

Harold Pinter's Progress from Modernism to Postmodernism
With Special Emphasis on Three Selected Plays:
The Room, Betrayal, One For The Road^(*)

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Abstract

Harold Pinter was the most influential, provocative, and poetic dramatist of his generation. Moreover, he was best remembered by his ability to create dramatic poetry out of everyday speech, which was considered as his greatest contribution to modern drama. The greatest power of most of Pinter's plays originates from the truth of a character's feeling that always lies in the unspoken words or in what is known as "Pinter's pauses". For Pinter, the drama is not inherent in the speech of the characters existed on the stage but rather in the unknown world in the invisible end of most of his plays. The main aim of this research is to highlight the progress of Pinter's dramatic writing from the modernist features, which were familiar with the audience at that time, to the postmodern principles in order to portray the dilemma of the contemporary man. Through his innovative Pinteresque technique, Pinter reveal the typical postmodern human predicament in his dramas. Strikly speaking, Pinter proceeded from the modernist tradition of the early Twentieth Century to a postmodernist mode, necessitated by his pseudo-realistic handling in the 1960s. The selected plays represent the three stages of Pinter's progress as a dramatist. *The Room* represents the comedy of menace, *Betrayal* is a memory play, *One for the Road* introduces an explicit political theme. On the other hand, the three selected plays, serving the main aim of this research, are ideal examples for the progress of Pinter's dramatic writing from the aesthetics of modernism to the

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main principles of postmodernism. Those notable plays highlight how Pinter employs the modernist elements to serve his presentation of the postmodern human life. Hence, those selected masterpieces elaborate the unique Pinteresque approach that contributes to the progress of drama from modernism to postmodernism.

Keywords

Harold Pinter, Modernism, Postmodernism, Postmodern Drama, Everyday Speech Drama, Pinter's Pauses, Pinteresque Language, Comedies of Menace, Memory Plays, Political Plays, Absurdism , Existentialism, *The Room, Betrayal One For The Road.*

المخلص

يعتبر هارولد بنتر من أكثر كتاب الدراما الشعرية تأثيراً في جيله. وبما إنه من أكثر كتاب الدراما اللذين أثاروا جدلاً بين النقاد فإن اي محاولة لتصنيفه ضمن كتاب الحداثة أو ما بعد الحداثة سوف يكون مصيرها الفشل حيث أن جميع مسرحياته تشمل خصائص من كل من الفترتين. يتمثل بنتر مع كتاب الحداثة في استخدام لغة المسرح والتي تتطابق مع المسرح الإنساني، ولكنه أيضا يتشابه مع كتاب ما بعد الحداثة في اهتمامه الشديد بلغة الصمت. ويتمثل أيضا مع كتاب الحداثة في أن مسرحياته توضح قوة اللغة، ولكنه يتشابه مع كتاب ما بعد الحداثة في التأكيد علي عدم الاعتماد علي اللغة من خلال مسرحياته.

يعتبر الهدف الرئيسي للدراسة هو التركيز علي تطور الكتابة المسرحية لبنتر من استخدام خصائص الحداثة والتي كانت مألوفة للجمهور في ذلك الوقت إلي استخدام مبادئ ما بعد الحداثة من أجل رسم صورة واقعية لأزمة الإنسان المعاصر. ومن ثم يمكننا القول بأن مسرحيات هارولد بنتر قد حققت شهرة ذائعة بسبب مساهماتها القوية في تطور جماليات الدراما من الحداثة إلي ما بعد الحداثة

الكلمات الدالة:

هارولد بنتر - الحداثة - ما بعد الحداثة - دراما ما بعد الحداثة - دراما أسلوب "الحديث اليومي" - "وقفات" هارولد بنتر - الأسلوب اللغوي الخاص بهارولد بنتر "بنتريستك" - كوميديا التهديد - مسرحيات الذكريات - مسرحيات سياسية - العبثية - الوجودية - مسرحية هارولد بنتر "الغرفة" - مسرحية هارولد بنتر " الخيانة" - مسرحية هارولد بنتر "كأس واحرة للطريق"

Introduction

Harold Pinter (b.Oct.10, 1930, London - d. Dec.24, 2008, London) was the most influential, provocative, and poetic dramatist of his generation. Occupying parallel careers as a poet, actor, director, screenwriter, and political activist, he was well-known as the most important postwar British playwright. Pinter's writing career spanned over 50 years; in 2005, he was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature. Pinter was continuously innovative in his use of the theatrical form, while his works remained remarkably consistent in its ethical and epistemological concerns. Moreover, he was best remembered by his ability to create dramatic poetry out of everyday speech, which was considered as his greatest contribution to modern drama.

The greatest power of most of Pinter's plays originates from the truth of a character's feeling that always lies in the unspoken words or in what is known as "Pinter's pauses". His plays are noted for their use of understatement to convey the substance of a character's thought which often exists in several layers beneath, and contradicts, his speech. For Pinter, the drama is not inherent in the speech of the characters existed on the stage but rather in the unknown world in the invisible end of most of his plays. Since there is always, in Pinter's plays, a speech beneath the surface speech, a feeling beneath the surface feeling, a thought beneath the surface thought, a character beneath the surface character, a drama beneath the surface drama, and a world beneath the surface world.

As a controversial playwright, any attempt to place Pinter under the rubric of modernism or postmodernism is doomed to failure, as most of his plays include certain features of both movements. Like modernists, Pinter uses stage language and appears to present a typical human drama, but he, like postmodernists, is much more interested in staging the unspoken. Also, like modernists, his plays illustrate the power of language, but like postmodernists, Pinter stresses the unreliability of language throughout his plays. On the one hand, the topics of Pinter's plays deal with the modernist principle of negation; on the other hand, his plays deal with the aesthetics of postmodernism. Hence, it can be said that Pinter achieved an international

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renown because of his significant and original contributions to the development of the aesthetics of drama from modernism to postmodernism.

The main aim of this research is to highlight the progress of Pinter's dramatic writing from the modernist features, which were familiar with the audience at that time, to the postmodern principles in order to portray the dilemma of the contemporary man. Through his innovative Pinteresque technique, Pinter reveals the typical postmodern human predicament in his dramas. Strictly speaking, Pinter proceeded from the modernist tradition of the early Twentieth century to a postmodernist mode, necessitated by his pseudo-realistic handling in the 1960s.

The selected plays represent the three stages of Pinter's progress as a dramatist. Many critics divide Pinter's career into three periods: his early plays were called "comedies of menace", his middle plays were obsessed with memory, and his later plays which dealt with overtly political themes. However, drawing an iron curtain for the works of a multidimensional dramatist like Pinter whose plays encompass different modes of writing is almost impossible. *The Room* represents the comedy of menace, *Betrayal* is a memory play, *One for the Road* introduces an explicit political theme.

On the other hand, the three selected plays, serving the main aim of this research, are ideal examples for the progress of Pinter's dramatic writing from the aesthetics of modernism to the main principles of postmodernism. Those notable plays highlight how Pinter employs the modernist elements to serve his presentation of the postmodern human life. Hence, those selected masterpieces elaborate the unique Pinteresque approach that contributes to the progress of drama from modernism to postmodernism.

The Early Pinter

In contrast to the typical feature of the British theatre which considered that the playwright's primary task is to provide neat resolutions to moral problems, Pinter's early plays utilized the comedy of menace in an attempt to refuse the typical generic conventions of comedy and tragedy. This can clarify the great hostility of Pinter's early plays.

According to Susan Hollis Merritt, it is Irving Wardle who “first applies this label [comedy of menace] to Pinter’s work” (225). Focusing on Pinter’s first masterpiece *The Birthday Party* (Written in 1957 and Produced in 1958), Wardle describes Pinter as “a writer dogged by one image – the womb”. For Wardle, such type of “comedy enables the committed agents and victims of destruction to come on and off duty; to joke about the situation while oiling a revolver; to display absurd or endearing features behind their masks of implacable resolution”. In Pinter’s early plays, menace stands for destiny, that destiny “handled in this way – not as an austere exercise in classicism, but as an incurable disease which one forgets about most of the time and whose lethal reminders may take the form of a joke – is an apt dramatic motif for an age of conditioned behavior in which orthodox man is a willing collaborator in his own destruction” (Wardle, “Comedy of Menace”, 33).

Acknowledging the great influence of Samuel Beckett and Franz Kafka, particularly on his early works, Pinter’s early plays begins with an apparently innocent situation which gradually becomes threatening by some entity or person outside the situation itself so it looks absurd since the characters behaves in an inexplicable ways whether by the audience or even by one another. Although paying an apparent attention to the description of the accurate details of the working-class settings in his first two decades plays, Pinter’s main purpose in his early plays is to comment on the absurdity of human life and on the alienation of postmodern man which seem obvious in his inability to achieve communication with his human fellows. Although focusing on two of the major trends of modernism, that are realism and naturalism, Pinter aims at emphasizing their failure in the postmodern world because of the impossibility of communication.

Middle Stage

While the first phase of Pinter’s career includes his early plays like *The Room* (1957), *The Birthday Party* (1958), *The Dumb Waiter* (1960), *The Caretaker* (1960), and *The Homecoming* (1964), his middle stage that is called “memory plays” includes *Landscape* (1968), *Silence* (1969), *Night* (1969), *Old Times* (1970), *No Man’s Land* (1975), and *Betrayal* (1978). All

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such plays of his middle phase share one central concern that is, memory. Pinter created an innovative structure for those plays which utilizes a unique dramaturgy that focuses on the past in the present.

In contrast to the setting of his early plays which mostly take place in closed private rooms, the middle plays often take place in the public space of a pub. His middle plays represent the world-creating properties of memory, two or three characters recall remembrances or recollections about their shared past. This can indicate an engagement in a complex mode of self-presentation where emotions and expedients intersect, moment by moment, to exert control over the present. In this phase of his career, Pinter narrows in on two essential questions that determine how we experience our lives: what we remember about the past and what we know about the present. Moreover, through the conflicting memories of his characters, Pinter represents different versions of the same story without giving any clue to his audience about the true one. For Pinter, it is terribly difficult to define the past since imagination can be truth. Hence, those plays do not only confuse the past with the present, but also confuse truth with imagination. Hence, those plays highlight the postmodern principle of the multiplicity of truth.

There is no doubt that Pinter's playwriting introduced an implacable imagination which changed the landscape of the British theatre. It is of significance importance to note that Pinter's depiction of his characters usually begins with the modernist notion of a stable authentic identity and a secure essentialized self. However, the sequential events of the plays prove that maintaining a sense of a secure identity is impossible, which is a typical postmodernist feature. While beginning his painting of his major characters by constructing a modern coherent subject, Pinter ends with a postmodern hybrid identity. Hence, his works emphasizes how the modernist clear and detailed images of the characters have been developed into the postmodernist fragmented images of the multiple perspectives of the same characters. By the same token, Pinter, in his memory plays, uses one of the major trends of modernism, that is expressionism, whose typical trait is to

present the world from a solely subjective perspective while concluding with multiple presentations of the world, so the futility of meaning which is a typical postmodernist principle.

A Postmodern Pinter

In the later stage of his career, Pinter's plays became more overtly political since they tend to act as a critique of oppression, torture, and abuse of human rights. Many critics share the point of view that most of Pinter's plays often allude to the Holocaust that occurred during the Nazi Regime of World War II. In his later political plays, all the themes that recur explicitly reflect his Jewish heritage. Broadly speaking, Pinter is fighting for the victim, for the minority, and for the abused. Steven H. Gale depicts Pinter's plays as reflecting "a picture of contemporary man beaten down by the social forces around him, based on man's failure to communicate with other men"(17). Such depiction highlights a type of social oppression that can be traced back to Pinter's Jewish background.

Overwhelming by the terrifying experience of war, Pinter's strong political point of view arouses from his deep feeling about the war. Pinter states, "I felt very strongly about the war. And still do, if you see what I mean. After all, I wasn't a child by the time it ended; though I was when it began"(Gross, 39).As a victim of Anti-Semitism, Pinter recalls a scene of his childhood experience, "I was evacuated – at the age of nine – and that left a deep mark on me, as I think it did on all children who were evacuated. To be suddenly scooped out of one's home and to find oneself hundreds of miles away – as I did, in Cornwall – was very strange" (Esslin, Pinter at Sixty, 38). In spite of the fact that the war has been ended, the everlasting experience of fear continually haunting Pinter. As Gale asserts that "when Pinter began his playwriting career in 1957, however, one idea was foremost in his mind as a major theme: **fear**" (Emphasis is mine, Gale, 18). For instance, important thematic element that recurs in many of Pinter's plays is the knock at the door which is a reminiscent of the fear and powerlessness felt by the Jewish communities in Europe during the Nazi Regime. Another example, most of Pinter plays are shaped by living in the shadow of the

Holocaust as they subconsciously represent the same conflict while masking it within everyday situations.

Political Pinter

While dealing with “the intricacies of domestic power” in the first two phases of his career as a playwright, Pinter’s “more secure private life enabled him to turn his attention to power-games in the wider public arena”. This took place after his second marriage with Antonia Fraser who “undoubtedly helped to sharpen and intensify his fascination with politics”. According to Michael Billington, the authorized bibliographer of Harold Pinter, “it was only in the mid-1980s that [Pinter] started to express his strong feelings about torture, human rights and the double-standards of the Western democracies in dramatic form” (“Harold Pinter”, *The Guardian*, 7). *One For The Road* (1984), *Mountain Language* (1988), *New World Order* (1991), *Party Time* (1991), *Moonlight* (1993), *Ashes to Ashes* (1996), and *Celebration* (1999) share, more or less, the same political views.

Moreover, “Pinter in his later years also lost no opportunity, either in the press, on television or in public meeting, to attack what he saw as the cynicism and the double standards of the Western democracies and, in particular, the brutal pragmatism of US foreign policy” (Ibid, 8). The climax of his political attack against oppression can be seen in his speech after being awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2005. As the title of the speech suggests “Art, Truth & Politics”, Pinter focuses on the process of searching for truth that lies between art and politics.

In spite of the fact that truth is the ultimate aim of any work of art, Pinter asserts that “Truth in drama is forever elusive” as “the real truth is that there never is any such thing as one truth to be found in the dramatic art. There are many”. For Pinter, “the search for truth” in art is a continuous process as it “can never stop. It cannot be adjourned, it cannot be postponed.” That is due to the fact that “language in art remains a highly ambiguous transaction”. On the other hand, truth in politics must be avoided at all cost,

as “objectivity is essential”. However, Pinter concludes his speech by claiming that the search for truth behind the political power is “a crucial obligation” in order to restore “the dignity of man”. Pinter is enthusiastically dared to say that “the United States is without doubt the greatest show on the road” so “language is actually employed to keep thought at bay”. Since the most sovereign country of the world, the United States’ “political philosophy contains a number of contradictory elements”(1-10), Pinter emphasizes that:

Political language, as used by politicians, does not venture into any of [the artist’s] territory since the majority of politicians, on the evidence available to us, are interested not in truth but in power and in the maintenance of that power. To maintain that power it is essential that people remain in ignorance, that they live in ignorance of the truth, even the truth of their own lives. What surrounds us therefore is a vast tapestry of lies, upon which we feed.(3)

Whether concerned with the state abuse of power or with the micro-politics of human relations that form the key motif in all of his works, the majority of Pinter’s plays anatomize the brute reality and the language of power, so there is no real contradiction between his early – apparently apolitical – plays and the more explicit political plays of the later stage of his career. Beginning every play – just like a typical modern dramatist – with an attempt to search for the truth, Pinter ends with the postmodernist principle of the multiplicity of truth. Moreover, the interweaving of some forms of popular culture with the modernist motifs that reflect that his admiration of Kafka and Beckett produces a suspenseful drama of interrogation, evasion, and silence that exposes a crisis of subjectivity at the core of the human identity. However, his works illustrate one of the most important postmodern trends which is that all types of communication are ambiguous and subject to multiple ways of interpretation.

Pinter's Use of Language

The cornerstone of Pinter's creativity is his innovative use of language: in spite of illustrating the power of language, which is an essential modernist feature, he continuously stresses its unreliability that refers to the postmodern concept of indeterminacy of language. Pinter's experimentation with language is primarily modern as his work is indebted to a naturalist/realist tradition in that his dialogues are often so close to everyday speech, however, he developed his use of language to include some postmodern elements in form and function. On the surface level of his works, Pinter, like modernists, uses stage language that seems to depict a typical human drama, but he is actually much more interested in staging the unspoken that reveals deeper psychological and philosophical dimensions in his characters. In this sense he must be belonged to the postmodern movement whose major characteristic is skepticism in language. Deeply influenced, from his first play to his most recent one, by the uncertainty of the modern fast-changing world as well as by the insecurity resulted from his Jewish background experience, Pinter stresses the existence of postmodern skepticism in language, meaning, and communication in real life.

A great example of the inventiveness of his language is "Pinter's Pause" which established Pinter as one of the most renowned dramatists of the Twentieth Century to the point that his name entered the language as an adjective used to describe a particular atmosphere and environment in drama: "Pinteresque". It is defined by the *Online OED* as "Pinter's plays are typically characterized by implications of threat and strong feeling produced through colloquial language, apparent triviality, and long pauses". "Pinter's Pauses" are important ingredients in making his drama difficult to be categorized. Also, it is a crucial technique in Pinter's plays that conveys the notions of alienation, absurdity, and the illusive nature of meaning in postmodern real life. Pinter wants to represent a real extract of life in his plays with all its confusing language and indefinite meaning. Moreover, Pinter's works are characterized by its modernist principle of the systematic

resistance to meaning-making which emphasizes his postmodern distrust in semantic fixity. As a natural consequence, Pinter left the whole space of interpretation to his audience which stresses the postmodern principle of the multiplicity of interpretation.

Unlike traditional plays where everything was explained by the characters or the author, in Pinter's plays, speech is completed with pauses, trailing off into endless thoughts. The dialogues of Pinter's plays seem inconsequential since beneath the forth of conversation lies a deep well of psychological needs and neurosis. The depiction of his characters depends mainly on internalization as deeply inside them there are great volcanic emotions which have been unexpressed. Influenced by Bertolt Brecht and Samuel Beckett, Pinter utilizes the strategy of engaging the audience into the events of his plays in order to be active participants in their interpretations to break the obvious illusion of the fourth wall in the theatre. Like modernists, Pinter begins with using language as a strategy to build human relationships as his characters are talking to maintain human contact in order to keep themselves going on. However, Pinter, like postmodernists whose general philosophical implication is that language is unreliable, meaning is slippery, existence is absurd, and truth is not absolute, ends with showing that language is a strategy to destroy human relationships that is shown in his confused dialogues, ambiguous meaning, inconsequential communication, and endless interpretations.

Pinter's Postmodern Themes

In general, there are two postmodern persistent themes that run through all of Pinter's work which deeply connect all of them: *the first is the lack of distinction between real and unreal, true and false*. He realized such theme from the beginning of his career as a playwright and asserted it in the opening lines of his Nobel Prize speech:

In 1958 I wrote the following:

‘There are no hard distinctions between what is real and what is unreal, nor between what is true and what is false. A thing is not necessarily either true or false; it can be both true and false.’

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I believe that these assertions still make sense and do still apply to the exploration of reality through art. So as a writer I stand by them but as a citizen I cannot. As a citizen I must ask: what is true? What is false?

Truth in drama is forever elusive. You never quite find it but the search for it is compulsive. The search is clearly what drives the endeavour. The search is your task. More often than you stumble upon the truth in the dark, colliding with it or just glimpsing an image or a shape which seems to correspond to the truth, often without realizing that you have done so. But the real truth is that there never is any such thing as one truth to be found in the dramatic art. There are many. These truths challenge each other, recoil from each other, reflect each other, ignore each other, tease each other, are blind to each other. Sometimes you feel you have the truth of a moment in your hand, then it slips through your fingers and is lost. (1)

As shown in the above quotation, unsettling ambiguity prevailed in all of Pinter's works. In addition to the ambiguous plots, the constant reversals of his characters, the silences and pauses, and the difficulty of speech, all create a postmodern world in which there is no distinct truth about those people who are performing his plays. For Pinter, "language in art remains a highly ambiguous transaction" (Nobel Lecture, 2). Consequently, such ambiguity has been extended to the audience who experience their own ambiguous world through watching his plays. On the other hand, such a theme suggests the obligatory involvement of the audience into the events of his plays in an attempt to search for the truth. Also, the open endings of all of his works evoke the engagement of the audience to produce endless versions of reality not only according to their own grasping of the events of his plays but also according to their own experience in their real life; he asserts that "we are actually looking at a never-ending range of reflections"

(Nobel Speech, 10). He also elaborates that: "Meaning begins in the words, in the action, continues in your head and ends nowhere." (*Various Voices* 1998, 9)

The second theme is the complete failure of communication which infuses all of his works. All of his conversations are non-productive, just talking without any specific goal of communication which deeply reflects the personal failure of his postmodern characters in spite of their consistent attempts to confirm their existence through lively talking. Pinter tackles these two explicitly postmodern themes through the modernist modes of Realism and Naturalism as being obvious in focusing on everyday situations, common conversations, recognizable characters, and working-class settings. However, Pinter's plays shows a persistent refutation of the most basic enlightenment tenets of modernist Western realistic theatre, particularly that everything can be explained and that we can know why people do the things they already do. So, he explodes a new version of realism, maybe a Pinteresque postmodern realism.

Pinter's Postmodern Modes

Moreover, Pinter is one of the early practitioners of the two other postmodernist modes: Absurdism and Existentialism. For Pinter, the main function of Absurdism is to get into the reality which is his main concern, as shown in the above quotation from his Nobel Lecture. Pinter's Absurdism can be seen in his deep involvement into the life of his characters to depict the impossibility of gaining neither a heavenly knowledge nor a physical strength throughout their own lives. Absurdism is considered to be one aspect of the existential philosophy which, as all of Pinter's plays, portrays the man of the Twentieth Century as dwelling in an inexplicable universe and living a meaningless life. The opening questions posed by Pinter throughout the events of his plays, which show the postmodern man's struggle to define his being and to determine his position in the universe, revolve around the philosophical explorations of Existentialism. In Pinter's plays, we can recognize how comic and tragic are creatively interwoven together to depict the real condition of postmodern man. As Esslin puts it in His book *The Theatre of Absurd* (1964): "the human condition is presented

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to us as a concrete poetic image that has become flesh on the stage and that is at the same time broadly comic and deeply tragic”(241).

Pinter’s characterization figuratively reveals the same anguish of Absurdism and Existentialism, the deeper perception of human existence. He portrays incomplete characters whose internal feelings has been fully exteriorized through disconnected situations in order to highlight that meaning can not be mediated through language, rather, one should endeavor to penetrate to deeper layers of meaning behind language/metalinguage in order to get a truer, however more complex, picture of reality. It is of paramount importance to note that the Swedish Academy awarded the Nobel Prize to Pinter to praise him for both his existential explorations and his political commitment, and to laud his art that “uncovers the precipice under everyday prattle and forces entry in oppression’s closed room”(1). Also, it can be recognized that Pinter’s later overtly political plays do not mark a new turn in his writing; rather, they are the product of an emergent element transferred from the backgrounds of his earlier works to the foregrounds of the later ones. Hence, his earlier plays are necessarily preface for his later ones.

Pinter's *The Room*

Strictly speaking, Pinter’s first piece of writing *The Room* (1958) is considered to be an exceptional play for a new playwright. According to John Russell Taylor:

The situations involved are always very simple and basic; the language which the characters use is an almost uncannily accurate reproduction of everyday speech...And yet in these ordinary surroundings lurk mysterious terrors and uncertainties, the whole external world of everyday realities in thrown into question. Can we ever know the truth about anybody or anything? Is there any absolute truth to be known? (270)

The Room (1957) is a typical menace play since it represents a social reality about people's entrapment, including Pinter himself, in this world where their personal relationships reflect a microcosm of society. Esslin notes that Pinter's fascination with menace is a result of his past:

Yet in Pinter's plays this existential fear is never just a philosophical abstraction. It is ultimately, based on the experience of a Jewish boy in the East End of London; of a Jew in the Europe of Hitler. In talking about his first play, The Room, Pinter himself made this point very clearly: "This old woman is living in a room which, she is convinced, is the nest in the house, and she refuses to know anything about the basement downstairs. She says it's damp and nasty and the world outside is cold and icy, and that in her warm and comfortable room her security is complete. But, of course it isn't, an intruder comes to upset the balance of everything, in other words, points to the delusion on which she is basing her life." (*Pinter at Sixty*, 36)

It is important to note that the underlying theme of menace that is represented by the dark, damp, cold, nasty and icy outside world attacks those qualities of light, warmth, and comfortable as represented by the room where Rose and Bert Hutt live in. As even when she decided to take an elusive refuge in her secure and safe room not only from the unknowable rest of the house but also from the uncertain outside world, some intruders came to destroy such imaginative secure world. In short, the room defines Rose's existential security; it is a reflection of her own personality. She has spun a cocoon out of herself around herself in order to protect her sense of self. As she elaborates: "If they ever ask you, Bert, I am quite happy where I am". Also, she confirms: "No this room's all right for me. I mean you know where you are" (96).

It is the first intruder, the landlord brings the seeds of uncertainty into Rose's room when he consistently refuses to answer her questions about the

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rest of the house, claiming to be unsure of how many floors there are. Also, he seems to recognize a chair he has not seen before and unable to remember that he put it there. Moreover, he raises the first question about Rose's ownership of the room, informing her that it was once his. The subtle menace of Rose's self-security becomes stronger with the arrival of Mr. and Mrs. Sands. They carries with them the dark and cold as symbolized by the man in the basement who informed them that room number seven, Rose's room, is vacant. While denying that the man who has just left is the landlord, they discuss with her that they can live in the room as if she never existed. They challenge her own existential identity. Similar to the Nazis, they took the possession of what was not their own, the Jewish homes.

Another brief visit from the landlord adds to the growing tension in the play as he reveals that there is someone who wants to see Rose, Mr. Kidd, which prepares her for an explicit confrontation with the blind Negro from the basement, the very personification of the blackness, coldness, and uncertainty that are her opposites. The Negro overtly threatens her identity by calling her by a different name, Sal, a name that could be short for Sara and a representation of a Jewish woman, and insisting that she has to come home to some other place, maybe the basement, whose early description suggests her familiarity with it, in contrast to what she affirms throughout the play that she never left the room. The presentation of the theme of race, through the Negro man, reflects Pinter's own awareness of his Jewishness. Esslin illustrates that:

It is very characteristic of Pinter that the element of race hatred (which we know, must be overshadowed his childhood in the East End of London) pervades the play without ever being directly pushed into the foreground. Mr. Kidd's strange vagueness about his own origins introduces the subject, which breaks to the surface with brutal clarity when Bert assaults the blind Negro with the exclamation 'Lice!'; here Bert's motivation must be one of hatred. (Pinter at Sixty, 58)

By the end of the play, Pinter introduces the power struggle which reveals the theme of domination between Bert as having the dominant power and the Negro man and Rose as the dominated victims. On the one hand, Bert's violent reaction is an attempt to regain his power over Rose who became blind, a reflection of being the dominated victim. On the other hand, Pinter depicts a class struggle between Bert and the Negro who symbolized the minor class and the discriminated whose blindness further denotes him to the position of the victim. Bert's victory over both of them symbolizes the inevitable dominance of power. After the visit of the Negro man, Rose has been vanquished by her opposite and deprived of everything by which she had defined herself. Thus, she has implicitly accepted the new identity that he imposed on her, she is no longer be able to take comfort from her room, and she became blind losing the sight that was so precious to her.

Esslin suggests that Rose's identity is compromised by her racial secrets; maybe she is hiding her relationship with the Negro man, but what this particular relationship implies? He may know something about her past that she is keen not to reveal to the other characters of the play. So such reality is the source of the constant state of nervousness and fear of the world around her with which Rose lives during the whole play(19). In the world of existence, man's search for knowledge and meaning in postmodern life results in nothing so he feels lonely and desperate. The only thing to which he can cling is a shelter from a fear of the earthly life in a small room which, in most cases, fails to protect its own dwellers.

The Room represents varied modes of modernism like realism: shown in using common characters, settings, dialogues; naturalism: shown in the detailed description of the characters and settings; and symbolism: shown in the indications of something for a particular character, for instance, the room symbolizes Rose's secure identity, the basement symbolizes fear, the outside world symbolizes uncertainty, the Negro man symbolizes the race struggle, and Bert symbolizes the dominant power. Moreover, the play combines various themes of postmodernism like Rose's isolation in a closed room; her sense of uncertainty; the failure of communication between all the

characters of the play; the ambiguity that surrounds her past; and the illusion that she created for herself and lived with in the room that is her ultimate shelter in the uncertain world. Hence, Pinter uses the varied techniques of modern modes in order to develop them into postmodern themes that represent the dilemma of the postmodern man in such meaningless world.

Pinter's *Betrayal*

Betrayal (1978) is Pinter's masterpiece which portrays the classic dramatic scenario of the love triangle: a wife, a husband, and a lover who is, at the same time, the close friend of the husband. All of the three characters are involved in a web of infidelity. As its title indicates, the central theme of *Betrayal* is the deception in human relationships and its vast effects on the human life. Pinter poses a very significant question through his play: *if one knew the consequences of certain act, would he still make it?* The audience attempts to answer this question during the play by penetrating through the varied ambiguities of this bitter comedy to recognize the price for the characters' betrayals. Through the events, the audience can realize, at every moment in the play, the unhappy romantic fortunes of the characters, whose joy is painful to see, more than the characters themselves. Moreover, Pinter allows his audience to recognize many tiny acts of deception that are involved in the bigger ones, thus, betrayal works at many levels throughout the play.

On the surface level, Emma, the wife, and Jerry, the lover and the close friend of the husband, have betrayed Robert, the husband, violating both marriage and friendship. Robert has betrayed Emma with his own affairs, violating marriage. Robert and Jerry have betrayed Emma by their homosexual affair, violating marriage and friendship. Robert has betrayed Emma and Jerry by not telling them that he knew their affair for four years ago, violating marriage and friendship. Emma has betrayed Jerry by not telling him that Robert has known their affair for two years ago, violating love. Jerry has also betrayed his wife, Judith, who never appears in the play, but who may be betraying him as well, violating marriage.

On the underlying level, Jerry and Robert, as an agent and publisher, “have betrayed the idealism that in their youth led them to worship poetry, that of Yeats specially, for its aesthetic joy” by treating “literature as a commodity”(Billington 2011, 1) as they flog commercial novels, violating self-honesty. Jerry and Robert, as two close friends since Jerry was Robert’s best man at his wedding, have betrayed each other as well as themselves by suggesting, paradoxically, that the very betrayals that destroy them also bind them, violating their own consciousness. Emma and Jerry have betrayed themselves in their treatment of the secret house that they rent to make love, while Emma treats it as a second home, Jerry treats it as a sexy escape from domesticity, violating love. Robert and Emma betrayed each other as well as themselves by pretending that their marriage is a happy one, violating their own emotions. Robert has betrayed himself by using his cuckoldry as an alibi for his liaisons with Jerry and Emma, violating his own feelings.

It is apparent that Pinter’s play from its very beginning till the conclusion is mainly concerned with love. While in the first scene Jerry and Emma in a pub recalling the memories of their previous love affair, the play concludes with “All You Need is Love” playing in the background. Ironically, whereas Pinter strongly affirms the importance of love in human life, he deeply refutes it. Since heart can embrace some deceitful feelings, so the real betrayals of the play are of the selves. For instance, any sense of a joyful sexual revolution is smothered by guilt and a fear of being caught out. According to Roger Ebert, in his review of the 1983 film that is based on Pinter’s play:

The “Betrayal” structure strips away all artifice. It shows, heartlessly, that the very capacity for love itself is sometimes based on betraying not only other loved ones, but even ourselves. The movie is told mostly in encounters between two of the characters; all three are not often on screen together, and we never meet Jerry’s wife. These people are smart and verbal and they talk a lot—too much, maybe, because there is a peculiarly British reverse about them that sometimes prevents them from quite

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saying what they mean. They lie and they half-lie. There are universes left unspoken in their unfinished sentences. They are all a little embarrassed that the messy urges of sex are pumping away down there beneath their civilized deceptions. (2)

A true fashion of Pinter's writings is pauses, pregnant pauses which say far more than the often nonsensical, superficial dialogue. "In order to cover the silences with acceptable repartee", the three characters engaged themselves in ridiculous conversations. Although the dialogue is often comical, it is frequently heavy of meanings. "The silences uncover raw emotion" which is not obscured by the mask of language. The characters remarkably convey their interior "struggles through their body language and facial expression". In spite of the fact that humour comes loudly through the play, pain sits heavily on the souls of the three characters (Holly Kline, 1999, 1-2).

A typical modernist characteristic in *Betrayal* is Pinter's use of symbolism. "Some elements in the setting act as windows" that enable the audience to see the real emotions of the characters. For instance, according to Kline:

A Venetian lace tablecloth symbolizes Emma attempt to create a home for herself and Robert, and a scotch glass acts as an indirect physical connection between Emma and her emotionally distant lover. The entire set is painted in green, a detail that later becomes significant: Emma and Robert assume the last name of Green when renting a flat together. The staging of the last scene is especially symbolic. Emma sits at her dressing table, the only source of light comes from the mirror that she uses. This illumination creates wonderful shadows, and later throws multiple images of Jerry's body against the set. These shadowy echoes of his material form make tangible the duplicity inherent in all of the characters. (2)

In order to dramatize the cumulative nature of betrayal, Pinter, as a postmodern innovative as he used to be, employed the reverse chronology in structuring the plot of *Betrayal*. The first scene takes place in 1977 two years after the love affair between Emma and Jerry has been ended while the last scene takes place in 1968 when the affair begins. It starts in the present with the wonderfully edgy pub reunion of the ex-lovers, as time's arrow speeds backwards over the previous nine years, we can see the increasing layers of betrayal. As a typical modernist who departs from the conventionality of the well-made plays of the classics, Pinter narrates a story of betrayal in an unconventional way. Pinter attempts to explain the truth of all the characters by reversing the chronological order of the real actions of the play. Similar to Pinter's manner in recalling the events of the play, his characters also recall, on the basis of memory, such events retrospectively in a non-chronological order. Time and memory, in Pinter's play, are betrayers too since all the characters are betrayed by time and memory. The disconnected situations presented to the audience in the play stressed the postmodern absurd attempt to search for truth on the part of the characters as well as on the part of the audience. In the course of recreating reality, the characters attempt to recall the events of their own betrayals by relying on memory beginning from the present and moving gradually back in time. Hence, it is this strangeness of human relation that depicts the absurdity of postmodern life and constitutes the reality of postmodern human existence.

In addition, *Betrayal* includes many postmodern elements that increase its significance as a memory play. It emphasizes Pinter's preoccupation with the elusive nature of the memory play and the significance relation between time and memory through its use of an anachronological sequence of events. *In spite of the fact that the postmodern preoccupation with memory is a direct reaction to the modernist structure of temporality, it concretizes the postmodern longing for and inability to return to the past.* The main difference between modernism and postmodernism lies in the concept of progress: while modernism defines it as a linear development through time, postmodernism conceived of it as a synchronicity which becomes clear in

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Pinter's move backward and forward at once throughout the play. Another important difference is that whereas modernism is concerned with the origins, postmodernism is more interested in remains and traces as shown in Pinter's attempt to trace the remains of an old love affair by retrieving some of its details through the events of his play. Moreover, in Pinter's unique postmodern reversed time sequence, the backward progress which amplifies the notion that the memory is degraded by time, allows him to reveal fragmented pictures of the affair rather than to present a linear forward action in time. Also, this memory play uses the postmodern distortion of time to reveal how each character is isolated by its self-deception. Once again, Pinter, in spite of using some modernist characteristics in his play, represents various innovative postmodernist techniques to depict the illusion of the postmodern world.

Pinter's *One For The Road*

In his later works, Pinter became more interested in eloquently depicting the abuse of power and its devastating effects on the human rights all over the world. Pinter wrote his explicitly political masterpiece *One For The Road* (1984) on a trip with Arthur Miller to visit the Turkish prisons in the 1980s, according to what he told to his authorized bibliographer Michael Billington. Pinter was horrified by some intelligent and attractive young Turkish women who recounted their experiences in Turkish prisons, which included different ways of torture like being raped, given electric shocks, rearrested and charged with insulting the state. In general, Pinter's later plays have attempted to urge his audience to recognize the realities of the world. Apart from provoking their intellectual and emotional responses, Pinter calls his audience to participate in the actions of the play by forcing them to identify with both the torturer and the tortured.

The most attractive element of the play is that it is Pinter himself who played the leading role as a brutal government interrogator of an oppressive unnamed regime, Nicolas, a self-proclaimed civilized man who earned his living as a torturer. Pinter illustrates that:

When I get up on the stage, I won't be acting a monster, although he is certainly monstrous – but a man. Nicolas is a desperate man who seeks validation from his male victim, talks about his love of God, country and nature, and is always trying to find a philosophical basis for his actions.

And you only have to look around you to see world leaders doing exactly the same thing. George W. Bush is always protesting that he has the fate of the world in mind and bangs on about the 'freedom-loving peoples' he's seeking to protect. I'd love to meet a freedom-hating people. But in the rhetoric of global politics there is a total dichotomy between words and action; and that, in part, is what I'm writing about in this play (Billington 2001, 1-2).

One For The Road opens with Nicolas sitting on a chair questioning Victor, a dissident intellectual who has been arrested with his wife, Gila and seven-years son, Nicky is to be imprisoned in a small closed room. Nicolas tries to force Victor to admit certain crimes that he did not commit in order to prove him guilty while Victor courageously refused. The main charge against Victor is his highest intelligence which can not easily submit to the corruption of the oppressive political system. Hence, Nicolas is in charge of exerting physical and psychological torture upon Victor with the intention of destroying his soul and mind. As a matter of fact, it is an explicitly violent political play that presents the modern world as a cruel police state. Its severe violence is not shown in those cruel actions presented on the stage, rather, through allusions to brutality that occur off stage. For instance, Victor has been tortured before his appearance on the stage as shown through his torn clothes and a clear bruise on his face, the repeated rape of the wife, and the killing of the son.

Despite his civilized manner, the dialogue between Nicolas and his three Prisoners shows that the torturer is tortured himself. Nicolas is a terribly lonely man who has nothing to do in his life except to serve the state in the way he did. In order to relief himself from his brutal deeds, Nicolas tries to

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offer a persuasive ground for his explicit oppression as believing that he is keeping the world clean for God. Hence, the main motivation behind Nicolas's corrupted exercise of power is certain moral convictions in which he is deeply convinced. Nicolas personifies the modern man's moral wasteland. Pinter asserts this point, stating that:

One For The Road is to examine the psychology of a man who was an interrogator, a torturer, a head of an organization, but was also a convinced passionate man of considerable faith; in other words, who believed in a number of things and fought for them. He was able to subject his victims to any amount of horror and humiliation for just a cause as he saw it. I believe that reflects, as you know, situations all over the world, under one hat or another, now and then, at all times. The question of a just cause. (Quoted in Billington 1996, 294)

Nicolas's brutal sadism has been fully portrayed in his keen intentions to increase the psychological torture and humiliation of both Victor and Gila through his repeated references to Gila's rape by several soldiers as well as to Nicky's murder. It is a typical intention of political dictators to corrupt the intimate familial relation and to destroy its moral ties by torturing the father, raping the mother and killing the son. Pinter fascinatingly depicts the inner self-contradiction of Nicolas, as beneath his seemingly intelligence lies his madness of exercising the absolute power, beneath his assured surface lies his deep weakness, and beneath his totally indifference to destroy Victor's family lies his neediness to restore to wine to forget his brutal deeds. Nicolas's stream of consciousness is represented through Pinter's pregnant pauses which offer the gradual self-revelation of Nicolas's mind.

As a true modern dramatist, Pinter depicts the panic of modern man's isolation through the small closed room where Victor, Gila, and Nicky were imprisoned; it is a sample of the closed modern life where man was subject to different types of torture. Also, the play portrays Nicolas's terrible

loneliness who has no one and nothing except the state that he serves in spite of the absolute power which he possesses. Moreover, the character of Nicolas shows the modern crisis of the self-contradiction, which is apparently a restrained self-righteous self but deeply a moral corrupted one. In addition, there are some elements of symbolism that lurk in the play: when Nicolas talks of “the common heritage” from which Victor is excluded he bunched his left fist in reference to Victor’s leftist political views, when Nicolas describes Gila’s late father as “iron and gold” in reference to his fantastic admiration of power and wealth, when Nicolas says “God speaks through me” in reference to the holy justification of his violent deeds throughout the play, and the silence of Victor during the whole play because his tongue has been cut out symbolizes the suppression of the dissident.

Still some significant elements of postmodernism that are latent in Pinter’s *One For The Road*, especially in reference to the critical movements of New Historicism and Cultural Materialism. Pinter personifies the New Historicist approach in the character of Nicolas whose main charge is to serve the strategy of the state apparatus by using his absolute authority to suppress the dissidents in order to consolidate the ideology of the dominant power and reinforce the perpetuation of the status-quo. On the other hand, Pinter personifies the Cultural Materialist approach in the character of Victor, the intellectual dissident who is involved in the struggle of power-relations by protesting against the dominant power. As a result, he was subject to a horrible torture along with his wife and son at the hands of the dominant power represented by Nicolas: cutting out his tongue, raping his wife, and killing his son. The main aim of Victor is to enable the performance of social and political change in his society through protesting against the oppression of the dominant power. Near the very end of the play, Victor’s gaze of protest at Nicolas reflects his insistence on pursuing his rebellion against the dominant power in spite of his physical and psychological destruction which did not defeat him in his struggle to maintain the human rights. Victor’s sharp look is a glimpse of hope in some change in the future, as cleverly symbolized by his own name. Again, Pinter

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typically depicts the modern man's moral wasteland only to represent the postmodern struggle of power-relations through suppressing the dissidents.

Conclusion

Through the fascinating journey of Pinter's masterpieces, it is apparent that he has always been politically aware; the keen analysis of all of his works reveals that he has always been delivering the same political message: there is a corrupt force in the society which leads man to enjoy torturing others. While suppressing his political point of view by hiding it within the themes of his early works, Pinter becomes more outspoken in his later overtly political plays. Of course, depicting such political struggles can be traced back to the strongest influence of his Jewish struggle to overcome oppression performed by the Nazi regime. Even his memory plays as *Betrayal* which depicts the exploitation of people, the loss of the real life, the lack of the present and the fragmentation of the memory which are the long-term consequences of the Holocaust. Also, his comedies of menace like *The Room* which concretizes the terrible fear that is the direct consequence of his Jewish experience. In sum, Pinter is mirroring what he saw happen in the past, what he sees happening now, and what he fears will continue to happen in the future.

Pinter's Modern Means to Postmodern Ends

Strictly speaking, Pinter's plays are considered to be modernist domestic plays about lower or middle class families and relationships. Through such seemingly comfortable and domestic environment which is familiar to everyone, he subtly delivers his message about the postmodern political oppression of the dominant power and the abuse of human rights. Pinter skillfully fuses the common domestic environment with the public political message in order to depict the poignant struggle to make a difference in the human life.

Worthy of note is that spoken language, a typical modernist feature, is not Pinter's means of communication since it conveys the meaninglessness of human conversation, rather, unspoken language, like silence and pauses, a highly postmodernist feature, are his real means of communication since

they conveys the deeply hidden meanings of human feelings. Through his ridiculous conversations and contradicted dialogues, Pinter cleverly proves the inadequacy of language to reveal the real emotions of his characters. Instead, he restores to illusions, past recollections, and childhood memories as a medium for his characters to relieve their mounting tensions on the one hand, and to serve as an escape from the present brutal world on the other.

Moreover, Pinter develops the elements of modernism to serve the principles of postmodernism through his Pinteresque technique in order to create his notable masterpieces. He has a unique tendency to mix the real and surreal in order to reveal the typical postmodern human predicament in his theatre. Nonetheless, the attempt to categorize Pinter's works underestimates his renowned approach to the theatre, which is, in fact, a multi-dimensional approach that represents the progress from modern to postmodern life, an approach which is quintessentially Pinteresque. So, all his works show his multi-dimensional way of looking at human life. Hence, his works offer significant achievements that contribute to the development of drama from modernism to postmodernism.

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