CHAPTER VII

THE LANGUAGE OF PINTER
It is by now an established fact and part of literary history, of dramatic history that Christopher Fry and T.S. Eliot and Synge made serious attempts early in the century to bring poetry into theatre. But though the attempts to revive poetry met with instant success they proved futile because the successive playwrights were no longer interested in myths and histories as did Christopher Fry and T.S. Eliot. As Thora puts it:

... the verse drama has been unsuccessful in the post-war period largely because present-day audiences lack the sensitivity and power of concentration which poetry demands in the theatre. Brought up on a diet of documentary realism on our sitting-room screens we are not prepared to cope with a highly stylised literary form unless it is already very familiar as in the case of Shakespeare. Verse may be acceptable if the setting is remote or the style ritualistic, Greek tragedy or a play like Murder in the Cathedral for example, but when Eliot attempts to put poetry into the mouth of the tweedy Aunt Army, it just doesn't work.1
However, poetry continued to find a place in drama in a different form. As a critic observes: "... if we are looking for poetry in the theatre today we must turn to the rhythms of Pinter's colloquial speech or the pattern of Beckett's dialogue:

They make a noise like feathers
Like leaves
Like ashes
Like leaves.

Pinter has such a fine ear for the musical sequences of everyday conversation, the juxtaposition of the serious and the trivial, the repetition and the pauses and the leap in thought, that he can create what sounds like a tape-recording in a pub or cafe but what in fact is a highly selective and sophisticated use of language. This perceptive skill in handling dialogue places him among the leading playwrights today. The sense of mystery and menace in his plays, the undercurrent of violence associated with his dominant and recessive characters may be wearing thin through over use..."²

There is no gainsaying the fact that the Pinter's criticism centres on the theme of violence and the palpable linguistic texture of his plays. Critic after critic chose
these aspects for discussion since they are not only novel but realistic as well. Eric Salmon's observations that "the accuracy with which he (Pinter) had caught the exact cadence and texture of local London speech, several layers down into the sub-culture," "that uncannily-well-observed naturalistic dialogue," "that almost all of Pinter's early characters speak the most accurate Cockney that has ever been written for the English stage," and that the movement "from the relative simplicity of plain portraiture to the complexity and opacity of indirect poetic statement" between the earlier and the later plays and within the individual plays, are worthy of note. Pinter starts from common language superbly observed and well set down and develops the use of this language for the revelation not of the trivialities of the surface detail but of something of the strange life that moves below the surface of all human experience. The early plays *The Room* and *The Caretaker* show this movement from surfacial to deeper experiences. But in later plays like *The Homecoming* instead of verisimilitude there is allusiveness and obliqueness of expression. In a much later play like *Landscape* there is syntactical formality and in *Old Times* there is a movement from exact nuances of daily speech to a difficult and complicated use of language to reflect interior life. Even so the exploration of interior life has little to do with nobler meanings or higher motives. Commenting on
Pinter's intuitive grasp of the basic and primitive rhythms Katharine Burkman suggests that it is because of the playwright's close and exact look at modern man:

This "close and exact look at modern man" is especially notable in the matter of conversation, language, dialogue. Pinter has a marvellous ear for the cadences and caesurae of modern urban speech. This naturalistic language fixes for us the point on the surface of life from which the exploration of inner reality, which is the function of all art, is in the case of these plays to begin. It serves also to anchor that exploration to the generality of human experience, to give it the necessary common touch. (This, incidentally, is why we come across, in the middle of some of the highly stylised passages towards the ends of the plays, or in the later plays as contrasted with the earlier, a sudden and brief descent into the vernacular, a sudden little shock of earthiness in the middle of the fantastic and convoluted language.) It prevents the experience from drifting away into an esoteric, private world."³
Although Pinter makes the best of the bad job of manipulating language to suit the characters and the context, he is not unaware of the limitations of his tools. His character Mick voices his suspicions about the reliability of language: "I can take nothing you say at face value. Every word you speak is open to any number of different interpretations. Most of what you say is lies." This recognition of inadequacy of language to communicate leads to silence. In *Landscape* the husband and wife do not talk to each other but talk to themselves. The *Silence* presents three characters who do not establish relationships verbally. Ellen in the play describes her predicament: "Such a silence. I can hear myself. Cup my ear. My heart beats in my ear. Such a silence. Is it me? Am I silent or speaking? How can I know? Can I know such things? No-one has ever told me. I must find a person to tell me these things." The foregoing sums up the dramatist's ennui with a system of signs which has a doubtful function. Nevertheless, plays are built upon those signs—signs which are articulate, sometimes not. The readers are up against the fact that while like a bad workman who complains about his tools, Pinter complains about the medium but has been writing very prolifically. In the following pages is a discussion of the elements of Pinter language and his use of them.
An inescapable element of Pinter’s plays is their moment to moment life supported by dialogue. The influence of Samuel Beckett is unmistakable and Pinter himself acknowledged it. Under that influence Pinter made his dialogue brilliant, individual, exciting, poetic as has often been described. Sometimes in his use of dialogue he reminds us of Chekhov whose interest in allusive or representational importance of small details, their inner truth is unmistakable. Pinter’s devices of menace and muddle compel the kind of brief dialogue because length is the lonely destroying effect he aims for. The use of pauses which Pinter appears to have learnt from Hitchcock serves to dispense with the narrative element of drama. The use of verbal quibble serves very often to terminate a conversation and shift to an another scene. The conscious and unconscious thoughts are sometimes embodied in the words that he puts in the mouths of his characters. All these suggest that Pinter is experimenting with the medium, the spoken word which is very effective in the theatre. A speech in the form of a narrative, which was the case in the traditional drama, tended to be loose and repetitive. The audience in the traditional dialogue did not mind missing a part of it for it would anyway be repeated. But in the Pinterian drama words are precious and are not wasted. The audience must prick their ears if they are not to miss any detail. It is not far
wrong to suggest that it is a dialogue which gives an instant identification of Pinter. The stock in trade of Pinterian drama comprises parties, toasts, kitchens, drawing rooms etcetera. It does not mean that the playwright attaches any importance to them. The outdoor, the vast panorama of life outside, the four corners of the drawing room are too large to focus on. The social, political, economic problems which sweep the course of history, the larger and deeper issues of life are excluded from focus. Consequently the world of Pinter like his locations appear narrow, trivial, small. Since the world is small and characters ordinary their preoccupations appear to be trivial. But scene after scene, play after play show that behind the apparent triviality there is tension, threat, menace, violence, crisis. Therefore the dialogue which appears to be trivial is in fact loaded with meaning.

It is true that much of the dialogue in Pinter's plays is sometimes in monosyllables, in single words and in short sentences. Rarely is there a dialogue running to several sentences. In spite of that they reveal the musical sense of Pinter which is to be seen in the light suppleness of his dialogue which incidentally helps to keep the audience's attention. Any number of examples may be cited from his plays for making forceful speech with the help of
Caretaker:

MICK (ruminatively). Yes, you're quite right. Look what I could do with this place.

Pause.

I could turn this place into a penthouse. For instance... this room. This room you could have as the kitchen. Right size, nice window, sun comes in. I'd have ... I'd have teal-blue, copper and parchment linoleum squares. I'd have those colours re-echoed in the walls. I'd offset the kitchen units with charcoal-grey worktops. Plenty of room for cupboards for the crockery. We'd have a small wall cupboard, a large wall cupboard, a corner wall cupboard with revolving shelves. You wouldn't be short of cupboards. You could put the dining-room across the landing, see? Yes. Venetian blinds on the window, cork floor, cork tiles. You could have an off-white pile linen rug, a table in ... in afromosia teak veneer, sideboard with matt black drawers, curved chairs with cushioned seats, armchairs in oatmeal tweed, a beech frame settee with a
woven sea-grass seat, white-topped heat-resistant coffee table, white tile surround.
Yes. Then the bedroom. What's a bedroom? It's a retreat. It's a place to go for rest and peace. So you want quiet decoration. The lighting functional. Furniture ... mahogany and rosewood. Deep azure-blue carpet, unglazed blue and white curtains, a bedspread with a pattern of small blue roses on a white ground, dressing-table with a lift-up top containing a plastic tray, table lamp of white raffia ... (MICK sits up.) it wouldn't be a flat it'd be a palace. (p.58)

On any page of Pinter's play one comes across a character giving a pause in his dialogue. Pinter so manages the pauses without audience losing a sense of continuity. As an interplay of conscious and unconscious motivation the pause serves Pinter's portrayal of characters very effectively. For example, Davies' in The Caretaker:

DAVIES draws the knife in to his chest, breathing heavily. ASTON goes to DAVIES' bed, collects his bag and puts a few of DAVIES' things into it.
You ain't ... you ain't got the right ...  
Leave that alone, that's mine!

DAVIES takes the bag and presses the contents down.

All right ... I been offered a job here ... you wait ... (He puts on his smoking-jacket.) .. you wait ... your brother ... he'll sort you out ... you call me that ... you call me that ... no one's ever called me that ... (He puts on his overcoat.) You'll be sorry you called me that ... you ain't heard the last of this ... (He picks up his bag and goes to the door.) You'll be sorry you called me that ... . He opens the door, ASTON watching him.

Now I know who I can trust. (p.67) 

Pinter has acknowledged his debt to Freud's The Psychopathology of Everyday Life (1901) and Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious (1905). Freud's discussion of the trivial is revelatory when it is odd, when it seems like a funny mistake or even a conscious joke. Pinter being a neo-realist focusses on the trivial so that it is shown to be a funny mistake. In his plays there are odd turns of
conversation, odd habits of speech and odd mistakes. In *The Collection* the following shows an odd conversation:

JAMES stands, goes to the fruit bowl, and picks up the fruit knife. He runs his finger along the blade.

JAMES: This is fairly sharp.
BILL: What do you mean?
JAMES: Come on.
BILL: I beg your pardon?
JAMES: Come on. You've got that one. I've got this one.
BILL: What about it?
JAMES: I get a bit tired of words sometimes, don't you? Let's have a game. For fun.
BILL: What sort of game?
JAMES: Let's have a mock duel.
BILL: I don't want a mock duel, thank you.
JAMES: Of course you do. Come on. First one who's touched is a sissy.
BILL: This is all rather unsubtle, don't you think?
JAMES: Not in the least. Come on, into first position.
BILL: I thought we were friends.
JAMES: Of course we're friends. What on earth's the matter with you? I'm not going to kill you. It's just a game, that's all. We're playing a game. You're not windy, are you?

BILL: I think it's silly.

JAMES: I say, you're a bit of a spoilsport, aren't you?

BILL: I'm putting my knife down anyway.

JAMES: Well, I'll pick it up. (pp.139-140)

In *The Caretaker* Aston's speech has a mannerism:

I used to go there quite a bit. Oh, years ago now. But I stopped. I used to like that place. Spent quite a bit of time in there. That was before I went away. Just before. I think that ... place had a lot to do with it. They were all ... a good bit older than me. But they always used to listen. I thought ... they understood what I said. I mean I used to talk to them. I talked too much. That was my mistake. The same in the factory. Standing there, or in the breaks, I used to ... talk about things. And these men, they used to
listen, whenever I ... had anything to say. It was all right. The trouble was, I used to have kind of hallucinations. They weren't hallucinations, they ... I used to get the feeling I could see things ... very clearly ... everything ... was so clear ... everything used ... everything used to get very quiet ... everything got very quiet ... all this ... quiet ... and ... this clear sight ... it was ... but maybe I was wrong. Anyway, someone must have said something. I didn't know anything about it. And ... some kind of lie must have got around. And this lie went round. I thought people started being funny. In that cafe, The factory. I couldn't understand it. Then one day they took me to a hospital, right outside London. They ... got me there. I didn't want to go. Anyway ... I tried to get out, quite a few times. But ... it wasn't very easy. They asked me questions, in there. Got me in and asked me all sorts of questions. Well, I told them ... when they wanted to know ... what my thoughts were. Hmmnn. Then one day ... this man ... doctor, I suppose ... the head one ... he was quite a
man of ... distinction ... although I wasn't so sure about that. He called me in. He said ... he told me I had something. He said they'd concluded their examination. That's what he said. And he showed me a pile of papers and he said that I'd got something, some complaint. He said ... he just said that, you see. You've got ... this thing. That's your complaint. And we've decided, he said, that in your interests there's only one course we can take. He said ... but I can't ... exactly remember ... how he put it ... he said, we're going to do something to your brain. He said ... if we don't, you'll be in here for the rest of your life, but if we do, you stand a chance. You can go out, he said, and live like the others. What do you want to do to my brain, I said to him. But he just repeated what he'd said. Well, I wasn't a fool. I knew I was a minor. I knew he couldn't do anything to me without getting permission. I knew he had to get permission from my mother. So I wrote to her and told her what they were trying to do. But she signed their form, you see, giving them
permission. I know that because he showed me her signature when I brought it up. Well, that night I tried to escape, that night. I spent five hours sawing at one of the bars on the window in this ward. Right throughout the dark. They used to shine a torch over the beds every half hour. So I timed it just right. And then it was nearly done, and a man had a ... he had a fit, right next to me. And they caught me, anyway. About a week later they started to come round and do this thing to the brain. We were all supposed to have it done, in this ward. And they came round and did it one at a time. One a night. I was one of the last. And I could see quite clearly what they did to the others. They used to come round with these ... I don't know what they were ... they looked like big pincers, with wires on, the wires were attached to a little machine. It was electric. They used to hold the man down, and this chief, ... the chief doctor, used to fit the pincers, something like earphones, he used to fit them on either side of the man's skull. There was a man holding the machine, you see, and he'd ...
turn it on, and the chief would just press these pincers on either side of the skull and keep them there. Then he'd take them off. They'd cover the man up ... and they wouldn't touch him again until later on. Some used to put up a fight, but most of them didn't. They just lay there. Well, they were coming round to me, and the night they came I got up and stood against the wall. They told me to get on the bed, and I knew they had to get me on the bed because if they did it while I was standing up they might break my spine. So I stood up and then one or two of them came for me, well, I was younger then, I was much stronger than I am now, I was quite strong then, I laid one of them out and I had another one round the throat, and then suddenly this chief had these pincers on my skull and I knew he wasn't supposed to do it while I was standing up, that's why I .... anyway, he did it. So I did get out. I got out of the place ... but I couldn't walk very well. I don't think my spine was damaged. That was perfectly all right. The trouble was ... my thoughts ... had become very slow ...
couldn't think at all ... I couldn't ... get ... my thoughts ... together ... uuuuh ... I could ... never quite get it ... together. The trouble was, I couldn't hear what people were saying. I couldn't look to the right or the left, I had to look straight in front of me, because if I turned my head round ... I couldn't keep ... upright. And I had these headaches. I used to sit in my room. That was when I lived with my mother. And my brother. He was younger than me. And I laid everything out, in order, in my room, all the things I knew were mine, but I didn't die. The thing is, I should have been dead. I should have died. Anyway, I feel much better now. But I don't talk to people now. I steer clear of places like that cafe. I never go into them now. I don't talk to anyone ... like that. I've often thought of going back and trying to find the man who did that to me. But I want to do something first. I want to build that shed out in the garden. (pp.52-55)"
There are many instances which have a slight tilt towards physical or sexual. In *The Homecoming* the following dialogue illustrates the point:

LENNY: ... I'll relieve you of your glass.
RUTH: I haven't quite finished.
LENNY: You've consumed quite enough, in my opinion.
RUTH: No, I haven't.
LENNY: Quite sufficient, in my own opinion.
RUTH: Not in mine, Leonard.

*Pause.*
LENNY: Don't call me that, please.
RUTH: Why not?
LENNY: That's the name my mother gave me.

*Pause.*
Just give me the glass.
RUTH: No.

*Pause.*
LENNY: I'll take it, then.
RUTH: If you take the glass ... I'll take you.

*Pause.*
LENNY: How about me taking the glass without you taking me?
RUTH: Why don't I just take you?
Pause.

LENNY: You’re joking.

Pause.

You’re in love, anyway, with another man. You’ve had a secret liaison with another man. His family didn’t even know. Then you come here without a word of warning and start to make trouble.

*She picks up the glass and lifts it towards him.*

RUTH: Have a sip. Go on. Have a sip from my glass.

He is still.

Sit on my lap. Take a long cool sip.

*She pats her lap, Pause.*

*She stands, moves to him with the glass.*

Put your head back and open your mouth.

LENNY: Take that glass away from me.

RUTH: Lie on the floor. Go on. I’ll pour it down your throat.

LENNY: What are you doing, making me some kind of proposal?
She laughs shortly, drains the glass.

RUTH: Oh, I was thirsty.

She smiles at him, puts the glass down, goes into the hall and up the stairs. He follows into the hall and shouts up the stairs.

LENNY: What was that supposed to be?

Some kind of proposal? (pp.33-35)

Ruth's words are also suggestive and sexual in The Homecoming:

Don't be too sure though. You've forgotten something. Look at me. I ... move my leg. That's all it is. But I wear ... underwear ... which moves with me ... it ... captures your attention. Perhaps you misinterpret. The action is simple. It's a leg ... moving. My lips move, Why don't you restrict ... your observations to that? Perhaps the fact that they move is more significant ... than the words which come through them. You must bear that ... possibility ... in mind.
Silence.

TEDDY stands.

I was born quite near here.

Pause.

Then ... six years ago, I went to America.

Pause.

It's all rock. And sand. It stretches ... so far ... everywhere you look. And there's lot of insects there.

Pause.

And there's lots of insects there. (pp.52-53)\textsuperscript{9}

Another example of Pinter's use of language which has the potential of physical and sexual occurs in \textit{The Birthday Party}:

MEG: .... Was it nice?

STANLEY: What?

MEG: The fried bread.

STANLEY: Succulent.

MEG: You shouldn't say that word.

STANLEY: What word?

MEG: That word you said.

STANLEY: What, succulent — ?

MEG: Don't say it!

STANLEY: What's the matter with it?

342
MEG: You shouldn't say that word to a married woman. (p.17)

If quibble was to Shakespeare what Cleopatra had been to Antony for Pinter it is an effective tone for a jest that expresses so much. Often the quibble may help to terminate a conversation and to facilitate introduction of another scene. Bill's account of his relation with his wife in The Collection is an example:

JAMES: You knew she was married ... why did you feel it necessary ... to do that?

BILL: She must have known she was married, too, Why did she feel it necessary ... to do that?
Pause.
(With a chuckle.) That's got you, hasn't it?
Pause.
Well, look, it's really just a lot of rubbish. You know that.

BILL goes to the cigarette box and lights a cigarette.

Is she supposed to have resisted me at all?
JAMES: A little.
BILL: Only a little?
JAMES: Yes.
BILL: Do you believe her?
JAMES: Yes.
BILL: Everything she says?
JAMES: Sure.
BILL: Did she bite at all?
JAMES: No.
BILL: Scratch?
JAMES: A little.
BILL: You've got a devoted wife, haven't you?
Keeps you well informed, right up to the minutest detail. She scratched a little, did she? Where? (Holds up a hand.) On the hand? No scar. No scar anywhere. Absolutely un scarred. We can go before a commissioner of oaths, if you like. I'll strip, show you my un scarred body. Yes, what we need is an independent witness. You got any chambermaids on your side or anything?

JAMES applauds briefly.
JAMES: You're a wag, aren't you? I never thought you'd be such a wag. You've really got a sense of fun. You know what I'd call you?

BILL: What?

JAMES: A wag.

BILL: Oh, thanks very much.

JAMES: No, I'm glad to pay a compliment when a compliment's due. What about a drink?

BILL: That's good of you.

JAMES: What will you have?

BILL: Got any vodka?

JAMES: Let's see. Yes, I think we can find you some vodka.

BILL: Oh, scrumptious.

JAMES: Say that again.

BILL: What?

JAMES: That word.

BILL: What, scrumptious?

JAMES: That's it.

BILL: Scrumptious.

JAMES: Marvellous. You probably remember that from school, don't you?

BILL: Now that you mention it I think you might be right.
JAMES: I thought I was. Here's your vodka.
BILL: That's very generous of you.
JAMES: Not at all. Cheers. (They drink.)
BILL: Cheers.
JAMES: Eh, come here.
BILL: What?
JAMES: I bet you're a wow at parties.
BILL: Well, it's nice of you to say so, but I
wouldn't say I was all that much of a
wow.
JAMES: Go on, I bet you are. (Pause.)
BILL: You think I'm a wow, do you?
JAMES: At parties I should think you are.
BILL: No, I'm not much of a wow really. The
bloke I share this house with is,
though.
JAMES: Oh, I met him. Looked a jolly kind of
chap.
BILL: Yes, he's very good at parties. Bit of a
conjurer.
JAMES: What, rabbits?
BILL: Well, not so much rabbits, no.
JAMES: No rabbits?
BILL: No. He doesn't like rabbits, actually.
They give him hay fever.
JAMES: Poor chap.
BILL: Yes, it's a pity.
JAMES: Seen a doctor about it?
BILL: Oh, he's had it since he was that high.
JAMES: Brought up in the country, I suppose?
BILL: In a manner of speaking, yes.

(PP.120-122)\textsuperscript{11}

In Shakespearean drama there are levels of significance to speech because it is meant to different categories of characters in the play. A speech is intended to carry parallel meanings and this is achieved by the poetry of the play. In the Restoration drama which is satirical the levels of significance are conveyed by the use of wit. In Oscar Wilde once again there is a use of wit which is more cynical than humorous. In the poetic drama of T.S. Eliot the different voices are contained in poetic expressions. In Pinter the dialogue has been made to point up differences in the awareness of characters on the stage. In \textit{The Birthday Party} the play on 'fried bread' by Stanley Webber is an instance. Samuel Beckett has used such a method:

MAX: I'm too old, I suppose. She thinks
I'm an old man.

\textit{Pause.}
I’m not such an old man.

Pause.

(To RUTH.) You think I’m too old for you?

Pause.

Listen. You think you’re just going to get that big slag all the time? You think you’re just going to have him ... you’re going to just have him all the time? You’re going to have to work! You’ll have to take them on, you understand?

Pause.

Does she realize that?

Pause.

Lenny, do you think she understands ...

He begins to stammer.

What ... what ... what ... we’re getting at? What ... we’ve got in mind? Do you think she’s got it clear?

Pause.

I don’t think she’s got it clear.

Pause.

You understand what I mean? Listen, I’ve got a funny idea she’ll do the
dirty on us, you want to bet? She'll use us, she'll make use of us, I can tell you! I can smell it! You want to bet?

Pause.

She won't ... be adaptable!

He falls to his knees, whimpers, begins to moan and sob. He stops sobbing, crawls past SAM's body round the chair to the other side of her.

I'm not an old man.

He looks up at her.

Do you hear me?

He raises his face to her.

Kiss me.

She continues to touch JOEY's head, lightly. LENNY stands, watching.

(pp.81-82)\textsuperscript{12}

In the conventional drama the characters are given lengthy speeches, dialogues, asides, soliloquies to enable the audience and equally the characters to understand the motivation of the speaker. But in Pinter lengthy expositions have been dispensed with, or rather long speeches are an

349
exception rather than a rule "... leaving the action and the characters unmotivated and unexplained, they reach no neat solution or conclusion." The playwright therefore makes the audience to raise questions and ascertain for themselves. In spite of the new format threatening the complacency of a spectator, the latter is not willing to reject it as totally unacceptable. His experience of life in which long speech explaining the motivations is so unusual that when Pinter leaves many things unexplained the reader becomes aware of the new reality which he had never bothered to notice. To questions such as why the absurdists have destroyed the conventional elements of drama, Martin Esslin finds answers in the thought of the time. He suggests that the absurd dramatists through the theatre sought to reflect the cultural situation of their day, "... these plays question the efficiency of language as an instrument of genuine communication - so does the British School of linguistic philosophy. If Pinter's characters talk nonsense, because they use language loosely and emotively, that corresponds to the critique of language made by the philosophers concerned." 

It may be claimed that in parts of Pinter's play the dramatic prose approximates to poetry. This does not mean that the playwright chooses the poetic medium but he is
making it clear that behind the words there are conscious and unconscious thoughts. Sometimes the playwright so chooses words that dialogue becomes polyphonic. Here he is one with Chekhov and Stanislavski. The latter employed words to suggest the subtext between them. In Stanislavski the subtext employs a consciousness "beneath the words of the text, giving them life and a basis for existing ... a web of innumerable, varied inner patterns ... all sorts of figments of the imagination, inner movements, objects of attention, smaller and greater truths and a belief in them, adaptations, adjustments and other similar elements. It is the subtext that makes us say the words we do in a play." 15 Stanislavski has trained his actors and made them aware of divergent awarenesses that a dialogue can develop into. By giving concrete hypothetical instances he suggested that words can direct different minds to different destinations in place and in time. Pinter likewise is concerned with such divergences embodied in words. His habit of making words capable of generating multiple and conflicting subtext, it may be imagined, leads to ambiguity. Therefore he said that: "The speech we hear is an indication of that we don't hear. It is a necessary avoidance, a violent, sly, anguished or mocking smoke-screen which keeps the other in its place." 16 In the performance the audience understand that the dialogue means nothing, it is only a smoke-screen for the character's
thoughts or something else. While this is interesting it is very demanding for the actor. Pinter himself agreed that his dialogue complicated things with the actors, but he felt that it was worth complicating. There are interesting accounts of how Pinter took great pains to explain to the actors the meaning of a situation or a dialogue.

Since Pinter labours on at dialogue at rehearsals he expects from the reader and the audience a similar labour, mental labour he or his dialogue deserves. To understand the subtext every detail, and especially the odd, funny, suggestive, repeated, the insignificant have to be noted. The subtext is revealed in Max’s suggestion to Sam in *The Homecoming*:

> When you find the right girl, Sam, let your family know, don't forget, we'll give you a number one send-off, I promise you. You can bring her to live here, she can keep us all happy. We'd take it in turns to give her a walk round the park.
>
> ... Sam, it's your decision. You're welcome to bring your bride here, to the place where you live, or on the other hand you can take a
suite at the Dorchester. It's entirely up to you. (p.15)\textsuperscript{17}

Another bit of conversation of Max, Teddy and Ruth helps us to find the subtext in \textit{The Homecoming}:

TEDDY: Ruth ... the family have invited you to stay, for a little while longer. As a ... as a kind of guest. If you like the idea I don't mind. We can manage very easily at home ... until you come back.

RUTH: How very nice of them.

\textit{Pause.}

MAX: It's an offer from our heart.

RUTH: It's very sweet of you.

MAX: Listen ... it would be our pleasure.

\textit{Pause.}

RUTH: I think I'd be too much trouble.

MAX: Trouble? What are you talking about? What trouble? Listen, I'll tell you something. Since poor Jessie died, eh, Sam? we haven't had a woman in the house. Not one. Inside this house. And I'll tell you why. Because their mother's image was so dear any other woman would have ... tarnished
it. But you ... Ruth ... you're not only lovely and beautiful, but you're kin. You're kith. You belong here.

Pause.

RUTH: I'm very touched.

MAX: Of course you're touched. I'm touched.

(p.75)18

In the chapter 'Language and Silence' of his book *The Peopled Wound* Esslin draws a line between Pinter's language in the early plays and his use of it in the later plays. The use of the method of repetition which he so exploited that the other playwrights started to imitate him. It is interesting that Pinter himself imitated his own dialogue to the extent that it became a self-parody. It has been stressed that Pinter's low mimetic mode is not born of his desire to expose the linguistic deficiencies of his characters. Nor was it a feeling of superiority that made the playwright use the vernacular structures of ordinary people. Whatever the motive the fact remains that he has an accurate hearing ability which catches the linguistic solecisms of ordinary people. With this habit of employing language spoken by people at the lower level, he decides to shift to compressed stage poetry.

354
Esslin before examining the radical change in language brought about by Pinter in his later plays suggests that in traditional drama from Sophocles to Shakespeare logic governed the use of language. The characters always spoke to clarify a situation, the position of themselves and others. The dialogue was clarificatory and informative in function, not until Strindberg a certain defectiveness of communication was introduced into the dialogue. Later it was Chekhov who introduced oblique dialogue in which a subtext was hidden in the text. Pinter went a little ahead by the use of repetition and suggested how the subtext was more important than the text. The repetition was meant as much to the character on the stage as to the spectators in the theatre. To illustrate this point Esslin compares the closing scene of Chekhov’s *Uncle Vanya* and the final scene of *The Birthday Party*.

MEG: Wasn’t it a lovely party last night?

PETEY: I wasn’t there.

MEG: Weren’t you?

PETEY: I came in afterwards.

MEG: Oh.

Pause.

It was a lovely party. I haven’t laughed so much for years. We had
dancing and singing. And games.
You should have been there.
PETEY: It was good, eh?
Pause.
MEG: I was the belle of the ball.
PETEY: Were you?
MEG: Oh yes. They all said I was.
PETEY: I bet you were, too.
MEG: Oh, it's true. I was
Pause.
I know I was. (p.87)\textsuperscript{19}

Meg's repetition of a statement is meant to indicate that the repetition of the statement is more relevant than the statement. Pinter achieves dramatic effect brilliantly by showing a total contradiction between the spoken word and the mental state that is suggested by it. In this manner Pinter breaks the convention of employing rhetorical dialogue which is expository in nature.

From the example cited above one might make the mistake of labelling it as dialogue of non-communication. The truth is that in life people rarely use language exactly and do not act logically. Pinter was aware of the emotion behind language and hence the emotional power of the words was exploited.
One of the devices of the dialogue of non-communication manifests in the failure of a character to find the right expression to suit the location. This device once again is realised on the mode of repetition. The characters in Pinter desperately struggle to find correct expression. It is an act of struggling for communication, sometimes succeeding, more often failing. Gus in The Dumb Waiter repeats words "mess" and "spread" because he has trouble to find expressive words, inarticulate person that he is. Once he gets the right expression or word he will not let it go. Examples of such dialogue which look primitive and poor by the standards of rhetoric will surprise the spectator by hearing settled dialogue. Repetition sometimes is used as a form of hysterical irritation. McCann in The Birthday Party is given such sentences. Repetition also as in The Caretaker helps in casual assimilation of facts.

So thorough going is Esslin's study of Pinter that he reads his work approximating to poetry. He says that "each word is essential to the total structure and decisively contributes to the ultimate, overall effect aimed at... Pinter's use of language is that of a poet; there are no redundant words in true poetry, no empty patches, no mere fill-ins. Pinter's dramatic writing has the density of
texture of true poetry."20 Teddy's sacrifice of his wife for the family, a poignant situation combining concern for the family and self-pity are unspoken in a few words.

An another important device that Pinter employs is the use of pause and silence. They are used in situations when a character is confronted with unauthentical question and cannot answer it instantly. He takes time to think and answer it. In such a situation he is given a pause and it is indicated by the words, pauses and silences. In a realistic play the characters respond to questions instantly and spontaneously. It is sometimes a battle of wits, witty, sarcastic, ironic and poetic. On reflection the spectator might wonder at the ingenuity of the character who might appear to anticipate questions. It has the appearance of a rehearsed response, not naturalistic. Here in lies the dramatic ingenuity of Pinter who makes his characters look natural. There are several scenes in Pinter's plays in which pauses and silences are employed. As Almansi remarks "the blanks convey a substructure of evil intentions and vile meanings."21 In The Homecoming the dialogue between Lenny and Ruth is an instance. Commenting on this device Esslin says: "When Pinter asks for a pause ... he indicates that intense thought processes are continuing, that unspoken tensions are mounting, whereas silences are notations for the
end of a movement, the beginning of another, as between the movements of a symphony."²²

Just as pause serves an important function in the dialogue, silence also performs its specific function. The long silence at the end of *The Caretaker* symbolises death of hope of the old man. The silence, the line with no words by being ambiguous and complex becomes a metaphor for overwhelming power. Thus silence does have all the potential of poetry. Like the long silence of the old man in *The Caretaker* Pinter needs a long silence in *The Collection* in the scene in which Harry and Bill sit facing each other after the former's confession. Stella's silence in the same play is another example. Sometimes silence is not a stance for the character refusing to communicate. In the very first play *The Room* there are characters who refuse to respond. Suggesting how the pauses and silences contribute to the economy and subtlety in the use of language, Esslin remarks:

... the effectiveness of the pauses and silences is, in Pinter's technique, the direct consequence of the density of texture of his writing: each syllable and each silence is part of an over all design, all portions of which are totally integrated; another way to
put this would be to say that Pinter's writing is of the utmost economy, there are no redundant parts in it. It is the economy by which a door, a simple, ordinary door, can become a source of nameless fear and menace, merely because the character in the room has been shown to dread the intrusion of the outside world: the economy of means through which a character who has been kept silent through most of the play can cause an effect of overwhelming surprise by suddenly starting to speak; the economy of words which can invest the most threadbare cliche with hidden poetic meaning.23

Austin E. Quigley cites Esslin's criticism of Pinter as an example of difficulties encountered in attempts to cope with the problems of Pinter's language. For Quigley the terms "poet", "poetry" and "poetic" are meaningless and are at best evaluative or descriptive. They are used to complement the unanalysed in Pinter and become bogus justification by an appeal to biographical evidence to support or to justify the use of evaluative words. Whether or not Pinter wanted to be a poet, he is a dramatist and as such his language has to be analysed as a language of dramatist. "There is" Quigley says, "also no reason to
suppose with Esslin that linguistic artistry is confined to or found at its best in poetry."\(^{24}\) According to Quigley approaches such as Esslin's are attempts to evade with a value judgement that which is "temporarily beyond our analytic capabilities,"\(^{25}\) a product of temporary critical failure.

That the theme of failure of communication was taken up by a number of critics is evident in the number of essays that have been published on the subject. Hollis in his work remarked: "Pinter employs language to describe the failure of language; he details in forms abundant the poverty of man's communication; he assembles words to remind us that we live in the space between words.... The effect of Pinter's language, then, is to note that the most important things are not being said...."\(^{26}\) Hollis's point is countered by criticism which considers such criticism as dangerous because Pinter's individuality will be lost in a generalization that has been applied to many other contemporary writers. If failure of communication is considered central and the plays are reduced to repeating a cliche then Pinter is one with many contemporary writers. Pinter himself denied having employed language as a failure of communication. He said, "'failure of communication,' and this phrase has been fixed to my work quite consistently. I believe the contrary. I
think that we communicate only too well, in our silence, in what is unsaid, and that what takes place is continual evasion, desperate rearguard attempts to keep ourselves to ourselves. Communication is too alarming. To enter into someone else's life is too frightening. To disclose to others the poverty within us is too fearsome a possibility."

Ionesco echoed the same notion when he said that "if he truly believed in incommunicability the profession of writer would be a curious choice."  

An attempt to resolve the obscurity created by the language in Pinter was sought in separating the surfacial and deeper meanings, in an appeal to the subtext. Minogue remarked: "The terrible thing about the dialogue is that it has the authentic ring of a stop-gap. Behind it lies the awareness of another world of meanings, a plane on which defeats are being acknowledged, and where there is a fight for the right to exist...."

A similar understanding of Pinter's language was echoed later by others. For example, Brine commented: "Underneath the web of cliches, repetitions, interjections, anecdotes, we can understand what the characters are feeling far more profoundly than if they had tried to put it into words themselves."  

This comment is meaningful because more often much more than words it is cliches which say more. That the words on the page are not completely reliable is made by Brown: "Pinter's reliance on
multiple and conflicting subtexts poses the main problem for understanding his dialogue, especially in reading the mere words of the printed text."\(^{31}\)

The major problem encountered by Pinter criticism as pointed by Quigley is to relate perceptive comments on his work with theories which deal with how language contains these perceptions. The age old form content dichotomy does not help. Critics recognise that his language is doing something that it is someway new and that to define that newness what is old has to be understood. Quigley says:

The constant search in Pinter criticism is for a distinction or set of distinctions that will clarify the nature of the novelty in Pinter's language. The barrier to progress in this area is the seeming impossibility of finding a controllable second term with which to contrast what is felt to be characteristic of non-Pinter language. With alarming regularity, this second term refuses to emerge in any adequate form.\(^{32}\)

Hence it appears that earlier theories are of thin value. Adverse attempts have been made to describe what is mean in
Pinter's language by an appeal to some norm in language that Pinter either transcends or imagines. Here are some of the terms to describe Pinter's language. Esslin says that Pinter's work has the "ability to express the inexpressible, to transcend the scope of language itself...."33 For Brustein, "Pinter's language, while authentic colloquial speech, is stripped bare of reflective or conceptual thought, so that the play could be just as effectively performed in Finno-Ugric."34 R.D.Laing found Pinter's language "... used to convey what it cannot say...."35 For F.J.Bernhard, Pinter's "... language that conveys something other than the meanings of its words."36 K.Morris says "... it is not the discursive connotations of the dialogue which matter ... but the fact and pattern of speech - how it sounds, and how it is made, and the response it provokes."37 M.Cohen commented: "This should not suggest that Pinter's language is that of plain speech; it is a highly conscious yet articulate poetry."38 In the above comments there is a reference to either a core or a boundary of normal language. The shortcomings in the above approaches is that there is a normal language which has a core or a boundary. Pinter has rejected the core or transcended the boundaries of normal language. The theories of meaning that I.A.Richards propounded and that of Wittgenstein, Jakobson, M.A.K.Halliday will not help. The irrelevance of theories to an
understanding of Pinter's language is summed up by Quigley: "Pinter's plays have simply drawn attention to the boundaries of the theory, not the boundaries of language." \(^{39}\)

While many others have used variety of terms to describe Pinter's use of language others merely said they are aware of the newness but are unable to think of an alternative term. Quigley comes up with the term "interrelational" to describe the function of language in Pinter, drawing on an alternative experience of Pinter in which there is a description of the author encountering a menacing crowd and how he came out of the difficult situation by a tactful way. That should have helped Pinter in creating situations and characters. It may all be described in Quigley's new term "interrelational". How he arrived at this term is summarised in the following extract:

The conflicting urges toward an individual and toward a shared reality are central to The Dwarfs and a major factor in many of the other plays. Though a private reality can be adapted to meet many of the demands of a particular character, it can never meet his need for external confirmation. Yet as soon as external confirmation is required, the self-concept that exists unchallenged in a
private reality is put at risk. Relationships thus become major battlegrounds as characters attempt to negotiate a mutual reality. In doing so, they have to cope with a compromise between the ways in which they wish to be regarded and the ways in which their companions are willing to regard them. In an important sense, then, the "personality" of a particular character, the kind of identity with which he can operate, is a function of a compromise negotiated in a particular relationship. Because of this his operative identity will not be a single thing but something potentially as multiple as the relationships in which he engages. The processes and consequences of these negotiations are central to the linguistic function at issue here. For this reason the term "interrelational" seems not unsuitable. The verb "to interrelate" is glossed in the dictionary⁴¹ as "to place or come into mutual relationship," and that is the central focus of linguistic activity in much of the dialogue of a Pinter play. This term is not, of course, designed to make the true but trivial
point that Pinter's plays deal with relationships. Rather, it provides a general name for the kind of language that is characteristic of people preoccupied with a particular kind of concern for the relationships in which they are involved. The term refers back to the preceding discussion of coercion, explicitness, self-concepts, reality-concepts, and relational roles.40

While drawing examples from The Dwarfs, Last to Go, The Birthday Party Quigley illustrates how Pinter used language not so much as a means of referring to structure in personal relationships as a means of creativity. Characters are engaged in exploring personal relationships, reinforcing them and changing them. To ignore this aspect "is not only to miss the essential but to distort it.... The activity of conversation in a Pinter play is a voyage of discovery. Facts, opinions, hypotheses, etc., are not given simply to transmit objective information; they are used for particular purposes."41

In conclusion it may be suggested that Pinter is with the post-modernists for whom language is an insurmountable obstacle. He does not belong to the theatre
of ideas led by Bernard Shaw, and the literature of feelings led by D.H. Lawrence, for both of which language is not a problem. Unlike them he did not believe that language is words, that it bridges taking safely from one place to another. The belief in the conductive power of words, that words used mimetically can clear obscure areas of life held by the earlier dramatists has failed to convince him. In Pinter words are not bridges but are barbs protecting the wired wall of the self. He was aware that "the more acute the experience, the less articulate (is) its expression." There is a whole lot of truth in criticism which points out how Pinter was not "concerned with manipulating not a language of enlightenment but a language of obfuscation; not a language of social progress but a language of existential survival; not a language of communal faith but a language of divisive strategy." Unlike other playwrights who show progress from immaturity to maturity Pinter has remained consistent. His language then and now is corrupt, never chaste. But his idiom though polluted, is, nevertheless, human.
NOTES


2. Ibid., p.278.


5. Ibid., p.67.


9. Ibid., pp.52-53.


12. Pinter, Harold, The Homecoming, pp.81-82.


16. Ibid., p.133.
17. Pinter, Harold, *The Homecoming*, p.15.
18. Ibid., p.75.
25. Ibid., p.29.
30. Brine, A., "Mac Davies is no Clochard," *Drama*, no.61 (Summer 1961), 36.


40. Ibid., pp.54-55.

41. Ibid., p.66.