woman with long bantering and challenging her personal outrage. The young woman is mostly direct in delivering answers and faces threatening by repetitions. She echoes what her predator speaks as a show of annoyance. At times she uses silence for the officer's long and sarcastic remarks.

The supermacy of the officer and his body--elusive of the officer could be seen in topic control also. It is often the officer or the sergeant who control the topic and others (young woman, elderly woman, and prisoner) oriented to him. Neither the young woman nor the prisoner has enough strength to challenge their topics and through minimal responses discourage its flux. But this turns up to be; in all cases a vain effort for they are put to physical torture for their efforts to abort interrogation conducted by the predators.

Today it is sacred to call Pinter a final word in dramaturgy. Nobel Prize has assured and ascertained his supermacy over his peers and contemporaries. 'Pinteresque' is now a new world of plays and the six plays that the six chapters treat at length demonstrate his distinctive artistic signature. With a wide periphery Pinter's writings carry a remarkable variety as well as remarkable quality of contemporary dramatic potential. His attributes exclusively claim him a grave and sedate reading with admirable salutations.
Study Corpus

6.1 One for the Road

Black out.

Light up. Night.

NICOLAS sitting. GILA standing. Her clothes are torn.

She is bruised.

NICOLAS

When did you meet your husband?

GILA

When I was eighteen.

NICOLAS

Why?

GILA

Why?

NICOLAS

Why?

GILA

I just met him.

NICOLAS

Why?

GILA

I didn’t plan it.

NICOLAS

Why not?

GILA

I didn’t know him.

NICOLAS
Why not?

GILA

I met him.

NICOLAS

When?

GILA

When I was eighteen.

NICOLAS

Why?

GILA

He was in the room.

NICOLAS

Room?

Pause.

Room?

GILA

The same room.

NICOLAS

As what?

GILA

As I was.

Pause.

GILA (screaming)

As I was!

NICOLAS

Room? What room?

GILA
A room.

NICOLAS

What room?

GILA

My father’s room.

NICOLAS

Your father? What’s your father got to do with it?

Pause.

Your *father*? How dare you? Fuckpig.(1.1.31,33,35and 37)
Study corpus

6.2 Moonlight

BEL

ANDY
Is this a joke? My God, she's taking the piss out of me. My own wife. On my deathbed. She's as bad as that fucking cat.

BEL
Perhaps it's my convent school education but the term 'taking the piss' does leave me somewhat nonplussed.

ANDY
Nonplussed! You've never been nonplussed in the whole of your voracious, lascivious, libidinous life.

BEL
You may be dying but that doesn't mean you have to be totally ridiculous.

ANDY
Why I am dying, anyway? I've never harmed a soul. You don't die if you're good. You die if you are bad. (1.1.3-4)
Study corpus

6.3 Betrayal


EMMA and JERRY standing, kissing. She is holding a basket and a parcel.

EMMA
Darling.

JERRY
Darling

He continues to hold her. She laughs.

EMMA
I must put this down. She puts basket on table.

JERRY
What’s in it?

EMMA
Lunch.

JERRY
What?

EMMA
Things you like.

He pours wine.

How I look?

JERRY
Beautiful.

EMMA
Do I like well?

JERRY
You do.

*He gives her wine.*

EMMA (sipping)

Mmmnn.

JERRY

How was it?

EMMA

It was lovely.

JERRY

Did you go to Torcello?

EMMA

No.

JERRY

Why not.

EMMA

Oh, I don't know. The Speedboats were on strike, or something.

JERRY

On strike?

EMMA

Yes, On the day we were going.

JERRY

Ah. What about the gondolas?

EMMA

You can't take a gondola to Torcello.

JERRY

Well, they used to in the old days. didn't they? Before
they had speedboats. How do you think they got over there?

EMMA
It would take hours.

JERRY
Yes, I suppose so.

Pause
I got your letter.

EMMA
Good.

JERRY
Get mine?

EMMA
Of course. Miss me?

JERRY
Yes. Actually, I haven't been well.

EMMA
What?

JERRY
Oh nothing. A bug.

She kisses him.

EMMA
I missed you.

She turns away, looks about.
You haven't been here... at all?

JERRY
No.
EMMA
Needs Hoovering.

JERRY
Later.

Pause.
I spoke to Robert this morning.

EMMA
Oh?

JERRY
I'm taking him to lunch on Thursday.

EMMA
Thursday? Why?

JERRY
Well, it's my turn.

EMMA
No, I meant why are you taking him to lunch?

JERRY
Because it's my turn. Last time he took me to lunch.

EMMA
You know what I mean.

JERRY
No. What?

EMMA
What is the subject or point of your lunch?

JERRY
No subject or point. We've been doing it for years. His turn, followed by my turn.
EMMA

You've misunderstood me.

Have I? How?

EMMA

Well, quite simply, you often do meet, or have lunch, to discuss a particular writer or a particular book, don’t you? So to those meetings, or lunches, there is a point or a subject. (1.6.91-96).
REBECCA
By the way, there’s something I’ve been dying to tell you.

DEVLIN
What?

REBECCA
It was when I was writing a note, a few notes for the laundry. Well... to put it bluntly ... a laundry list. Well, I put my pen on that little coffee table and it rolled off.

DEVLIN
No?

REBECCA
It rolled right off, onto the carpet. In front of my eyes.

DEVLIN
Good God.

REBECCA
This pen, this perfectly innocent pen.

DEVLIN
You can’t know it was innocent.

REBECCA
Why not?

DEVLIN
Because you don’t know where it had been. You don’t know how many other hands have held it, how many other hands have written with it, what other people have been doing with it. You know nothing of its history. You know
nothing of its parents' history.

REBECCA

A pen has no parents.

Pause

DEVLIN

You can't sit there and say things like that.

REBECCA

I can sit here.

DEVLIN

You can't sit there and say things like that.

REBECCA

You don't believe I'm entitled to sit here? You don't think I'm entitled to sit in this chair, in the place where I live?

DEVLIN

I'm saying that you're not entitled to sit in that chair or in or on any other chair and say things like that and it doesn't matter whether you live here or not.

REBECCA

I'm not entitled to say like what?

DEVLIN

That that pen was innocent.

REBECCA

You think it was guilty?

Silence.

DEVLIN

I'm letting you off the hook. Have you noticed I'm let-
ting you slip. Or perhaps it's me who's slipping. It's dangerous. Do you notice? I'm a quickstand.

REBECCA

Like God.

DEVLIN

God? God? You think God is sinking into a quickstand?

(1.1.33,35,37 and 39)
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