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## Estrangement, Violence , and Language of Deceit In Harold Pinter's *The Birthday Party*

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### Abstract

Literary reviewers have given Pinter's *The Birthday Party* much attention in the past ten years. This is primarily due to the dramatist's challenge of the conventional method of character portrayal. However, the extent of the players' rhetorical style in the play as tools for deceit, manipulation and confusion has not received much attention from critics. Thus, the current research investigates the play's violent and perplexing use of language by multiple characters in the play. Moreover, the research highlights the connection between characters' lack of communication in a domestic space and the growing sense of estrangement by the main protagonist. Methodologically, the research focuses on close reading method, particularly the 'Formalist Approach'. In so doing, the research specifically examines the rhetorical strategies used by the two primary antagonists in the play to linguistically subjugate and control the main protagonist. The research is significant, for it offers new reading of the text , particularly, the way language is used as a method of deception and manipulation by various characters.

**Keywords:** : Conflict, Control, Deceit, Estrangement, Identity

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## الاغتراب، العنف، واستخدام لغة الخداع في مسرحية ' حفلة عيد ميلاد' هارولد بينتر

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### المستخلص

حظيت مسرحية "حفلة عيد الميلاد" باهتمام كبير بين نقاد الأدب على مدار العقد الماضي. ويرجع ذلك في الغالب إلى حقيقة أن بينتر يتخلى عن التصوير التقليدي للشخصيات. لكن العديد من النقاد لم يهتموا كثيرًا بأهمية الأسلوب اللغوي للشخصيات، لا سيما مدى استخدام الخطاب اللغوي للشخصيات كوسيلة للارتباك والسيطرة والتلاعب الذهني. وكما يوضح هذا البحث، فإن مسرحية بينتر تكشف الوظائف المعقدة والمربكة للغة بما يتجاوز وظيفتها الطبيعية كوسيلة للتواصل الاجتماعي وللقيام بذلك، يحلل البحث بإيجاز الأسلوب البلاغي لاثنتين من الخصمين الرئيسيين في حفلة عيد الميلاد أثناء محاولتهما السيطرة على بطل الرواية الرئيسي والتلاعب به لغويًا. وتكشف البحث أيضًا، عن العلاقة بين عدم التواصل اللغوي بين الشخصيات في الفضاء المنزلي وتطور الشعور بالضياع والاغتراب لدى بطل الرواية الرئيسي .

**الكلمات الدالة :** صراع ، تضليل، الإغتراب، السيطرة، الذات

### Literature Review:

Recent criticism paid considerable attention to Pinter's artistic use of language in his plays. For instance, Jeanette R. Malkin in *Verbal Violence in Contemporary Drama* (1992) refers to "the role which language itself plays" in Pinter's plays, particularly, "the extensive use of verbal violence." ( Malkin , 1992. p.53) Also J. R. Hollis in , *Harold Pinter : The Poetics of Silence* (1970 ) explains that the play indicates the " failure of language", and the "poverty of man's communication" ( Qtd: Silverstein, 1993.p.13). Critic Adrian Brain on his part reflects on the way character's feelings are conveyed through various linguistic mediums. " Underneath the web of cliches, repetitions, interjections, anecdotes, we can understand what the characters are feeling far more profoundly than if they had tried to put it into words themselves" (qtd: ( Qtd: Silverstein, 1993.p.13). Also, Martin Eslin in *The Theatre of the Absurd* ( 1961) reflects on the contradiction between spoken words and their meanings in Harold Pinter's plays. To Eslin, Pinter's language enacts " the complete

contradiction between the words that are spoken and the emotional and psychological action which underlines them ... the language has almost totally lost its rhetorical, its informative element” (Silverstein, 1993.p.13).

Contemporary criticism pays considerable attention to the aesthetic aspect of Pinter’s linguistic style such as the fact how language “constitutes a structure of re- representation”. (Silverstein, 1993.p.14). In other words, language is no longer a medium of communication but it transgresses “the law of language” (Silverstein, 1993.p.14). Austin E. Quigley ‘s *The Pinter problem*’ ( 2015) focuses on the ‘discursive function’ of language in Pinter’s plays. As he explains, language becomes a means through which characters exert power and authority over each other. Accordingly, language’s “ interrelation function”, in plays like *The Birthday Party* “ assumes the presence of a speaking ‘Subject’ and as definite ‘Other’.( Silverstein, 1993.p.20.) A similar assumption is made by Marc Silverstein in his book *Harold Pinter and the Language of Cultural Power*(1993). Here, he outlines the “ complex questions about the relation of language to subjectivity ; about the relation of the subject to the Other; about whether the subject can become an agent or must remain subject(ed) to the language that voices cultural power”(Silverstein, 1993.p.25). Most critics, however, haven’t paid considerable attention to the way language in Pinter’s plays is used as a means of deception and manipulation. Consequently, the current research delves into analysing speeches and dialogues to show how language is used as a means of deception and manipulation. In Pinter’s *The Birthday Party*, for instance, language is not only a method of communication rather than a medium of power and authority. In the play, the villain’s verbal violence aims at deluding and deceiving the main protagonist. That process of verbal torture and intimidation not only brings the protagonist into total mental break down but it also leads to the loss of his identity. Through close reading, the research explains the linguistic techniques used by the antagonists to manipulate and deceive the protagonist, and ultimately breaking him both physically and mentally. The research is significant for it adds another layer to the current studies related to Harold Pinter’s unique use of language.

**Methodology:**

The research employs close reading approach in its critical analysis. The theoretical framework of such approach is the ‘Formalist Approach’, which implies that “the meaning of a literary work resides within its structure, language, and form.” (Gawali et al. 2024, p.21). Through textual analysis of the passages, structures and meaning, the research demonstrate the extent language is used by various characters as a means of deception and manipulation. In so doing, the research specifically examines the rhetorical strategies used by the two primary antagonists in the play to linguistically subjugate and control the main protagonist. Furthermore, the research’s close reading provides a new reading of the text , particularly, the way language is used beyond its communicative function.

**Discussion:**

Harold Pinter's plays have received conflicted responses because critics so often labeled the dramatist's plays according to various dramatic conventions such as realist, absurdist or experimental. Nonetheless, any critical evaluation of the playwright's dramas lacks validity without taking into consideration the context within which these plays were written and performed. From socio-cultural aspects, the dramatist lived in a period of time marked by many significant changes. Historically, "The 1950s was a curious and idiosyncratic decade". (Lacey, 1995. P.1). Such a period witnessed economic prosperity as well as "socio-political stability across England". Art and literature, particularly modern drama, had their share of prosperity. Nonetheless, "viewed in terms of the plays alone, the moment of the fifties and the early sixties is a difficult moment to map with any confidence: there is no manifesto, no obvious 'schools' of writing". (Lacey, 1995. P.2). Some critics praised that period as they called it the "New Elizabethan Age" of drama, even though it "was driven with paradox and contradiction". (Lacey, 1995, P.9). That period also has been characterized by multifaceted dramatic conventions. Harold Pinter and many other influential modern dramatists like John Osborne and Samuel Becket were among those innovative dramatists who radically changed the English drama. Each dramatist, however, followed quite different dramatic convention, and each had different approach to deal with contemporary social issues.

John Osbourn's realist play *Look Back In Anger* (1956) changed the dramatic convention in England during the 1950s. Differently, Samuel Becket's absurdist play *Waiting for Godot* undoubtedly laid the foundation for the 'Theatre of Absurd' which was radically different from previous dramatic genres. Some critics nonetheless found common similarities between Pinter's theatre and Becket's absurdist theatre though both dramatists had different dramatic styles. Notably, there is something unique about Pinter's theatre which is quite distinguishable from his contemporaries. This has to do with Pinter's realist portrayal of his characters. As stated by Raby (2009) Pinter's name so often "associated with the social realism of *Young Men*, and with the absurdism of Beckett and Ionesco" (P.45 ). Some other critics even compared Pinter's dark realism to Anton Chekov's grim projection of reality. As Raby (2009) asserted there are several common factors in both dramatists, and they both used dark humor and satire in their drama to highlight the grim reality of less privileged individuals in society rather than simply instigating sympathy.

each (dramatist) uses comedy to prevent the audience from slipping into a consolatory emotional response of pathos and sentiment. Realism is thereby compromised by theatricality of speech, situation and character. In Chekhov some characters hide their pain behind a comic mask, whereas Pinter uses laughter to induce a retroactive guilt as audience insecurity parallels that of his characters. ( Raby, 2009, p.50).

Pinter's plays, however, are too complex to be categorized within the realist dramatic convention. Notably, critics made close association between Pinter's plays and the other

two dramatic genres of the realist and absurd drama. Tenets of absurdism in Pinter's plays "prompted comparison with the absurdists" like Samuel Becket and Eugene Ionesco. 'The Theatre of Absurd', as defined by Ionesco, is a type of drama which "is devoid of purpose ...cut off from his religious, metaphorical, and transcendental roots, man is lost; all his actions become senseless, absurd, useless". ( qtd in , Eliopulos, 2019, P.40). Elements of absurd and realist are artistically intermixed in Pinter's drama, particularly in *The Caretaker* and *The Birthday Party*. As Raby states, Pinter's drama "deconstructs social realism by divorcing the identification of character and environment, defamiliarizing the pedestrian and destabilizing the audience with ultimately self-recriminating laughter". (Raby, 2009, p.46). As the current research explains, Harold Pinter employs both realistic and absurdist elements for artistic purposes. In *The Birthday Party*, particularly, Pinter uses both realist and absurdist features to highlight the destructive function of language with regard to alienating and cutting off certain individuals like Stanely from society and ultimately stripping them of their identity. Here, the main focus will be on showing the destructive mean, particularly the confusing rhetoric, the two antagonists would employ to manipulate the protagonist linguistically, and eventually stripping him of his identity.

#### **Chaos and Estrangement in Troubled Domestic Space:**

The play's first scene gives an impression of a realist play as there is a middle- aged couple passing their time chatting about simple and ordinary subjects. Soon the realistic dramatic projection shifts into quite different situation due to the couple's strange, somehow surrealist, use of language. The more the play proceeds, the further it moves from realism into absurdism. Raby (2009) referred to Pinter's speech on certain occasion " what goes on in my plays is realistic, but what I'm doing is not realism." (p.46). Such a shift can be felt from the linguistic tone and the sequential pattern of talking in Meg and Petey's dialogue:

Meg. Is that you Petey? Pause. Petey, is that you? Pause. Petey? Petey. What? Meg. Is that you? Petey. Yes, it's me. Meg. What? (Her face appears at the hatch). Are you back? Petey. Yes. Meg. I've got your cornflakes ready. ( Pinter, 1991. p.9)

The conversation seemingly does not deliver meaningful communicative message except mechanical repetition of words, for the whole dialogue, " goes around in circles for a short while, and there is a comic play on words, which also contributes to the absurdity and meaninglessness of life." (Mogensen, 2009, P.149). Typical to Pinter's style, there are elements of casualty and randomness in Meg and Petey's linguistic exchanges. Meg as lonely middle-aged woman desperately tries to have a meaningful communication with Petey who on his part appears indifferent and emotionless towards her:

.. are they nice? Petey. Very nice. Meg. I thought they'd be nice. (She sits at the table.) You got your paper? Petey. Yes. Meg. Is it good? Petey. Not bad. (Pinter, 1991. p. 9-10)

Dialogue between the two characters takes the form of overused and meaningless daily speeches which is characterized by "repetition and lack of logic." (Mogensen, 2009, P.149). Each of the two characters tries to escape from the dreadful sense of alienation and

loneliness in the domestic space of the boarding house. Due to her sense of loneliness, Meg desperately tries to build a meaningful communication with Petey. On his part, Petey tries to escape a sense of loneliness and boredom by keeping himself preoccupied with some occupation outside the house. The absurd dialogue between the couple on stage may provide a grim picture of human relationships in general. Meg and Petey need to talk, but because they do not have sincere and genuine compassion toward each other, so they merely talk “about things that do not need to be discussed”. (Bennet, 2015, P. 87). As an alternative to the lack of communication with Petey, Meg finds solace in Stanley’s companion, who ironically tries his best to distance himself from any fruitful communication. Their tense linguistic exchange provides a parody of mother-son relationship. In a way, Stanley finds in Meg a compensation of a sense of lost motherhood she yearns for in her fruitless marriage. Stanley does not seem interested in building any kind of human relationship but rather he favours staying in a total state of solitude. The conflict arises when Meg forcibly tries to break Stanley’s state of solitude in his self-made domestic space:

Meg : (She goes to the door.) Stan! Stanny! (She listens.) Stan! I'm coming up to fetch you if you don't come down! I'm coming up! I'm going to count three! One! Two! Three! I'm coming to get you! (She exits and goes upstairs. (Pinter, 1991, p.13)

While Meg insists on treating Stanley “like a good boy”, Stanley reacts rudely and even mistreats her verbally. Strangely, Stanley neither approves Meg’s motherly advances nor leaves the domestic space altogether. Thus, Stanley faces a dilemma between preserving the private space he desperately tries to keep as a lodger or forcibly accepting Meg’s constant and torturous interrogations. Pinter cleverly hints at the hidden conflicts that exist in any domestic space where characters’ lack of communication and sense of absurdity overtake everything. Noticeably, there are striking similarities between Pinter’s play and Samuel Becket’s *Waiting For Godot*, for the protagonists in both plays try to escape boredom and sense of estrangement through hollow and meaningless talking. As Raby (2009) states, “reviewers of *The Birthday Party* occasionally linked *Beckett* and Ionesco’s names”. (P.77). As in Becket's play, dialogues and verbal interaction in Pinter's play would become a method for estranged characters to find solace in each other’s company than building meaningful communication. To escape boredom and a sense of alienation, Stanley finds amusement in tormenting his host verbally. This is the case when he accuses her of not acting responsibly toward her husband:

Stanley. You're a bad wife. Meg I'm not. Who said I am? Stanley Not to make your husband a cup of tea. Terrible. Meg He knows I'm not a bad wife. Stanley Giving him sour milk instead. Meg It wasn't sour. Stanley Disgraceful. (Pinter, 1991. p.16)

On her part, Meg finds enjoyment in disturbing Stanley verbally, or even physically, by intruding into the private zone he desperately tries to keep himself within. She thinks she has every right to invade Stanley’s privacy whenever she likes. On his part, Stanley uses

his superior linguistic skill to counter Meg's aggressive attempt to breach his privacy. He takes advantage of Meg's limited linguistic incompetence by using complex linguistic terms and lexis in his speech. As an example, Meg finds it difficult to comprehend the meaning of certain words like 'succulent', which Stanley purposely uses to intimidate and confuse her:

Meg: Was it nice? Stanley: What? Meg: The fried bread. Stanley: Succulent. Meg: You shouldn't say that word. Stanley: What word? Meg: That word you said. Stanley: What, succulent--? Meg: Don't say it! (Pinter, 1991.p.19)

The tense relationship between Stanley and Meg may represent a symbolic projection of any abusive relationship that occurs in any domestic space where the inhabitants find enjoyment in tormenting each other. Strangely, Stanley does not exert any effort to practice his free will to escape the unhealthy domestic space but rather stays passive towards his surroundings:

The repressiveness of a dominating mother-figure, who threatens the ego/identity of her son, and the son's incapability of emotionally independent and forming a family of his own, are characteristic of these relationships. Pinter's son figures like Stanley, are therefore torn between the conflicting impulses of coming home and leaving home, and there is no solution to this dilemma. ([Gordon, 2014, p.179](#)).

As in any troubled domestic space, the power relationship between Stanley and Meg is shifting back and forth between who could better intimidate the other. Whereas Meg tries to intimidate Stanley by projecting herself as dominant, somehow totalitarian mother figure, Stanley on his part, tries to assert himself by using aggressive and intimidating language. Stanley's threatening and intimidating linguistic tone is evident when he tries to assert himself as someone with high status in the boarding house:

Stanley. tell me, Mrs. Boles, when you address yourself to me, do you ever ask yourself who exactly you are talking to? Meg . Didn't you enjoy your breakfast, Stan? (Pinter, 1991.p.21).

Ironically, Stanley himself will become a victim of verbal manipulation once the two other mysterious intruders, Goldberg and Mccan, arrive at the boarding house and begin tormenting him mercilessly. Alienated and isolated from the outside world, Stanley nonetheless identifies himself as someone with higher social status than others. He claims he was once a professional concert pianist. He neither explains why he quitted his career, nor providing satisfactory reasons why he ended up jobless and outcasted at the boarding house. *It is unclear whether or not Stanley had ever played as a professional pianist, or he had made up the story or even it is simply part of his own delusion. Stanley self-identification as an artist may provide him with some sense of superiority against Meg. However, that kind of self-glorified image he desperately tries to project will be shattered once the two newly lodgers arrive at the boarding house.*

***Deception, Violence and Estrangement:***

*The sudden arrival of the two mysterious guests at the boarding house brings the play into a state of confusion. It is unclear whether or not either of Petey or Meg has any involvement in bringing the two strangers. Meg seems to be very pleased to have new guests at the boarding. They were amazed by the level of simplicity and naivety Meg displays at the very beginning of their conversation. Goldberg finds in Meg's announcement of arranging a birthday party for Stanely an opportunity to better assert himself:*

*It's his birthday today. Goldberg. His birthday? Meg. Yes. Today. But I'm not going to tell him until tonight. Goldberg. Doesn't he know it's his birthday? Meg. He hasn't mentioned it. Goldberg. Ah! Tell me. Are you going to have a party? ( Pinter, 1991.p.32)*

*The exchange of the speech provides some hints that Goldberg has some mysterious scheme against Stanely. That scheme will be actualized during the birthday ceremony. Stanely expresses discontent and even alarmed at the prospect of seeing two strangers at the boarding house. He views their arrival as an invasion into his private space. A sense of fear and bewilderment overtakes him, and desperately tries to find out from Meg the identities of the two strangers and the reasons why they particularly have chosen the boarding house. This tense dramatic situation marks a symbolic shift of power relation between Meg and Stanley since the latter can no longer display himself as the only favoured guest at the boarding house. Meg on her part finds enjoyment in tormenting Stanely by withholding the identities of the two strangers, and the purpose of their visit:*

*Who is it? Meg The two gentlemen. Stanley. What two gentlemen? Meg. The ones that were coming... Stanley. They've come? Meg. They're very nice, Stan. Stanley. Why didn't they come last night? Meg. They said the beds were wonderful. Stanley. Who are they? Meg . They're very nice, Stanley. Stanley- I said, who are they? Meg. I've told you, the two gentlemen. ( Pinter, 1991.p.34)*

*The two strange intruders, like Stanely, do not provide so much information about their personalities except they say they come here to “ do ‘a job’ ”, and strangely “ the nature of the job, its goal, and the previous relationship between Stanley and the intruders, remain purposely obscure.” ( Malkin, 1992. p.54 ). Remarkably, the mystery surrounding the arrival of two strangers and the state of confusion they cause in Pinter's *The Birthday Party* allude to other literary works , like Kafka's *The trial*, in which two strangers torment the protagonist for ambiguous and mysterious reasons:*

*In his screenplay of Franz Kafka's *The Trial*, a novel of which Pinter was fond and which must have played some part in the intellectual genesis of *The Birthday Party* , Pinter opt stress the fact that the two warders who wake Joseph K to arrest him do so on his birthday. ( Batty, 2001, p. 92 )*

*Similar to Joseph K, the protagonist in Franz Kafka's novel *The Trial*( 1915), Stanely in Pinter's play feels alienated and indifferent toward the two intruders. Strangely, he does not make any attempt to escape or evade the forthcoming tragic doom. The play provides some hints that there might be some connection or association between Stanely's past and*



*the two intruders. As if predicting the imminent danger, Stanely tells Meg about the upcoming intruders even before their arrival:*

..Stanley (advancing.) They're coming today. They're coming in a van. Meg Who? Stanley And do you know what they've got in that van? Meg What? Stanley They've got a wheelbarrow in that van. Meg (breathlessly.) They haven't. ( Pinter, 1991.p.24)

*While the two intruders try to establish themselves in the house and start their interrogation of their victim, Stanly on his part tries desperately to evade any serious communication.*

McCain first approaches Stanley and begins questioning him about his personality. Tension arises when Stanely presses McCain to tell the reasons behind their arrival at the boarding house. *Meg for a while* “succeeds in lifting the tension by suggesting a birthday party for Stanley, who staunchly maintains that it is not”. (Eggenberger, 1972, P.428). On his part, Stanely tries to distance himself from any serious communication. When McCain inquiries about Stanely’s past, he replies that he had a good life before settling down at Meg’s boarding-house, and it was by chance that he ended up here. Apparently, The estranged Stanley doesn’t feel comfortable seeing McCain and his companion around him and asks them to leave the boarding house immediately. McCain on his part tries to deflect himself from Stanlye’s inquiry, and start talking about Stanley’s birthday. The scene develops into a linguistic duel between the two conflicting characters. Stanely angerly tells McCain that he suspects his presence and he probably had met him before, but McCain gives no reasonable explanation as to whether there is any acquaintance between them. Stanely tries not to show any sign of weakness by talking about his somehow glorious past life as a reputed pianist , but McCain pays no serious attention to his talking.

Goldberg's masterful use of language distinguishes him from McCain when he interrogates Stanley. He presents himself as a self-made man, and as a model of high morality. Deceptive and manipulative rhetoric becomes an effective tool through which he asserts his authority over the surrounding characters. His masterful linguistic capability, together with his charismatic personality, at first impresses both Meg and Petey. The way he narrates personal stories captivates other characters’ attention. For instance, he narrates stories that cannot be verified either true or merely fiction. This is evident in the way he narrates his personal story which is filled with cunningly organized details:

Uncle Barney. Of course, he was an impeccable dresser. One of the old school. He had a house just outside Basingstoke at the time. Respected by the whole community. Culture? Don't talk to me about culture. He was an all-round man, what do you mean? He was a cosmopolitan. ( Pinter, 1991.p.27-28)

Using confusing and contradictory statements is among many effective means Goldberg uses to intimidate and confuse Stanley. Sometimes he gives too many details while "important things are not being said” ( Silverstein , 1993, p.15 ). To assert his authority in the house, Goldberg first takes advantage of Meg’s naivety and Petey’s absence. He cunningly persuades Meg to go along with arranging a Birthday party for Stanely who

dismisses the whole idea. Particularly, he has immense controlling authority over McCain. Their connection has not been clarified in the play except for a little reference to their associations with some sort of mysterious secret organization. McCain is fascinated by Goldbergs' charismatic personality and his skilful way of talking. He takes Goldberg's words and recommendations seriously and follows his orders whole heartedly. Goldenberg cunningly plays with words to manipulate McCain's by showing himself as someone who is really concerned about his well-being "at all events, McCann, /I can assure you that the assignment will be carried out and the mission accomplished /with no excessive aggravation to you or myself". ( Pinter, 1991.p.30). After the establish themselves in the boarding house, the two strange intruders begin their linguistic interrogation of Stanley with simple and casual speeches. It nonetheless develops into tense and aggressive verbal interrogation. In the meantime, "Stanely tries unsuccessfully to get Goldberg and McCann to leave the premises, but they refuse". (Sternlicht, 2005, p.73). The first intruder starts questioning Stanley about where he has been living lately, and why he has been treating Meg so badly. Macan on his part puts further psychological pressure when he rudely snatches Stanely's glass. This aggressive act irritates Stanely and he moves around to get it back. The aggressive intimidation, moreover, symbolizes the extent the intruders are trying to invade Stanly's privacy. By creating a state of confusion and disarray in the house, Goldberg aims at isolating Stanley and eventually breaking him mentally. To add further confusion and anxiety, Goldberg begins asking unrelated and illogical questions such as:

Goldberg Webber, what were you doing yesterday? Stanley Yesterday? Goldberg And the day before. What did you do the day before that? Stanley What do you mean? Goldberg Why are you wasting everybody's time, Webber? Why are you getting in everybody's way? Stanley Me? What are you Goldberg I'm telling you, Webber. ( Pinter, 1991.p.47)

There are elements of ferocity and violence in the way Goldberg interrogates Stanley linguistically. Confused and puzzled, Stanley struggles to comprehend the overflow of questions. The ferocious and confusing rhetoric gradually takes harsher turn when *Goldberg questions* Stanely: "what did" you "wear last week, Webber? or "what were you doing yesterday?" ( Pinter, 1991.p. 47). As a cunning rhetorical trick, Goldberg begins interrogating Stanley like a criminal who *belonged to underground dark organization*:

McCann Why did you leave the organization? Goldberg What would your old mum say, Webber? McCann Why did you betray us? Goldberg You hurt me, Webber. You're playing a dirty game. ( Pinter, 1991.p.48 )

Ferocious and confusing rhetoric takes its grave effect slowly on Stanley as he gradually loses the power to argue and defend himself against the two intruders. Confused and panicked, he can't defend himself against the accusations laid against him. In reality, the two invaders would "empower their victim more by the violent impact of their language

than by any physical action". (Sila, 2012, P.144). Contradictory statements would become an effective tool through which the intruders torment their victims. Their main objective is to bring him into a state of mental breakdown. Linguistic manipulation, in a way, becomes "tools for manipulating reality. But it isn't words that manipulate reality, it is the manipulation of words" and that is what Goldberg and McCain do". ( Paul Gee, 2014, P.113 ) For instance, Goldberg and McCain in the following lines use false and contradictory statements to confuse Stanley:

Goldberg Where was your wife? Stanley In-- Goldberg Answer. Stanley [turning, crouched.] What wife? Goldberg What have you done with your wife? McCann He's killed his wife! Goldberg Why did you kill your wife? Stanley [sitting, his back to the audience.] What wife? McCann How did he kill her? Goldberg How did you kill her? McCann You throttled her. ( Pinter, 1991.p.49)

In the above speech, both intruders not only are trying to confuse the victim but also to make him doubt whether or not he had committed a crime. Confused and shocked, Stanley can't comprehend the overflow of contradictory statements which he can't neither deny or verify. Taking advantage of the victim's confusing state of mind, both intruders further intimidate him verbally. Gradually, the ferocious and confusing language shifts to psychological manipulation, particularly when Goldberg begins asking ambiguous question about Stanley's supposedly dark past: In the following speech, for instance, the intruders shift the sequence of their interrogation:

Goldberg Webber! Why did you change your name? Stanley, I forgot the other one.  
Goldberg What's your name now? Stanley Joe Soap. Goldberg You stink of sin.  
McCann I can smell it. Stanley What? ( Pinter, 1991.p. 50)

Paradoxically, Goldberg 's contradictory statements cannot be verified as true or false, and their sole aim is to delude and confuse Stanley. *To further delude* the victim, the two intruders shift their linguistic strategy by asking Stanley illogical and ambivalent questions like "when did you last pray?", and "is the number 864 possible or necessary? ( 1. P. 50), and at the same time rejecting every answer given by Stanley. Confused by the ferocious linguistic manipulation, Stanley can't deny nor assert the senseless and irrational questions. Sometimes, the psychological intimidation takes a harsher turn when the interrogators use nonsensical and confusing statements, like "Which came first? ! Chicken? Egg? And," "Do you know your own face?( 2. 50) , which brings Stanley into states of confusion and delusion:

interrogation here combines questions that echo the rhetoric of police interrogation, and others that suggest that the interrogators and Stanley are all members of the same criminal gang; a third category are nonsensical questions, that point nowhere in particular but to the functioning of language – but they all are directed to Stanley as if to confuse him, make him insecure and therefore vulnerable. ( Olsson, 2013, P.146).

The more the two intruders intimidate Stanley psychologically or even physically, the more he feels estranged and alienated. This is evident when the intruders' ferocious and confusing rhetoric changes into personal attacks which include, among others; verbal abuse, humiliating comments, ferocious language, and physical threat. The intruders' intimidation of Stanley takes an aggressive turn when they begin to intimidate and abuse him verbally by calling him "traitor", "a plague", "an overthrow", "odour", and even threaten to "sterilize" him. This verbal intimidation has a grave effect on Stanley's mental and psychological capacity. This becomes materialized in Stanley's aggressive reaction when he burst out angrily and "kicks Goldberg in the stomach" (Pinter, 1991.p.52)

### **Chaos and Disarray During the Birthday Ceremony:**

Both Goldberg and McCain exploit the Birthday Party Ceremony as an opportunity to further intimidate Stanley both physically and mentally. To isolate Stanley from his surrounding, Goldberg uses his linguistic skill to manipulate less intelligent characters like Meg and Lulu. With Meg, he exploits her naivety by praising her new dress, and then he takes initiative to ask other characters to participate in arranging Stanley's supposedly birthday party. As gentlemanly gesture, he asks Meg to deliver a speech. This gentlemanly manner further impresses Meg who innocently expresses a compassionate motherly-like speech: "he's my Stanley now. / And I think he's a good boy, / although sometimes he's bad." (Pinter, 1991.p. 55) McCain, on his part, knows his role perfectly in executing the task assigned to him. He waits for the right opportunity to begin the greater process of psychological intimidation of Stanley. Goldberg's celebratory speech, though seemingly praising Stanley's happy occasion, yet it is *filled with ambiguous and irrational utterances*:

How often, in this day and age, do you come across real, true warmth? Once in a lifetime. Until a few minutes ago, ladies and gentlemen, I, like all of you, was asking the same question. What's happened to the love, the bonhomie, the unashamed expression of affection of the day before yesterday, that our mums taught us in the nursery? (Pinter, 1991.p.56)

Typical of Goldberg, the speech is filled with vague, irrelevant, somehow illogical statements. It nonetheless captures the attention of all the attendants. Meg naively is impressed by Goldberg's seemingly compassionate and gentlemanly manners. Similarly, Lulu praises his skilful use of language by calling him a "marvellous speaker". Stanley feels lonely and isolated during the exchange of speeches. His sense of alienation grows seeing Lulu and Meg abandon him and join Goldberg and McCain. The birthday ceremony gradually descends into chaos and disarray. Neither Meg nor Lulu feels what Stanley is going through and they don't offer any assistance. "During the party, all character's drink, and play blind man's buff. This is a children game turns immediately into a violent act." (Baştan, 2020, P.45). Each character plays his/her part in the ceremony, and both Goldberg and McCain exploit that opportunity to further intimidate Stanley. In the darkness, Stanley feels estranged, and he is no longer feeling safe in the comfort zone he thought it might

protect him. While he struggles to find his way in the darkness, McCain cunningly tries to intimidate him physically by snatching his glass. Both Meg and Lulu are fully emersed into the dancing ritual and they are totally distracted from seeing Stanely's deteriorating situation. The strange ceremony reaches its turning point when Stanely is blindfolded and forced to "play blindman's bluff". In the meantime, "McCain, who has been holding Stanely's glasses, breaks them". Then the "lights suddenly go off", and the ceremony turns into violent "menace" (Sternlicht, [2005, P. 73](#)). To further intimidate Stanely, McCain picks up the drum and places it sideways in Stanley's path, and he unknowingly walks into the drum and falls over with his foot caught in it. Strangely, the intruders' abusive action against Stanley goes unnoticed by both Lulu and Meg. The broken glass symbolizes Stanly's loss of sense in-front of the violent external world. Similarly, the broken drum indicates that the absurd ceremony soon descends into chaos and disorder. *As unconscious reactions to physical and mental intimidations*, Stanley assaults Lulu and she screams and faints. That violent act would provide the intruders with golden opportunity to manage and control Stanley Physically.

#### **Verbal Violence and Stanely's Transformation:**

After the Birthday Party's violent ritual, Stanly appears on stage devastated both physically and mentally. His sense of loss and estrangement indicates that the two intruders have somehow succeeded in bringing him into total submission to their will. The surrounding characters one way or another have been affected. Lulu has been physically assaulted, and she no longer cares about Stanly's deteriorating situation. Meg, too, has been affected and deluded by the violent ceremony, and she does not remember what had happened during the birthday ceremony. Similar to early scenes in the play, she begins the new scene with mechanical and nonsensical speech with Petey. Stanley is missing which makes Petey to inquire about his whereabouts. Meg tells Petey that she has no idea; and yet she doubts that Stanely and McCain might have some connection. Goldberg cunningly interacts with Petey and tries to distract him from seeing Stanley's deteriorating situation. He had already prepared a black car outside the boarding-house, and a wheelchair to transport the collapsed Stanley to unidentified location. When Petey insist on knowing about Stanley's condition, Goldberg replies with sarcastic and mocking tone: "what came over him?/ Breakdown, Mr. Boles. pure and simple/ nervous breakdown" (Pinter, 1991.p.71 ). Goldberg always finds a way to trick others, and he cunningly assures Petey that " It's all taken care of" ( Pinter, 1991.p.74) by "Monty" , who is probably someone with medical qualification. When Petey insists on knowing about Stanley's condition, Goldberg uses his confusing linguistic style to distract him from thinking of him:

Goldberg. You'll have a crowded beach today ...on a day like this. They'll be lying on their backs, swimming out to sea. My life. What about the deck-chairs? Are the deck-chairs ready? Petey. I put them all out this morning. Goldberg. But what about the tickets? Who's going to take the tickets? ( Pinter, 1991.p.75)

At the final stage in Stanley's linguistic interrogation, the two intruders begin preparation to bring their victim into total mental breakdown. To assert his authority, Goldberg linguistically manipulates, and even physically threatens McCain to follow his orders. He has a unique linguistic style in asserting his authority which is so often delivered through a mixture of sarcastic narration. This can be noticed in the following lines in which he uses confusing rhetoric:

Follow the line, the line, McCann, and you can't go wrong. What do you think, I'm a self-made man? No! I sat where I was told to sit. I kept my eye on the ball. School? Don't talk to me about school. Top in all subjects. And for why? Because I'm telling you, I'm telling you, follow the line? Follow my mental? Learn by heart.  
(Pinter, 1991.p.77)

The preparation to bring Stanley into mental breakdown would not be the last stage, but rather part of a longer process of rehabilitating, or re-shaping his character. Goldberg and McCain begin preparation to bring Stanley to the stage and subject him to the most cruel interrogation. In the first stage of the interrogation they "verbally bludgeon(ed) Stanley into submission and silence by the sheer number and variety of their accusations" (Rega, 1995 . P.24). The final stage would be different as Stanley shows no sign of discontent since he has lost awareness about the surrounding. Once again, Goldberg appears at this stage as the sole representative of authority. The forcible transformation of Stanley, in a certain way, epitomizes the mechanism of total authority through which an individual is subjected and manipulated. Symbolically, Goldberg and McCain may represent ultimate power, "the hierarchy, the establishment, the arbiters, the socio-religious monsters" (Baker, 2009, P.184), or the cruelty of authoritarian rulers. To further assert their authority, Goldberg uses ferocious rhetoric against Lulu. She has already been subjected to Goldberg's intimidation and maltreatment during the birthday party. Once again, she becomes a victim of verbal misuse as Goldberg in ironic speech tells her to "confess" as if she is a real sinner. Her protesting speech gives implicit hints at the extent she has been subjected to intimidation: "I've seen everything that's happened. /I know what's going on./ I've got a pretty shrewd idea" (Pinter, 1991.p. 81). When Lulu finally leaves the house, Goldberg and McCain prepare Stanley for the final phase of Stanley's interrogation. Stanley, who is dressed in a dark suit and "white collar" is in a very bad condition, and he still holds his broken glasses. The broken glass symbolizes total loss and alienation. Moreover, the dark dress is associated with tragic destiny awaiting Stanley.

Stanley gradually is subjected to long process of ferocious and confusing verbal attacks. And the final linguistic intimidation is very tense and filled with contradictory statements. They include aggressive verbal abuse and hidden threats, yet "Stanley shows no reaction, and remains with no movement". (Pinter, 1991.p.82). The aim is not only to destroy his will to resist, but also to deconstruct his identity. They deceptively promise to heal him, because as they claim, has been "cocked for years", and he needs a long process of

rehabilitation. Through a long sequence of confusing exchange of speeches between McCain and Goldberg, Stanely is getting confused:

Goldberg. You need a long convalescence. McCain. A change of air. Goldberg. Where angels fear to tread. Goldberg. Exactly. McCain. You're in a rut. Goldberg. You look anaemic. McCain. Rheumatic. Goldberg. Myopic. McCain. Epileptic. Goldberg. You're on the verge. McCain. You're a dead duck. Goldberg. But we can save you. McCain. From a worse fate. ( Pinter, 1991.p.82)

The ferocious and confusing interrogation instigates fear and panic in Stanly as he cant follow up the sequence or nonsensical and contradictory statements. Notably, the intruders' interrogation " generates both cultural discourse, with references to songs and novels ( or to films), as well as a distinctively diagnostic discourse, with medical terms." ( Olsson, 2013 , P. 146). The reason behind such mixing and shifting style of language is to make Stanly loses concentration. This happens when the linguistic items and symbolic representation are detached from each other. "This goes on for some time, with the interrogators adding more and more lines with no interrogative logic to them." (Ibid). Such sequence of nonsensical statement would gradually descend into direct ferocious verbal abuse. The main objective is to make Stanley not only loose touch with reality, but also deconstruct his identity. Through a sequence of confusing and contradictory statements, the interrogators promise to reshape and transform Stanely:

Goldberg. We'll make a man of you. McCann. And a woman. Goldberg. You'll be re-orientated. McCann You'll be rich. Goldberg. You'll be adjusted. McCann. You'll be our pride and joy. Goldberg. You'll be a mensch. McCann. You'll be a success. Goldberg. You'll be integrated. McCann. You'll give orders. Goldberg. You'll make decisions. McCann You'll be a magnate. Goldberg. A statesman. McCann. You'll own yachts. Goldberg Animals. McCann Animals. ( Pinter, 1991.p.83-84)

Alienated and confused, Stanely sits between his interrogators silently and linguistically crippled. In such dramatic situation, Stanley "appears to have been brainwashed and is incapable of speaking or resisting his tormentors who verbally attack him again." ( [Sternlicht, 2005, p. 73](#) ). Goldberg is well aware of the extent the aggressive rhetoric affected Stanely, and he cunningly shifts his linguistic strategy by pressing him to speak out and say his opinion:

what do you think ? Eh, boy? (Stanley begins to clench and unclench his eyes). McCain What's your opinion, sir? Of this prospect, sir? Godberg Prospect. Sure. Sure, it's a prospect. (Stanley's hands clutching his glasses begin to tremble.)What's your opinion of such a prospect? Eh, Stanley? ( Pinter, 1991.p.84).

Ironically, the hasty and confusing interrogation does not leave any chance for Stanely to reply, and he can't hardly comprehend the confusing situation. Afterwards, both interrogators cunningly "use three different forms of address here : Stanley's name, but also the contemptuous 'boy' and the falsely polite 'sir' ". ( Olsson, 2013, p.146).



Gradually, Stanely loses the capacity to “concentrate, and “fails” to emit “sounds from his throat” ( Pinter, 1991, p.84) . Eventually, the interrogators’ ferocious and confusing rhetoric produces the desired result as Stanely breaks down physically and becomes linguistically crippled:

well, Stanny boy, what do you say, eh? ( They watch. He concentrates. His head lowers, his chin draws into his chest, he crouches.) Stanley. Ug-gughh... McCainn. Mr Webber! What’s your openion, ? Goldberg. What do you say, Stan? What do you think of the prospect? ( Pinter, 1991.p.84-85)

Stately’s loss of the power of argument symbolizes the loss of his identity. Interestingly, no one except Petey rushes to his assistance. Unfortunately, Petey’s last attempt to offer assistance brings no result at all. “ When Petey finally ( insists on assisting Stanely ) tries to help Stanley and Goldberg threatens to take him along with Stanley in the big car waiting , he backs away out of fear . ( [Sternlicht, 2005](#), p.74). Finally, Pete submits to Goldberg’s will and, similar to other characters, lets Stanley’s fate to be decided by the two mysterious intruders. The final scene in which Stanely will be taken outside the boarding house collapsed and speechless indicates the tragic end of Stanly’s individuality. Pinter through the destruction of Stanely’s character brings into focus a grim reality which is the extent confusing and ferocious rhetoric not only destroys an individual’s will to resist, but also deconstructing his/her identity altogether.

**Conclusion:**

Overall, Harold Pinter in the play presented a dark portrayal of modern Human trapped within a violent and absurd surrounding. In the play, Pinter used both realist and absurdist features to highlight the destructive and confusing function of language. Here, the dramatist cleverly hinted at hidden tensions aroused within a troubled domestic space where lack of communication and violence overtake everything. The tense relationship between the protagonist and the female host at the boarding house represented a symbolic projection of an abusive relationship that exists in any troubled domestic space where the inhabitants find enjoyment in tormenting each other. The play particularly reflected on the dangerous impact of confusing and ferocious rhetoric on the protagonist. This is materialized when two intruders invaded the protagonist’s private space and begun the process of linguistic intimidation. The ferocious and confusing rhetoric had immense impact on the protagonist as he gradually lost ability to argue and defend himself against the two intruders. Confused and panicked, the protagonist couldn’t debunk the accusations laid against him. By creating a state of confusion and disarray in the house, the two antagonists in the play succeeded in isolating the protagonist and eventually destroying him both mentally and physically. The final stage of the protagonist’s mental break happened after a long process of confusing and ferocious linguistic intimidation. Symbolically, the protagonist’s loss of linguistic capability indicated his loss of identity. Here, Pinter in the play highlight the ferocious and confusing role the modern rhetoric could play in deluding, and most dangerously, stripping the identity of modern Human Being in contemporary society.



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