Chapter II

The Strangeness
Of
Constructed lives
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Drama is to some extent a mode of direct communication; being multimodal, it is invariably complex as it works at more than one contextual form at one time. It is a conglomeration of sign system; has cultural vibrations and also an ideological phase. The richness of a drama and its multi-contextual peculiarity is well illustrated by John O’Toole in his book *The Process of Drama Negotiating Art and Meaning.*

![Diagram of Drama Model](image-url)

*Figure 2.1 Drama model: the elements of Dramatic form*
The twentieth century theatre embodies two dominant developments—realism in play and production and the so-called 'new stage craft', which can serve both the realistic and the imaginative play. This grew to noticeable proportions around 1905. The chief elements of the new stagecraft were bettered by Appia and Craig who introduced new changes in the physical side of production, first comes simplification of means and effect. A simple setting emphasizes the actor and, therefore, the play. In addition the production transformed into a clean fusion of settings, costumes, movement and perhaps music, so that the acting presented the play in its fullest effects. Craig recognized that the theatre is a synthesis of many arts and skill. It is not merely a display of acting, scenery, lights, music, movements or dance. The theatre, he held, was all or many of these things. Craig never exalted the artist above the theatre. To him the stage was not a place that offered its backdrops as the hugest canvas any painter even had.

'The theatre', he wrote, should not be a place in which to exhibit scenery...it should be a place in which the entire beauty of life can be unfolded...and the inner beauty and the meaning of life.

The theatre owes to America the most radical of all projects for abolishing the proscenium and curtain. This has been called a variety of names—“Central Staging”, “Arena Staging”, “The Theatre in the Round” See Fig. 2.2. The earliest experiment in placing the actors in the centre of the theatre and the audience round them
Fig. 2.2 THEATRE IN ELLIPSOIDAL FORM
"appears to be a production by Azubah Latham, in 1914, of the Mask of Joy at Teachers College, Columbia University". In 1930 Geddes drew plans for a special theatre for central staging, and in 1940 Gleen Hughes of the University of Washington, in Seattle brought this sort of play house into being, first in roof top apartment, then in Penthouse Theatre. Within ten years, there were at last fifty similar ventures, often rather temporary in structure. In central staging the sense is defined by floor covering, small set pieces, and furniture, while directing and lighting become a special and difficult problem. See Fig. 2.3, 2.4, 2.5...

British Drama too has an interesting face lift. Soon after the Second World War Paris became the hub of Western dramatic art and the French Theatre associated with surrealist drama came to be recognized as "The Theatre of the Absurd". This period also resounded with approvals and disapprovals for Beckett’s Waiting for Godot (1952) and Ionesco’s Exit the King (1962). To some the sudden rise of absurdism was an attack on the brutal human atrocities like the gas chambers and nuclear bombs of the war where as to some it revealed the negative side of Satre’s existentialism. Beckett’s bleak images in Godot and Endgame conjured up a human existence which Richard Coe interpretes as, “Intolerable Imprisonment”.

Harold Pinter found in Beckett an eternal model. He acknowledged his debt, to him. Beckett was “The greatest writer of our time”. The indebtedness is writ large on the format of his early plays which are spread against bleak settings and have sparse dialogues. Landscape and Silence are recognisable inclination towards Beckettian monologues. Nevertheless, he excels his model by sheer dint of his sug-
Fig. 2.3 THEATRE IN ROUND OF 1930S
Fig. 2.4 VIEW OF EXTERIOR (THE FACADE)
Fig. 2.5 VIEW OF THE INTERIOR (THE FACADE)
gestive obliquity, part of his achievement also rests on his dramatic way of revealing the threat behind the evasive exchanges of everyday life and in exhibiting the tension between those who otherwise claim to be intimate. Pinter has the reputation of being a difficult playwright, he is also labelled as ‘obscure’ and has suffered the rebuke of his defeated readers for twenty-five long years as - “What the hell is it all about?” Pinter’s plays have psychological reflections also and offer striking shades of metaphysics as additional profit. His philosophy is not current abstractions but thoughts test in trivia whether of person or of matter. Therefore little stage craft is Pinter’s requirement. Further purposeful avoidance of space and time details have further made staging of his plays difficult for stage accessories are not required even to the bare minimum. In this way Pinter has made the stage more focussed on action and the uncharacterized space has made the play - theme take up a universal meaning. With these motives, Pinter has carried ‘British drama’ many steps ahead by his singular efforts.

Esslin upholds the idea that drama is a sum total of the verbal and the paralinguistic internal communication. Pinter’s plays, therefore, offer a wide variety of actions, which are interesting both in its fictional context as well as the context of the medium, that denotes an exchange of idea. The fictional context structures the text where as the context of medium-language, paralanguage, or silence transit the ‘substance’ of action. The fun of reading Pinter’s spectacle is therefore the social game, which Wittgenstein describes as “language game”. He believes:

... network of relationships overlapping and crisscrossing
that we accomplish the activities of giving orders, describing objects, reporting events, speculating and formulating hypotheses, fabricating stories, asking, thanking, cursing and praying.

(The Language of Silence. Unspoken in Modern Drama, 17).

There are several straight-forward reasons to take up this study for my interpretive strategies. Pinter’s plays stand wide apart from those of his predecessors in terms of language and literary features. Here, the focus is on the dominant inter-relational function and not on simple referential as it is used to be earlier. Pinter is particularly concerned with how his characters are presented via their text and how its effect in the form of language creates the textual world. The problem on the enigma thereby demonstrates that which is commonly not the gild of character and situation in the plays to precede Pinter. The social and cultural milieu enhances the structure of personal relationship rather from exploring, enhancing, or re-enforcing such a situation.

Pinter’s world appears simple on the surface level but the undercurrent of textuality adds obscure shades to it. Therefore, one has to concentrate on the focus of character-confrontation in order to make it not only meaningful but also amusing. Further Pinter’s plays pose an open challenge to its readers, for the social and the geographic location in the plays are detailed with only precise touches. Learning them, one at first impulse, shudders at the confusions and we desire to step out of this. In terms of Freud, Pinter’s world is a
regular sway between 'heimlich' and 'unheimlich'. (German word for 'familiar' and 'unfamiliar'). This further depicts how complex a world place constructed in order to project the uncanny world around.

Pinter's plays abound in the dramatization of victim fighting against victimization. Commonly, the victim and the victimizer relationship remain shrouded in mystery because the cause of victimization is more commonly hinted than described. The focus of Pinter is, thereby to present those psychological relationship where by power travels from executor to the affected. The psychological relationship is analogous to the shades of metaphysics and compulsorily follows all relationship whether proximal or distal. For example, in *Mountain Language*, the senior and the younger women are harassed and the two victims share every impulse of humanity in order to check each other from further harassment. The play hovers over brutality whereby, life on extreme edge of sensitivity is depicted. Here, Pinter has made explicit what has been implicit in all his previous plays- an agonized isolation of the individual. This living much alone is so traumatic that even within a community or a family or a group pangs of isolation can not be escaped or crushed.

Pinter's technique of play writing altered the delineation of characters within the situational world. Here, the characters are merely individuals representing but none is specific as their names and roles are not maintained; but if a social problem is to be fashioned like *Mountain Language* or *No Man's Land* then the roles are merely mentioned; in order to characterize the dramatic persona as individuals so as to glaringly reveal how enimity exist within the
common group or structure. Because, the characters are not introduced in accordance with the traditional rules a reader is commonly obfuscated in placing characters within the action slots and at times not one but repetitive readings are required to fathom the interpersonal relationship.

Pinter’s plays are far more dramatic than the theme contained because of the strangeness in craft. For example One for the Road begins at a point where the action has reached its explosive reach – the woman is victimized physically, her husband and their son psychologically, and to enhance the trauma he is described as brutally killed by the victimizers. Likewise, in Mountain Language the play starts at a point where the men-folks are already subjected to physical violence in custody and the women have come to plead innocence before the victimizers who further imprison them and hence, the victimization continues. These two instances reveal how the play begins abruptly and, thereby, the obscurity of the reader is intelligibly explained.

The orientation of the plays under study lies in the emotional reverberations. The characters speak about their emotional traits under the throes of exploitations, whereby, the soul is laid bare along with the mind. On one hand we have the aggressiveness of the victor and on the other the plight of the victim, the convergence of the two is verbally detailed through repetition or silences. Steven Gale rightly says that

Pinter does not describe characters and events precisely:

... they can readily shift direction, leaving behind them the s-curves and “dangerous corners” that create exciting theatre. Pinter’s masterful use of this technique, however, lies
in his honest approach to it. The unexpected in Pinter's plays is believable, not contrived, because it is dictated by the characters themselves.

(Harold Pinter—Critical Approaches, 95)

Further the characters are exposed in their aspect of personality in a progressive manner. A character presents himself in one shade at the beginning of the play and then moves on to unwound other layers whereby a full personality evolves at the close of the play. This is unlike the traditional dramatists who first explore the character in full to make an entity and further details traits to singularize him. Pinter's mode is not the same. This makes a character an object of curiosity for a reader throughout the length of a play. Betrayal substantiates this features with much authenticity. On the surface Emma, Jerry and Robert seem untouched by infidelity and rejection but they are neck deep into it. More so Robert announces that he does not care a bit about his wife's or his friend's extra-marital affairs yet, he himself does not confess his own sin the extra-marital relationship blessed him with a child. Surprisingly he hangs on to his marriage to Judith throughout the five-year affair with Emma who also feigns indifference. Pinter maintains that "... people fall back on anything they can lay their hands on verbally to keep away from the danger of knowing, and of being known". (177)

Pinter at times juxtaposes active characters with passive. For example in No Man's Land, Hirst is placed within the slot of time where he remains stagnant in growth, Because, he insists in a still point, he confuses people of today with people of yesterday, whereby, the past and the present collide within an hour. He lives a timeless
'no man's land' because of this flaw he succeeds in killing the roots of alienation from his life.

Time is a changeable concept in Pinter's plays. Time and character are so integrally blended that one changes the hue of the other. For example, in *No Man's Land* the fleeting time is indicated by the change of the acts. Act II opens with Hirst and Spooner waking up after a long sound sleep. But soon past intrudes as they take up activities of the present day. This assists a reader to explore the temporal relativity of time. Further such a flux of time juxtaposes Hirst, the timeless man in contrast to Spooner who moves with time as spontaneously as dead leaves vanish when thrown in a flowing river.

Conflict is another element as strikingly noticeable as is time. The root cause of subtle psychological conflict is a struggle for domination. One marvels at the verbal stratagems adopted to prevail over the opponents. Insolence highly charges the rude remarks aimed by the predator at the prey. The level of subjugation 'on' therefore, is measured in the use of dialogues. In *Mountain Language* the prey-predator ratio in terms of confrontation is based on the number of words syntactically arranged in the dialogues aimed at each other. For example, the words spoken by the younger lady hardly exceeds by six words in numbers and are commonly monosyllabic where as, the sergeant uses words which are bi-syllabic and at time tri-syllabic and frequently repeated to execute power. Repetition of dialogues, whether it be the prey or the predator, therefore, becomes evidently striking. One marvels at the circuit of the language.

The officer steps towards the women

OFFICER
Now hear this. You are mountain people. You hear me? 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. Any questions?

YOUNG WOMAN

I do not speak the mountain language.

Silence.

The Officer and SERGEANT slowly circle her.

The SERGEANT puts his hand on her bottom.

SERGEANT

What language do you speak? What language do you speak with your arse? (1.1.21-23)

In the above extract it is clearly indicated that Pinter’s characters are governed more by situational meaning than by characteristic personal details. Here, their social language becomes a ‘tool of inquiry’ or thinking devices, whereby, the character develops his situational identity now referred to as subjectivity’. The focus, therefore, is on their personal dynamics and actual practices and experiences. Describing situated meaning James Paul Gee in his book An Introduc-
tion to Discourse Analysis says:

... A situated meaning is an image or pattern that we assemble “on the spot” as we communicate in a given context, based on our construal of that context and on our past experiences (Agar 1994; Barsalou 1991, 1992; Clark 1996; Hofstadter 1997; Kress 1985; Levinson 1983). One can even “feel” one’s mind assemble different situated meanings. For example consider there two utterances about “Coffee”.

1. “The Coffee spilled get a mop”

The situational meaning is based on a particular perspective, which is channelized by language and, therefore, one manages to hold what is called pattern recognition or builders. Language, therefore, is an active matter in the process of assembling the situational meaning for action in the make-belief world. But as the play begins the situated meaning gets contextualized and becomes somewhat general.

James Paul Gee explains this feature as:

Situated meaning are, then, a product of the bottom-up action and reflection with which the learner engages the world and the top town guidance of the cultural models or theories the learners is developing. With out both these levels, the learner either ends up with something too general (a cultural connected to contextualized, mid level patterns) or with something too specific and contextualized. something that functions too much like a proper name (the word applies just here. I don’t really
Therefore, the plays are important in terms of inter textuality where words comprise and where the characters imply at. Hence, the roles are “atrophied” in order to make the situational meaning an immediate profit to the readers. Further, the plays are also important because of its cultural environ.

It is cultural hue of the inter-personal relationship that consciously or unconsciously guides our actions and interactions in the world. It is the cultural milieu that helps us to shape and organize the important aspects of an experience through which a character reveals himself. Landis Strauss and W. Quinn demonstrate how cultural models are distinguished and are identified.

(A Cognitive Theory of Cultural Meaning, 97)

* Espoused models, that is models which we consciously espouse.

** Evaluative models, that is models which we use, consciously or unconsciously, to judge others; or ourselves

*** Models-in (inter) action, that is models that consciously or unconsciously guide our actions and interactions in the world (68).

The characters of Pinter organize their dialogues in such a striking way that the malice between them is easily revealed.

Here, the three models are completely obliterated and what we have is just a display of inherent ill will made conscious not only by actions but also by ways of acting, interacting and even by display of emotions.
For example,

**DEV LIN**

Good.

*Pause*

Shall we talk more intimately. Let's talk about more intimate things, let's talk about something more personal, about something with in your own immediate experience. I mean, for example, when the hair dresser takes your head in his hands and starts to wash your hair very gently and to massage your scalp, when he does that, when your eyes are closed and he does that, he has your entire trust doesn’t he? It isn’t just your head which is in his hands, is it, it’s your life, it’s your spiritual ... welfare.(1.1.41-43)

Pinter’s world is narrow limited to a few characters and the confrontation between them is a series of dialogues. Pinter’s plays are synonymous to physical, psychological or political violence; realistic explanations are absent and disturbing questions connected with lives and characters keep on rising. One is unsure of the inexplicable actions of the characters and the oddity of their speech exchanges. Pinter adds to the strangeness of his dramatic worlds by his refusal to focus on answers to “who” and “why”. He rather projects with intensity “what” and “how”, his dramatic aspects add to the unconventionality with which “Pinteresque” is associated. Here the menace is built up through what happens and what has happened — a double-forked display of meaning. Therefore Pinter is not an easy reading. Christopher C. Hudgins observes:
What the audience learns from a Pinter play depends on the audience's creative inferences gleaned from the focale indexes of intended response; the distanced, intellectual attention the play require should gradually lead to the emotional identification Pinter's vision of participation implies. ("Intended Audience Response, The Homecomming and Ironic Model of Identification", 105)
Works Cited


