CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

CONSTRUCTION OF MEANING IN PINTER’S DRAMA: A LITERATURE REVIEW, ITS SURVEY AND DEVELOPMENT –I

It is a well known fact that theatrical communication begins and ends with the audience. Therefore the dramatic communication system involves a different pattern than the narrative communication system, in order to create a meaningful experience. In drama, while the sections concerning characters, plot and time and space follow the same pattern as that of a narrative, the major difference between the two genres lies in the ‘showing’, which is the basic mode of dramatic form; rather than relating the events, which is an essential mode of narrative system. This means, that in a dramatic pattern, there has been an absence of the narrative instances, which are substituted for, by the creation of an internal and external communication system, by the author.

Throughout the history of dramatic constructions, we have witnessed playwrights crafting alternate methods and techniques in order to overcome this absence of narrative instances. This has been affected by resorting to the use of chorus (as in Greek tragedy), or asides and soliloquies in the Elizabethan drama, or by the Brechtian epic narrator or the placard bearer, and the extended secondary text of dramatic instructions in modern drama.

Another major difference between the communication system of the two genres lies in that, while the prose narrative is the work of a single omnipotent author, drama involves a collective effort in both its production and reception. A dramatic text which is written for performance, consists in a sending forth its meaning through a joint effort of many people; which include the author, the director, the setting constructor, the technicians, the composers and the actors. Also, the message received at one time, is done so by the collective audience in varied numbers, which allows for an immediate two way communication system (with reciprocation in the form of appreciative applause or whistles or by booing). The multi-modality of a theatrical performance differentiates its communication process from that of a prose narrative,
in that it allows various other aspects and codes that are specific to a performance. These codes constitute an underlying system which becomes essential to aid a play's analysis.

For the purpose of literary study and analysis, it becomes absolutely imperative that we understand the distinction, between theatre and drama. According to Keir Elam, a theatre refers to “the production and communication of meaning in the performance itself and with the systems underlying it [while the drama is] that mode of fiction designed for presentation and constructed according to a particular [dramatic] convention.” (2, Keir Elam). The relationship of the two is that of a double dynamics, since the performance stems from the text, while in its very act, it adds something to the text and supplements it in the sense of filling a void, which doesn’t become apparent till the performance itself.

Tadensz Kowzan, a Pole Semiotician, demarcated a poly system of thirteen signs and codes of theatrical performance; eight out of which are associated with the performer (actor) and the rest with the stage (outside the actor)

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**Kowzan’s 13 Sign Systems**

*Adapted from Drama and Theatre Studies at AS/A Level, Neelands and Dobson, 2005, 0340758691*

Based on the work of the Czech Tadeusz Kowzan who attempted to analyse the various sign systems at work in the theatre during the 1940’s.

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Theatre is more than literature. It communicates through many sign systems at once. In literature, the text refers to all the signs of language which taken together make a complete or coherent intended message. In performance the text refers to all the signs that communicate during the performance. Kowzan’s system allows us to deconstruct the theatre experience in order to better understand the way in which the meaning transmitted by various signs is woven together to create a coherent intended message for an audience.
These non verbal categories are an essential element of theatre which are used to focus the audience’s attention to specific characters or elements of set, or to the relationship between the characters.

A dramatic presentation derives its emotional power from the co-presence of actors and the constructed sets with their props, light and sound effect, and from its iconicity; where everything presented on the stage is similar to or a sign of something else. Marvin Carlson has pointed out that the degree of the iconicity on which theatre relies, varies according to its historical categorization. For example, in the realistic drama, there has always been an effort to affect an exact resemblance to the real world outside the stage, while in the absurd or the surrealist drama the iconicity is more of a symbolic nature. Yet both the forms derive an equally strong emotional power from the presence of these theatrical signs, whether in the form of actors (word, tone, mime, gesture, movement, makeup, hairstyle and costume) or of stage paraphernalia (props, decor, music, lighting and sound effects).

The iconicity of these signs is strongly felt in Pinter’s drama too. For example in *A Slight Ache* the mere presence of the match seller as an iconic usurper, (and one who remains silent throughout the play), aids in the intense dialogue build up, eliciting Edward’s hidden fears and laying bare his spiritual dryness as well as his physical sterility, while bringing to the fore Flora’s repressed and latent sexuality. The immediacy of theatrical representation is also marked by Pinter’s symbolic or iconic representation of Time Past in the figure of Anna in *Old Times*, and also in the characteristically ‘Pintereque’ figures of blind or nearly blind people in his early comedies of menace; ones which signify impotence and sterility as well as emotional and spiritual bankruptcy. Although Pinter denied consistently, of ever having consciously used any props or actors as symbols or concepts in his plays, Charles A Carpenter doubts this, remarking that perhaps, Pinter says so because he is playing underhand or perhaps ‘anti-symbolic’ games with us. Carpenter, in his very enlightening article ‘What Have You Seen the Scum or the Essence: Symbolic Fallout in Pinter’s *The Birthday Party*’ cites an example from Pinter’s *The Birthday Party* to make this point:
In Act II of Harold Pinter’s *The Birthday Party* Stanley Webber comes face to face with two men [...]. When he confronts [...] McCann, he finds the burly Irishman seated at a table carefully tearing a sheet of newspaper into five equal strips. During the muted sparring match that follows, Webber twice picks up a strip of paper and McCann menacingly tells him (using the same words both the times) ‘Mind that’. Mind it we must; symbolically or otherwise it’s got to have a point. (93)

Stage props in Pinter never simply-exist. The repeated pointers within the plays about their existence are enough to highlight the fact that Pinter’s disclaimer might be a deliberate debunker. His characters’, seemingly recurrent pointless behaviour with objects used in the plays, cannot be dismissed easily as meaningless. Carpenter illustrates this point by counting the number of occasions Mr. Boles enters the stage with the newspaper, and reads it, using it as a protective wall against his wife’s constant prattle. The daily paper also symbolizes a regular daily ritual that set the mood of ritualistic rhythm patterns of both, language usage as well as defining the institutional code of conduct in the play. In this detailed analysis, while close reading Pinter’s use of this technical devise, focus has been on the use of this particular prop in variously changing ways throughout the progress of the play, where the five torn strips of paper symbolize the five phased breaking down process of Stanley at the hands of the intruders, Pete Boles, broken down by his failure to save Stanley, seeks solace in picking up this daily escape device, but is deceived by this supposedly reliable ‘shutting-out-door’ as five torn sheets flutter on the floor denying him an escape. Similarly, in *The Caretaker* we come across a bucket hanging from the rain dripping ceiling, which has been analysed as a prop used to caricature Chinese water torture used in horrific third degree police interrogations. The most highlighted icon used by Pinter, has undoubtedly been the figurine of Buddha, which has been variously used in a subtle metaphorical sense, and which signifies Aston’s role in the past, as having been one of ‘a seer’. Later Mick’s action of breaking the statue may signify his desire that symbolizes the Davies affair as closed.

In the present analyses regarding the iconicity of props used by Pinter, the effort has been to show how (just like the meaning in his plays) every icon or prop operates on a multiple level, producing multiple effects at various instances of the plays. With an exercise of brilliant economy, Pinter has integrated icons, which are not just objects in the plays, but which become processes that acquire a varied significance
along with the linear movement of the plays. The audience watch the ‘non-striking’ become quite ‘obviously striking’, and the symbolic insinuations accumulate subtly through a metaphoric web of dialogue and movement. What appears as banal in the beginning becomes theatrically highlighted through Pinter’s dexterous crafting of his dramaturgy. He brings out such nuances from mundane objects, which enrich the dramatic patterns adding both pleasure and meaning to their dramatic experience. Thus one finds strewn within Pinter’s oeuvre a gamut of symbolically charged icons, actions and a language, which group together to form larger patterns of meaning and powerful messages. This has been sought, to be examined in detail within this thesis, in order to watch and establish these icons as evolving and impregnating the plays in a way, that they become reborn as extended metaphors that establish their poetic nature.

Being a genre in itself, the dramatic form follows its own conventions of analysis that are manifest in specific ways. Drama, by definition is an imitation of a certain action or a series of actions that are ordered in some manner. Yet despite being a mimesis of life, it differs from real life conventions where events occur in a continuous tangle of cause and effects, accidents and associations, without any specificity of a beginning or an end. In other words they are a continuity of ‘middle’ or the present. Yet, the action in a play has to be selective and structured by the playwright with obvious planning and plotting as he has to tell his story through performed action. Therefore all action (although presentational) is artificially structured. This is a perpetually abiding problem of all dramatists, as Pinter asserted once, that what concerned him most while writing a play, was its ‘shape’ and ‘structure’. Throughout the history of drama, various structural devices have been employed by the playwrights to work on audience’s understanding. These elements of stagecraft have been used in a number of ways with varied emphases, and in infinite sets of combinations. Dramatist Strindberg even went to the extent of listing a few necessary elements as hints and intimations (to the secrets): outburst of emotions or rage, a discovery or denouement, a punishment, a resolution (with or without reconciliation), a quid pro quo or retribution, a parallelism and a reversal or a turn with a disappointment, or a well planned surprise.

Information in drama is also conveyed through structures of space and time. The use of time in dramatic structures can be interesting, and fictional time can be handled
in a number of ways: in direct sequential progression or diffuse sequence, where the linear progression is punctuated by flashbacks or circular repetitions (Like in Beckett’s *Play* or *Waiting for Godot* and in Pinter’s *Old Times*). The performance time itself unfolds rhythmically in a juxtaposition of slow and fast scenes, producing a pacing effect or a tempo. Harold Pinter who had worked as all; an actor, a director and a playwright had a multiple advantage of having had worked from all angles of theatrical production. This made him an author with a fine tuned sensibility of controlling the tempo of his plays by writing and directing pauses and silences within his texts, to the best possible advantage, which added poetic rhythm and meaning as well as humour in his plays.

In drama, time can be viewed in a chronological progression of both change and static conditions. In postmodern drama, especially the plays of Beckett and most of Pinter’s too, the situations at the end of the plays do not differ much from that in the beginning. What changes perhaps, is the character’s insight and the audience perspective with the chronological provision of information as the play progresses. The progression of time in postmodern drama is thus more subjectively static or cyclic. In Pinter’s *The Caretaker*, one witnesses a change in perception of both the brothers Mick and Aston while the position of the tramp Davies (who has perhaps been used as a catalyst in bringing about the change in the brothers’ relationship) remains status quo. Also, in *Old Times* the change is minimal and perceptual while one witnesses the positioning of the characters in relation to their respective surfaces, being same as before, in relation to the progression of time, yet reversed in a mirror effect spatial terms. In Pinter’s drama what one sees, is mostly a subjective progression resulting in the reversal of dominant/ subservient binary relationships. This is through an extended presentation of time, stretched to an effect of slowing down the tempo with his use of pauses and silences.

It is a well known fact that dramatic texts, which are written for stage enactment are built upon dialogue. Yet there are segments of written verbal language in the texts that are not intended to be spoken on the stage. This is the secondary text of the written form of drama which consists in performance aids. Pfister identifies them as: “Title of the play, inscription, dedications and prefaces, the dramatis personae, announcements of acts and scenes, stage directions and identification of the
speakers.” (13, Pfister) The stage directions are important in indicating details of the performance, which include actor’s timing of entrance and exits, their gestures and movement and tone of address and also the paralinguistic elements. The stage directions in a particular context also refer to stage setting, lighting, the audio effects (music and off stage sounds). Pfister points out that, in this manner, the secondary text of drama offers a literary reception of the text, thereby blurring the difference between a narrative and a dramatic text, serving to make it autonomous, which makes it easier for a literary student to follow.(14, Pfister)

As far as the ‘shaping’ of his plays is concerned, Pinter’s drama is interspersed with various techniques within the text, in order to guide the reception perspective of the reader/audience. What has been his most innovative technique is the one, which the author has used in his plays for the creation of ambiguity, and that one sees as a kind of guidance for audience to exercise their reasoning faculty. By cutting away the traditional dramatic irony, Pinter replaces it with its reversal; an unverifiable befuddlement. This way the author invites the audience participation in the creation of meaning in his plays, and such a practice helps create as many interesting analyses as the readers/audiences. This is Pinter’s method of denying the audience a closure, which leads to a profligate hankering for meaning. Alice Rayner writes about this:

Attention in Pinter is a way of describing what Heidegger called ‘dwelling’ in the sense that it defies the closure upon singular meaning and replaces it with openness to multiple significations in process where being is becoming. Pinter’s various techniques for subverting narrative trajectories radically alter the epistemological forms for the kind of meaning that come from narrative and its attending shaping of time, identity and subjectivity. (91, Pinter at Sixty)

Of the various verbal and non-verbal ranges of semiotic signs and channels that the dramatists employ to guide the audience, one such technique is the use of telling names which, according to Marvin Carlson, is the quickest and the most potent device which a dramatist uses to orient his audience. Carlson says that the names impart “information, not just about the character who bears a particular name but also about his actantial role in a total dramatic structure: about his place in a pattern of relationships and about intertextual relations between the drama in which he appears and the other dramas of the same or contrasting genres.” (26, Carlson) The history of drama has revealed, different dramatic codes which operate in attributing names to the
dramatic figures, which seek to reflect or refer to attributes of sexual, national or ethnic differentiations. Also, some codes refer to social status or positions of the characters and some to their qualities. There have been ‘stock names’ which are attributive to a certain behaviour (Harlequin or Pantalone); or ‘speaking names’ that fall into four kinds namely, animal names (Volpone, Otter), names relating to objects of resemblance (Syringe, Scale), ones of profession action (Haircut) and ones that describe the figures they represent (Jolly, Sneerwell).

In Pinter’s entire dramatic work, one notices a careful choice that the dramatist exercised in naming his characters. In his very informative article entitled ‘Names and Naming in the Plays of Harold Pinter’, Ronald Knowles discusses the playwright’s particular choices in the process of naming, and its instrumentality in the exercise of power and issues of social and existential identity. Knowles goes at length to discuss the various principal categories of names and naming in Pinter’s plays. About this technique Knowles comments: “No dramatist has been so consistently and conspicuously concerned with names and naming throughout his career. [Pinter’s naming] contribute[s] intrinsically to the design of each play as a whole.” (113, Knowles) Knowles discusses three particular categories in this respect: “[Of] those who are present on stage but who remain unnamed in the course of the play; those who are absent but are given a kind of presence by being named onstage; the function of the names of places and pubs” (113-114). Knowles proceeds to outline how names are used as a kind of negation of the true self identity (like the drab Rose in The Room or the ironically cunning cruel Goldberg in The Birthday Party, who reject the other appropriations to them; Sal, by Riley and Simey by McCann, respectively). The knowledge of others’ true names demonstrate a kind of power over others, since the names reveal their true, geographical, ethnic or religious identity, which when revealed, exposes the characters as “speechless cipher[s] of surface respectability” (116). Therefore, in Pinter, re-appropriating names of the figures means re-appropriating their very characters. Such propriety in renaming is usually reacted against by the characters. Slipping into the familiar first names (Christian, Jewish or Irish) is a threat of true identity revelation, which Pinter’s characters fight tooth and nail to hide.
Conversely, in *The Caretaker* Pinter has used the power of naming as a form of rejection. Mc Davies, the tramp in the play, assumes the name of Bernard Jenkins, with the notion of finding for himself an upper class identity, which he can only prove as real, if he can get back his identity papers, which he left at Sidcup, fifteen years ago. Yet his prevarication, whenever he is asked to provide his identity proof, exposes the discrepancy between the real and the claimed identity, and also the tramp’s need for social legitimacy (a fact that Mick recognizes, and uses to break him literally as “Jen ... kins” and then reject him). Pinter has also used name, as a tool of pounding a person. The name Foster, as introduction, is pounded to a degree in *No Man’s Land* in a manner to set in a firm establishment of the person it belongs to, within the richly secure household of his employer: “His name is Friend. This is Mr. Briggs. Mr. Friend. Mr. Briggs. I am Mr. Foster. Old English stock. John Foster. Jack. Jack Foster. Old English name. Foster. John Foster, Jack Foster. Foster. This man’s name is Briggs” (98, *Complete Works 4*)

Again, Knowles illustrates (quite interestingly) how with the use of names and surnames, Pinter constructs a structural circularity, quite originally in one of his plays entitled *The Basement*; with an inversion of the opening lines of the play, in the closing lines:

**OPENING LINES:**

LAW: (*With great pleasure*) Scott!

SCOTT: (*Smiling*) Hullo Tim.

**CLOSING LINES:**

SCOTT: (*With great pleasure*) Law!

LAW: (*Smiling*) Charles.

Knowles analyses it thus:

Nothing could be simpler, yet the context leading to the last quote makes us recognize the subtexts of both. The affected use of the surname gives the formal a special kind of familiarity, which registers a mannered regard, simultaneously accommodating surprise and evoking a past guardedness. The *great pleasure* provides an appropriately exaggerated rhetorical gambit which the response compliments with its defenceless, yet patronizing friendliness. The uniformity of masculine rivalry and aggression beneath individual identity
are thus concisely indicated by the circularity, duplication and interchange ability of the structural inversion (120-121, Knowles)

This Thesis, aims to take Pinter’s naming strategy further and research, the effect of names as anagrams and to analyse their onomatopoeic, syllabic and semantic content, all of which, add to the dramatic theatricality in their use by the playwright. Also, there would be some delving their historical placement in order to illustrate the semantic weight they lend to the content of the plays. One of the best examples is from Pinter’s *The Homecoming*, a play which satisfied its author the most as far as its technical shaping is concerned. In this play, Pinter posits a subversion of the traditional family values, using the ironic inversion technique. The naming of the central female character Ruth, drips irony, where one can draw a parallel reference from the biblical figure of Ruth, who, after her husband’s death vowed to remain with her mother in law Naomi. To quote from the English Standard Version of the Bible: “But Ruth said, ‘Do not urge me to leave you or to return from following you. For where you go I will go, where you lodge, I will lodge, your people shall be my people.’” (Book of Ruth 1: 16-17- ESV)

The biblical Ruth, like the Ruth of *The Homecoming* (but in an ironically inverted sense) chose the lower status of a job, which was to glean the fields despite the inherent dangers that she faced from lustful men, in the open environment. Barry Webb, in his *The Book of Judges* talks about Ruth’s role in Naomi’s rehabilitation; where, when Naomi plans Ruth’s seduction by Boaz in order to ease Ruth’s burden by turning her into the wealthy landowner and Naomi’s late husband’s kinsman’s mistress, Ruth asks Boaz to marry her instead, reviving lineage and secure patrimony to her family. Pinter in this dark parody of the parable; posits his Ruth’s set up, by her own husband Teddy, and offers us an image of modern time’s Ruth’s acceptance of the role of a seductress, in an ironic contrast to the biblical figure’s refusal. Such juxtaposition, by contrast, mocks familial ties and relationships of the postmodern era. With the use of a dramatic inversion in naming technique, Pinter exhibits brilliance in empowering the play with intense irony. Similarly in *Ashes to Ashes*, Pinter chooses to name his protagonist Rebecca; a name borrowed from another biblical figure, Rebecca wife of Isaac, who sends her child Jacob away from her. The reference is archetypal and compares as a universal parallel that suspends temporal and spatial
significance of the act, by its repetition by yet another Rebecca in another time and another place.

Pinter’s technique in naming his dramatic personae varies drastically throughout his oeuvre. It is to be noted that in his political play *Mountain Language* the characters are not given names but descriptions like Old Woman, Young Woman, Sergeant, Officer, Guard, Prisoner, and Hooded Man. The anonymity chosen here is deliberate. Then suddenly, there is a calculated disjuncture by appropriating a collocation (with the self-introduction of the young woman as Sarah Jonson) in what seemed like a Kurdish locality at first. Talking about such disjuncture as a postmodern theatrical practice, Jeanne Colleran comments:

Torn from any immediate, claimable frame of reference or meaningfulness [the plays] challenge spectators to find a frame of reference and construct meaning [which seems to be ever] shifting by virtue of theatrical performance from unspecified location to a cultural context. (59, Colleran, *Pinter at Sixty*)

Without any geographical identity, which is provided by geo specific names of either the place or the people, the unspecified state of the play can be politicised variously, and can invoke historical comparisons to the oppression of the Welsh or the Irish people (who can also be called ‘mountain people’) as much as to that of the Kurds in Turkey. In a typically postmodern sense, the refusal by the dramatist to provide a collocation and names to his characters, is his anti-narrativizing technique, and the play’s potency derives from, and depends upon (as Colleran points out) “spectator’s decision to reject [a] passive reception.”(60)

As Pfister points out, “in realistic drama the non-verbal elements function as unconscious manifestation of a psychic condition or reflect the need for silence in the face of verbal impotence.” (18, Pfister) Sometimes the key to a play’s central meaning is provided by non verbal action (mime) or even shaped as a frozen tableau, where all movement on the stage ceases, giving space to what may be called a pictorial moment. The frozen moment offers general comments on the whole play and is used as a mode of communication by the dramatists. In his illuminating article entitled ‘Body Language in Pinter’s Plays’, Richard Allen Cave elucidates the paralinguistic codes and gestures not usually indicated in the secondary text in Pinter’s plays, but which the author himself, and his various directors have utilized to
a semantic advantage. Cave attributes the importance of such codes, to Pinter’s direct revival of his own plays (in which the playwright chose to act as well) where he demonstrated how an actor’s body language can be used to convey sub-textual complexities to quite some extent, and as equally well as the use of the verbal codes. For this Cave refers to the collective reviews of Pinter’s 1998 performance of the role of Harry in his own play, The Collection. The reviews described Pinter’s physical presence as ‘commanding and domineering’ with his ‘big frame physique’ and his ‘elegance and panache’. Cave elucidates: “What impressed about Pinter’s performance was the way the commanding stance and physical urbanity were offset by a constant wariness, indicated by subtle turn or angling of head” (109, Allen Cave). He points out, that such a ‘meticulous control’ was made obvious by moments of its relaxation by the actor on two occasions; where first (in the words of ‘The Observer Review’) “[Pinter] signalled his allegiance to his partner merely by a casual practiced massage of the neck.’(109), and secondly in a frustrated wrenching at a newspaper as his partner Bill refused to speak the truth about the Stella and his (Bill’s) affair. About this kind of body language used as a stagecraft by Pinter, Cave comments:

These moments registered as more than conventional stage business, because isolated and unexpected in being in marked contrast to Harry’s prevailing restraint, they took on the status of physicalized metaphors: both indicated a depth of affection, although the first had an ambiguity (there was a certain take-him-by-the-scruff-of-the-neck quality to the gesture that hinted at mastery) and the second a maniac energy which were at once touching and sinister.(111,Allen Cave)

It was therefore merely in the use of his physical attributes within the performance, that Pinter chose to focus the spectators’ attention to the ‘uneasy power structuring’ in the homosexual relationship between Harry and Bill.

As a stage director, Pinter believed in drawing out the physicality of the acting style in order to shape further implications of the verbal text or the dialogue. Thereby, in Pinter plays, the characters’ placement or positioning in relation to the acting space becomes suggestive of a whole new panorama of insights. With reference to The Caretaker, Cave talks about such a positioning by the playwright: “Pinter’s constant positioning of Aston on the peripheries of the acting space, as if seeking the
comforting proximity of a wall or a solid piece of furniture, suggested a troubled, insecure individual, prone to self consciousness and a fear of making connections with others.”(112)

It is to be noted, that by opening the first scene of The Caretaker with a mime, which presents Mick’s body in both stillness and in motion, Pinter makes it a medium of expression, which establishes a mode of interpretation of the ensuing performance; one to which the physicality of the figure makes a definite contribution. We first witness Mick as sitting in a chair, observing his surrounding, when a sudden bang of the door, offstage, throws his body into an alert attentiveness, as the offstage voices of the people makes him get up and move stealthily to the door and out as it closes silently after him. Earlier, his silent observation of each object in the room (as his eye roves from one thing to another) is perhaps Pinter’s method of drawing the audience’s attention to various objects in order to make them get involved imaginatively with the situation and the given surrounding, in order to invite spectator’s perception. Also, attention to the characters’ body language in makes the characters as “site of cultural and biographical reference” observes Cave.

One can’t help noticing that gestures, particularly the use of hands is very important in the Pinter plays, in revealing the nature of the figures. For example, in The Caretaker Aston’s constant fiddling with an electrical wire plug reveals his neurotic tendency, while the tramp Davies’s use of punching and stabbing hand movement reveals him as a person in a constant defence mode. Again, in One for the Road, Nicolas victimizes Victor and Gila with vulgar hand gestures; by thrusting his penile finger at their faces. Yet, the most potent image of hand occurs in Ashes to Ashes as Rebecca’s words sketches a picture of her lover’s hands playing with her in a sadistic sexual foreplay:

Well ... for example ... he would stand over me and clench his fist. And then he’d put his other hand over my neck and grip it and bring my neck towards him. His fist grazed my mouth. And he’d say “kiss my fist” (395, Plays 4)

The gesture and its significance with both a metaphorical resonance as well as a metonymy have been discussed in detail in Chapter VI of the thesis.
As mentioned earlier, another technical feature of Pinter’s drama have been the tableaux of his plays. Beginning from *The Dumb Waiter* in many of Pinter’s plays, the dramatic action with all its resonant implications of an imminent past, concluded with a resolution into concrete physical images. The frozen tableaux invite the audience to rethink what they have responded to up till the given moment. A tableau posits as presentational, a powerful image, the expression of which can be compared to a Joyce’s Epiphany. The statis which ensues from the plays’ movement is, paradoxically, an ending that resists closure and one which “hold[s] a deft poise without endorsing any one as definitive.” (122, Cave) Perhaps the most complex final tableau that ends a Pinter play is the one which we witness in *The Homecoming* where we see Ruth sitting on a sofa at the centre of the stage, after having displaced Max from his position as the patriarchal head of the household. As she sits on the seat, Joey, the youngest son crosses over the stage space to sit at her feet, placing his head on her lap (which she begins to stroke). Lenny the second son goes to stand behind her on one side, and Max quite subjugated, crawls across the floor on bended knees towards her, with his hands clasped in form of making an entreaty. Cave describes the tableau as: “a black parody of the traditional grouping of a Nativity scene or those countless paintings entitled ‘Madonna and Child with Saint and Donor’ ” (121) {See Figures, next page}

With Ruth’s action and an image of consummate poise at the centre stage, Pinter re-defines passivity as new form of power and matriarchal/ sexual control, one of a still nucleus around whom the men revolve. Pinter’s very own technique in crafting this central irony in this play of ironies has perhaps been described by the playwright himself within this very play. In the voice of Teddy (Ruth’s husband) he offers the most comprehensive statement of his own work:

TEDDY: You wouldn’t understand my works. You wouldn’t have the faintest idea of what they were about. You wouldn’t appreciate the points of reference. You’re way behind. All of you. There is no point in my sending you my works. You’d be lost. It’s nothing to do with the question of intelligence. It’s a question of how far you can operate on things and not in things. I mean it’s a question of your capacity to ally the two, to relate the two, to balance the two, to see, to be able to see! I’m the one who can see. That’s why I write my critical works. Might do you good ... have a look at them ... see how certain people can view ... things ... how certain people can maintain ... intellectual equilibrium (77-78 Complete Works 3, Italics mine)
Perhaps this is what makes us supply objective correlatives and view the image from the play (*Le Retour*, Paris, 1966) in relation to, and in juxtaposition with the archetypal image in the painting (*Madonna and Child with Saint and a Donor*, Master of Sforza Altarpiece c. Late 15th century {Italian})

The act of such juxtaposition would tantamount to blasphemy for most, as the dark parody of the image violates moral sentiments of a particular community. Neither does Pinter work upon asserting the credibility of the tribal like situation in the end; promoting the jungle like lawlessness of sharing a common sex partner, that too, the daughter/sister in law and also making her use her sexuality for earning her keep. By far, this situation seems to verge on the ridiculous. It appears that Pinter has just taken to demonstrating how far the situation has taken its own possibility: of “how far one can operate on things”, without causing much offence, mainly for the reason of the situation’s own improbability. This is Pinter’s experiment in the construction of Irony with a clinical detachment, an activity best described by Hakkan Chevalier in the following terms:

The ironist is committed to the search of a more exterior point of view, so as to embrace all contradictions and behold the world from a point of vantage to which nothing else is superior. The indefinite extension of his field of vision to the furthest attainable reaches is implied in point of view of the ironic observer of simple human situation. The ironic reaction is exterior to both elements of the contrast observed. (151, qtd. in Bert O State)

Another irony in *The Homecoming* is Pinter’s expression of a satirical formalism of the politician’s pure rhetoric in the guise of parodic situations. According to Bert O State, what Pinter is doing in the play is evident from the politician’s language that he puts in the mouth of various characters as we watch the rhetoric unfold the ugly reality or vice versa; as in the following exchange:

SAM: You know what he said to me? He told me I was the best chauffer he’d ever had. The best one.
MAX: From what point of view?
SAM: Eh?
MAX: From what point of view?
LENNY: From the point of view of his driving Dad, and his general sense of courtesy, I should say. (29, CW 3)

Then again, when the family discusses how Ruth (the daughter in law who has just been offered to work for them as a prostitute) is to be treated in her various other roles as a mother, a cook and as mutually exchangeable sexual partner for all the male members of the house:

MAX: Lenny, do you mind if I make a little comment? It is not meant to be critical. But I think you’re concentrating too much on the economic considerations. There are other considerations. There are human considerations. You understand what I mean? There are human considerations. Don’t forget them. (87, CW 3)

The various roles euphemistically expressed as ‘human considerations’ is without doubt a politician’s jargon made to sound considerate (as in hegemony) to the subject concerned, which is very ironic.

In Old Times, the enacted penultimate extended mime reveals how Pinter deploys silent movement or body language in the careful shaping of the final tableau, the details of the significance of which have been discussed here, in the Chapter about the play. Tableaux in Pinter have been used by the playwright to express intense and profoundly illuminating emotional, spiritual, psychological and symbolic relevance. Cave remarks: “Pinter contrives a strategy whereby, in resolving the action into an icon of richly allusive intensity, he opens the play up beyond the performance to the enquiring imagination.” (122) The outer bodies of the characters become correlative to the inner conditions. In his later political plays however, Pinter’s technique involves a subversion of image built by the words of the characters into their corporeal materializing on the stage. In Ashes to Ashes the image built by Rebecca’s word in the earlier description of her lover’s sadomasochist sexual foreplay, is later enacted by Devlin on the stage in order to bring out the subconscious reality to the surface, which apparently her grief has relegated to the limbo or the inner recesses of her mind.

Another method that Pinter employs is the use of voice-overs. In Mountain Language, they speak the mind of lovers’ happier dreams or a soothing discourse between a mother and a son. This is shown to display how the victims of extreme
torture rise above their catatonic states in the play. The fact that these lyrical moments arise out of enforced silence of the prison, make them more poignant and intensely dramatic. Writing about her experience of the rehearsal with Pinter in directing *Mountain Language* Carey Perloff has remarked:

> In a culture of total repression such as depicted in *Mountain Language* real communication never happens except through silence. In that silence thoughts are shared. Pinter reveals this in the play through the use of carefully chosen voice-overs that occur in moments of brutality when spoken communication is impossible. [...] To Pinter, the tone of voice-overs should stand in contrast to that of the scene so that the voice-overs could offer a moment of transcendence (as if a small bud was pushing through the rest of the muck. They serve as a reminder of the indomitability of the human spirit in the face of destruction. (15-16)

In order to impart information in drama, the categories of time and space play an important role. It is therefore necessary to analyse the fictional space and the fictional time of the dramatic world of Pinter. What is important to remember is that any exposure of their being fictional tends to break the absolute autonomy in drama. With the Epic Theatre of Brecht, such a break was a deliberate move by the author, for the sake of the producing an alienating effect. Brecht introduced an epic mediating system to castigate autonomy as an ideological ruse, which he felt was in fact a contingent formation disguised as reality. The classist playwright insisted upon the absence of space and time ruptures in drama to maintain a closed space/time continuum. Such closed structures are also visible in much of naturalistic theatre and even in the Theatre of the Absurd as it was developed by Ionesco, Beckett and Pinter. Yet because of the thematic function of these very structures in naturalistic drama, ruptures of time and space become marked as gaps have to be identified. The function of space in drama is to influence the characters and their formation in the environment of the setting. Another function is the special relation formed between the characters, and also the semantic relations spatially, whether they follow the naturalistic principle or use it for extreme stylisation.

Pinter employs the spatial relations of the binary oppositions in many of his plays to portray reversals and subversions. The dramatist’s innovation lies in establishing dynamic spatial relationships between his characters which shift inside single locale within the dialogue structure of the plays, especially as one seen in *Old Times*. But it
is almost in the entire Pinter *oeuvre* that we can observe this dynamics of the dominant and the subservient binary relationship. This is visible within the plays’ progress as in verbal imageries or gestures or expressions and in the relative positioning of the characters and their discourse, as in Michael Foucauld’s concept of shifting power dynamics. As far as the concept of space is concerned, Pinter strove, not to just recreate the contingent reality, but also presents it in a manner that makes it acquire a symbolic significance. Pinter’s innovative experiment has been in the affecting a successful amalgamation of both private and public space as seen on the political level. Beginning from *The Homecoming* it gathers impetus in his later plays to reach an acme in the final political plays. A brilliant fusion is achieved in *Ashes to Ashes* where both the private and the public are presented within a single gestalt, as has been discussed in the detailed analysis of the play in the sixth chapter.

Time as another governing system of structure in dramatic constructions, has been given equal importance in Pinter’s plays. Absolute autonomy of the dramatic genre determines that the predominant tense in drama is that of time-present. The dramatist creates a desired effect by relating fictional time with real time of the audience, which is an act to invite the audience to generalize from the specific events of the plays’ situations. Pfister defines the chronological relationships in drama as varying along two axes: one of successive events and another of simultaneous happenings. He says: “This simultaneity applies both to action and events that are presented scenically and those that occur offstage, and which are related verbally either as they occur or retrospectively.” (276). Further, the two deictic elements of space-time cannot be totally separated. The axis of simultaneity can possess special elements, where in order to represent simultaneous events; the dramatist divides the stage into several areas. In Pinter, the division of stage space has been brought about in *The Collection*, *Silence* and *Moonlight*, where several areas have been demarcated as separate scenes.

In *The Betrayal*, Pinter employs a postmodern method of rearranging the chronological events, by a technique which has been termed as meta-cinematic. In his mechanics of temporal manipulation, Pinter flexes time through a method analogous to cinema’s flashback code. He plays with time, pleating and reeling it back in and over in a zigzag manner several times, as he keeps stretching out the time-past to an
even more later time before it. Thus here Pinter crafts a play which is unique in its temporal dislocation and in dumping chronology, and then piecing together and recasting the theatrical medium as self reflexive. By applying this cinematic method, Pinter’s aim is to produce a revelation which has a crime solving effect that foregrounds knowledge about ‘knowing’ in the characters as well as the audience. Such a chronological dislocation brings forth the relevance of the very theme of the play, making it evident that the play is actually a process about when the characters learn the already known in the play. With this unusual operation of the medium of time Pinter exposes our fixation with the power of knowledge, by exposing our voyeuristic desire in the unravelling the origin of knowing what has always already been known.

In Pinter’s plays that end in a tableau or “conclusions without closure” Alice Rayner comments about the playwright’s dramaturgy in the time/space relation:

The temporal unfolding of events through time tends to circle back upon itself so that the unfolding appears at the end of the play as a tableau. Closure thus arrives not as an aspect of coherence between beginning and end but as an arrested image in the theatrical space (94)

Rayner feels that the friction between temporal and spatial form in Pinter creates ‘differences in forms of knowledge’ (94). Normally a narrative construction of events determines a beginning and an end, shaping an equation between linear time, semantics and knowledge, thus crafting an artefact out of experience. In Pinter the reverse happens where an experience is created out of the characters’ and the audience focus on spatial construction of meaning rather than on the temporal coherence. Time is ‘spatialized’ as a present event with a focus on ‘knowing’ as both action and a thing. The temporal structure of the play normally progresses horizontally as a narrative (with a beginning, middle and an end) from conflict to climax. This differs from a spatial structure, which rejects the narrative in favour of vertical form, where the tension emerges from anxiety or stress or a dread from ‘within’ the character, rather than from the outside events. Such a spatial aspect in a play gives it a random or a disjuncture in its sequence, where it is the gaps between the scenes that are given precedence over the connectors.
Pinter’s plays are unique as being ‘realistic’ in a sense that they demonstrate how the unknown and the inexplicable operate within and alongside the mundane. Pinter structures his plays paradoxically, with events resembling real life situations, and characters and their speeches, only to undercut this sense of real so as to provoke uneasy tension between the realistic and the unnameable. In this way, the menace in Pinter’s early plays derives from the intrusion of the inexplicable and the unexplained, into a recognizable environment, which can be as ordinary as an average middle class sitting room. This unnerves and puzzles as it gives an absurdist quality to the realistic situation. Pinter’s affecting such hybridization is uniquely innovative and has resulted in what has characteristically been termed as Pinteresque. This is Pinter’s methodical technique of selection and arrangement of his material in a manner that posits reality as a tension between conflicting yet persuasive forces. In this way, the author creates an ambivalent reality. For example, in The Caretaker we see Davies’ expulsion as cruel but necessary for Aston’s protection from the tramp. Thus we see Pinter’s ability to create characters that are both cunning, yet full of pathos. With this kind of complexity, his plays are open to differing yet equally valid interpretations.

USE OF LANGUAGE AND SILENCE IN PINTER’S DRAMA: A LITERATURE REVIEW, ITS SURVEY AND DEVELOPMENT – II

Relevant to the technical construction of Pinter’s drama, is also his movement away from the conventional stage dialogue and his creation for himself, a mode of speech, where the playwright crafted such an explicit text, which could hint at an implicit subtext. Andrew Kennedy in his Six Dramatists in Search of a Language pointed out that Pinter’s use of language was an alteration and further development of the naturalistic ‘oblique’ dialogue as introduced by Anton Chekov, on the dramatic scene. On Pinter’s designing of such a kind of dialogue Kennedy writes:

Pinter writes a quasi naturalistic dialogue as if he had linguistically trained perception; but the seemingly accurate ‘real language’ phrasing is consciously patterned to show up inadequacies- idioms as idiocies- and the failure of language. (21)
Kennedy viewed Pinter’s language as grown out of what he calls the ‘crisis’ of original naturalistic method as both ‘impoverished’ and ‘over explicit’, taken and developed towards its intensification by its very distortion. This was Pinter’s ‘showing’ of falling apart of speech and action, where the subtext served to stylize the ‘rhythms of evasion’ and the ‘misuse of speech’ (21) Kennedy describes such a language as one which is “potentially self annihilating”(21) and one which, contrary to being a medium of communicating, becomes a “barrier that must be broken down in each act of expression”(22) Kennedy also recognized Silence as one of the two ultimate analogies for verbal expression ( music being the other). He elaborates the effort of the postmodern dramatists, as “the desire to ‘purify’ language—to make it say less and intimate more, to exploit inner relations and undertones in a language[...] as an aspiration towards ‘a language within a language’.”(22) Therefore, the effort to make language speak louder in its very inarticulateness is one of the characteristic features of Pinter’s drama. Such inarticulate speech becomes more expressive than any form of articulate eloquence. Moreover, the greater intensity emerging out of such fragmentary language brings about a kind of inner integrity to the dialogue. A new kind of language is thus recreated through its very decay through a process of ‘infolding’ within this minimal speech, observes Kennedy.

In Pinter’s oeuvre, one comes across many such occasions where this principal of inner economy is at work in the way the playwright uses his linguistic and stylistic devices. About such a language technique Martin Esslin has remarked in his essay on ‘Language and Silence’ in Pinter:

Only when it was recognized that verbal element need not be dominant aspect of drama, or at least that it was not the content of what was said that mattered most but the action that it embodied, that the inarticulate, incoherent, tautological and nonsensical speech might be as dramatic as verbal brilliance when it was treated simply as an element of action only then did it become possible to place inarticulate characters in the centre of the play and make their unspoken emotions transparent. Pinter is among the discoverers of this highly significant aspect of drama. (39, Language and Silence)

Language, in the mouth of Pinter’s inarticulate characters, becomes mannerist in illuminating disturbing mental processes, which lie underneath the apparently nonsensical words. As Esslin describes(in an illustration from The Birthday Party) as
to how a simplistic repetition performs a significant action. After having served cornflakes to her husband Meg enquires of Pete:

MEG: Are they nice?

PETE: Very nice.

MEG: I thought they'd be nice.

The dialogue in its very shallowness represents an empty married life of a couple desperate to keep their relationship together with the repetition of the word ‘nice’ three times in a ten word dialogue. A dialogue lacking in any worthwhile concept, nevertheless holds a compressed dramatic information about the staunch determination of the middle aged couple to hold their relationship together with a vainly fumbling action of being ‘nice’ to each other. It may be noted here, that the dialogue, however representational, is always ‘planned’ by the playwright, and even in these apparently subconscious repetitions, or some accidental blurtmg out or fumbling with words and trailing off, there lies the author’s own agenda of working on a particular technical aspect for a definite purpose. The overuse of the word ‘nice’ in the dialogue above is actually a cover up for the ugliness of a near-decayed-and-stale relationship. The very poverty of having nothing to say except clinging on to a word that sounds positive rings desperately hollow. Thus the trite word has its importance in relating to the theme of the play and in forming the audience impression about the characters in the conversation.

Esslin points out how in the traditional drama from the stage dialogue has been more to the point than anything else: “People on stage from Sophocles to Shakespeare to Rattigan have spoken more clearly, more directly more to the purpose than they would ever have done in real life”( 35, Language) It was Chekov and Strindberg who became the pioneers of bringing to fore the other functions of the language of drama, the use of which was developed and taken up further by Pinter for a purpose quite different, from the conventional communicative motive. In Pinter’s treatment of language, he transformed its mere rhetorical informative element to that of a dramatic psychological action. Pinter was of the view that (in Esslin’s words) “people interact not so much logically as emotionally through language. [...] What matters in most oral verbal contact is[...] what people are doing to each other
through[language] than the conceptual content of what they are saying.” (38) It is therefore that we find the characters in Pinter’s plays struggling to search for the right words, and upon finding which they hold on to it tightly, repeating them as if savouring their moment of achievement.

Studying in detail Pinter’s use of repetitions in language, Esslin has observed that Pinter’s characters use “obsessive permutations of the same elements” which mark hysteria or repetitions that exhibit a difficulty in coming to terms with something or a struggle to stomach a hard fact that life doles out to them. In *The Caretaker* in one of the exchanges between Aston and the tramp Davies illustrates this:

Davies: Who was that feller?
Aston: He’s my brother
Davies: Is he? He’s a bit of a joker, en’ he?
Aston: uh.
Davies: Yes he’s a real joker.
Aston: He’s got a sense of humour.
Davies: Yes I noticed

*Pause*

He’s a real joker that lad, you can see that.
Aston: yes he tends... he tends to see the funny side of things
Davies: Well he’s got a sense of humour en’ he?
Aston: Yes
Davies: Yes, you could tell that.(48-49, *CW 2*)

Pinter designs a brilliant interlocking of more than one tautologically repeated phrase:

1) Joker/ got a sense of humour/ a real joker/sees the funny side of things
2) I noticed/ can see/can tell that/ you could tell

Esslin elaborates how the various permutations in the tramp’s speech in relation to Aston’s give the dialogue a poetic shape (fellar/ brother, joker/ sense of humour, a
real joker/ he tends to see the funny side of things). The variations of Davies’ speech as pitted against Aston’s musical dialogue form. Thus repetitions, which the traditional dramatists rejected as stylistically poor flaw of drama, was not only brought to fore in the dramatic dialogue of Pinter, but was also made poetic in its permutations and juxtaposition with other speech. Also in the poetic refrain like recurrence of full sentences, made the dialogue look fundamentally phatic, and therefore hyper realistic. Such a speech became an illustration of the fact that real life conversation does not proceed logically but is usually punctuated with leitmotifs in the shape of whole sentences. For example, in Davies long speech, where the tramp asserts his authority over Aston, he tries to rub it in that he is in alliance with his brother Mick as his spy. He repeats several times “Because I tell you, your brother has got his eye on you.”

Pinter’s dialogue construction posits various similar peculiarities or modifications that serve different functions in different dramatic situations. We witness one such appropriate alteration of speech as spoken out of the mouth of a sophisticated character Harry in *The Collection*, where the word ‘slum’ occurs eleven times and ‘slug’ five time, in the description of his gay partner Bill:

Bill is a slumboy, you see he’s got a slum sense of humour. That is why I never take him to parties. Because he’s got a slum mind. I have nothing against slum minds per se, you understand, nothing at all. There’s a certain kind of slum mind which is perfectly all right in a slum, but when this kind of a slum mind gets out of the slum it sometimes persists you see, it rots everything. That’s what Bill is. There is something faintly putrid about him, don’t you find? Like a slug. There’s nothing wrong with slugs in their place, but he’s a slum slug; there is nothing wrong with slum slugs in their place, but this one won’t keep his place.[...] All he can do is to sit and suck his bloody hand, and decompose like a filthy slum slug he is.(154-155, CW 2 emphasis mine)

Such a hammering away with use of derogatory terms for the purpose of an aggressive mental torture and abuse reveals a mixed ambivalent feeling of intense hatred, coupled with his obsession for Bill. The rhythm generated by the ritualistic repetition in this speech is also tantamount to a creation of a complex effect of both sympathy and laughter amongst the audience. Yet this highly stylized rhyming and repetition that emerges from colloquial speech pattern makes the speech stand out as
extraordinary. Pinter ensures to retain the essentially colloquial *Pinteresque* speech with the inculcation and reproduction of genuine speech pattern by the use of recurring refrains: “I have nothing against” and “there is nothing wrong”. And yet these very refrains lend to the speech, their uniquely musical, rhythmic and a poetic structural pattern.

The language that Pinter uses has also a highly associative quality. Types of associations in his dialogues vary, and may fall into subtypes that may include, connotative, collocative, social, affective, and reflective thematic associations. For example, in the following speech from *Night School*, Pinter uses an associative phonological structure to indicate lying by the character. When Solto is asked how he had reached Australia he answers:

Solto: By Sea. How do you think? I worked my passage. And what a trip. I was only a pubescent. I killed a man with my own hands, a six foot ten Lascar from Madagascar.
Annie: From Madagascar?
Solto: Sure, A lascar
Milly: Alaska?
Solto: Madagascar.

*Pause*
Walter: It has happened before,
Solto: and it’ll happen again. (212 CW 2)

It is clear, that the association here springs from the sound of the words ‘Lascar’ and ‘Madagascar’, which makes the story, ring as hollow. Even the insistence on its verity in the last attempt at convincing fails. It is with the invention of such a pathetic thought process that Pinter brilliantly impresses upon his audience, the limited imagination of the working class and petty crime world. Just one word leads to the next producing a comic grotesquery. In their desperate attempts and eagerness to impress, these characters are led, against their better judgement, to begin a conversation with their half-baked knowledge and an enforced grandiloquence which leads them to make comically pathetic fools of themselves.

Esslin remarks: “Always in Pinter’s world, personal inadequacy expresses itself in an inadequacy to cope with and use language.” (46, Language) This makes the characters cling to the few ‘educated terms’ which they might know. Sometimes to
portray a mixed action, Pinter’s uses adroitly, a technique which he has crafted to bring together a string of associations to a single speech. This is mainly for the purpose of making the audience/reader follow the line of main thought process that lies beneath it. In Night School, the protagonist Walter, in his attempt to impress the girl Sally brags about his success as a librarian in the prison that harboured him. The word ‘library’ drives him to mention ‘manuscripts’ which leads to a chain of associations that weaves a brilliant grotesquery that best describes what Andrew Kennedy calls ‘an idiom focused into idiocy’:

I’ve had a good bit to do with rare manuscripts in my time. I used to know a bloke who ran a business digging them up ... rare manuscripts. Out of tombs. I used to give him a helping hand when I was on the loose. Very well paid it was too. You see they were nearly always attached to a corpse, these manuscripts, you had to lift up the pelvic bone with a pair of tweezers. Big tweezers. Can’t leave the fingerprints on the corpse you see. Canon law [...] The biggest shock I ever had was when a skeleton collapsed on top of me and nearly bit my ear off.[...] You’ve never been inside a grave, I suppose. (220, CW 2 Emphasis mine)

The thought process here can somewhat be mapped as follows:
Rare manuscripts ➔ archaeology ➔ tombs ➔ skeletons ➔ [urged to add a technical term from anatomy, which he knows probably from having watched soap operas]
Pelvis ➔ operation ➔ tweezers ➔ [coming back to the familiar world of crime] corpse and no fingerprints ➔ [for fear of] Canon Law.

But the speech goes much beyond just being a man’s desperate attempt to impress a girl. The words speak about the character that Walter is, and reveal exactly what kind of crime that he indulged in, which was that of resurrection, that is of being a body snatcher from graves. Wikipedia, defines body snatching in Britain as originally being a crime that invited capital punishment, till the nineteenth century. Later with the demand for cadavers for medical study, body snatching from the grave became “a misdemeanour of common law, not a felony, and therefore punishable with fine and imprisonment rather than transportation or execution. The trade was a sufficiently lucrative business to run the risk of detection.” (Wikipedia) Wikipedia also mentions harvesting bones and body parts for transplant surgeries by modern body snatchers, who feed this demand and get well paid for it.
Yet another aspect that the speech might aim at is (contrary to being words that seek to impress) that it might be a frightful expression to scare Sally away. With a subtle mention of the sort of criminality he indulged in (besides being the gun totting criminal that he already impressed he was), the speech may be Walter’s deliberate design; a linguistic structure to evoke a feeling of fright, in order to spook Sally away from his room and take back its possession. (In Pinter’s work, there is a constant battle for territorial possession) In this respect, the speech reflects as an act of aggression, just like Lenny’s braggart speeches in *The Homecoming*. Thus it may be seen that the beauty of Pinter’s poetic use of language lies in its indeterminacy, multidimensionality and in the multi-linearity of the play’s plot structures. Such speeches also portray Pinter’s obsessive preoccupation with language and its subtle nuances and the zone of reality that lies beneath the use of the same.

Quoting Jean Vannier’s definition of new theatre, Andrew Kennedy remarks:

Pinter has [...] invented “drama of human relations at the level of language itself.” [...] Pinter, to develop the image has taken linguistic Babel for granted (perhaps too glibly at times) at the level of everyday exchanges, talk, chat, verbal games – with an ear for local usage, or rather abuse and verbiage. He seems to carry no literary ‘burden of the past’. He has created dialogue out of failures of language that might occur as English is spoken by frightened, evasive or sadistically playful characters [...]. The patterning in the dialogue frequently goes with violent and mannered distortions. (169, *Six Dramatists*)

Pinter has been an innovator of a new dimension of stage dialogue which, in contrast to that of his predecessors (Samuel Beckett’s and Eugene Ionesco) highly stylized classical literary modes, posits what Walter Kerr called ‘tape recording fidelity’. Kennedy points out that the pursuit of the process of shaping dialogue which is ‘not subject to false articulation’ has, paradoxically, led Pinter to an “indulgent pattern making and mannerism” (171, *Six Dramatists*) Pinter thus became a dramatist who wrote with an intense stylistic awareness, and was successful in shaping mimetic dialogue towards an expressiveness unheard of before in the language of theatre.

Traces of influence from Joyce’s stream-of-consciousness prose novels are quite visible in Pinter’s drama. It was a major innovative achievement on the part of the
playwright, who inculcated and integrated James Joyce’s experimental form into a
dramatic framework. The language structures from various speeches of his plays
demonstrate this pursuit. For example, there is a subtle use of this technique in one of
Lenny’s horror filled tales in *The Homecoming*, which he relates to Ruth regarding his
own career and life:

One night, not so long ago one night down by the docks, I was standing alone
under an arch, watching all the men jibing the boom, out in the harbour and
playing about with yardarms, a certain lady came up to me and made a certain
proposal. This lady had been searching for me for days. She’d lost my tracks
and my whereabouts. However the fact was she eventually caught with me and
made to me this certain proposal. Well this proposal wasn’t entirely out of
order and normally I would have subscribed to it. I mean I would subscribe to
it under the normal course of events. The only trouble was that she was falling
apart from pox. [...] so I clumped her one. It was on my mind at the time to do
away with her, you know, to kill her, and the fact is, that as killings go, it
would have been a simple matter nothing to it [...] no one about, all quiet on
the Western Front.[...] But ... in the end I thought ... Aaah, why go to all the
bother ... you know, get rid of the corpse and all that, getting yourself in a state
of tension. So i just gave her another belt in the nose a couple of turns of the
boot and sort of left it at that. (46-47 CW 3)

In this speech we notice Pinter parodying speech at various linguistic levels. This
one speech is quite similar in technique to Joyce’s *Ulysses*, Book II; Episode 14:
‘Oxen of the Sun’. This Chapter from the James Joyce novel is a remarkable
recapitulation of the entire history of the English language: Starting with Latinate
prose, it proceeds to ‘Anglo Saxon alliteration’ and “parodies of Malory, King James
Bible, Bunyan, Defoe, Sterne, Walpole, Gibbon, Dickens and Carlyle before it
concludes in a haze of nearly incomprehensible slang.” (Ulysses (novel) Wikipedia)
Similarly, Pinter in this speech has used various types of jargons:

1. **Formal linguistic speech of narration** (“one night not so long ago, one night
down by the docks”)

2. **Nautical Parlance** (“Watching all men jibbing the boom ...playing with
yardarms”)

3. **British Press terminology of euphemistic respectability** (“a certain lady came
up to me and made me a certain proposal [which] wasn’t out of order and
normally I would have subscribed to it.”)
4. **Professional argot of sex trade** (“she was falling apart with pox [slang for syphilis]”)

5. **The patois of the underworld** (“So I slumped her one. It was in my mind to do away with her. Kill her...”)

6. **Journalistic idiom of crime reporting** (“her chauffer who had located me for her has popped around the corner to have a drink [...] she was up against this wall- just sliding down the wall following the blow”)

7. **Brutal dispassionate vernacular of a dangerous criminal** (“everything was in my favour for a killing [...] why go all the bother, getting rid of the corpse and all that [...] so I gave her another belt in the nose, a couple of turn of the boot and left it at that”)

Pinter has used various samples of (what Andrew Kennedy calls) “culture patter” in order to shape dialogue with thick texture of multiple patterns of English language, producing an effect of density. Kennedy defines Pinter’s dialogue as shaped out of “a language that excels in playing internal variations on its own verbal themes”(220, *Dramatic Duologue*). Kennedy goes on to define this as ‘indulgent pattern making’ and ‘Mannerism’ which is:

[A]n inherent and consistent tendency to exploit ‘conceits’, linguistic complexity or modish *jeux d’esprit* which a ‘sophisticated’ public can be expected to understand and enjoy.[...Mannerism is] a parasitical classical art: it can develop ‘line by line’ or through richly ambiguous local scenes and texture only because the underlying structure is grasped with reference to an earlier form – (in Pinter’s case classical naturalism.) (173)

Pinter in his short essay ‘Writing for the Theatre’ has described this technique as an ‘overcoming [and] following to the hilt’ a nausea that springs from “a bulk of stale and dead terminology, ideas endlessly repeated and permuted [till they] have become platitudinous, trite and meaningless.”(13, *CW I*) Pinter’s dialogue, as he himself points out, “spring from what is inexpressive, elusive, evasive, obstructive and unwilling” in his characters. (14) In the same essay, Pinter also confesses paying “meticulous attention to the shape of things, from the shape of the sentence to the overall structure of the play.” This shaping is about ‘arranging’ and ‘listening’.
Andrew Kennedy in his *Six Dramatists in Search of a Language* discusses Pinter’s ‘shaping’ technique at length which is recapitulated in brief here:

1) **Contrast method in shaping** -- two women’s conversation at a cafe in revue sketch ‘Black and White’: “Second: Yes there’s not too much noise/ First: There’s always a bit of noise/ Second: Yes, there is always a bit of life.”


3) **Shapes of ‘listening’** (where Ben in *The Dumb Waiter* listens to the speaking tube, with rhythm (of repeating what he hears) and pauses (expressed by holding the tube alternately to the ear from the mouth): BEN: The Eccles cake was stale/ the chocolate was melted/ the milk was sour/ The biscuits were mouldy.? Well we are very sorry about that. / What? What? Yes, Yes. Yes certainly./ Certainly Right away.”

4) **Parodist Litany of Ritualistic repetition** (in *The Dumb Waiter* again; led of food litany order to killing game spree orders): “Shut the door behind him/ Shut the door behind him. / Without divulging your presence/ Without divulging my presence [...]”

5) **The Catechistic cross examination**: shaping the dialogue using **stichomythic ritualistic rhythms**, which change the beat of incantation with the change in subject, as in The Birthday Party) “You are in a rut./ You look anaemic? Rheumatic/ Myopic/ Epileptic/[...] We’ll provide the skipping rope/ The vest and pants/ The ointment/ The hot poultice/ The fingerstall[...] you’ll be rich/ You’ll be adjusted./ You’ll be our pride and joy/ You’ll be a mensch.”

6) **Shaping with (what Kennedy calls) “ritualized interplay between decorum and scatological violence”**. In *The Homecoming* the language of a tribe in para-animalistic display within one family” (177-178). There are images-counter-images, following one after another, which are Pinter’s unique method of transforming a home into a brothel, merely through speech patterns, mainly evident in Max’s comically antithetical dialogues: (a) “I’ve never had a
whore under this roof before. Ever since your mother died.” (58, CW 2) (b) “I remember the boys came down in their pyjamas, all their hair shining, their faces pink... and they knelt down at our feet, Jessie’s and mine. I tell you it was like Christmas.” (62, CW 2) On Ruth’s query about the group of butchers that he had mentioned in his relating, Max’s speech once more flips to counter retroactive abuses “The group? They turned out to be a bunch of criminals like everyone else... I worked as a butcher all my life [...] a crippled family, three bastard sons, a slut bitch of a wife.” (63, CW 2) Kennedy points out how Pinter’s shaping here is an initiation towards shaping of the larger contraries in the end.

7) The minute inner shaping of the dialogues and monologues of Landscape and Silence. The first involves the ‘interweaving’ of two contrasting voices of Beth and Duff. Also in Silence these contrasts work on every level of images, structure and rhythm of the language. Of these Kennedy writes: “The musical rhythmic patterns—the sound of words emerging out of timed pauses and silences—may be played out, may become the play.” (188-189)

8) Shaping by intermingling two patterns of reality and fantasy within an implicit plot structure, as in Old Times. In the surface banality of the dialogue, Pinter loops the conversation enough to intrigue the audience. The verbal texture here (though as important as the other two memory plays Landscape and Silence) is more firm, and the various sections add up to move towards a significant recognition.

9) In No Man’s Land Pinter’s Mannerist shaping falls within a looser structure, more like Joyce’s style, involving speech forging by both Hirst and Spooner, which, (in the words of Kennedy), parody “a whole set of verbal postures and impostures taking in its stride a gallery of pastiche voices (from generalized Georgian to precise Prufrock)” and “the nearest thing to a direct linguistic satire” (225, Dramatic Dialogue)

Pinter’s No Man’s Land (1974) is one of the finest example of his bricolage technique, consisting of parodies and pastiches from literary styles of various authors: from oblique references to Marlow’s ‘Passionate Shepherd’ (in Spooner’s speech, “let me live with you and be your secretary”(146)); Dylan Thomas’ ‘The Fern’ (“who

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knows they may quicken ... in their chain in their glass jars”(137)); Shakespeare’s Iago from *Othello* (“And I am an honest man”(147)) and Eliot’s Prufrock (“I have seen this before”(96, 117, 118, 135-CW4))

Interestingly, it is notable that the Eliot like refrain “I have known this before” that recurs throughout the play, begins the lines in which Pinter self- parodies from his own oeuvre, recounting scenes and also foreshadowing those that come in his later plays:

1. “I have known this before. The exit through the door, by the way of belly and the floor.” (96, CW4) (reminds us of blind Rose from *The Room* crawling after Bert’s exit towards the door, shouting ‘I can’t see” and Stanley’s exit in a catatonic state from his boarding house in *The Birthday Party*)

2. “I have known this before. Morning. A locked door. A house of silence and strangers.” (117, CW4) (Eerie silence before Stanley’s exit from the house with the strangers in *The Birthday Party*)


4. “I have known this before. The voice unheard. A listener. The command from an upper floor.” (135, CW4) (*The Dumb Waiter, Hothouse*)

Pinter’s plays of the nineties, took a turn to concern with love, violence and larger political issues and questions of justice that brought into being, a new lens to view his plays through another kind of perspective. His later political plays focus on people with power, who delude themselves and others in the name of idealism; plays that expose the “destructive power of seeming good intentions” (ixxiv, Penelope Prentice, *The Pinter Ethic*)

Pinter’s political plays, mainly *One for the Road* (1984), *Party Time* (1991) and *The Mountain Language* (1988) unmask such horrific political realities that imbricate postmodern discursive practices and misogynistic animus in their representation. Through effective use of dialogue Pinter unravels the postmodern legitimizing strategies adopted by the totalitarian and even the so called democratic regimes. In *One for the Road* and *Party Time* for example, two methods (as explained by Jean
Francois Lyotard, a French philosopher, sociologist and a literary theorist), have been shown as being used by totalitarian states, in order to justify their authoritarianism, and in “dispersing the absence of foundational legitimization; both making recourse to narration [where one procedure] directs this dispersion upstream towards an origin, the other [...] downstream, towards an end.” (41, *Postmodern Explained*).

In *One for the Road*, Pinter conveys valorisation of nationalism through Lyotard’s “upstream” method, in Nicholas’ (the state torturer’s) allusions of “sharing a common heritage.” (232, *Plays 4*) This has been represented by Gila’s father, in his association with tradition of ‘nationalist heroism’. Nicholas glorifies him in the tradition, by making an exalted Shakespearean connection (of him with Hamlet Senior) by calling him “poor perturbed spirit”, (just what Hamlet calls his father). Such a glorification (as explained by Nicholas) is one from the “Voice of God” (227, *Plays 4*) or “the man who runs the country” (234, *Plays 4*), both of whom Nicholas claims to represent, himself. He also voices his wariness of State’s common enemies namely ‘women’ (who are merely good as ‘volunteer’ sex objects, that can be used in the State run brothel for the soldiers); as well as of the postmodern concern, of subverting the traditional binary dominance/subjugation practice, which threatens to destroy the ‘purity’ on which patriarchal totalitarian regimes rely, in their aim to “keep the world clean for God.” (246, *Plays 4*)

In *Party Time*, Pinter fictionally actualizes the use of Lyotard’s “downstream” method used by another ideological and repressive State Apparatus. The autocrats of *Party Time* rely on an “idea to realize”, which is a utopian dream of a future filled with freedom and luxury. Such men of power, justify their brutal methods of subjugating opposition as a historical necessity; and use hegemonic practices as means of attaining “cast iron peace” without any “leaks” or “draughts”.(292, *Plays 4*). In these political plays Pinter sketches adroitly the methods by which brutality and violence are legitimated in political discourse and narratives.

*The Mountain Language* is a presentation of imperialism and the methods of operations by the colonialist forces, and where the colonised are cast as the wretched ‘Other’ with all the possible denigration which the term applies. By the use of ruthlessly crude terminology, Pinter sketches the Colonialist’s Discourse which
defines the subaltern in derogatory manner, with its emphasis on bestial sexuality, intellectual depravity and limitation, and also accusing them of immorality and decadence. The local mountain people are denigrated by the colonist Sergeant as ‘enemies of the state’ and ‘shithouses’ and same as ‘dogs’: “Every dog has a name! They answer to their name. They are given a name by their parents and that is their name; that is their name! Before they bite they state their name. It’s a formal procedure ....”(253-254, Plays 4, emphasis mine). By repeating the word ‘name’ six times in the speech above, Pinter seems to emphasise the derogatory connotation of regional naming (Kurdish/ Irish/ Jewish/ ethnic).

Also in The Mountain Language, Pinter’s theatrical technique involves disjuncture to serve as an act of disclosure. Jean Colleran in her essay ‘Disjuncture as Theatrical and Postmodern Practice’ comments on Pinter’s method saying that Pinter establishes “connections between presence and authority [through] non-discursive juxtaposition”. She goes on to explain this technical method adopted by Pinter by discussing a particular scene from the play:

In this scene, the officer explained why mountain language is outlawed. In a curious logic [...] the officer declares in the midst of mountain people speaking their language that the language is “dead”. This arbitrary, indeed false designation enables the next set of formulations: the mountain language is not permitted, it is “outlawed” it is “forbidden”. This prohibition is a “military decree”. The decree is “the law. Then the logic is reversed: “your language is forbidden. It is dead. No one is allowed to speak your language. Your language no longer exists.” The officer’s language relies on an arbitrary but powerful establishment of presence, which in turn becomes an establishment of power. Articulation becomes definition becomes decree. Equivalences drawn linguistically [...] become equivalences in fact. The end result is the desired result: the language described as dead becomes dead. (61, Pinter at Sixty)

In Ashes to Ashes (1996) Pinter experimented with an innovative fusion of the ‘private-political’ and the ‘public-political’. The play deals with an individual’s response to a totalitarian state set-up. It is a play of dense texture, where the language comes thick and fast, as has discussed here, in the chapter on the play.

Pinter’s use of language always involved a rhythm, which has been his innovative method of striking a relation between natural conversation and music, a style that creates tension between spontaneity and ‘natural artifice’ that Pinter affects in his
dramatic dialogue. Such a unique blend creates theatrical qualities, which co-exist in tandem despite their structural opposition. The fusion of the binaries like naturalism with artifice, flow with fragmentation and de-familiarisation with the break of speech rhythms, have all given Pinter’s plays a poetic quality.

Rhythm and timing form an important part of Pinter’s plays to create meaning. The broken developments in the very flow of language have important implications for interpretation. Such a ‘brokenness’ is written in Pinter’s plays, by the author, in the ‘shape’ of Pauses and Silences, within the very structures of the plays. Two very significant Pinter critics among others, Martin Esslin and Peter Hall (also a drama director) have discussed Pinter’s pauses and silences at length. About a question put up by one of the protagonists, (Len, in Pinter’s novel The Dwarfs who discusses poets climbing from ‘word to word’, suddenly asks “what do they do when they come to a line with no words in it at all?”) Esslin writes:

The answer to that question is that drama is a kind of poetry that can find room for unspoken charge of the unspoken line. What speaks on the stage is the situation itself: the characters who confront each other in silence; what has gone before and the expectation, the suspense as to what will happen next. Pinter’s pauses and silences are often the climaxes of his plays, the still centres of the storm, the nuclei of tension around which whole action is structured. (56, Language)

Pinter’s pauses and silences have therefore been minutely studied and interpreted, in relation to their context and the situations that they inhabit. Esslin describes these variously as “a line of dialogue” an “unwillingness to communicate” or the “speechlessness of total collapse” and “catatonic collapse” and also as “the silence of gradual fading of memory [and the] inevitable dissolution of human personality itself.” (57Language) Esslin cites the effectiveness of these pauses and silences as a “direct consequence of the density of texture of [Pinter’s] writing: each syllable and each silence is part of an overall design, all portions of which are totally integrated.” (58)

Peter Hall, in his essay ‘Directing Plays of Pinter’, sees the placement of Pinter’s pauses as “meticulously considered”, ones which “give precise form to the seemingly ordinary and emotional power to the mundane” (148) an ellipsis in his dialogue may express a temporary hesitancy or pressure point or a search for an appropriate term.
Thus a Pinter’s pause becomes a dramatic speech which may be expressive of an ‘act’. The silence, Hall feels, on the other hand is longer moments of stillness that signify “extreme crisis” like deep anger after a verbal conflict, where it becomes necessary to change the subject, and from where the attitude of the character may become transformed. Hall comments: “As members of audience, we should feel what happens in a pause, but we can be, and should be frequently surprised by the change in the character as he emerges from a silence [which is] often unexpected and highly dramatic.” (148) Thus ellipsis, pauses and silences in Pinter express “moments of turbulence and crisis” and change. Pinter appropriates these as a part of his dialogue and requires the actors to fill them up accurately with all their appropriate implications.

Silences and pauses in Pinter, are therefore to be felt by the reader/audience and the actors in order to be understood. In the close reading of the plays that have been chosen for this study, the attempt is to mark this precisely subtle and implicit differentiation in order to assimilate and endorse his plays with accurate messages that they try to convey. It is also noticeable, that when written into Pinter’s complex texts, these pauses and silences impart meaning to various multi-linear or vertical structures, dynamically and changing variously within the same plays that offer different models of complex social exchange in assorted domains of different scopes and complexity.

AIMS AND METHODOLOGY:

This Thesis aims at a series of observations and disclosures based on close reading and analysis, which involves an examination and recognition of the various devises and technical methods employed by the playwright in the constructing his plays, mainly of the ones that have been chosen for study here. The basis of terminology used for the analyses has been taken from that used by various drama critics and playwrights and may well modify or provide variations and additions on to the construction techniques (employed by Pinter) discussed so far. Some discussions by the critics of Pinter that do not pertain to the specific empirical discussion related to the topic may have been ignored.

The selection of plays, chosen for study is based upon the relevance of the topic for the thesis, which aims to lay emphasis on stagecraft technique of Pinter as a
postmodern dramatist. Therefore, the choice of most of the plays is of those that were written by him for stage performance (Pinter’s *oeuvre* also consists of various radio plays, television and screen plays). The selection is further based on the variations in techniques in the course of development of the playwright’s *oeuvre*; of plays adopting methods that have been landmarks for the author’s change in, or the refinement of his technique or important points of peripety in his craftsmanship.

The methods chosen for treatment of the plays vary in different chapters in accordance to the varying demands of the dramaturgical analysis. This is in order to delve deeper into the already explained technical methods of Pinter plays, for a more extensive analysis, that will make the plays emerge in a new light, and also in some cases reflect the contemporary world situations on a wider level.

As there have been only been a few filmed versions of some of the plays that were available for viewing, under such a circumstance, precedence has been given to dealing with some plays as autonomous texts, rather than as performance art. This unfortunately, might have resulted in missing out on the more intense effects of performed pauses and silences, and the audio visual effects. Yet, the effort has been to discuss the importance of some as ‘heard’ and ‘felt’ in the mind, in an attempt to decipher what they may signify and how they signify on a multi-linear level.

The attempt has been to read the plays on almost all levels, be they interpersonal relations of domestic power struggle, or of the larger domain of historical and socio-political or global significance. Therefore, this extensive analysis also includes their allegorical, symbolic and historical significance; of both the time at which they were written, and also as harbingers and a media of forewarning; and of creating a general awareness and awakening of the masses.

The second chapter (after this first Introduction chapter) focuses on reading Pinter’s first two comedies of menace, namely *The Room* (1957) and *The Birthday Party* (1958). *The Room* which specifically sees the genesis of the central poetic image of Pinter plays (two people in a room), sets in motion a recurrent motif of almost entire Pinter *oeuvre*. The basic themes and Pinter’s idiom and style are elements contained in this play, which later developed within his longer plays that are a blend of the hyper-naturalistic and absurdist technique and are called *Pinteresque*
Comedies of Menace (mainly *The Birthday Party*, *The Dumb Waiter* and *A Slight Ache*).

The third chapter is a detailed analysis of Pinter’s realistic play *The Caretaker* (1959) in which Pinter employs a method close to minimalist hyper-realism, with a more than accurate rendering of various kinds of idioms and jargons, and a language of ‘lived encounter’ recreated by mannered distortions rendering both inarticulateness and glib speech in poetic juxtaposition.

The fourth chapter deals with what have been categorized as Pinter’s landmark Memory Plays. Two plays, *Landscape* (1968) and *Silence* (1969), have been studied in this chapter. These plays saw a sudden shift from the traditionally Pinteresque to a turning inwards, an innovative step in drama, where the technique adopted was similar to the stream of consciousness technique of modern novelists namely James Joyce and Virginia Woolf. Pinter’s technique of building the plays involved an intertwining of monologues, where images that begin to develop as realistic, slowly blur to a dream like impressionistic quality. While in *Landscape* Pinter sets up word portraits built with a juxtaposition of subtle interior monologue with crude speech; in *Silence* Pinter posits the process or the ‘nowness’ of life proceeding as “a semi transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of our consciousness to the end.” (Virginia Woolf, *The Common Reader*, e book)

Chapter V deals with *Old Times* (1970) in which Pinter develops the status of *Landscape* and *Silence* into mysteriously subtle action, where he utilizes an innovative technique of an ever changing and dynamic minimalistic positioning of the characters with their situations and in relation to each other, as well as flowing into permutations that create startling effects.

*Ashes to Ashes* (1996), has been taken up in the sixth chapter, which is one of Pinter’s later socio-political and historical play. Here Pinter experiments with affecting a brilliant amalgamation of private and public domains, fusing his earlier ambiguous mode of writing with his later explicit and direct method.

The plays that have not been chosen for extensive study as separate chapters, have contributed significantly in the enumeration of Pinter’s innovative technical methods that have been discussed in the Introduction or the first chapter here.
The seventh and final chapter consists of the conclusions drawn in relation to the study of Pinter’s dramaturgy and its analysis within this thesis.

WORKS CITED:


