

## POLITICAL DISCOURSE IN HAROLD PINTER'S DRAMA

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**Abstract.** Introduction. The problem of political and mental disorder, which has been addressed to by many writers, – and the expressive figure of the British playwright, director and screenwriter, a poet Harold Pinter (1930-2008) is no exception. Apparently, his theatrical and acting performance has dwelled upon many issues, similarly significant to social and interpersonal spheres of life, since he stated that these may be diverse parts of similar mental activities. Methods. The complex descriptive analysis and historic cultural methods have been selected as the main tools to approach the issue under discussion. It also uses hermeneutic analysis and intertextual method in accessing the main Pinter's style characteristics. Results and discussion. His writing blends violence, menace and terror, intimacy and authoritative oppression. The author build his own language of the highest metaphoricity up, arguing upon the concepts of gender and language, being and non-being, misogyny, totalitarianism. His characters are the embodiment of the idea that any person can meet his extreme limits in attempt to tolerate pain and traumatic experience, physical and mental tortures, language abuse that leads to violence, which in Pinter's plays are merely subjectified in order to depict a distorted dramatic reality. Conclusions. This study has demonstrated the complex character of Harold Pinter's drama, which functions on various layers of interpretation and reception. It has also pointed out some peculiarities of his style and method that is intrinsic to many of his works, thus giving enough space for deeper investigation of the issue in its connection with the literary and theatre studies.

**Key words:** politics, Harold Pinter, Pinteresque, drama, violence, traumatic experience.

A window closes and a blind comes down  
 The night is black and he is deadly still  
 There is a sudden burst of moonlight in the room  
 It lights his face – a face I cannot see  
 I know he's blind  
 But he is watching me

**The Watcher (9 April, 2007) [1]**

**1. Introduction.** A remarkable writer, actor, political activist and a holder of many prestigious literary awards, Harold Pinter has introduced his readership to a unique world of people isolated in a room. The interest he takes in depicting two people conversing upon various topics has proved to be a playwright's hallmark. Being politically aware and concerned about the current state of society, he overhears the voices from the bottom which unravel the absurdity and aggression of existence. Although his plays can be seen as purely metaphorical and existentialistic, his method is much more complex since he applies to hardly identifiable style, bordering somewhat in between realism, modernism and postmodernism. As he once stated himself, '...I'm not conscious of any particular social function. I write because I want to write. I don't see any placards on myself, and I don't carry any banners. Ultimately I distrust definitive labels.' [2] The atmosphere of terror under which all the characters are kept and thus united can be traced even in his earliest plays, such as *The Room* (1957) and *The Birthday party* (1957), where any attempts of personality manifestation in the forms of remembering and denying the past are severely cut as non-acceptable. Naming the places where the characters originate from or calling the latters by their pet names, Pinter introduces the aggressors such as McCann and Goldberg who elaborate this moral humiliation of Stanley, setting a mortal mechanism into action; old negro Riley that turns into a victim for he fails to let the past go for Rose-Sal. The process of victimization is one of the peculiarities of Pinter's writing which allows him to address the selves of his characters, which he believed to form independently once he had given them names and put them into the setting of a play. He studied the structural component of society in dramatic terms, speaking both implicitly and explicitly of the eternal conflict between an individual and the world, the system. Even if they surrender, the system can be swung as well as the realities of the universe they populate. The veil of silence [3] and pausation, another attribute of Pinter's dramatic method allied with the unique touch of human communication, add to the construction of the reality where the two are hardly ever heard or are able to take any comfort in the other, alienated and deprived of any normal emotional performance. This explains better the way people are smashed into their face of personality.

**2. Methods.** This article is based on complex descriptive analysis and cultural and historical method in approaching the political context and to what extent it could have affected the author. During the investigation receptive and biographical methods were used, though they do not stay in the main focus of this study. Among the other methods there hermeneutic and intertextual analyses, which allowed to retrace the development of language and main themes and motifs in early and later Harold Pinter's plays.

**3.Results And Discussion.** In the centre of playwright's attention are the wounded creatures, terrorized by intruders or by their rather distorted and haunting past memories. One of the scholars studying Pinter phenomenon, Mary Luckhurst [4] has stressed the importance of torture and trauma in his method, which presence was already marked by Kane [5], who found traces of violence and victimization both in Pinter drama and films. The personal attitude of the dramatist to the hypocritical world of politics leaves a stamp on his oeuvre, violent, traumatic, dread, absurd. [6] All these concepts artfully inscripted into his plays create a sophisticated scene [7] with the characters who can unexpectedly act of their own free will. In the context of Pinter's problem there arouse two another issues, intertextuality of his texts states the question of dialogue between culture and literature, which was discussed by Russian scholars Sibgatullina and Krylov [8], and the question of national identity addressed in the study by Amineva [9]. His pausation and silences has become hallmarks of his writing and scholars have come with a term Pinter's pause [10, 11], no wonder many scientists referred to this in its relation to Anton Chekhov and his influence made on Harold Pinter's creativity. The specific character of his plays makes it possible the discussion upon a number of discourses imprinted in playwright's talent, as we can observe in this paper, where Pinter blends political and social layer with ethnic and racial prejudices and realistically depicted picture with allegoric, figurative meaning applied to the same situation. [12]

The organization Stanley was the member of in distant times in Ireland in The Birthday party, the intrusion of the past for Rose in The Room in Riley, the story-making of Spooner and Hirst in No Man's land (1975), the family roots that no longer can make the son come back home in Family voices (1981), continuous exclusion and tabooing of the language as act of saving tradition in Mountain language (1988), experiments to weaken the person so to learn his dead limits during the interrogation in One for the road (1984) and a revue sketch Applicant (1969). Uncivilized tortures and unjustified violence originated from the sense of super power of the victimizer does not represent anything surprising, as they have gained ground in the modernity, but the objective of this growing suspense in Harold Pinter's plays is to reflect the world, as if the readers were looking into the mirror, where they can easily recognize the characters as if they existed in reality, though in terms of the genre we can hardly call Pinter "realist". In his Nobel speech he was defending his sound position as the author, who tries to be true to reality and to himself, who is certain about some political aim of art as it is, taking into account that in the contemporary art of that period it could be already traced the approach of labeling any piece of undoubtedly creative thing as art. When asked about the nature of stagecraft, Pinter agreed to inevitable affects of frantic modernity on what is made on the stage and behind it.

As an actor and writer all his life Pinter cared for language and the way we use it, founding our communication on various functions of the former. 'Pinter has always been obsessed with the way we use language to mask primal urges. The difference in his later plays is not simply that they move into the political arena, but that they counterpoint the smokescreen of language with shocking and disturbing images of torture, punishment and death.' [13] This ambiguity in real and dramatic world concerned him and by the plays, revealing the outskirts of reality, he made his own attempt to tell the truth.

As can be seen in Mountain language, power abuse and moral injustice cannot be left unspoken. The play, which was inspired by Pinter's visit to Turkey and his observation of the Kurdish language suppression, lifted the veil on the suppression of language, speech, thought and existence, relevant to the British society to the same extent as it is to the Turkish one. Though the fact that Pinter wanted to compare the Eastern and Western worlds is quite dubious, it is rather another peculiarity of his to speak in universal terms. The precise, surgical language unites this play with Kafkaesque method in terms of his parables, where the personality is nagged both by the earthly system and the artillery of Heaven. The tendency of outspokenness is becoming present in modern drama, nonetheless in Pinter's time his directness was not the case of immediate acceptance by the critique and reading public.

GUARD

Oh, I forgot to tell you. They've changed the rules. She can speak. She can speak in her own language. Until further notice.

PRISONER

She can speak?

GUARD

Yes. Until further notice. New rules. [14]

The man is a creature that does not need any compassion after he has been set at his own abyss. The same happens to the man who came to the gate of Law (Kafka, "Before the Law"): when he is finally being explained that the gate was originally elaborated only for him to enter, it is too late a revelation as the only gate he can enter at that time is death. It becomes a final punch of the world into the guts of a victim. Thus, when given the permission to speak, the old mother of the prisoner (Mountain language) can no longer express herself in terms of her native language, the mutual understanding is broken, and the language is literally dead. The message of the play is that aggression, rage, violence, predominance of the oppressor, and terror are not possible without us, it is already within us. That is why this play has such a powerful effect on public: when we are given a true image of ourselves, we feel terrified but through recognition we are able to admit it and thus relieve the burden of the soul.

Another play that is also related to terror and menace generated by the person who believes to fulfill some godly service, thus justifying his acts of injustice and mutilation, is One for the road (1984). In various scenes of

interrogation - that of Victor, his wife Gila and their son Nicky - the bloody human nature is revealed, which is embodied in the image of Nicolas, who is weak at heart but following some perverted Nietzschean ideas postures himself as super-human.

NICOLAS (CONT'D)

You can go.

(pause)

You can leave. We'll meet again.

I hope. I trust we will always  
remain friends. Go out. Enjoy  
life. Be good. Love your wife.

She'll be joining you in about a  
week by the way. If she feels up  
to it. Yes. I feel we've both

benefited from our discussions. [14]

Neither humiliation, nor murder and group rape introduced as a role model in the society depicted in this play can make the aggressor take time question himself: 'What am I going to do when the world makes another turn and I take the place of my victims?' Silence. As there is no chance for these questions to be answered, there is no way out of this vicious circle. When politics comes into your family, it ceases to be just political, it becomes extremely personal. This is what the playwright feared throughout his life, reality transformed into eternal lying, doubling and blacking out the real state of affairs. Overcoming the trauma in Harold Pinter's plays is something inaccessible for his characters, either they are too wounded for that and it requires more time or this experience is never to be eliminated from memory, since it reveals its horrifying nature, denuding the human inability to outlast some moments in life. That is not peculiar of Pinter's "political drama" as it is classified by the scholars studying his creative work, but may also be memory. Human memory can act at different levels of perception, playing mind tricks and leading to misconception of the present.

Being haunted by relations with his own mother, Nicolas reveals his deep complex pursuing him, no matter how hard he tries to get away from that. Ruinous effect of the system has left scars on the social body: Victor is no longer able to communicate, Gila is left a whore, Nicky is dead. Harold Pinter cannot approve of the martyrdom in the modern world, because the people subject to political violence are innocent in the face of moral issues. As Michael Billington states in his attempt to interpret this play: 'Nicolas acts not out of pure sadism, like the interrogation in a bad spy movie, but out of righteous belief in family, state and religion. In fact, the play's horrific irony is that Nicolas tears asunder an individual family in the name of patriarchal values.' [13]. The authority in this play being omnipotent and incarnating masculinity exposes itself as impotent. Seeming helplessness of the victims in the first scenes is no longer true for the closing ones, where the person is left deprived of any aspect of his masculinity and personality.

The other two political sketches by Harold Pinter develop the same theme of political euphemization and terror *The New World Order* (1991) and *Precisely* (1983), which concise language have the opposite effect, showing that intellectuals cannot enter political circles, even though they do the thinking. Again we deal with suppression of the personality, misogynistic abuse, rape, female submission and the conception of blindfolded people both in literal and metaphorical sense. Not everyone who has a good sight can see the things precisely. 'The focus of male authoritarianism in these 'political' plays provides only mute or submissive forms of resistance. Political realities are drawn on only to be aestheticised in a dramaturgy of sadistic power games which blocks analysis of the contexts metaphorically evoked.' [15] The hypothetical talk on terrors to be committed on the victims in these sketches reveal the instability of power and its inability to take real actions. As in "One for the road", the oppressors themselves are ipso facto sub-humans who are more likely to be subject to the same violent actions intended for their victims. The order they have chosen to celebrate is not a very pleasant thing and from their fake superiority they claim it to be the action in God's service, or acts approved for the sake of democracy.

LIONEL

I feel so pure.

Pause.

DES

Well, you're right. You're right to feel pure. You know why?

LIONEL

Why?

DES

Because you're keeping the world clean for democracy.

They look into each other's eyes. [16, p.277]

**4. Summary.** Thus, Harold Pinter's political drama is aimed at its significant function to reveal the true reality to the reader and make him stay for a moment of thinking in this frantic modern world. The biographical and intertextual methods used in this study facilitated the research mainly aimed at giving a thorough analysis of complex

nature of Pinter's plays. His concerns of the current state of human mind, memories about traumatic past experiences, the concepts of mysogyny and machismo, political terror and abuse that at times reflects ordinary human nature, which is vicious towards everything that stands in its way.

**5. Conclusions.** Our conviction about Pinter's political and artistic position is very much alike the one expressed by Ruben Moi: 'Partly or totally, these plays lack plot, and they evoke claustrophobic situations of menace and stillness, apparently beyond specific temporality and locality. They inhabit a Heideggerian universe of death, language and silence, and they interrogate the realities of human uncertainty.' [17, p.34] The British playwright's beliefs cannot allow him to stand aside, since the main aim of him as it comes to his creativity is to use poignant and witty language to sting lazy and preposterous society we are living in. The world we inhabit is ugly, but what is inadmissible to Pinter is blacking out the truth in the world he constructs himself – drama.

**6. The Conflict Of Interests.** The authors confirm that the data presented do not contain any conflict of interests

**7. Acknowledgements.** The work is performed according to the Russian Government Program of Competitive Growth of Kazan Federal University.

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