



## Silence in Pinter's plays: Silence and The Dumb Waiter

**Moez Marrouchi**

Mazoon College, GFD

[moez.marrouchi@mazcol.edu.om](mailto:moez.marrouchi@mazcol.edu.om)

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.36892/ijlls.v1i3.62>

### **Received:**

23/08/2019

### **Accepted:**

20/12/2019

### **Keywords:**

Silence; Fear;  
Menace; Solitude;  
Death

### **Abstract**

*The Silences and pauses, Harold Pinter has employed in his plays, have remarkably encapsulated his mastery of such theatrically effective techniques. Silence is not just a moment when characters keep silent and the audience cannot hear their utterances; it is a moment so pregnant with meanings that the readers find it difficult to find their way to the final meaning. Silence in Pinter's plays are unexpectedly never silent. When it pervades, one has to think deeply of that moment. And when characters stop talking, one needs to contemplate their unsaid thoughts. This paper investigates the notions of fear, uncertainty, menace and death evoked when characters pause or keep silent in Pinter's Silence and The Dumb Waiter. In other words, it is how those moments of silence mark a state of calmness on the one hand and how this state gives way to that of chaos and death on the other that this paper shall strive to prove with reference to the aforementioned plays.*

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 Harold Pinter the Dramatist**

Known for his magnificent style, referred to later on by modern drama critics as 'Pinteresque', the 2005 literature Noble Prize winner, Harold Pinter 1930-2008, has largely influenced the contemporary British drama. Pinter presents his audience with an atmosphere that repeats in almost his twenty-nine mysterious plays. While fear ignites horror and anxiety in a Pinter play, interest tends to arouse as an element to guide the reader/ audience throughout the work. While the characters he introduces interact, their utterances seem to be devoid of meaning. While his dramatic action illogically proceeds, usually confusing the audience/ reader, the sense of menace increases to announce a tragic loss looming ahead; the very absurdity of our existence, the human being existence. Pinteresque context of no meaning, where power and identity are obviously focused on, and where language loses its known communicative function, identifies well the dramatist as a thinker who is, in essence, into exploring the various facets characterizing the humans' relationships.

### **1.2 Pinter's Web of Silence**

When the idea of silence is raised in connection with Harold Pinter's plays, one thinks directly of his very short play *Silence* and more specifically of Ellen's utterances as she clearly expresses her uncertainty, failure and fear. Ellen is paradoxically speaking of silence and her need for a person to break this state and tell her things:

Around me sits the night. Such a silence. I can hear myself. Cup my ear. My heart beats in my ear. Such a silence. Is it me? Am I silent or speaking? How can I know? Can I know such things? No-one has ever told me. I need to be told things. I seem to be old. Am I old now? No one will tell me. I must find a person to tell me these things. (Pinter, 1976, p. 200)

Upon her questions, the reader/ audience may expectedly get engaged into asking other related questions: Is this a philosophical speculation of Martin Heidegger's sort, as Siamak et al. (2012) noticed? Or a mere dramatic possibility to explore the internalizations of the human being? Are we being exposed to humanity in modernity or modernity on humanity? And if it is so, will there be any hope to escape death apart from death? Quite apparent that the lady is in a sort of moral dilemma and she is attempting to find somebody to comfort her. She asks questions, but ironically cannot find answers, ponders on how life is, yet cannot come to a final statement. The external heavy force vehemently interferes to shake the internal stability and introduce the character as defined through fear, uncertainty, and probably loss. It seems that her forever ignorance of past, present, and future things seriously intensifies her sense of loneliness to make her reminiscent of "the surveyor of Kafka *The Castle* and the librarian of Borges' *The Library of Babel*" (Hollis, 1970, p. 117) who continuously appear to fail in reaching the wanted contact.

In *The Room*, Pinter has undoubtedly concentrated not only on Rose's attempts to please her husband Bert Hudd and the latter's indifference, but also on that paradox between the internal world, a warm and light room, and an external hostile world characterized by darkness and coldness. The depiction of Rose's complete devotion to present herself as sentimental as possible and as agreeable to her husband as possible and Bert's entire indifference is paralleled with the depiction of a hostile world that surrounds a warm room. Hollis (1970, p. 22) rightly explains that "Bert's reticence is superficially humorous to the audience, but it is horrifying to Rose. His silence is the silence of one who has nothing to say while her loquacity is the silence of one who is trying desperately but failing to say what she really wants to say." The elements coming from outside tend to destroy the ones living inside where the very idea of security tends to dramatically fade away (Babae, Babae & Nesami, 2012). Similarly, the sort of laughter deriving from the comic scenes seems to diminish and finally disappear when crossing the outside atmosphere to the inside world of hostility and horror. Unexpectedly enough, what the reader thinks of as a comedy dramatically turns into a hostile tragedy, what is expected to bring security turns into fear, and what is supposed to enlighten tends to tragically darken. We know that Rose loses her sight in the end of the play and with such a loss looms the idea of blindness as a way to nothingness and death. Dukore

### **Silence in Pinter's plays: *Silence* and *The Dumb Waiter***

(1976) and Hornby (2015) have interestingly suggested that laughter turns into its opposite the moment comic scenes move inside the room. Pinter has obviously carried out this through a language that takes into consideration the general context of the play, the atmosphere, and the main themes treated.

In *The Caretaker*, the play which marks Pinter's success, the dramatist presents us with a world characterized by loss and failure. The three characters, Mick, Aston and Davies, appear to be a perfect representation of loss: Mick opens the play with a great inspection of the room that ironically foreshadows his uncertainty and failure. Aston, Mick's older brother, has confidently saved an old tramp from being hardly beaten up in a brawl in a café. Davies, who is the old tramp, has vainly tried to find a place in that café and he is now looking for integration. Pinter has clearly pushed his characters to intensify that atmosphere of menace and horror. Aston appears to be so talkative that he has hallucination while Mick and Davies are always volubly complaining about their situation. The use of language is highly significant as it exposes not only that atmosphere of menace but also Pinter's artistic ability. Yuan (2013, p. 72) has pithily encapsulated the dramatist's ability by stressing that:

In Pinter's plays, language functions in a way as a crucial means of characterization, a way to serve as a weapon of attack or a fortification for defense, or a way to provide a nebulous metaphor for the past. As an important part, or maybe a hard core of Pinteresque language, Pinteresque discourse becomes the most distinctive feature of Pinter's plays.

### **1.3 Pinter's Silence and the Dumb Waiter**

Pinter's two plays, *Silence* (1968) and *The Dumb Waiter* (1957), do not clearly unfold what they are striving to introduce. Where the dramatist resorts to his well-known techniques such as the 'pauses' and the 'moments of silence', the audience / reader finds it difficult to both to grasp and follow. The silences, Pinter has introduced in such plays, have remarkably encapsulated his mastery of this theatrically effective technique. It is not just a moment when characters keep silent and the audience hardly hears utterances; it is a moment so pregnant with meanings that the intended one is intentionally blurred. Silence here is unexpectedly never silent. When it pervades, one has to think deeply of that moment. And when characters stop talking, one needs to contemplate their unsaid thoughts. This paper intends to investigate the notions of fear, uncertainty, loss, and death evoked when characters pause or keep silent in Pinter's *Silence* and *The Dumb Waiter*. In other words, it is how those moments of silence mark a state of calmness on the one hand and how this state gives way to that of chaos and death on the other that this paper shall strive to prove with reference to the aforementioned plays.

## **2. DISCUSSION**

### **2.1. Silence in Pinter's *Silence***

The first reading of Pinter's *Silence* stresses the idea that it is a short play on love and highly sensitive characters, and indeed, it is like that. *Silence* is a one-act, three-character play. Ellen, a girl in her twenties, Rumsey, a man of forty, and Bates, a man in his middle thirties. Rumsey and Ellen we learn are in deep love while Bates, who appears to be a lover, vainly tries to convince Ellen to accept his Kind invitation. The play opens with Rumsey poetically speaking about his girl. Ellen, on the other hand, informs us that there are two men in her life and she loves one of them who is assumingly Rumsey and she is not interested in the other, Bates. The experience Rumsey has related clearly draws a relationship based on harmony and reciprocity, a mutual exchange of love between Ellen and Rumsey:

Rumsey: I walk with my girl who wears a grey blouse when she walks and grey shoes and walks with me readily wearing her clothes considered for me. Her grey clothes. She holds my arm. On good evenings we walk through the hills to the top of the hill past the dogs the clouds racing just before dark or as dark is falling when the moon. (Pinter, 1976, p. 201)

Ellen's reply seems to stress the same idea:

Ellen: There are two. One who is with me sometimes, and another. He listens to me. I tell him what I know. We walk by the dogs. Sometimes the wind is so high he does not hear me. I lead him to a tree, clasp closely to him and whisper to him, wind going, dogs stop, and he hears me. But the other hears me. (Pinter, 1976, pp. 201-202)

Her relationship with Rumsey is best understood in her lines:

He sat me on his Knee, by the window, and asked if he could kiss my right cheek. I nodded he could. He did. Then he asked, if, having kissed my right, he could do the same with my left. I said yes. He did. (Pinter, 1976, p. 211)

Yet the play is not only about a love story between Ellen and Rumsey. *Silence* tells us a lot about Bates's deep dissatisfaction with them and their sense of fear. Bates's dissatisfaction stems originally from his inability to convince Ellen to accept his invitation and her, as it appears, deep love for Rumsey. Being alone, talking to himself, asking himself all sorts of questions, thinking of whether they are making love or just whispering and, from time to time, reassuring his girl that birds rest when they reach a tree with good solid branches after a long journey over the country has increased his sense of fear. Our first confrontation with Bates gives us the impression that he is in harmony with his girl "she clutching me." (Pinter, 1976, p. 202). But that harmony is paradoxically mixed up with an atmosphere deeply rooted in fear that gives way to a complete drowning to silence "Caught a bus to the town. Crowds. Lights round the market, rain and stinking...Black roads and girders...Pubs throw the doors smack into the night. Cars barking and the lights." (Pinter, 1976, p. 202). These are the very first sentences

### Silence in Pinter's plays: *Silence* and *The Dumb Waiter*

Bates has uttered and the first sentence will be the last one to close the play. The play is meant to “consider human existence in terms of purposelessness, nothingness, suspended sense, lack of meaning, and the challenge to one’s identity.” (Vairavan & Dhanavel, 2014, p. 37).

Pinter has cleverly concentrated on shaping characters. Hollis (1970, p. 114) believes that they “are forever in the realm of the fragmentary, the hypothetical, the provisional.” This appears to be a fact in all his plays and more specifically in *Silence*. They might have known each other before, or they may build a good relation sometimes in the future, but the current situation seems to be devoid of meaning, devoid of purpose, and certainly devoid of possibilities. His three characters appear to be talkative in the very beginning of the play, but they progressively become silent in the end. During this movement Pinter has inserted from time to time silences and pauses that strongly intensify the sense of restlessness, fear and death. Pinter’s use of silences as well as pauses remarkably indicates his mode of writing, a writing that relies on a careful handling of punctuation marks. Such marks have successfully become for this dramatist another kind of language. It is, I would like to put it in this way, a language upon another language. The dramatist’s punctuation marks do tell us more than his mere language does. The moment of silence indicates a state of calmness paradoxically pregnant with meanings. In his *Harold Pinter: The Caretaker of the Fragments of Modernity*, Gauthier (1996) has stressed the idea that:

Silences are more complex than pauses which are a mere phase of transition. With silence there is no question of bridging anything anymore. Silences are not only more extreme, they appear to be somehow unavoidable, making a moment when no word can be uttered. The breath is kept in. The tension is total. They indicate a decisive rupture between the end of a moment and the beginning of another. They delimit two fragments separated by a void, a lack that of children for instance. (91)

The first moment of silence that appears in the typography is clearly preceded by a long conversation between Ellen and Bates where he vainly tries to convince her to accept his invitation. She does not want to go out with him for a walk, does not want him to buy her a drink and does not know what she wants to do. The silence Pinter has just indicated after her refusal tells us her sense of restlessness, her sense of fear. Her meaningful utterances, “I turn. I turn. I wheel. I glide. I wheel. In stunning light. The horizon moves from the sun. I am crushed by the light”, (Pinter, 1976, p. 208) are followed by a silence that heavily underlines her frustration. Bates finds that moment as “Funny moment. That calm moment” (Pinter, 1976, p. 209). But that is only when he presses his hand on his forehead and forgets about all his problems. That is only when he feels at ease which is a very brief moment.

Ellen, however, appears to be in harmony with Rumsey, if her conversation with Bates has been characterized by a total refusal of any kind of harmony with him, now it appears to be

characterized by a complete acceptance and readiness to be in harmony with Rumsey. Now, she loves music, knows how to cook and is ready to cook for him. Ironically enough, what Bates fails to achieve with Ellen appears to reflect her failure with Rumsey; while Bates vainly tries to convince Ellen, she hardly attempts at changing Rumsey's mind. Ellen and Bates seem to have some points in common. Both of them are horrified by the idea that they will fail; Bates to reach Ellen, his supposed beloved, and Ellen to reach Rumsey, her supposed lover. Bates's failure is revealed through a conversation followed by silence. So is Ellen's:

Rumsey: Find a young man.

Ellen: There aren't any

Rumsey: Don't be stupid

Ellen: I don't like them

Rumsey: you're stupid

Ellen: I hate them. Pause.

Rumsey: find one – Silence (Pinter, 1976, pp. 212-213)

It is clear that we are provided with a mysterious triangular relationship. The three characters are deeply thinking of a past introduced through fleeting images. What is remarkably striking towards the end of the play is that Pinter's characters appear to lose their abilities to remember things. Ellen, Bates and Rumsey are only capable of remembering "half things, beginnings of things" (Pinter, 1976, p. 214). They strangely keep repeating the first sentence of their first utterances while Pinter keeps inserting the indication of silence. In fact, the more they repeat "the beginnings of things", the more Pinter increases the tension through the heavy use of silence. The whole play is therefore, as Gauthier (1996, p. 91) has aptly put it, "softly toned down, woven with repeated fragments of speech suggesting memories or a progressive drowning in total silence, in death".

The play ends with a long silence and this does not surprise the reader who is familiar with Pinter's plays. *The Caretaker* does end with a long silence and the meaning in both plays is more or less the same. In *The Caretaker*, Davies has finally lost the room, the shelter, while Aston stands silently. Davies fails to speak and stand by the door as the curtain falls. His long silence implies that he will have to leave, that he has lost protection in that room and so life. The play henceforth appears to be a reflection on the bonds where family and friends play a vital role. It is quite obvious that WWII has tremendously affected the relationship between people and Pinter's text tends to mirror such a context with silence as a major comment on the nature of such relations. Love can easily be turned into hatred when humanity is reduced to the level of animalism. The state of togetherness loses its meaning and loneliness becomes a major feature to characterize the relation between characters. The play marks the absence of love, affection, care, sincerity and to a great extent belonging. Pinter has vainly made them fight to understand the concepts of intimacy and harmony as necessary elements to establish a relationship with clear identity. The implication of the long silence in the end is henceforth an emphasis on the characters' failure to communicate, their failure to understand, and their inability to construct. Silence ironically speaks violence and frustration. The quiet moments



## Silence in Pinter's plays: *Silence* and *The Dumb Waiter*

present us with looming tragedies with an elusive nature of self-knowledge. Characters go adrift with an equivocal understanding of what stability means or what bonds demand. “*The Caretaker* becomes,” Prentice (2000, p. 86) writes, “a play about human connection, about friendship, loneliness, isolation, and distantly about love.”

*Silence*, on the other hand, is certainly about silence and its implications. In this play, language has paradoxically stopped telling us things. So do its characters. The dramatist himself has acknowledged their complexity. He says, as quoted by McTeague (1994, p. 82), “It’s clear,” he stresses, “that the implications of character go deeper than the surface. But it is not question of allegory. It’s just men. Men are much more complex than those bloody symbols. When a character cannot be defined in terms of the familiar, people say, ‘he is a symbol’. But these characters are not all unrelated to ourselves. We are all in the same boat. I am with them.” *Silence* seems to cross the boundaries and speak the unspeakable. Commenting on the function of silence, Gauthier (1996, p. 26) says “Silence reveals either annihilation or the awareness of impossibility. Suddenly speech cannot go any further. Language has reached its limits. By using Language again and again the indication “silence” shows the boundaries and underlines the unspeakable”.

### **2.2. Silence in Pinter’s *The Dumb Waiter***

*The Dumb Waiter*, like many of Pinter’s plays, provides us with a classic situation: a room which stands for warmth, and an outsider meaning those living in it. The outsider is unknown and those living inside are wondering to know this threat / menace. Gus and Ben, the characters in this play, are working together as killers. They come from time to time, as they have been ordered, to an already prepared room, wait for their victim to enter, finish their job and leave to do the same thing in another room. “The intruder,” Peacock (1997, p. 69) clarifies, “is not a human being but a familiar inanimate object, a dumb waiter that brings capricious orders from above.” Paradoxically enough, one of these Killers, Gus, will be a victim towards the end of play; Ben will have to follow the instructions in order to do away with him. The dramatist has not concentrated a lot on the victims of these Killers as he puts all his emphasis on the idea that Gus and Ben are turned to be a killer and a victim. The whole atmosphere and the conversation between them stress this idea. So are the silences Pinter has indicated from the beginning to the end of the play. Those brief moments expose Gus as a victim more than anything else for silence appears as Pinter’s effective technique to foreshadow a long silence, death, in the end. The dramatist, as Taylor (1969, p.25) mentioned, states that:

I think that we communicate only too well, in our silence, in what is unsaid, and that what takes place is continual evasion, desperate rear-guard attempts to keep ourselves to ourselves. Communication is too alarming. To enter into someone else’s life is too frightening. To disclose to others the poverty within us is too fearsome a possibility.

The play opens with silent characters, Gus and Ben, in a “silent” atmosphere. They produce some noise while moving here and there, while walking to the door, shaking foot and rattling the paper, but they never utter a word. Silence is already implied in a noise that is devoid of speech. Gus restlessly moves here and there and vainly tries to start a conversation with Ben. Ben, however, carelessly reads a paper and fixedly watches his victim. Their eyes meet twice and at that moment they stop moving, they stop producing noise. “The essential ingredients rarely change,” stresses Copeland (2001, p. 22). Pinter has clearly concentrated on how to introduce that brief moment when the reader / audience follows Gus’s very restlessness and Ben’s carelessness to reach a moment of silence so pregnant with meanings, a moment announcing a coming tragedy, Gus’s death. The contradiction opposing the notion of restlessness to that of carelessness seems to pithily reflect a contradiction opposing what is comic to what is tragic. The reader / audience may laugh at what is performed / read. However, a close reading / follow of the scene definitely leads to remind that: laugh, but consider well that laughter, have fun, but go beyond such a moment. The probably comic nature of their movement in the beginning of the play tends to unexpectedly introduce them tragically in the end. Dukore (1976, p. 21) has correctly explained the idea by stressing that:

Comic at the opening of the play, death is not comic at its close. Comic tales of victims start the play, a non-comic vision of Gus as victim concludes it. An amusing apparent error in the repetition of instructions is at the end of the play no longer amusing when the same situation is actualized. The comic deprivation of Gus’s resources turns unfunny when Gus may be deprived of his life.

Their very first conversation revolves around an incident that has nothing to do with what they are doing. The incident, an old man crawled under a lorry, appears to be ambivalent, and we might ask some questions: Is it significant? What does it stand for? Are we being introduced to an incident with philosophical implications? Or is it an incident for the dramatic necessity? Does the death of the old man suggest anything related to both characters? Does it have to do with the personal experience of the dramatist as a Jewish artist facing some hard time in London? The answer is somehow clear: the incident is what is said and what is unsaid is something else. This dichotomy is a typical characteristic of Pinter’s plays for the character’s utterances hide something fearful. The reader / audience is invited to read between the lines and make more efforts to see various meanings beneath the lines. The language implies meanings with various layers. So do the moments evoking a silence or a pause. The dramatist himself announces, as Taylor (1969, p. 26) mentioned, that:

So often, below the words spoken, is the thing known and unspoken... There are two silences. One when no word is spoken. The other is perhaps when a torrent of language is being employed. This speech is speaking of a language locked beneath it. That is its continual of reference. The speech we hear is an



Silence in Pinter's plays: *Silence* and *The Dumb Waiter*

indication of what we don't hear... When true silence falls we are still left with echo, but are nearer nakedness.

The torrent of language Pinter has employed tells us about the tragedy of an old man, the said, and implies another tragedy, the unsaid, Gus's death in the end of the play. The silence the dramatist has indicated just after the end of their dialogue strongly stresses this idea. It is a moment that brings together the said and the unsaid, silence and what lies behind silence. Having read the play we know that both Gus and Ben come into a place when it is dark, sleep all the day, wait for their victim, do their job and leave again at night. We also know that Gus is fed up with what he is doing while Ben is always ready to kill:

Ben: I've got my wood work. I've got my boats. Have you ever seen me idle?

I 'm never idle. I know how to occupy my time, to its best advantage. Then when a call comes, I'm ready.

Gus: don't you ever get a bit fed up?

Ben: fed up? What with? (Pinter, 1978, p. 7)

Again Pinter concludes their quarrel with a silence that certainly stresses Gus's weakness and Ben's power. We follow their conversation and we clearly notice from time to time a never ending quarrel followed by Pinter's indication, silence. That verbal quarrel occurs regularly in the play to introduce not only two opposite views, but also to prepare us for a moment around which the whole plot revolves. Gus is aware of what he is doing and the nature of his job, but appears to be trapped and torn apart between that external order and his internal fear. We know that he will be "glad when it's over" (Pinter, 1978, p. 153), but the silence followed his words indicates again and again the prison he is circulating in. It is a prison because he cannot refuse Ben's order, because he cannot refuse the outsider's hateful decision and because he cannot speak any more when the dramatist indicates the notion of silence. He can only breathe and breathe hardly while looking silently at his friend and Killer Ben. Gus moves from one state to another, from a state in which he defines the external atmosphere to a state in which the atmosphere defines his internal thoughts and translates his fear and finally his death. Whenever he speaks, the themes he deals with are his hatred for the person giving orders from above and the fact that he is fed up with his job, killing unknown people in unknown places at least for him. We know then, through his speech, that he is living in an atmosphere where crime pervades. But when silence pervades, we are invited to read Gus's thoughts and even his gestures. He unconsciously appears to be thinking of something strange, something that cannot be but his certain death. It is clear that Pinter has dramatically increased his use of the indication "silence" towards the end of the play. We are more and more invited to read the character's thoughts and gestures:

Ben: (savagely) That's enough! I'm warning you! *Silence*.

Ben hangs the tube. He goes to his bed and lies down. He picks up his paper and reads Silence

The box goes up

They turn quickly, their eyes meet. Ben turns to his paper

Slowly Gus goes to his bed, and sits.

The hatch falls back into place.

They turn quickly, their eyes meet...

Silence (Pinter, 1978, pp. 162-163)

Ben speaks savagely announcing his power and superiority over Gus who silently goes to his bed and sits. Ben unconsciously behaves as a killer, and Gus unconsciously reacts as a victim. The first is thinking of crime, the second of death. They meet in one point while thinking of death and when they keep silent, but they have different intentions; the first is to kill, the second is to be killed. Gus does not know and could not imagine that he is the person to be killed next. He ironically keeps asking about this person, but Ben does not answer nor does the person who gives his orders. It is only in the end when they stare at each other that Ben unexpectedly meets his victim and he has to do his job. Gus is savagely pushed in and finally realizes that he is the victim:

The door right opens sharply. Ben turns, his revolver levelled at the door.

Gus stumbles in

He is stripped of his jacket, waistcoat, tie, holster and revolver

He stops, body stooping, his arms at his sides

He raises his head and looks at BEN

*A long silence*

They stare at each other. (Pinter, 1978, p. 165. Italics added)

Gus acts, enters, and Ben reacts, prepares himself to do away with his victim. Pinter indicates a long silence as they fixedly keep looking at each other. The reader knows from the very beginning, from Pinter's first indication of silence, that Gus will be the last victim. He knows this only towards the end of the play. We become fully aware of the function of silence. In fact, it is an indication or moment behind which the unsaid, fear and death, lies. "The abyss that opens in the play's final silence between Ben and Gus," Grimes (2005, p. 60) interestingly writes, "has always been present. The lives of Ben and Gus are defined by coercion and violence, directed from the pair onto the others, and onto Ben and Gus from their organizational supervisors." In doing so, the dramatist seems to have reflected on a type of characters tragically entrapped in relationships where their situation gets even more complicated no matter how hard they try to understand each other. Their communication tends to be nonsense and their relationships appear to be fake. Together they live, but devilishly they plot to get rid of each other; they mutually discuss and share their problems, but also mutually betray to survive. It is that if the one does not win by leading and controlling the other, he / she is likely to lose and henceforth should be ready to follow and accept the dictations of the

### Silence in Pinter's plays: *Silence* and *The Dumb Waiter*

winner. Their togetherness is therefore meaningless. So is their communication. Sasani, Samira, and Ghasemi (2014) note that:

the more the characters try to untie the knot, the more the noose tightens. The more the characters discuss their problems, the less they are able to solve them. The more they share their views with one another, the more they become isolated. (p. 37)

The aberrant characters, with their aberrant attitudes and unexpected interactions, are introduced as isolated from the external world. The paradox characterizing their utterances makes them look morbid people engulfed in a circle where there is no room for escape; no room for being good. Having been entrapped in a vicious circle, of deceptions and contradictions, and of loneliness and despair, where they fail to be indifferent or positive, they can only be either bad or mad, and they are 'bad' and to a great extent mad. What happens in both plays is that the characters' traits and behaviors are openly displayed where truth, expected to be as such, is introduced as quite illusory and human relationships, supposed to be so humane, are but misleading unethical games. Meaningless endeavors prevail while efforts are just purposeless. The Pinteresque style challenges the human being in existence when displaying a dark microcosm of the threatening macrocosm world where identity fades away and reality proves to be quite grim. The audience / reader is engaged into a bitter reality of absurd elements and gloomy horizon. "The battle for positions in human relationships," Vairavan and Dhanave (2014, p. 38) have aptly remarked, "the everyday occurrence which Pinter sees as the forerunner for violence, is the source of dramatic action in *One for the Road*." It is also like that in *Silence* and *The Dumb Waiter*. The notions of superiority and domination, as opposed to the ones of extreme loss and inferiority, are the basic elements to determine the nature of relationships between people in both plays. The language speaks, but silence speaks even more; of a scenario for agony, of a gradual death scenario, of a tragic story with endless miseries, of a comedy meant to be for menace.

This is power in all its manifestations; of the language and the techniques on the one hand and of the external organization with its various details and elements on the other. It is, as Foucault (1978) has probably indicated, embodied in all life 'layers' where people expect it to come from everywhere and transcend all sorts of barriers. It is "not something that is acquired, seized or shared, but something that one holds onto or allows to slip away" (p. 94). Agony might be a result and position might be dependent on power and vice versa. Such three elements are quite intertwined in Pinter's plays in general and in *Silence* and *The Dumb Waiter* in particular. They are largely utilized by the dramatist to further explore the human being in relation to the surroundings as well as their inner thoughts. In fact, they seem to re-shape their behaviors as they are introduced behaving, and essentially proceeding, unexpectedly. Baldwin (2009) aptly notes that they:

[P]roceed tenuously, speaking minimally, amid frequent pauses, as if wary of revealing a particle of information about them that might make them vulnerable. Pinter's female characters have been branded as iconic and intriguing; dark, threatening and enigmatic, sexual and alluring; the male character sat once desire them and detest them. Pinter is concerned with the battle for power between the sexes; the personal domestic politics of male female relationships that seemed consistent with the issues of the day.

Placed on the periphery, where they have to face exclusion and dismemberment, Pinter's characters are the embodiment of people in various societies, and definitely the position of man in the world where human rights are continuously violated by well-structured totalitarian regimes; where there is no room for freedom or goodness. His engagement with understanding and criticizing the politics, in relation to power, position, agony and human existence in its broader sense, taking place in the twentieth century, and in many places around the world, has profoundly helped him shed enough light on the nature of the relationships between the oppressors and the oppressed, the internal environment, usually a safe and warm room, and the external one, usually a hostile fearful world. His individuals, no matter how hard they try to agree, are endangered in identity and existence due to the rotten political and social environment. Pinter is into examining how, as Garner (2012, pp.1-4) stressed, "social relations involving authority and power threaten the autonomy and importance of the individuals... [who] are established through the creation of individual identities that subvert generic classifications such as name, racial group or nationality." In doing so, he seems to be keen on creating one voice for all of them; that calls for reconsidering the human relationships and the family bonds. One voice to resist the hostility of the external world and the aggression of the oppressor. Denying speech for them, at least in *Silence* and *The Dumb Waiter*, seems to introduce another form of resistance; another way of refusing the brutality of the other: the power of the other, and behind this, there is the voice of the dramatist and his quest into exploring what is really happening to the human being; his long journey into attempting to set things right.

### 3. CONCLUSION

Stressing the fact that Pinter relies a lot on the indication "silence" while writing his plays is not an awkward repetition. It sometimes sounds inconvenient when the reader is interrupted and the meaning appears even more ambiguous. But a closer reading shows that Pinter brilliantly makes use of silence as a dramatic technique. The reader is invited to think deeply of its implications when it pervades throughout the play. It is only then that he can understand the unspeakable, the unsaid, which language could not express. Silence crosses the boundaries and paradoxically proves to be "talkative". Speech becomes unable to go any further. "It has", to borrow a phrase from Gauthier (1996, p. 66), "reached its limits." Pinter deals with a silence that can never be silent. He even gives it as a title to one of his plays. In his two plays *Silence* and *The Dumb Waiter*, his characters speak and express themselves. The dramatist inserts from

### Silence in Pinter's plays: *Silence* and *The Dumb Waiter*

time to time the technique “silence” which unexpectedly speaks of the unspeakable. Thinkers are to examine our relationships with the others and well as with the world surrounding us. Harold Pinter seems to be one of them to reveal a particular sort of relations between people in probably a particular context. He dramatically presents us with characters of various facets, playing different types of roles, vainly attempting to establish a real identity. Sociologically, the relations marking the development of human dealings in a society function in such a manner. Dramatically, the playwright confronts us with sick, and perhaps desperate, characters. Their failure strongly mirrors a situation where identity is quite hard to be identified and inhumanity is certainly difficult to be humanized again. Such is the context Pinter has probably wanted to depict, the external forces that vehemently govern people till they lose all sorts of self-confidence and hence self-control, the external power that makes them dead souls going adrift, the odd norms that tend to cut all social as well as family bonds. Morris (1977, p. 76) is helpful to notice that “both Beckett and Pinter use the pause, the long silence, as a device to illustrate how difficult it is to reach another person, how little we can actually say to each other.” The gap in social relations is pretty large and the silence we are confronted with is possibly the result of a prevailing fear and a horrendous uncertainty. Death of the soul could very well be an ultimate result whereas chaos and destruction in society could very well be the long term results. This is what Pinter drama in general is attempting to expose and this is what his plays *Silence* and *The Dumb Waiter* in particular are striving to highlight. Both plays are henceforth a call for human beings to save humanity from an unavoidable spiritual and ethical loss. The characters, with their numerous facets, imply, along with the fearful world they display, the responsibility of mankind to re-humanize what has already been dehumanized, to joint the fragmented selves, and to attain the noble values and principles that elevate humanity and not destroy it.

### REFERENCES

- Babae, S., Babae R., & Nesami M. (2012). Modernism and Social Condition: A Study on Harold Pinter's the Homecoming. *Studies in Literature and Language*, 4(2), 40.
- Baldwin, V. M. (2009). Look for the Truth and Tell It: Politics and Harold Pinter. PhD. Thesis, Unpublished, University of Birmingham.
- Copeland, R. (2001). A Room of His Own. *American Theatre*, 18(8), 22.
- Dukore, B. F. (1976). Where Laughter Stops: Pinter's Tragicomedy. Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press.
- Foucault, M. (1978). The History of Sexuality. Trans. Robert Hurley, Vol.1, Pantheon, New York.
- Garner, N. (2012). *The Politics of Harold Pinter. Inquiries*. 4(2), 1-4.
- Gauthier, B. (1996). Harold Pinter: The Caretaker of the Fragments of Modernity. Paris: ellipses.
- Grimes, C. (2005). Harold Pinter's Politics: A Silence beyond Echo. Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press.

- Hollis, J. R. (1970). *Harold Pinter: The Poetics of Silence*. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press.
- Hornby, R. (2015). Theatre of the Absurd. *The Hudson Review*, 67(4), 640.
- McTeague, J. H. (1994). *Playwrights and Acting: Acting Methodologies for Brecht, Ionesco, Pinter, and Shepard*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.
- Morris, M. B. (1977). *An Excursion into Creative Sociology*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Peacock, D. K. (1997). *Harold Pinter and the New British Theatre*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.
- Pinter, H. (1976). *Harold Pinter, Plays: One*. London: Eyre Methuen.
- Pinter, H. (1978). *Plays Three*. London: Eyre Methuen.
- Prentice, P. (2000). *The Pinter Ethic: The Erotic Aesthetic*. New York: Garland.
- Sasani, Samira, & Ghasemi P. (2014). Entrapment in Relationships in August Strindberg's the Father and Harold Pinter's the Collection. *K@ta*. (16) 1, 37.
- Taylor, J. R. (1969). *Harold Pinter*. London: Longmans, Green.
- Vairavan, C., & Dhanavel, S. P. (2014). Power, Position and Agony in Harold Pinter's One for the Road. *IUP Journal of English Studies*. 9(3), 37.
- Yuan, Y. (2013). Power from Pinteresque Discourse in the Birthday Party. *Studies in Literature and Language*. 7(2), 2013, 72.