

The Treatment of Communication in a few selected major plays of Harold Pinter

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Abstract

The Treatment of Communication in place of Harold Pinter is an center of attraction. It would seem that Pinter's characters suffer from unanswerable crisis of existence leading to a kind of "nervous breakdown" as Goldberg reports us of Stanley towards the end of *The Birthday Party*. This mental failure reinforces their problem of communication, their speechlessness, the pauses and gaps, repetition, silence. No wonder, the characters wait for adequate words/phrases to express their intense moments and for want of availability of proper equivalents they sometimes merely repeat the same words/expressions to show both the abnormality of their existence and their inability to fully communicate themselves. Pinter's communicative stance is a radical departure from the Naturalistic conventions complying singularly of meaning. Pinter is too conscious of the complexity of existence of characters, their desire to act and react and what they really express to rely on verbal devices.

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1. Treatment of Communication

Indian Drama is a method of communication. This genre has delighted both the king and the Clown, the lay and the Wise, perhaps, more than any other genre through its greater variety, spectacle and above all, by its very essential quality or involving the audience consciously or unconsciously.

A common flaw in some of the critical approaches, especially since the 19th

Century is that these critics tend to treat drama primarily as a written literature or verbal text. Concentration on this verbal part of the drama to the exclusion of many other elements comprising a composite dramatic speech/language does often offer an explanation which seems to be at variance with what a play, in fact, communicates.

Pinter's communicative stance is a radical departure from the Naturalistic conventions complying singularly of meaning. Pinter is too conscious of the complexity of existence of characters, their desire to act and react and what they really express to rely on verbal devices.

Pinter is an absurd dramatist, par excellence. His dramas also seek to communicate his felt experience of the futility of existence marked by insecurity, callousness, pain, dilemma etc. Distrustful of the warmth of human life and relations as he was, he acutely felt the problem of communication for fear of reality that such communication may reveal. Pinter himself declares

that in his plays, "there is a continual cross-talk, a continual talking about other things, rather than what is at the root of their relationships."

When human life is so complex and harsh, and man's action is grotesque almost throughout from cradle to grave, the absurd dramatists show least trust in the set-patterns of communication and this accounts for their ceaseless striving for coming to terms with the problem of communication. Pinter very aptly says:

I think that we communicate too well in our silence, in what is unsaid, and that what takes place is a continual evasion, desperate rearguard attempt to keep ourselves to ourselves.

Communication is too alarming. Pinter's plays, (like Beckett's plays,) deal with the inscrutable mysteries of life. For such characters confronted with the basic paradox of life marked by menace, desires etc., the language of symbols often helps them to articulate their otherwise inarticulate motives/feelings. This throws light on Pinter's reliance on the nonverbal, symbolic language to communicate something beyond realism.

Pinter says, "....what goes on in my play is realistic, what I am doing is not realism."

It would seem that Pinter's characters suffer from unanswerable crisis of existence leading to a kind of "nervous breakdown" as Goldberg reports us of Stanley towards the end of *The Birthday Party*. This mental failure reinforces their problem of communication, their speechlessness, the pauses and gaps, repetition, silence. No wonder, the characters wait for adequate words/phrases to express their intense moments and for want of availability of proper equivalents they sometimes merely repeat the same words/expressions to show both the abnormality of their existence and their inability to fully communicate themselves.

In Pinter's dialogue we can always watch the desperate struggle of his characters to find the correct expression. We are thus enabled to see them in the dramatic act of struggling for communication, sometimes succeeding but often failing. And when they have got hold of a formulation, they hold on to it; they savour it, and they repeat it to enjoy their achievement, like Gus in *The Dumb Waiter* when he recalls the time he and his companion had killed a girl:

It was a mess though, wasn't it? What a mess!

Honest, I can't remember a mess like that one.

They don't seem to hold together like men, women.

A looser texture, like. Didn't she spread, eh?

She didn't half spread.

If language is the communication of one's thoughts and feelings, Pinter's characters are found suffering from personal inadequacy expressing itself in an inadequacy in coping with and using language. This compels characters to take recourse to 'silences' and 'pauses'. That's why, silences play such an essential part in Pinter's dialogues. There is a definite purpose behind the silences and pauses in Pinter's plays. When Pinter indicates a "pause", he wants us to understand that intense thought-processes are continuing and that unspoken tensions are mounting; and when he indicates a "silence", it is a sign of the end of a movement and the beginning of another, as between the movements of a symphony. Also, the silence which is a refusal to communicate is one of the dominant images in Pinter plays: from Bert's non-responsiveness to Rose in his first play *The Room* to Bert's inability or unwillingness to hear, and to respond to, what Duff tells her

in the play *Landscape*? At times, silence shows the incapacity to speak; it is the speechlessness of total collapse or of annihilation. This can be seen in the inarticulate gurgling sounds which come from Stanley's throat towards the end of the play,

Ug-gug.....uh.....gug..... caahhh

cag.....caahh.....caahh.

The *Caretaker* is Harold Pinter's breakthrough in the realm of modern dramas. It seems that Pinter's genius for technical perfection such as minimal words, pause, silence, extreme realism etc. achieves its excellence in the play. The play presents a human predicament through three male characters Mick, Aston and Davies. Mick and Aston are brothers, the younger in his late twenties, the older-Aston in his early thirties. Davies is an old tramp.

It would seem that the dislocation of existence leads to the dislocation in the responses and behaviour of Pinter's characters. The dislocation is due to their deep sense of insecurity, uncertainty and grotesqueness of life. Unable to find therefore, adequate words/phrases, the characters take to silence, pause and gaps to express themselves in the given situation. Pinter communicates towards the end of "*The Caretaker*" the expulsion of the already homeless Davies by Aston & Mick through a highly suggestive non verbal situation. The situation is highly intense. Davies seems to be caught in Mick's dark designs but his aggression towards his benefactor, Aston remains unjustifiable and unforgivable. This profoundly tragic moment is depicted by Pinter through the aptest use of pauses, silence present in modern drama. Davies's "sputtering helplessness", his screams are open-ended and marked by indeterminacy. Through "silence" Pinter depicts the disturbing truth that man's suffering is endless and his existence is a hopeless waiting amidst the harsh and hostile world around him,

DAVIES: But..... but..... Look..... listen..... listen here.....I
mean.....

ASTON turns back to the window.

What am I going to do?

Pause.

What shall I do?

Pause.

Where am I going to go?

So the Treatment of Communication in a few plays of Harold Pinter' can prove an absorbing critical pursuit as it is a common theme in absurd dramatists signifying unbridgeable gap between man and man and therefore their linguistic inadequacy to articulate perceived reality. Pinter's characters escape from communication. They continue to have a non-communicative posture against all provocation, till they collapse under pressure.

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