

Unraveling Pinter's World: A Study of the Room and Its Pinteresque Characteristics

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Abstract: The aim of this paper, "Unraveling Pinter's World: A Study of The Room and Its Pinteresque Characteristics", is to critically examine the literary devices- that later came to be known as Pinteresque- employed in the first play of Harold Pinter, *The Room*. This play established the basis for his distinctive writing style, which he later carried over into his other works. The work, which is regarded as one of his earliest examples of the Comedy of Menace and Absurdism, also signaled the start of the distinctive writing style known as 'Pinteresque', which bears his name and is akin to terms like Shavian, Brechtian, Byronic, etc. Pinter's unique way of using language, pauses and silences, and repetition to create a shadowy and eerie background with several interpretations is referred to as Pinteresque. Pinter uses distinctive storytelling techniques like pauses and silences to highlight the characters' feelings which became the major aspect of pinteresque. The characters' fractured conversations and misunderstandings are a result of the absence of communication, information, and a clearly defined context. The paper demonstrates how Pinter's style, which gained popularity through his second play *The Birthday Party*, takes its origin in his first play- *The Room*, and how it contributes to the themes of the story, which include fear, threat, isolation, and the lack of communication.

Keywords: Pinteresque, Absurdism, Pinter Pauses, Silence, Isolation, Communication.

1. Introduction

Harold Pinter, winner of the 2005 Nobel Prize in literature, was rightly asserted as "a complete man of theatre" by Bold for his contribution in various writing and theatre fields. He began his career as a playwright with his 1957 one-act play *The Room*. The play represented several distinguishing elements that later became important in all of his works, and it functioned as a foundational piece that ultimately defined his own distinctive style. *The Room*, like many of his plays, is a reflection of his difficult childhood experiences since he was raised in a time of ongoing wars and bombings. In his biography called *Harold Pinter*, Michael Billington describes how Pinter's early life circumstances left him with "loneliness, bewilderment, separation, and loss: themes that are in all his works." Being one of his early examples of the comedy of menace, Pinter subtly attacks the horrors carried out by the Nazi government and the terrified state of the life of the bourgeoisie.

The plot examines an evening event in the lives of an elderly couple and how the protagonists lead troubled, fear-filled lives. Rose, Bert's sixty-year-old housewife, believes that the outside world poses too much of a risk to her and her spouse, and she lives in a room that she finds secure and pleasant. She consciously decided to live an isolated life as she sees everything outside of her room is otherwise dangerous. She hadn't left her room in a long time and was also worried about the basement and the realm outside her room. This lonely couple is visited by some familiar and unfamiliar faces in an evening and the plot explains what happens to the couple after those unwelcomed encounters.

2. Literature Review

Hamedreza Kohzadi, Fatemeh Azizmohmmadi and Sayed Abolfazl Makki's *Alienation in Harold Pinter's The Room* (Google Scholar 2012). The paper focuses on the main idea of the security risks Rose faces in her room. It also examines the evidence of alienation and how, in contrast to the warm environment of her room, the cold, dark outside world creates feelings of estrangement. The paper also seeks to identify the source of the threat that has followed Rose throughout the play.

Fariba Sadat Sadreddini and Parisa Sadat Sadredini's *The Echo of Isolation in Harold Pinter's The Room and The Caretaker* (Google Scholar 2014). This article compares and contrasts two of Pinter's plays to highlight the common elements of isolation, which is the primary subject matter in many of his plays. It also examines how the author has depicted the absurdity of existence through isolation and focuses on how the characters lose their identities while leading alienated lives, both from others and from themselves.

Benalda Djamel and Rahmani Mokhtaria's *Language and Being in Harold Pinter's Plays: The Room and The Caretaker as a Case Study* (Google Scholar 2018). Harold Pinter is renowned for the way he examines human existence and his unique use of language. This paper examines the language used in two of Pinter's plays, as well as the characters' experiences surviving in a surreal environment. It also highlights how incapable the characters are of using language to convey who they are and how they feel.

Pravindh, *Exordium of Anxiety in Harold Pinter's The Room* (Google Scholar 2018). The plot of *The Room* revolves around the regular citizens' feelings of stress and anxiety brought on by the wider world. Rose experienced a great deal of external pressure, which she expressed in her behavior. This article attempts to investigate Pinter's handling of anxiety through an analysis of the characters' emotional states.

Neshwa Abdelkader Elyamany, *The Interrogation Scene in Harold Pinter's The Birthday Party: A Multi-Faceted Analysis of Pinteresque Dialogue* (Google Scholar 2017). The primary objective of this paper is to highlight the Pinteresque element found in *The Birthday Party*. It focuses in particular on how the characters maintain their places through words. This essay also examined the play via the lenses of conversational analysis and two-fold pragmatic analysis, which incorporates the Gricean maxims.

Pinteresque

Pinter earned the adjective Pinteresque for his unique writing style. As many of his characters are based on real-life occurrences, Pinter's plays often convey unspoken messages. He expresses tragic and cruel incidents subtly, a technique commonly known as the comedy of menace. He employs a distinctive use of language, conversation structures, and silences and pauses which later is later defined as Pinteresque. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, it is the "resembling or characteristic of his plays... Pinter's plays are typically characterized by implications of threat and strong feeling produced through colloquial language, apparent triviality, and long pauses." It is the use of "oblique dialogues, repetitive interspersed with pauses, menacing and loaded with hidden meanings" (Sharma 1).

Pinter's characters indirectly express what they feel. The use of pauses and silence, which portrays the reality of human speech that frequently needs breaks and how humans occasionally maintain total silence, is the essential element of Pinteresque. Pinter has used pauses between dialogue to establish suspense and mysterious backgrounds in several of his works. He thought the contemporary plays did poorly in portraying the complexities of carefully drafting a sentence or the unpredictable nature of human communication. As a species, we frequently pause to find the right words and that ideology influenced him in using pauses in between dialogues, especially when the characters are mentally disturbed. In his plays, Pinter deliberately sought to reject perfection in favor of realism. Additionally, he emphasized the characters' helplessness to respond to their circumstances by using silence between serious exchanges.

A Study of Pinteresque in the Room

The Room, his first play, served as his stage debut and had a unique writing style including pauses and silence, menace and threat that would later be a recurring theme in many of his other plays. The play was composed in four days, drawing inspiration from two real-life personalities. From the beginning, the protagonist Rose experiences continual fear. She believes that the room is the only choice that could keep her safe. She hasn't been outside in a very long time because everything outside the room is enigmatic and terrifying as she seems to have had a terrible past life. Furthermore, the cause of her fear was never revealed. Rose is sometimes used as a symbol of the terror that Jews felt under the Nazi regime. Though the play is not fully written using Pinteresque, it employs many references that match with the Pinteresque technique.

Pinter Pauses

In many of his works, Pinter has made use of pauses in between dialogues to express the characters' desperate situations. These are breaks used by characters while uttering their dialogues. In general, Pinter has used three types of pauses, including an ellipsis, silence and a pause, to show the nature of human thought process while speaking. These breaks are a result of the character's inability to express their thoughts and emotions, which could be the consequence of the characters' unpleasant past experiences.

Rose's words are impacted by her ongoing fear, which stems from her past. She takes several pauses in her conversation with Bert to let the audience know how her fear of the outside world has affected her and also the

trauma which had been rooted deep inside her. Rose is the only one who speaks throughout the initial scene, whereas her husband Bert maintains silence. She peeks outside to ensure she isn't being tracked down since she worries about their safety. To make sure Bert is kept warm and provided with sufficient food, she enters and exits the kitchen. Her constant movements across the room reveal her anxious and frightened state of mind regarding her current situation. She compares the outside world with that of "murder", which highlights the gravity of the situation and keeps the play's atmosphere inexplicable. By maintaining a constant sense of mystery by not unraveling the information, Pinter examines the unpredictability of human existence when living under a dictatorship. To her, the room provides the safest shelter of all places- a place no one can expect to find her. Though she is the only one to maintain the conversation, she took multiple pauses in between her dialogue, explaining her obscurity.

"Wait a minute."

Pause.

"I wonder who that is."

Pause.

"No. I thought I saw someone."

Pause.

The characters also apply these pauses to try to hide information from other characters and occasionally from the readers. For instance, Rose found it hard to trust Mr. Kidd when he mentioned having a sister because she could never recall him having one. They paused in between to stray from the subject when Rose questioned them further, which raised suspicions. The Sands couple experienced something similar when they talked about the stars, with Mr. Sands appeared to be attempting to conceal the fact that they had spotted a star while travelling. The characters' pauses also mirror their shock because they are too astonished to react. For instance, Rose found it difficult to believe that her room—the only place in the world where she felt safe—was going to be out of her control when the Sands couple informed her that the man from the basement had informed them that Rose's room was empty.

Silence

The play's general silence is an additional significant component of Pinteresque that allows readers to interpret it in a variety of ways. In the opening scene, Bert made the decision to be silent, and Rose didn't appear to find it bothersome. She asks questions and answers them with her own thoughts. Even when Mr. Kidd spoke with Bert, he never answered his inquiries, and Mr. Kidd was not surprised either. No complaints have been made, and Bert appears to have agreed with his silence. The streets outside seemed even more serene and quiet.

This silence can be further studied from the perspective of a communication barrier set between the characters, which is the result of isolation. Bert felt unhappy with his married life now that Rose was treating him like a child. Readers were left perplexed by the first exchange between Rose and Mr. Kidd and the discussion between the Sands couple and Rose over who actually owned the estate because the dialogues did not provide the necessary information for the plot:

Rose: What about your sister, Mr.Kidd?

Mr. Kidd: What about her?

Rose: Did she have any babies?

Mr. Kidd: Yes, she had a resemblance to my old mum, I think. Taller, of course.

Rose: When did she die then, your sister?

Mr. Kidd: Yes, that's right, it was after she died that I must have stopped counting...

Because Bert chose violence to cope with Riley, the seamless plot ultimately comes to a horrific finish, setting up a scene akin to calm before a storm. Ultimately, Bert interrupted Riley just as he was ready to say anything about Rose, leaving the reader with an unclear impression.

Repetition

Repetition is one of Pinteresque's distinguishing characteristics. Pinter's characters frequently reiterate specific conversations, allusions, and concepts to highlight how important the subject is. Repetition is employed throughout the play to convey the characters' comprehension of the circumstances, as well as their main concerns and general terror. For instance, on different occasions, Rose and Mrs. Sands both liken the terrible weather outside to "murder." Rose believes that her room provides her with the highest level of safety. Her needs are so ideal that not even the same mansion's basement can meet them. She thus repeatedly remarks on the tranquility she feels within the room.: "This room's all right for me"... "If they ever ask you, Bert, I'm quite happy where I am. We're quiet, we're all right. You're happy up here. It's not far up either, when you come in from outside. And we're not bothered. And nobody bothers us"... "This is a good room. You've got a chance in a place like this".

Rose continued to worry about the basement despite her anxieties about the outside world. She keeps asking how many people reside in the basement and what kind of condition it's in. The tension that never stops foreshadows the big moment when the threat she has been worried about ultimately emerges from the basement. Rose was completely taken aback by what Riley told her during their conversation. To be sure what she heard was accurate, she stated her point again many times. She was unable to accept Riley addressing her as Sal:

Riley: Come home, Sal.

Pause

Rose: What did you call me?

Riley: Come home, Sal.

Rose: Don't call me that.

Riley: Come, now.

Rose: Don't call me that.

Pinteresque Atmosphere:

Many of Pinter's plays have a gloomy as well as dark atmosphere. The conversation between the characters subtly suggests to the readers the unfavorable heaviness in the air, even though the narration does not say it explicitly. In addition, many of Pinter's plays take place in a single room and feature interruptions to the protagonists' lives from outside sources. The play's title implies the importance of the room, as the entire story takes place entirely in Rose's room, the only warm location in the narrative. Rose's affinity for her room stems from the coziness and comfort it provides.

"Obviously they are scared of what is outside the room. Outside the room there is a world bearing upon them which is frightening. I am sure it is frightening to you and me as well." (quoted in Esslin, 235).

It is evident that the life existing outside of the room is inappropriate even though the readers are not given enough information about the background. The landscape outside the room is freezing, with snow-covered streets that are deserted. Additionally, the play is set in the evening and she soon begins to be haunted by the night's gloom. When the Sands couple arrived, they told Rose that, "There's not much light in this place, is there, Mrs. Hudd? Do you know, this is the first bit of light we've seen since we came in?". Rose hadn't been outside in a long time because the room was the only bright area in the play. She never wanted the darkness outside to enter the room, since she felt that this warmth and brightness were her only chance to live a safe life.

Riley, however, stays in the basement, which is just as black as the outside world. Pinter used the basement's darkness to indicate to readers that Riley is the play's adversary. It was too dark for the Sands couple to see Riley as they entered the basement, so they were only able to hear him speak. Mrs. Sands said, "We couldn't see where we were going, well, it seemed to me it got darker the more we went, the further we went in." The contrast between the many characters' bright and dark environments subtly conveys the background's density. Esslin pointed this out as "The room becomes an image of the small area of light and warmth that our consciousness, the fact that we exist, opens up in the vast ocean of nothingness from 8 which we gradually emerge after birth and into which we sink again when we die" (236).

3. Conclusion

Harold Pinter's second play, *The Birthday Party*, was an ideal instance of the Pinteresque technique. But its roots can be seen in his debut play, *The Room*. *The Room* makes extensive use of pauses, silences, and other literary devices, albeit less clearly and formally than *The Birthday Party*. Although many critics have praised Pinter for writing in a Pinteresque style, Pinter rejected the assertion, believing his style to be less distinctive than others had claimed. Nevertheless, this approach is still frequently used in writing, and it has served as the foundation for numerous works. Pinter first used this approach in his 1957 play *The Room*, and it was eventually improved in his subsequent plays, including *The Caretaker* (1960) and *The Home Coming* (1964).

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