

## **Abstract**

Undoubtedly, drama is one of the most impressive genres from long time ago. In the ancient Greece, before Christ, drama has been the essential entertainment of the Greeks. From that time up to now, drama has basically changed, from classic ones to the modern dramas like the Absurd Theatre, which is a new genre. Harold Pinter (1930-2008) is one of the dramatists of this genre who won the Noble Prize in 2005. “Pause and Silence” is a technique that he uses in his dramas. The subject that is present in most of his works is the attempt of one of the characters for attaining power.

In this study, the relation between three plays by Pinter and thinking of Michel Foucault, the contemporary philosopher, especially his opinions regarding power relations, has been investigated. After studying Foucault’s ideas and comparing them with Pinter’s dramas, it can be concluded that these two authors have other similar subjects in their minds, like studies about those who have mental problems.

Preface involves a brief history of the absurd Theatre. In chapter I, the research presents brief biographies of these two persons and their ideas regarding power and politics. Also, the political atmosphere of their time has been discussed. In chapter II, each of three plays (*The Birthday Party* (1957), *The Caretaker* (1960) and *The Dumb Waiter* (1957)) are compared to Foucault’s ideas about power and other related terms to power like Panopticon. And chapter III is allocated to conclusion.

Key words: Power, Harold Pinter, Michel Foucault, The Absurd Theatre, *The Birthday Party*, *The Caretaker*, *The Dumb Waiter*.

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# **PREFACE**

## **PREFACE**

Theatre of the Absurd refers to particular plays written after the Second World War. It deals with existential aspects of human lives. The term refers to a particular type of play which first became popular during the 1950s and 1960s among a number of European and American dramatists and which presented on stage the philosophy articulated by French philosopher Albert Camus in his 1942 essay, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, in which he defines the human condition as basically meaningless. Camus argued that humanity had to resign itself to recognizing that a fully satisfying rational explanation of the universe was beyond its reach; in that sense, the world must ultimately be seen as absurd. For Camus ‘the feeling of the absurdity of the world’ springs from these sources: the confrontation between man’s conscience, his consciousness, his thirst for rationality and the inert, irrational, unknowable world. Convinced of the ultimate absurdity of life, man will

strive towards a moral and ethical imperative for greater lucidity and for living life to the full, since life is, after all, the only human tangible reality.

*Oxford Companion to English Literature* (2000) in the entry of the theatre of the absurd mentions:

“To define the world as absurd is to recognize its fundamentally mysterious and decipherable nature, and this recognition is frequently associated with feelings of loss, purposelessness, and bewilderment. To such feelings, the Theatre of the Absurd gives ample expression, often leaving the observer baffled in the face of disjointed, meaningless, or repetitious dialogue, incomprehensible behaviour, and plots which deny all notion of logical or ‘realistic’ development” (*Oxford Companion to English Literature* 3).

The theatre of the absurd also presents such conditions. In contrast to the classical dramas of old times which obeyed firm rules and had organized structures, absurd dramas put aside all these rules (like unities of time, place and action; unity of tone; verisimilitude and decorum).

David Mikics defines an absurd situation as follows: “An absurd situation is one that is discordant, incongruous, and illogical. The sense that human existence remains inherently absurd, supremely challenging in its apparent meaninglessness, is significant to certain twentieth-century writers and philosophers: Franz Kafka, Albert Camus, Jean-Paul Sartre” (*A New Handbook of Literary Terms* 1).

M.A.R. Habib in his book *A History of Literary Criticism and Theory* describes the atmosphere of the world that led to the formation of “The Theatre of the Absurd”:

The conclusion of World War II formalized the opposition between the Western powers and the Soviet bloc of nations. While some literature participated in the ideological implications of this conflict, much writing retreated into a longer-term contextualization of the confrontation as futile and resting on debased values. This retreat from an “objective” reality reached a climax in philosophies such as phenomenology, which parenthesized the objective world, viewing it as a function of perception, and existentialism, which called into question all forms of authority and belief, as well as literary developments such as the Theater of the Absurd, whose proponents such as Samuel Beckett and Eugene Ionesco dramatized the existential absurdity, anguish, and ultimate isolation of human existence (Habib 565).

The Absurd playwrights attempt to convey their sense of bewilderment, anxiety, and wonder in an inexplicable universe. Harold Pinter (1960- 2008) is one of these playwrights who has been grouped under the title of Absurdist. It was the Hungarian-born British writer Martin Esslin who coined the phrase “Theatre of the Absurd” in his book of the same title, published in 1961. Samuel Beckett (1906–1989), author of *Waiting for Godot*, was the first to gain international fame as an absurdist playwright. He was Irish and he moved to Paris in the 1920s. His plays gained popularity first in France and then elsewhere. Beckett’s plays are

characteristic of the post-war 1950s, a time when people still felt the threat of war and their own powerlessness to understand or control the world they lived in.

Pinter is a minor absurdist among dramatists like Samuel Beckett (1906-1989), Eugene Ionesco (1912-1994) and Jean Genet (1910-1986). This study is done because there is a “sense of reality” in Pinter’s dramas which cannot be found in other dramatists of absurd genre and also silence as a characteristic of Pinter’s works plays an important role in transferring the thinking that flows in the minds of the characters. George E. Wellworth believes that

Pinter has often been praised for his realism, particularly for the realism of his speech patterns. Human beings are ultimately inscrutable in depth, even to themselves (on the surface, of course, they are perfectly clear: in life we deal in facades), but the theatre of realism gives us the comforting, if illusory assurance that human beings are explicable in depth. The spectator at a realistic play can understand the characters, what they do and what happens to them, because they are planned by the playwright. Outside the theatre human beings are incomplete, mysterious even to themselves, and anything but logical. Most people feel they need relief from that—hence theatre. Pinter gives his audience neither the illusion of control over life nor relief from its inscrutability. Worse: he assures them that there is neither a hidden meaning nor any superior force that might be hiding a putative meaning. Philosophically, he is, of course, following Beckett here with the sole difference that the surface reality that Beckett eschews makes Pinter’s plays more ambiguous and has resulted in the strange and largely lamentable outpouring of interpretation of his works on the part of academic critics. (Wellworth 98-99)

In contrast to the most of the dramas in the absurd genre which display an unreal and surreal world, in Pinter's dramas every day situations are shown realistically. For example in *Rhinoceros* (1959) by Eugene Ionesco, the readers confront an unreal atmosphere in which inhabitants of a small provincial town turn into rhinoceroses in large or small groups. The protagonist remains alone at the end of the play, the last soul in the town to resist the epidemic. But such surrealist situations are rare in Pinter's works. In most of the cases, Pinter's ordinary characters are presented in every day situations.

There are some characteristics which are common among absurd dramas. Some of them are mentioned here:

- \_ Situations and characters' emotional states may be represented through poetic metaphor (dreamlike, fantastical or nightmarish images).
- \_ Set and costumes may not reflect an outward reality.
- \_ Dialogue is often nonsensical, clichéd or gibberish.
- \_ Communication is fractured.
- \_ There is usually an emphasis on "theatricality" as opposed to realism.
- \_ Absurdist playwrights often use dark comedy for satiric effect.
- \_ Characters exist in a bubble without the possibility of communication.
- \_ Characters may be one-dimensional, with no clear motivation or purpose.
- \_ Characters may be symbolic of universal situations.
- \_ Behaviour and situations may not follow the rules of logic.



- \_ Structure may be circular, without a precise resolution.
- \_ Action may be minimal.
- \_ Setting of the play may be in one locale.
- \_ Often characters perceive a threat from the “outside”.

We can not find all of these characteristics in Pinter’s dramas, but most of them exist in his plays.

Also, Pinter has created a new style in writing plays known as ‘the comedy of Menace’. Francesca Coppa in *Comedy and Politics in Pinter’s Early Plays* mentions the source of this menace:

... menace depends on ignorance; the terror of it stems from the vagueness of that threat. We do not know what is happening or why, and the lack of information leads us to fear the worst: that the threat is somehow beyond articulation-literally unspeakable. ( ed. Raby 51)

This lack of certainty is a common element in Pinter’s dramas. For example, in *The Birthday Party*, we don’t know what the relationship between Goldberg and Stanley is and why they try to irritate him by their irrelevant questions. Or in *The Caretaker* there is no clear reason for accepting Davies as a caretaker and then rejecting to give this job to him by Mick. All of these lack of accurate information leads to a sense which critics has named ‘menace’.

The major themes in Pinter’s plays are interpersonal power struggles, failed attempts at communication, psychological cruelty, antagonistic relationships, and the nature of memory. The coining of terms and phrases such as *Pinteresque*, *the Pinter pause* and *the Pinter moment* indicate his lasting impact of

his innovative theatrical style. As early as 1961 Pinter explained that his central image is a room which for him serves as a microcosm of the world. In the room people feel safe. Outside are only alien forces; inside there is warmth and light. The conflict in his plays occurs when one of the outside forces penetrates into the room and disrupts the security of its occupants. This is the major atmosphere which is dominant in Pinter's dramas. *The Oxford Companion of English Literature* defines Pinteresque as 'Pinter's gift for portraying, by means of dialogue which realistically produces the nuances of colloquial speech, the difficulties of communication and the many layers of meaning in language, pause, and silence, have created a style labeled by the popular imagination as 'Pinteresque''(793). Drew Milne in an essay in *The Companion to Harold Pinter* writes: 'the tension between rhetoric and grammar enables a figurative diversity of conversation which has come to seem recognizably 'Pintersque', a comically pregnant moment of conversation which dwells in a menacingly tragic absence of social recognition' (Milne 233). The Pinter moment is that unique moment that has specific features that only Pinter can create them. The moments in which no one says a word, but everything can be understood in the silence of the moment. Those moments that even though the characters speak no words, we can feel the flow of words behind that mysterious silence.

Pinter is under the influence of eminent authors like Kafka, Hemingway, T.S. Eliot and Samuel Beckett. Martin Esslin in his book *Pinter, A Study of his Plays* writes:

He (Pinter) acknowledges the influence of a number of writers. 'I read Hemingway, Dostoevski, Joyce, and Henry Miller at a very early age, and Kafka. I'd read Beckett's novels too, but I'd never heard of Ionesco until I'd written the first few plays.' Of these he says Kafka and Becket had made the greatest impression on him (Esslin 36).

Also, Strindberg's influence in treating power struggle is evident in Pinter's works.

The subject of this study is finding how ideas of Michel Foucault about different ways of applying power are related to three plays by Pinter. Both of them write about common themes. As they experienced and witnessed the world events after the Second World War, the anxiety and horror of those days haunt in their writings, but in different shapes. In Pinter's works this anxiety exists in the form of drama, but in Foucault's works we confront the philosophical and historical aspect of human conditions.

*Michel Foucault* (1926-1984), was a French philosopher, sociologist and historian. Foucault is best known for his critical studies of social institutions, most notably psychiatry, medicine, the human sciences, and the prison system, as well as for his work on the history of human sexuality. His work on power and the relationships among power, knowledge, and discourse has been widely discussed.

Foucault's analysis of power is founded on his concept "technologies of power". Discipline is a complex bundle of power technologies developed during the 18th and 19th centuries as Foucault demonstrated in *Discipline and Punish* (1975). For Foucault power is exercised with intention. Instead of analyzing the

difficult problem of who has which intentions, he focused on what is intersubjectively accepted knowledge about how to exercise power.

For Foucault, power is actions upon other's actions in order to interfere with them. Foucault does not recur to violence, but says that power presupposes freedom in the sense that power is not enforcement, but ways of making people by themselves behave in other ways than they else would have done.

### **Review of Literature**

There are articles about Pinter's plays which their writers consider Pinter's works as single plays and discuss about them. But in one of them, Sarah Lyall remarks her attitudes about the concept of power struggle in Pinter's plays. Sarah Lyall in her article "Pinter Wins Noble for Dramas of Ominous Power Struggles" (2005) writes: "Mr. Pinter is known for plays like *The Caretaker*, about the painful power struggles between two brothers and the tramp who comes to stay with them." She mentions that the Swedish Academy gave him the Noble Prize of literature because he "restored theater to its basic elements: as enclosed space and unpredictable dialogue, where people are at the mercy of each other and pretence crumbles". She believes that "so precise and paved down is his prose, so artful his use of pauses and omissions to invoke discomfort, foreboding and miscommunication that he has his own adjective, Pinteresque, signifying a peculiar kind of atmospheric unease. In *The Birthday Party*, *No Man's Land*, *The Homecoming* and other plays, Mr. Pinter

dispenses with the easy comforts of fluent speech and has his characters speak in non sequiturs and sentence fragments, interrupt one another, fail to listen, fail to understand. He uses language to convey miscommunication and lack of understanding rather than shared comprehension.”

Jay Parini in *Pinter's Plays, Pinter's Politics* (2005) refers to Roger Kimball's statements about Pinter plays. Kimball writes that “the essence of Pinter's drama is adolescent Samuel Beckett- it's warmed-over and secondhand.” But Parini rejects Kimball's remarks. Parini explains that “Kimball's description of Pinter's plays as warmed-over Beckett, however, is woefully misconceived. The reaction to the award from Pinter's peers- Michael Frayan, David Hare, Tom Stoppard, and others- has been uniformly positive.” Parini ends his article by confirming this idea that “the Noble Prize in literature was given to the right man for the right reasons. Few writers in our time have demonstrated such a passionate concern for victims of oppression, whether in the family's living room or in the torturer's faraway bunker, as Harold Pinter.”

## **Methodology**

This study is based on a library research, and the concept of power according to Foucault, which mainly is discussed in his *Discipline and Punishment*, will be considered in three plays by Harold Pinter.

This study compares three plays by Pinter with main concepts which exist in Foucault's theories about power. Although initially the first aim was to find

relations between concept of power and these three plays, while studying them, other common fields were discovered between the works of the authors.

### **The significance of the study**

Pinter wrote his plays when the world was in turmoil of the World War II. This War and the fact that he was a Jew affected his mind and thought greatly. As Martin Esslin explains, 'Pinter believes that his father's family might have come to England from Hungary; the name Pinter does occur among Hungarian Jews' (Esslin 11). The hard life that Pinter had during this time and the horror that he experienced led to writing absurd plays. When in 1944 he returns to London he writes "On the day I got back to London, in 1944, I saw the first flying bomb. I was in the street and I saw it come over... There were times when I would open our back door and find our garden in flames. Our house never burned, but we had to evacuate several times." (Esslin 12)

As M.H. Abrams writes "After the 1940s, however, there was a widespread tendency, especially prominent in the existential philosophy of men of letter such as Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus, to view a human being as an isolated existent who is cast into an alien universe, to conceive the universe as possessing no inherent truth, value, or meaning." (A Glossary of Literary Terms 1)

These fears occupy Pinter's mind and are reflected in his first plays. The fear of entering a stranger into a room exists in the most of his earlier

plays. A stranger threatens the well-being and safety of those who are inside the room. The sense of fear and the efforts of one or two of the characters to impose their will and power on the other characters in relation to Foucault's notion of power will be studied.

# **Chapter I**

## **Introduction**



## **Chapter I**

### **Harold Pinter and Michel Foucault**

The purpose in this part is not to put forward Michel Foucault's biography. This section has been written because there are crucial events in his life which illuminate his political reactions. There is an interesting relationship between his ideas and the political and intellectual climate of his time. Especially the events of 1968 all across the world had a crucial influence on Foucault's thought. His works and his political activities show that why he worked on the concept of power and what he thought about different regimes.

Although it is wrong to establish a one to one relation between biographical details and works of an author, there are instances that using certain biographical details can help to make Foucault's works more accessible. Sara Mills in her book *Michel Foucault* writes that we can not impose a simple cause-and-effect relationship on events in Foucault's life and their reflections in his texts. But a

series of conflicts in political and intellectual scenes in France during his life had major influences on his works. So here is an outline of Foucault's life.

He was born Paul-Michel Foucault on 15 October, 1926 in Poitiers, France. His father, Paul Foucault, was an eminent surgeon and hoped his son would join him in the profession. But he began his academic training by studying philosophy and after his first degree in philosophy; he trained for a higher degree in psychology and a diploma in pathological psychology. He was employed as a university lecturer in philosophy and in psychology and also a teacher of French literature and language when he worked overseas. He worked at universities and cultural centers in Sweden (1954); Poland (1958); and in Germany (1959). In the same year he became the head of philosophy at Clermont-Ferrand University, France. He completed his doctorate (PhD) on madness and reason and published it as *Madness and Civilisation* in 1961. In the following year, he published a book on the work of the poet Raymond Russel, and in 1963 he published *The Birth of Clinic*.

In 1966, he moved to Tunisia to teach, returning to France to become the head of philosophy at Vincennes University. In 1969 he published *The Archaeology of Knowledge* and in 1970 he became chair of the History of Thought at the College de France. In 1975 he published *Discipline and Punish* and in 1976 he began the publication of the three-volume History of Sexuality; he died on 25 June 1984. The 1960s and 1970s were full of determining events at his time.

Therefore it is necessary to describe the events which took place at these decades to set Foucault's thought and his political activities in context.

In 1968 significant events took place around the world. A series of student demonstrations took place in Paris. 'Hippie' fashion became prominent. One characteristic of this youth movement was a rejection of western materialism. The Marxist historian, Chris Harman describes the events that happened in 1968 as follow:

1968 was a year in which revolt shook at least three major governments and produced a wave of hope among young people living under many others. It was the year the peasant guerrillas of one of the world's smaller nations stood up to the mightiest power in human history. It was the year the black ghettos of the United States rose in revolt to protest at the murder of the leader of non-violence, Martin Luther King. It was the year the city of Berlin suddenly became the international focus for a student movement that challenged the power blocs which divided it. It was the year teargas and billy clubs were used to make sure the US Democratic Party convention would select a presidential candidate who had been rejected by voters in every primary. It was the year Russian tanks rolled into Prague to displace a 'Communist' government that had made concessions to popular pressure. It was the year that the Mexican government massacred more than 100 demonstrators in order to ensure that the Olympic Games would take place under 'peaceful' conditions. It was the year that protests against discrimination in Derry and Belfast lit the fuse on the sectarian powder keg of Northern Ireland. It was, above all, the year that the biggest general strike ever paralyzed France and caused its government to panic. (Mills 14)

In 1960s, there was an anti-authoritarian atmosphere in political context of the time. Many of the intellectuals in France and also in other countries opposed the status quo and the political regimes of their countries. Gradually, these oppositions gained currency among a wider group of people. Most of these protests were against American neo-imperial policy abroad and racism in Europe and America. These protests entered into more mundane events of everyday life, such as who lectures to whom in universities and who does the washing up at home. In the other word, the personal matters become the political ones. Foucault considers this shift toward a widening of the definition of politics as a significant matter and he states in 1969 in an interview:

‘The boundary of politics has changed, and subjects like psychiatry, confinement and the medicalisation of a population have become political problems.’ (Foucault qtd. in Mills 14)

Previously, it was explained briefly in this study about hippies and their open rejection of bourgeois values and materialism. All of these protests and groups like hippies or the beatniks formed a sub-culture or counter-culture. There were also many anti-war protests. The most important one was against the American presence in Vietnam. It is in this context that Foucault’s ideas developed. These events and the political protests forced intellectuals to consider power and its relations as a determining factor in their works.

One of the questions which critics try to find an answer for it is about Foucault’s political position. Foucault’s political position is a contradictory