

Public Consciousness Beyond Theatrical Space: Harold Pinter Interrogates Borders and Boundaries.

By Dilek Inan

For Harold Pinter 'writing is discovery and journey', a journey which led him to become a dissident thinker (Pinter at Cambridge Conference Cambridge, 13 July, 1999). Each decade has confirmed a continuing movement in his work. There was a move from East London (in many of his pre-1970 plays) to North London (his post-1970 plays), from menace to mannerism. The significance of his move from the plays' original working-class milieu towards a world of intellectual and professional middle-class culture made him a cultural icon in the 1970s. As his political development advanced in the 1980s and 1990s, his status as world-renowned playwright, in a theatre that was increasingly looking towards the political arena, was even clearer and he became a 'political' icon, a theorist, and a critic of the social order. For Pinter theatre 'is essentially exploratory. [...] theatre has always been a critical act' (Mel Gussow 123).

In 1975, Howard Brenton dreamed 'of a play acting like a bush-fire, smouldering into public consciousness. Or - like hammering on the pipes being heard all through a tenement.' (Howard Brenton interviewed by Catherine Itzin and Simon Trussler, 20). Brenton's generation - David Edgar, Edward Bond, David Hare - founded the fringe theatre whose dream was to create an 'alternative culture' as resulting from feeling the public nature of the theatre; however, Brenton regretted that the fringe had failed, and no playwright of his generation had 'written well enough yet', had 'actually got into public, actually touched life outside theatre' (Brenton 20). A few years later Pinter's writing overtly political plays was actually a dream come true for Brenton and his generation. As early as 1948, Pinter knew that he 'wanted to get out in the world' (Gussow 142). Indeed, Pinter was the only person who broadcast/televised an anti-war programme for BBC2 on the calamity in the Balkans for which he held NATO responsible; additionally he delivered a speech on the same issue, 'The Nato Action in Serbia' (Speech delivered by Pinter at the Confederation of Analytical Psychologists 25 June, 1999). Not only Brenton, but John Arden, too, was looking for a playwright

who would write the ‘serious social play’; and in the early 1960s he found Pinter’s agenda frustratingly hard to define. Arden thought that in The Caretaker,

the elder brother’s account of his brain-operation is highly detailed and circumstantial. But is it true? If it is true, why isn’t Mr Pinter writing that serious social play to denounce the cruelty prevalent in mental hospitals? And if it *isn’t* true, why does it take the crucial place in the text - the climax of Act Two? (John Arden 118)

Eventually in his later stage and screen scripts Pinter criticised current widespread persecution in the institutions of the state: from hospitals (Hothouse - written but discarded before The Caretaker, produced in 1980) to prisons (One for the Road, Mountain Language). Pinter’s plays reached beyond the world of the theatre and became part of the starkly politicised 1980s social and cultural scene. Above all, his work established a ‘theory of power’ and articulated the use/abuse of the political power of language. Pinter’s work has obviously met the needs of the contemporary theatre.

Pinter’s established persona of the 1950s and 1960s started to become unstable in the 1970s. At that time a new theatrical charter was emerging in Britain of which perhaps Edward Bond was the symbol. While Tom Stoppard was entertaining the nation with his language games, the Royal Court fostered a wave of social realists and social critics as diverse as David Storey and Howard Barker. In 1978, Pinter’s Betrayal was seen as a crisis: ‘Yet the play is a definite departure for Pinter. Gone are the carefully formed innuendoes, the sinister ambiguities, the impending disasters’ (Linda Ben-Zvi 127). Additionally, his mature plays of the 1980s and 90s received hostile criticism, especially when One for the Road in 1980 represented a greater break with his previous work. The critics failed to see that his plays represented his political involvement (both internationally and as an opponent of Thatcherism) and his interest in wider social issues. Critics wrote a great deal about Pinter’s alleged creative constipation: ‘Why Doesn’t He Write More’ (Patricia Bosworth 3), ‘Plot there is none’ (John Bush Jones 296). He wrote fewer plays but instead he created several adaptations for the screen; and it is wrong to dismiss this as a second-class activity. He was participating actively in questions of human rights, censorship, and the United States’ foreign policy in

Central America. In 1980, he founded the June 20 Group for intellectual sceptics to discuss the plight of Thatcher's Britain. During that time, Betrayal (1978) and One for the Road (1984) were his only full-length plays. The previously 'non-political' Pinter now openly admitted the importance of the social forces that govern our lives. At the British Council Conference, Pinter admitted that he knew his early plays were political, but he actually lied that they were not. His creative work was 'about' tyranny abroad, but also about injustices at home and the ways Britain seemed to be changing morally.

Pinter concentrated heavily on cinema after No Man's Land; he experimented and surveyed different subjects and explored notions of self-consciousness. He looked at other people's works to enrich ways to reflect his main concerns and re-explore his own roots. But critics and academics marked this period as Pinter's end as a writer, a setback in his career: he was a second Stanley who had nothing to say (In *The Birthday Party*, Stanley is deprived of his individuality and of his ability to speak). Nevertheless, films gave an overview that supported and reflected his political concerns. His film-scripts fitted in very well with what Pinter was trying to achieve, for films are more public work than plays. And also Pinter insisted that the film adaptations were 'acts of the imagination on [his] part'(Gussow 188). The film work and the absence of a full-length play in the fifteen-year period between Betrayal and Moonlight were regarded as symptoms of writer's block. In fact, however, this period was penetrating and acute; as we shall see later on in the article, it was the period in which Pinter, the withdrawn artist of the 1960s and 1970s, revolutionised his privacy and remodelled his use of theatre into a more public activity; when Pinter the playwright became a critic of Western democracies, and when his new political works functioned as agents of history.

Despite the assumptions of mainstream Pinter criticism, the period between Betrayal (1978) and Moonlight (1993) marked a revolution in Pinter's career. This was also the time when he transformed his image, which had been framed by the idea of the 'Pinteresque'. The 'Pinteresque' is often interpreted as pauses, enigmas and menace. The word, which implies the use of silences, vague dialogues, memory games and menacing outsiders, has passed into everyday

language. Pinter does not approve of the image. He believes that 'Harold Pinter' sits on his back, and he is 'someone else's creation' (Gussow 25). Pinter has succeeded in dissolving that image with his political plays. Critics who could not fit Pinter's political plays into the 'Pinteresque' image dismissed them; they preferred to label this period as a core of 'writer's block' because of their own inability to accept Pinter's political arguments and because of their incapacity and reluctance to see Pinter from outside the 'Pinteresque' image. And yet when Pinter seemed to abandon politics in Moonlight (1993), critics were back to influence their readers to join in a tired scepticism. Ghilardi-Santacatterina and Sierz argued that Pinter is 'a victim of his own image' (Maria Ghilardi-Santacatterina and Aleks Sierz 112). Contrarily, he is both intuitive and intellectual, and more intentional than is generally recognised.

The different genres, and the miscellaneous writings for different media, prove Pinter's expertise in 'various voices'. His output explores the depth of the human condition in the space of the twentieth century; it is a set of sketches portraying 'Western Civilisation' - the developed capitalist world - in decline. He has perhaps become the only leading English playwright to imagine the world from the viewpoint of colonised peoples rather than from a Western perspective and has shown the power to understand and share the other's vision of the world. He is at one with the theorists of Post-colonial discourse. He has updated the term 'imperialism' to establish that it 'remains an active and vibrant force in the world today, through the vehicle of financial institutions such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank; imperialism is in a position to dictate policy to smaller states which rely on their credit' (Pinter, *Nato Action in Serbia*).

Discussing the reception of his new agenda, Pinter satirically talked in 1985 with his publisher Nicholas Hern about becoming 'an exhibitionist, self-important, pompous. [...] Before you know where you are you're having make-up put on, your eyelashes are being tinted.' Critics regarded Pinter's politically engaging plays as a revolutionary new direction. However, Pinter pointed out that the critics had regarded his earlier work as 'rubbish' too - 'absurd rubbish' (Nicholas Hern 19). For example John McGrath had condemned Pinter for an indulgence in absurdity, mystery and enigma - 'the significant failure to say anything significant'

(84). But in a real sense, from the beginning, his texts had been defining an inescapable sense of pessimism and alienation in the contemporary world, and though the perspective had altered, the vision had not. For example, his unpublished early prose work written in 1949, The Queen of all Fairies, introduced his embryonically present political attitudes. This is an autobiographical piece in which Pinter writes about his family, his friends and the Jewish population in Hackney:

The Fascists did not come into it, though, forcibly, one night I remember a cry in the sudden hustling - 'They've sorted out Harold.' Jimmy flinging out his arms and charging. A nightmare of coshes and stupid faces. And me almost ruined, busted in the crutch. [...] 'Why don't you join the Communists, or the 43 group?' I was asked. I had to laugh. It was all such dross. Causes, banners and speeches. If they squashed me, then that was that. I would be free till then. The effect of the whole business was to give me 'pernicious aggravation in the cobblers.' I didn't give the monkey's toss. (The Queen of All Fairies)

Towards the end of The Queen of All Fairies, Pinter explained what happened to his friends:

Moishe became a soldier in Germany. [...] Ron disappeared, bearing his cross to the stock-exchange. Henry loved and was loved. Jimmy took to the Café Torino in Old Compton Street, read Sartre and La Fargue.

As for himself he wrote:

I, as a conchie [conscientious objector], did not go to prison, but counted myself a king of infinite space, while as an actor, I trod the boards. [...] We see them coming, the barbarians. (Queen of All Fairies, cited in Susan Hollis Merritt 29).

In 1999 Pinter's participation in a Cambridge Conference, organised by the British Council, made the fact clear once more that he had always been critical of the operations of the state machinery, and the ideological underpinnings of the authoritarian state as another example of ideology's ability to mystify/abstract its own operations. As he read and acted scenes from a selection of his plays, and especially when he delivered Stanley's line, 'They carved me up' with

wholehearted malevolence, he deliberately stressed the political power of language. Pinter has continuously been a conscientious objector in the widest sense, even in his ‘comedies of menace’, the ‘absurd’ and ‘mysterious’ early work. His plays are constantly being generalised as filled with ‘mystery’. But this was a conscious strategy, set out in his early novel, The Dwarfs, where Len says:

Mysteries are always new mysteries, I’ve decided that. So, you see, I am alive and not a storehouse of dead advice and formulas of how to live. And won’t be. But I have to be silent, like the guilty. (The Dwarfs 94).

For many years, Pinter was determined not to fall into the trap of offering ‘dead advice.’ Increasingly, however, he became convinced that it was his duty to name ‘the guilty.’ Pinter broke his ‘silence’ with One for the Road; and the ‘directness’ of his political views was obvious from then on.

Despite the clear political statements, he was still concerned with time, memory, sexuality, loss, separation and solitude. However, the major difference in the political texts is the depiction of the *destruction* of memory and sexuality. While the earlier plays were about the opposite/gendered linguistic acts of the isolated man and woman, in the political plays individual freedom is suppressed by established authority.

Pinter has announced himself as ‘the king of infinite space’, and this paper explores Pinter’s satirical ‘celebration’ of space, and how he awakens public consciousness in Pinter’s One for the Road and Mountain Language. For many scholars, space in Pinter’s work has involved distinct and limited interpretations of ‘the room.’ However, his earliest play The Room formulates at the start Pinter’s idea of the room as symbolic space: it is not an ordinary room but a ‘psychic space, a speck of consciousness cursed with a vivid awareness of its own significance and insecurity in a world ruled by forces outside itself’ (Katherine Worth 32) Thus this study sets out to decode the strong sense of an environment *beyond* the room: the social space which is described through communication, speech and memory.

The 1980s plays explore a political no-man’s-land. Precisely, New World Order, One for the Road, Mountain Language and Party Time are all about political schizophrenia and social repression in the contemporary world. The plays

re-present a male-constructed theatrical space - a no man's land - politically taken over and hostile to all those, male or female, who will not integrate themselves into a regime which strangely empowers yet denies their own individuality. The unconquerable psychic spaces of the earlier plays now become brutally breached, and memory and sexuality are destroyed. The political plays also show the characters' private fantasy worlds as a massive and historically important objective reality. Space is unspecified, deliberately unlocalised; it is global, because Pinter did not want to reduce the plays' meaning to certain countries, but rather he interrogated borders and boundaries in an alarming, vast, incomprehensible world. On the other hand, his plays make the actuality of this no-man's-land British and bourgeois.

1980s plays extended Pinter's poetic perceptions into an objective analysis of the urban phenomenon, portraying cities working as modulators. This is the decade when his 'metaphorical' political engagement is at its greatest. He wrote about the 1980s social and cultural scene as he discovered and explored the workings of police power, official secrecy, and the insidious state censorship. Through rational understanding, Pinter conducted himself as an 'investigator.' His political dramas frame the relationship between fictional and empirical reality as Pinter clarifies and reworks his earlier themes of oppression and the individual, and the subversive function of language. He writes of the inhuman character of a great city poisoned by misery, contempt and oppression. The lyrical interiors and serene landscapes of the memory plays are taken over by a political anti-pastoral, a pastoral subjugated and colonised by the metropolis. The plays depict an evolution of the pastoral from retreat to indictment, where a brutally corrupt society is matched by its landscapes.

Pinter transfers menace from private relationships to expressively political ones; but his preoccupation with language as an instrument of distortion has never decreased and proffers the use/abuse of language as the quintessence of oppression. He refers to the dregs of society, to the masses who do not conform to the state, to those faced with the pain of death, imprisonment, and social degradation. Some of the plays, like One for the Road and Mountain Language, target a change, like Peter Handke's Kaspar's transformation from inarticulate

clown to model speaker. In Handke's influential play about language and socialisation, *Kaspar*, the hero seems a broken man. Kaspar gets more and more mixed up - his language is suddenly deranged - until complete schizophrenia sets in. The state of schizophrenia caused by language in Handke is replaced by a state of 'paralysis' in Pinter, as seen in the victims of *The Birthday Party*, *One for the Road*, *Mountain Language*, *Party Time*, and *The New World Order*. It is this paralysis that Pinter sets out to oppose. This also applies to the promised transformation that Stanley will undergo at Monty's: 'This was a model of conduct, building a person into society's course of conduct by language, by giving him words [...] he is reconstructed by voices, by language models' (Peter Handke 60).

The depersonalised system, the source of power, which is rigid, resistant, and strictly hierarchical, is represented by the voice of spokesmen, what Derrida calls the 'mouthpieces' in 'The Theorem and the Theatre' (Of Grammatology): 'Like the alphabetic signifier, like the letter, the mouthpiece himself is not inspired or animated by any particular language. He signifies nothing. He hardly lives, he lends his voice.' (Jacques Derrida 305). Nicolas in One for the Road is exactly such a voice, a 'mouthpiece' of 'the man who runs this country' (who never appears and may not even exist); the Sergeant and the Officer in Mountain Language claim to be repeating and enacting the dictates of some mythologised 'military decree.' In all of these plays the longing for individual freedom is walled in by a social institution that is an over-determined and a closed system.

Pinter's movement into political drama was not easy. Other Places, which he wrote in 1980, was followed by a three-year period in which he did not write a play; he said he was 'getting more and more imbedded in international issues.' (Billington 286) After Other Places, Pinter told Mel Gussow that he 'felt obliged to explore other territory' (Gussow 149): the world of national/international public events; and at this stage he still thought this was inimical to dramatic experience. But, with Precisely, Pinter started to explore the 'other territory' and discover a new voice for himself and his theatre.

Pinter has stated that 'each of the plays dealt with the individual at the mercy of a certain authoritarian system.' (Ronald Knowles 184). Pinter said 'These plays,

all of them, are to do not with ambiguities of power, but actual power.’ (Gussow 152).

The political plays employ a linguistic geography that refers to a universal social repression in the contemporary world. One for the Road takes place in the urban world, and Party Time is set in a fashionable bourgeois house in a metropolis, Mountain Language, as its title suggests, takes place in the country. But the plays represent the colonisation of the country by the city; and now, the city is controlled by a brutal elite. They also present the multiple ways in which women are abused by men. Teddy and Ruth; Duff and Beth; Deeley and Kate; Robert, Jerry and Emma: the male was master in none of Pinter’s earlier texts; they were dominated by the emotional complexities of territorial conflict between men and women. His political dramas concentrate on a struggle between the individual and the political (super)structure. As a result, these plays involve a radical change in the nature of space: once impregnable spaces become brutally conquered. The central themes of the subtlety of memory and sexuality are destroyed in the political plays, where masculinity trumpets the triumph of the will. The brutes have escaped from the Room.

Power and Fear: Total Institution as Theatrical Space

I do not have an ideology in my plays. I just write; I’m a very instinctive writer. I don’t have a calculated aim or ambition; I simply find myself writing something which then follows its own path. And that path tends to include acts of violence of one kind or another, because it is the world in which I live. And so do you. (Aragay 60).

Pinter’s observations and explorations in an alarming world convinced him of the duty to depict and criticise authoritarian forces and oppressive institutions through his art: ‘The facts that One for the Road refers to are facts that I wish the audience to know about, to recognise. Whereas I didn’t have the same objective at all in the early days’ (Hern 11). More than merely polemical, the cycle it initiated forms complex reflections of the dark side of the European imagination, a sharp critique of bourgeois civilisation. In particular, he reflects on the way established systems of society project images onto individuals. Moreover, the political plays now show

the fantasy world of 'abroad,' 'other places' as a massive and historically important objective reality. They explore a cultural notion of the 'other,' the need of it, but also the terror of it.

One for the Road is about Pinter's concerns with authoritarianism, unjust imprisonment, the abuse of human rights, and religious intolerance. The play exposes various kinds of institutional cruelty and injustice through language; a diseased language that causes nausea both for the abused and the abuser. Pinter's preoccupation with language as a tool of distortion has never decreased. In the play, the use/abuse of language is at the core of oppression. Nicolas's language paralyses Victor. But the torturer too becomes more and more mixed up; he estranges and deranges language to create terror to the point where he stands on the borders of madness himself:

What do you think this is? It's my finger. This is my big finger. And this is my little finger. This is my big finger and this is my little finger. I wave my big finger in front of your eyes. Like this. And now I do the same with my little finger. I can also use both...at the same time. Like this. I can do absolutely anything I like. Do you think I'm mad? My mother did. *He laughs.* (223).

Nicolas's free-associating words create a fierce picture of the psychology of arbitrary torture, his verbal attacks enact the disturbing relationship between power and fear.

The play portrays authorised cruelty directly and physically, through brutality, murder and rape. As Pinter argues in his essay 'Eroding the Language of Freedom,' a governing power must be assessed 'not by what it says it is, or by what it says it intends, but by what it does. Because language is discredited and because spirit and moral intelligence are fatally undermined, the government possesses carte blanche to do what it likes. Its officers can bug, break in, tap, burgle, lie, slander, bully and terrorise with impunity' (Pinter Various Voices 173-74). More recently, Pinter told his interviewers about the 'police action', which he believed was 'a very strong brutal element in this society' (Gottlieb 25). One for the Road analyses and describes the State through 'what it does':

I hear you have a lovely house. Lots of books. Someone told me some of my boys kicked it around a bit. Pissed on the rugs, that sort of thing. I wish they wouldn't do that. ... But you know what it's like - they have such responsibilities - and they feel them - they are constantly present - day and night - (228).

Denying any fundamental separation between Brecht's theatre and Artaud's, One for the Road sets art to provoke 'tension' and 'fear' in the audience: in Pinter's words, '[f]ear not only of being in the position of the given victim, but a fear also born of recognition of themselves as interrogator' (Hern 17). Nicolas uses his menacing and obscene language to threaten Victor. By waving his fingers, a simple act, which gives him great joy, Nicolas enjoys his absolute power and believes he is acting for his country, legitimately and properly; he wants to be loved and respected. The play creates anxiety for the actors as well. Pinter said that the dictum of the play was so real and direct that it was a 'difficult' play for the actors; they found the experience 'too oppressive [...] they found themselves in danger of being taken over by the characters. Because there's no escape once you're in there' (Hern 17).

Yet Pinter's verbal violence does not reject beauty. Even Nicolas's ghastly lines bear smoothly flowing, poetic, energetic and potent language. His brutality is matched by fantasies of landscapes, too: 'I do love other things, apart from death. So many things. Nature. Trees, things like that. A nice blue sky. Blossom.' (One for the Road 231). His speech is disconcertingly dominated by metaphoric, ironic and poetic images and he tells Victor, 'Let's not beat about the bush. Anything but that. *D'accord?* You're a civilised man. So am I.' (223) He links his own dreadful territory to an energetic cricket field:

I chat away, friendly, insouciant, I open the batting, as it were, in a light hearted, even carefree manner, while another waits in the wings, silent, introspective, coiled like a puma. (225).

Once again, this involved Pinter reworking a favourite metaphor with new ferocity. The traumatic scene Nicholas depicts is a metaphoric, yet a literal picture of 'the system', which applies 'silent' operations of violence to its victims. Pinter himself said in 1998 that cricket is actually a 'very violent game', however

‘friendly’ it may seem - ‘It’s a very physical game, a battle is going on there’ (The South Bank Show) - much as Peter Hall described the inner dynamics of Pinter’s mid-period dramas:

My vocabulary is all the time about hostility and battles and weaponry, but that is the way Pinter’s characters operate, as if they were all stalking round a jungle, trying to kill each other, but trying to disguise from one another the fact that they are bent on murder (Peter Hall 22).

Disguising the fact he too is ‘bent on murder,’ Nicolas makes a rhetoric of death: ‘Death. As has been noted by the most respected authorities, it is beautiful. The purest, most harmonious thing there is. Sexual intercourse is nothing when compared to it’ (One for the Road 229). Some of his speeches heighten the seductive verbal beauty of violence, employing a terrorising language beneath a civilised mask:

I’ve heard so much about you. I’m terribly pleased to meet you. Well, I’m not sure pleased is the right word. One has to be scrupulous about language. Intrigued. I’m intrigued. Firstly because I’ve heard so much about you. Secondly because if you don’t respect me you’re unique. (227).

Indeed Nicolas’s ‘scrupulous’ style simply shows the way established institutions crush individuals who fail to conform, and how institutional power destroys individual resistance.

Roland Barthes discusses the violence of language in his essay ‘Writing the Event’. He suggests that ‘[v]iolence implies a language of violence, i.e. of a system’ (153). Though Nicolas does not actually participate in the acts of violence detailed in the play - Nicky’s murder, Victor’s torture, Gila’s repeated rape - his imposition of violence through language defines the dynamics of power and becomes as operative as the offstage physical cruelty. Pinter said ‘I’m quite violent, myself. I have violent feelings and...I feel quite strongly about things. On the other hand, however, I’m quite reticent’ (Hern 19). Although Pinter is quite direct and open in this play, much of its power stems from the impression that he does not say all he knows.

Pinter described The Birthday Party and One for the Road alike as ‘the destruction of an individual, the independent voice of an individual’(Gussow 69).

He shows that the absolutist state can only ensure its monopoly of power if it controls both 'the discursive and repressive apparatus' (Mark Silverstein 432). For Pinter the system represents a source of power that resists change. It is strictly hierarchical, and is here portrayed through the voice of Nicolas - the 'mouthpiece' of 'the man who runs this country.' When Victor, an intellectual/academic, is suspected of not fitting in with the system, he is by definition guilty of rejecting the 'guiding light.' He is faced with the pain of death, imprisonment, and social degradation. His son is killed because he spat at his country's soldiers, and his wife is raped in prison. Space has become degrading. Here is a place of physical and mental torture - with 'a first-class brothel upstairs, on the sixth floor, chandeliers' (One for the Road 246). Pinter depicts a system which deprives the individuals of their 'animal' rights.

Pinter's general determination to avoid sentimentality and direct the violence back at the Establishment is striking. As an agent of a 'predictable, formal, long-established pattern,' Nicolas is a distracted character; he is thrilled and moved by his job, which is to keep the world clean for democracy by punishing and removing those, who, in Pinter's words, are not 'like everyone else,' who do not 'go along the normal path' (Susan Hollis Merritt 20). Nicolas describes 'death' as 'beautiful' and 'the purest, most harmonious thing there is.' He is obsessed by the eyes of those brought to him: '[t]hey're so vulnerable. The soul shines through them' (One for the Road 224). Through Nicolas's chilling articulation of the 'responsibility,' 'respectability,' 'religion', and 'honesty', Pinter refers to a false sense of dignity which is deployed to cover up murderous activity' (Gussow 130). Surprisingly however, he denied that his play would have any success as propaganda - its bleak tone does not allow any images of the victim gaining relief or revenge over the victimiser, because Pinter believed that

[r]eason is not going to do anything. Me writing One for the Road, documentaries, articles, lucid analyses, Averell Harriman writing in the New York Times, voices raised here and there, people walking down the road and demonstrating. Finally it's hopeless. [...] Because the modes of thinking of those in power are worn out, threadbare, atrophied. Their minds are a brickwall (Hern 20).

The official status imposes a collective, shared identity, a ‘commonwealth of interest’ whose only aim is to ‘keep the world clean for God’:

The man who runs this country announced to the country: We are all patriots, we are as one, we all share a common heritage. Except you apparently. *Pause*. I feel a link, you see, a bond. I share a commonwealth of interest. I am not alone. I am not alone! (One for the Road 232).

This whole system aims at the one-dimensional man which Pinter developed in The Birthday Party. It does not want trouble, it eliminates or homogenises he who causes ‘despair’: ‘Despair, old fruit, is a cancer. It should be castrated. Indeed I’ve often found that that works. Chop the balls off and despair goes out the window. You’re left with a happy man. Or a happy woman’ (One for the Road 233).

Mountain Language: Colonising the Country through the Capital’s Language.

Like One for the Road, Mountain Language shows the horrors and dangers of life in totalitarian or seemingly democratic but essentially authoritarian countries. In his meditation on the ‘civilised’ West, Pinter’s analysis very much corresponded to the Post-colonial theorists’ determination to expose the realities under the universalistic discourse of democracy, power and knowledge. While Post-colonial discourse creates a space in which a theatre produces only a utopian suggestion, Pinter shows that one can work towards that utopian suggestion. Pinter criticises a concept of imperialism, led by the USA and parts of Europe masquerading as democracy. Through different means, he tried to support Third World experiments of ‘collective theatre,’ ‘a theatre of the oppressed’, by bringing history to the fore through drama; their struggle for a cultural identity. Pinter’s 1980s plays were a sharp critique of the First World as an armed power which sees in democracy a real threat. The Kenyan writer Ngugi wa Thiong’o commented in 1986 that ‘[i]mperialism is total: it has economic, political, military, cultural and psychological consequences for the people of the world today. It could even lead to holocaust’ (Ngugi wa Thiong’o 2). He discussed the effect of a ‘cultural bomb’ that aims to ‘annihilate a people’s belief in their names, in their languages, in their

environment, in their heritage of struggle, in their unity, in their capacities and ultimately in themselves,' a cultural bomb that makes them see their 'past as one wasteland of non-achievement' (Thiong'o 3). Pinter's political plays, and especially Mountain Language strongly allied themselves to this global discourse of protest.

For some Post-colonial theorists, 'language' is a dialect backed up by an army. For example, Chakravorty Spivak disputes the institutionally established forms of knowledge, and argues that there is no universalistic discourse without military support. Similarly, Amin discusses the notion of democracy which is in fact *policed democracy*, and while Ngugi defines colonialist control through military conquest and political dictatorship, he sees more dangerous effects practised through the vehicle of language: 'The bullet was the means of physical subjugation. Language was the means of spiritual subjugation'(Thiong'o 9). This idea lies at the core of Mountain Language.

In Mountain Language, Pinter writes about a culture of total repression - presenting a people who have lost their dignity. A minority culture in a rural area is colonised and maltreated by the capital. The capital's language disables the minority's dialect. The play is set in a military prison whose location is never specified. Officers abuse women waiting to visit their husbands/sons/fathers in prison and order: '[y]ou may only speak the language of the capital. That is the only language permitted in this place. You will be badly punished if you attempt to speak your mountain language in this place' (255). Pinter said that the play is 'about suppression of language and the loss of freedom of expression'(Gussow 68). Mountain Language exemplifies the systematic suppression of a minority's language. The capital's language has to be bowed to, otherwise the victims are faced with humiliation and corporal punishment.

Written with the economy and eloquence of poetry, Mountain Language vocalises the Post-colonial debate artistically. Here, literally, language is colonised by an army. Of course, language has always been a crucial issue in Pinter's plays - his characters exist, fantasise, remember, dominate via the medium of words - however Mountain Language is a production of a counter-discourse, in which to

speak is to tyrannise. Here, Pinter supports the same objective as Thiong'o, who writes that:

Economic and political control can never be complete or effective without mental control. To control a people's culture is to control their tools of self-definition in relationship to others. For colonialism this involved two aspects of the same process: the destruction or the deliberate undervaluing of a people's culture, [...] and the conscious elevation of the language of the coloniser. The domination of a people's language by the languages of the colonising nations was crucial to the domination of the mental universe of the colonised (Thiong'o 16).

Mountain Language, like Brian Friel's Translations, is about the political admission that linguistic dominance is a form of imperialism. Roland Barthes, in his essay, 'The War of Languages', theorises the relationship between language and power:

In contemporary societies, the simplest division of languages bears on their relation to Power. There are languages which are articulated, which develop, and which are marked in the light (or the shadow) of Power, of its many state, institutional, ideological machineries; I shall call these *enocratic* languages or discourses. And facing them, there are languages which are elaborated, which feel their way, and which are themselves outside of Power and/or against Power; I shall call these *acromatic* languages or discourses (Barthes 107).

In the light of Barthes's division of languages, we can see a commitment in Mountain Language to formulate the distinction between a powerful capital/enocratic language which is constructed around ideology, and the minority's acromatic language, which is outside Power. The language of the capital is empowered to produce state-controlled information and to destroy alternatives.

As the play's title suggests, the governmental/military manipulation of information erodes the language and the dignity of the mountain people. The Officer and the Sergeant talk with the voice of the military establishment. Their words establish definitions. They try to terrify the women and make them feel insecure via a language they do not understand. The Sergeant says:

Your husbands, your sons, your fathers, these men you have been waiting to see, are shithouses. They are enemies of the State. They are shithouses. (Mountain Language 255).

The Officer continues to humiliate the women and exterminate their language and individuality, to take them further from their selves and incorporate them into the capital's self: As Jeanne Colleran points out: 'The language described as dead becomes dead' (Jeanne Colleran 61).

Now hear this. You are mountain people. You hear me? Your language is dead. It is forbidden. It is not permitted to speak your mountain language to your men. It is not permitted. Do you understand? You may not speak it. It is outlawed. You may only speak the language of the capital. That is the only language permitted in this place. You will be badly punished if you attempt to speak your mountain language in this place. This is a military decree. It is the law. Your language is forbidden. It is dead. No one is allowed to speak your language. Your language no longer exists. Any questions? (Mountain Language 255-56).

Mountain Language is much more than a study of the traumatic effects of torture applied by authority, even though this is a serious part of Pinter's intention. This time despite the aura of constant violence, there is no use of onstage violence. Instead, the abuser uses obscene language - and Pinter believes that 'those old Anglo-Saxon words are still very strong' - the Sergeant has a stick which he does not have to use, he 'uses the words instead' (Anna Ford 4).

Mountain Language portrays an authoritarian state whose major aim is to create a patriarchal, one-dimensional society. It presents human beings at the mercy of the cruellest, most incomprehensible, illogical social order, which does not allow variety or resistance, and whose only aim is to control thought and language. The central authority punishes and assimilates the intellectuals and the ethnic minority alike, because they are equally non-conformist. The prison is divided into two sections to identify the rural prisoners robbed of their natural linguistic rights, and the prisoners from the city - the intellectuals. Thus even amongst the oppressed, the system imposes a clear-cut distinction between the city/capital and the mountain people. Failure to conform to their segregation is treated as a crime in itself: when the Young Woman, Sara Johnson, says she does

not speak the mountain language, and the Officer sees on her papers that her husband 'doesn't come from the mountains. He's in the wrong batch' (Mountain Language 257), he and his Sergeant 'slowly circle her. The Sergeant puts his hand on her bottom' and asks her 'what language do you speak with your arse?' Pinter talks about the human capacity to endure here: 'And she has to bear this. [...] She ignores it - doesn't scream or faint or do anything, just ignores it. I admire her very much. Seeing this act of control on her part, they discuss her arse, as it were, in those terms, merely to offend'(Ford 4). Pinter argues that the aim of the militarised state is to diminish both those whom it classifies as minority and those who consciously decline to conform. Again, the way that his plays of the 1980s treat the intelligentsia as a significant class marks a major development from The Birthday Party or The Homecoming where they are treated as impotent, powerless and pretentious fantasists. The change reflects Pinter's growing belief that the failure of the post-war educated middle classes to contribute to the moral and intellectual growth of Britain, especially in the Thatcher period, was a profound problem that needed to be redressed.

Following 'The Prison Wall,' Pinter takes his audience into the 'Visitor's Room,' where the old woman, whose hand was bitten by the prison dog in the first scene, is visiting her son. Now the Guard hits her because she cannot speak the language of the capital. As she speaks to her son in the only language she knows, the Guard 'jabs her with a stick,' shouting at her that it is 'forbidden.' Then the forbidden conversation is heard in the half light as a voice-over: these two languages are in fact, to our ears, identical.

The play moves, through short, sharp, brutal scenes into the darkness in which we overhear the lovers' discourse. In the third scene, 'Voice in the Darkness,' the Young Woman (a 'fucking intellectual') visits her husband (the 'hooded man'), where the lovers try to defeat the state by living positively in defiance of its imperatives. Colleran argues that their resistance is achieved by means of 'nondiscursive, nonrepresentational juxtaposition, it is more than anything else *tonal* rather than verbal or visual'(Colleran 61). However, here Pinter stresses the universality of speech. As opposed to the mimetic spaces of the prison wall and visitors' room, this key scene evokes diegetic spaces, recalling the lyrical pastorals

of the memory plays but giving them new meaning: this is the only scene where two characters use Pinter's idiosyncratically simple, poetic language:

YOUNG WOMAN'S VOICE You smile. When my eyes open I see you above me and smile.

MAN'S VOICE We are out on a lake.

YOUNG WOMAN'S VOICE It is spring.

MAN'S VOICE I hold you. I warm you.

YOUNG WOMAN'S VOICE When my eyes open I see you above me and smile. (Mountain Language 263).

The lovers' speech verbalises an urgent beauty. Their poetry offers and shelters a model of a possible idyllic counter-society. In a play where all the characters feel threatened, the only protection is found in pastoral language. However, the idea of nature as protection exists only briefly in darkness; the hooded man is destroyed offstage and dragged off by the Guard. As Lefebvre argues, it 'is becoming impossible to escape the notion that nature is being murdered by 'anti-nature' - by abstraction, by signs and images, by discourse' (Lefebvre 71). The official language overpowers and exterminates the lovers' lyrical whisper.

Pinter delivers the punch-line of the play via poetry - the remnant of the pastoral tradition linking nature with faith and emotion. The pastoral here is colonised by an authoritarian metropolis but survives in the imagination of two victimised characters as - in Raymond Williams's phrase - 'an idealisation, based on a temporary situation and on a deep desire for stability, served to evade the actual and bitter contradictions of the time' (Williams 60). The tone of the voice-overs offers 'a moment of transcendence, as if a small bud were pushing through the rest of the muck' (Perloff 15). Even the awfulest destruction cannot conquer the human soul. Applying the vision of the memory plays with new urgency, here Pinter reinterprets the pastoral in terms of his ideological values - to quote Terry Gifford:

The pastoral can be a mode of political critique of present society, or it can be a dramatic form of unresolved dialogue about the tensions in that society, or it can be a retreat from politics into an apparently aesthetic landscape that is devoid of conflict and tension (Gifford 11).

The exploitation of 'mountain people' demands that their language and landscape are forbidden and remain only as a utopian realm. As against the fantasy-reality of the memory plays, the pastoral here formulates a relationship between fictional and empirical truth. His plays of the early 1970s were lyrical, and the characters used their imagination freely to create lyrical discourse; Mountain Language forbids speech itself. This political anti-pastoral calls for a poetry that will return to speak to contemporary concerns.

The final scene takes the audience back to the Visitors' Room. Recalling Vaclav Havel's satire, The Memorandum, the regulations governing language change suddenly. The mountain language can be spoken. Casually, the Guard tells the Prisoner who sits trembling with a bloody face that the mountain language now has official recognition: 'Oh, I forgot to tell you. They've changed the rules. She can speak. She can speak in her own language. Until further notice' (Mountain Language 265). But the old woman remains still and silent all through the scene. She has lost her ability to speak. The Prisoner pleads with his mother to talk until he himself falls on his knees and begins to gasp and shake violently. The Sergeant studies the Prisoner shaking on the floor and tells the Guard: 'Look at this. You go out of your way to give them a helping hand and they fuck it up' (267). In John Lutterbie's opinion the mother's silence acts as an act of resistance, opposing Authority in 'a space defining the interface of opposites' (Lutterbie 468). On the other hand, the mother's silence, the Prisoner's collapse, and the Sergeant's mockery suggest the final futility of resistance according to Terry Eagleton: 'Pinter's celebrated silence had become the muteness of a whole people' (Eagleton 20).

Mountain Language, like its predecessor The Birthday Party, is about the suppression of local differences in favour of a centralised official culture. Stanley, too, is finally unable to speak. He makes a last effort to communicate but no longer has 'access to his tongue' (James Campbell 18). When Goldberg and McCann reduce him to silence, the form of mental murder they commit is similar to the eroding of mountain language: 'You're dead, no juice in you, you're nothing but an odour' (The Birthday Party 33). But in early Pinter it was possible to regard such horror stories as symbolic fantasies. Mountain Language cannot be

seen as anything but an accusation. It derives from his campaigning against ethnic and human rights abuses in States supported by the USA and NATO, but its application to the British scene was also inescapable. Discussing Clause 28, which Pinter said, 'singles out the homosexual section for censorship and repression,' he stated that something 'that could be described as uncommon or slightly out of the norm is regarded as an alien force, something to be suppressed and disciplined' (Gussow 69).

The suppression expressed in Mountain Language is applied internally by state institutions and globally by forces which are sometimes subtle (cf. Precisely), sometimes savage, and Pinter indicts a universal system of oppression. Many countries, in their history, have suppressed minority languages. Friel's Translations reminded British and Irish audiences of the abolition of Gaelic in the nineteenth century and it was instantly translated into many other languages with a history of linguistic oppression - and indeed a Welsh version of Translations recalled the English attempt to prohibit the Welsh language in the last century. Pinter's play is set in a contemporary political prison and a brutalised countryside, whose locations are not identified. Although Pinter carefully undermines the political and geographical reference, and in spite of the fact that the play is set in an unspecified totalitarian state, there are numerous English allusions: the manner and diction are consistently English like, the names (Charley and Sara Johnson, Joe Dokes), the references to Babycham, 'Lady Duck Muck.' David Pryce-Jones, however, argued that the British connotations fail because Pinter's prison state has no connection with the British system (David Pryce-Jones 1228). But most importantly, Mountain Language, like One for the Road, explores a rhetoric of nationalism. Both plays account for nationalism as an ideological configuration. The Power in both plays aims at a unity and control of national consciousness. Like Pinter, Lefebvre suggested in his Production of Space that '[n]ationhood implies *violence* - the violence of a military space, be it feudal, bourgeois, imperialist, or some other variety' (Lefebvre 112). And Mountain Language is an urban nightmare with uniforms and hooded hostages - working for national unity while destroying the 'other', the minority, the female, the rural.

Reworking earlier works in which the 'masculine' enjoys a powerful status while the 'feminine' is associated with powerlessness, space in Mountain Language, both territorial and linguistic, is masculinised by the authoritarian and official speech of the 'military decree.' However, in the previous plays, territorial and linguistic space was crucial for the conflict between male and female possession: now the ultimate owner is the military power. In Mountain Language individuals have no rights and no command of the spaces they inhabit. Where The Birthday Party showed the individual stripped from his surrogate Mother and reduced to speechlessness, here an entire social minority, the mountain people, are banned from the use of their mother tongue.

The military are granted complete power over space and language: to dominate and define. Chinua Achebe, questioning a similar hostility between central authority and his own minority nation asked in 1975 whether it was 'right that a man should abandon his mother tongue for someone else's? It looks like a dreadful betrayal and produces a guilty feeling' (Chinua Achebe 18). In this sense, the play is a reworking of one of Pinter's recurrent themes - betrayal. Self-betrayal transforms into forced betrayal. The mountain people, the weakest and the most vulnerable members of society, are not allowed to shape or discuss their own lives in their own language.

Pinter liberates himself from the 'room': 'There's a room in Mountain Language, but there is also a corridor. What I was talking about was freeing myself' (Gussow 78). And the usual rhythm of pauses and silences evolves into an explicitly political discourse. Pinter denied this both in One for the Road and Mountain Language, repeating that his only aim in writing was to explore the images that came into his mind. But by 1988 he was finding some of these images appalling - '[s]o they shock me into life, and into the act of writing' (Ford 4). He believed that Mountain Language, with its poetic economy, '*simply does something*' (Sue Summers 19).

Russell Celyn Jones writes that Pinter's drama is 'framed chaos' ('Political Zeal of a Literary Revolutionary' (7). It is a romanticised framing of twentieth century chaos that, in the hands of a poet-playwright, has found an impressive voice and a cultivated visuality. As opposed to other literary figures of our age

such as Eliot and Beckett, who wrote of the banality of corruption, Pinter romanticises the very same corruption and pursues and formulates the poetics of terror in our space and time, holding up many contemporary issues (rationalism, nationalism, democracy, masculinity) to irony, criticism and mockery, simultaneously celebrating and disturbing them.

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