

**Jadwiga Uchman**

University of Łódź

## Pinteresque Dialogue

# ABSTRACT

---

The expression “Pinteresque” describing the characteristic features of Harold Pinter’s artistic output, established its position as a literary critical denominator many years ago. The aim of this article is to analyze some of the specific aspects of the playwright’s use of language. On several occasions, the artist made comments pertaining to certain issues concerning communication. He rejected the idea of the alienation of language and promoted the concept of evasive communication, thus showing people’s unwillingness to communicate. He also spoke about two kinds of silence, the first referring to a situation where there is actual silence, when “no word is spoken,” and the second, when “a torrent of language is being employed” in order to cover the character’s “nakedness.” Accordingly, Pinter’s plays may, depending on their perspective, be treated as dramas of language or of silence. This led Peter Hall, Pinter’s favourite theatre director and also a close friend, to notice that in the playwright’s *oeuvre* there is a clear distinction between three dots, a pause and a silence. This article discusses in detail the uneven distribution of pauses and silences in Harold Pinter’s 1977 play, *Betrayal*. It becomes evident that the use of different kinds of silence clearly indicates the emotional state of the characters at any given moment.

**Keywords:** Pinter, “Betrayal,” pause, silence.

---

It is not clear who first used the word “Pinteresque,” but it is obvious that by now it has acquired the status of an often used and accepted critical term describing the specific quality of Harold Pinter’s output. As early as 1968, Ronald Hayman wrote that the introduction of this descriptive term “must mean that [Pinter’s] style is the most distinctive, or at least, the most easily recognizable” (1). The word appears as an entry in various encyclopaedias and dictionaries, and so, for instance, *Brewer’s Theatre* defines it in the following way: “Pinteresque: Resembling the work or style of Harold Pinter. It is used especially of dialogue that resembles Pinter’s in being oblique, repetitive, interspersed with lengthy pauses . . . , menacing, and loaded with hidden meanings” (357).

Pinter worked out his dramatic dialogue according to the idea that real-life conversations do not proceed smoothly and logically—they are full of unfinished sentences, repetitions and inconsistencies. While discussing Pinter’s style, Hayman contends that: “This is the writing which succeeds by breaking all the rules of writing. It’s good because it’s so realistically full of bad syntax, tautologies, repetitions, pleonasm, non-sequiturs and self contradictions” (2). Similarly, G. S. Fraser concedes that Pinter’s language is a minute reproduction of real-life conversations. Moreover, he argues that what seems natural and realistic dialogue to actors is not one that is a precise reproduction of contemporary speech as, for instance, Pinter’s is, but a dialogue which reminds them of what they are used to speaking and hearing on the stage, an artistic reshaping of real life conversations (54–55). Thus, Pinter may be called an innovator as far as the introduction of a new kind of realistic dialogue is concerned.

Martin Esslin argues that Pinter “attempted in dramatic form what writers such as Virginia Woolf and James Joyce have accomplished in the novel. He has tried to realize dramatically the complexities of consciousness and the subconsciousness” (13). He also points out the similarities between the plays of Pinter and the music of Webern (12). Correspondingly, using musical terminology, John Russell Taylor writes about the “orchestration” of Pinter’s language. According to Taylor, Pinter’s dialogue is an exact reproduction of everyday speech, yet

it is orchestrated with overtones and reminiscences, with unexpected resonances from what has gone before, so that the result is a tightly knit and intricate texture of which the “naturalistic” words being spoken at any given moment are only the top line, supported by elusive and intricate harmonies, or appearing some times in counterpoint with another theme from earlier in the play. (315)

This view stresses the fact that the words spoken at a given moment are important not only because of their exact meaning, but also because of the other “harmonies” evoked through them. Harry Burton, who, as he argues himself, “played several Mozart operas,” while recalling his experiences of taking part in the production, argues:

Playing Jerry was probably the hardest thing I've ever done. Because the play's like a piece of music. . . . *Betrayal* is riddled with silences and pauses, and what I found doing Jerry was that you'd only done half your job in preparation once you'd learnt your part. I then had to learn the pauses and the silences, so that I could *play* them. And, you know, just as a piece of music requires diminuendos and silences and pauses and so on, every silence, every pause has a value musically, and if you don't play them, you're not hearing the piece—you're not playing the *notes* properly either. (Smith 211)

Pinter himself likewise employed musical terminology, when he stressed his sensitivity to “the balance, the timing, and the rhythm . . . , the silent music, as it were” of language (qtd. in Hollis 92). This opinion, once again, links the tradition of Pinter with that of Webern, whose music, according to Witold Lutosławski, “is on the way towards silence” (qtd. in Norwall 54). It also suggests the importance of silence in Pinter's theatre, one of the issues concerning language Pinter himself tackled. In 1962, during the National Student Drama Festival in Bristol, Pinter gave a speech which was later published under the title “Writing for the Theatre”:

Language . . . is a highly ambiguous commerce. So often, below words spoken, is the thing known and unspoken. . . .

There are two silences. One when no word is spoken. The other when perhaps a torrent of language is being employed. This speech is the speaking of a language locked beneath it. This is its continual reference. The speech we hear is an indication of that which we don't hear. It is a necessary avoidance, a violent, sly, anguished or mocking smoke screen which keeps the other in its place. When true silence falls we are still left with echo but are nearer nakedness. One way of looking at speech is to say that it is a constant strata-gem to cover nakedness.

We have heard many times that tired, grimy phrase: “Failure of communication” . . . and this phrase has been fixed to my work quite consistently. I believe the contrary. I think that we communicate only too well, in our silence, in what is unsaid, and that what takes place is a continual evasion, desperate rear-guard attempts to keep ourselves to ourselves. Communication is too alarming. To enter into someone else's life is too alarming. To disclose to others the poverty within us is too fearsome a possibility. (13, 14–15)

The first kind of silence, when no word is spoken, is marked in the play-text by three dots, a pause and a silence. The specific importance of pauses in Pinter's theatre has been noticed by a number of critics and theatre people, and is discernible in the introduction of an entry in *Brewer's Theatre*:

Pinter Pause: A long significant pause in stage dialogue. The name derives from Harold Pinter's characteristic use of the device; notoriously, he indicates his pauses explicitly in the text rather than leaving them to the discretion of the actors. John Gielgud has noted, "The 'Pinter Pause' is now a kind of copyright in the theatre world as it once was of the actor MACREADY in the nineteenth century." (357)<sup>1</sup>

Pinter, thus, describes it: "The pause is a pause because of what has just happened in the minds and guts of the characters. They spring out of the text. They're not formal conveniences or stresses but part of the body of the action" (qtd. in Gale 273). Peter Hall, Pinter's favourite theatre director and also his friend, wrote in the following way about the importance of pauses in Pinter's drama:

Pinter's pauses have become, journalistically, his trademark, and it is easy to denigrate them, even to think that they are meaningless—to think the characters have nothing to say because they say nothing. This is never true. . . . [I]he unsaid in Pinter is as important as the said; and is frequently as eloquent. He once rang me and announced a rewrite: "Page thirty-seven," he said (I found page thirty seven). "Cut the pause." There was a smile in his voice as he spoke, but he was nevertheless dead serious. It was like cutting a speech. The placing of the pauses, and their emotional significance, have always been meticulously considered. His imitators do not understand this. He often uses neatly colloquial speech patterns. But by the use of silence and of pauses, he gives a precise form to the seemingly ordinary, and an emotional power to the mundane. It is a very expressive form of dramatic dialogue. ("Directing the Plays" 147–48)<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Under the entry Macready (William, 1793–1871), we can read that he was an actor-manager, known as an eminent tragedian and that "He could . . . use silence to great effect: the term Macready pause is still used of a long significant pause" (*Brewer's Theatre* 282).

<sup>2</sup> On another occasion, Hall remarked: "A pause is really a bridge where the audience think that you're this side of the river, then when you speak again, you're on the other side. That's a pause. And it's alarming, often. It's a gap, which respectively gets filled in. It's not a dead stop—that's a silence, where the confrontation has become so extreme, there's nothing to be said until either the temperature has gone down, or the temperature has gone up, and then something quite new happens. Three dots is a very tiny hesitation, but it's

Pinter seems to have appreciated Hall's approach to the specificity of his playwriting as, in *The Paris Review* interview with Lawrence Benschky, he said: "Hall once held a dot and pause rehearsal for the actors in *The Homecoming*. Although it sounds bloody pretentious, it was apparently very valuable" ("Art").

At this point, it seems justified to have a closer look at the use of silences and pauses in a concrete play. *Betrayal*, written in 1977, at the most basic level presents a marital triangle—Emma's (the wife of Robert) love affair with his friend, Jerry. The play, though, is not as trivial and simple as might be expected, this being due, among other things, to the appearance of different kinds of betrayal in the drama, and also to the specific time structure of the piece. *Betrayal*, as Susan Hollis Merritt argues, got a mixed reception from the theatre critics, "with arguments ranging from its being totally superficial and emotionally remote to its being deeply profound and emotionally intense" (233).<sup>3</sup> Benedict Nightingale opposed the criticism concerning the play and stressed the advantages of its theme, specific time structure and masterly use of language:

[*Betrayal* is] one of Pinter's most successful exercises in presenting the least and evoking the most. What looks flat commonly has fissures of feeling beneath it, and what sounds banal can be magnificently resonant. . . . It substitutes the question "how?" for the cruder "what next" in the minds of the audience. And in my view it deepens and darkens our perception of the play, infecting the most innocent encounter with irony, dread and a sense of doom. . . . [Its every sentence expresses] desire, hurt, regret, rage or some concatenation of the impulses that are pounding about the slippery brainboxes of these artful dodgers. (718)

The drama consists of nine scenes and moves backwards in time. The first scene, set in 1977, presents the meeting of Emma and Jerry whose love affair ended two years earlier and contains (on 20 pages of text) 1 silence and 36 pauses. Scene Two, taking place slightly later in the same year, shows a meeting between Jerry and Robert (14 pages, 3 silences, 27 pauses). Scene Three moves back in time to 1975, when Emma and Jerry break up their love affair (20 pages, 7 silences, 12 pauses). In Scene Four, which shifts back to 1974, we witness Jerry paying a visit to Emma

---

there, and it's different from a semicolon which Pinter almost never uses, and it's different from a comma. A comma is something that you catch up on, you go through it. And a full stop's just a full stop. You stop" ("Directing Pinter" 26).

<sup>3</sup> Merritt provides an extensive survey of criticism concerning the play, its successive theatre productions and film version (231–39).

and Robert (11 pages, not a single silence, 6 pauses). In Scene Five, set in Venice in 1973, Robert finds a letter written by Jerry to Emma and gets her confirmation concerning the betrayal (13 pages, 6 silences, 22 pauses). Scenes Six and Seven, both taking place in the same year, just after the married couple's return from Italy, present the meetings of the lovers and the two friends, respectively. In the former, Emma meets Jerry (11 pages, no silences, 8 pauses), while in the latter Robert, the betrayed husband, meets Jerry, his friend (14 pages, no silences, 4 pauses). Scene Eight (summer 1971) presents Emma and Jerry in their rented place where they hold their secret meetings (10 pages, 1 silence, 19 pauses). Finally, the last, the ninth scene, demonstrates how the love affair started in 1968 at a party in Robert and Emma's house. It contains no pauses or silences (6 pages).

The specific character of the last scene is unique not only in the absence of pauses or silences, and the almost complete lack of three dots (they are used only twice), but also in its brevity. As it presents falling in love at first sight (almost, as they have met earlier), both Jerry and Emma feel at ease. When Robert enters the room, the following exchange takes place:

EMMA

Your best friend is drunk.

JERRY

As your best man and oldest friend and, in the present instance, my host, I decided to take this opportunity to tell your wife how beautiful she was.

ROBERT

Quite right.

JERRY

It is quite right, to . . . to face up to the facts . . . and to offer a token, without a blush, a token of one's unalloyed appreciation, no holds barred.

ROBERT

Absolutely. (137)

When Robert leaves the room, "*Jerry grasps her arm. [. . .] They stand still. Looking at each other*" (138).

Antonia Fraser, Pinter's wife, thus writes about *Betrayal*: "Peter [Hall] says it's a bleak play but I think it's about the affirmation of love, hence the ending on love, even if it begins with bleakness *after* the ending of love" (91). Slightly later, she writes:

For me, the unique quality of *Betrayal* was best captured by Samuel Beckett in his note to Harold after he had read the script. He referred to

the power of the last scene which is in fact the first scene chronologically, the dawn of the love affair; “the first last look in the shadows, after all those in the light to come, a curtain of curtains.” It is this sense of foreknowledge which clutches me with pain every time I see the play. (91)

It seems that the uneven distribution of silences and pauses in concrete scenes is indicative of the different emotional states the characters are in, at a given moment, and also of the rapport between them. The last scene presents all three characters as being relaxed and at ease, there are no tensions among them, and, therefore, they do not need to use masks to “cover their nakedness.” On the other hand, the first scene, charged with emotions and presenting Emma and Jerry two years after their love affair ended, contains 36 pauses and one silence. We learn that Emma and Robert had a quarrel the previous night and decided to get divorced. Under the pressure of the moment, Emma decided to call Jerry and arrange their meeting, her move being due, perhaps, to the fact that she had learned about Robert’s betrayal of her for years, or, which is equally possible, because she still keeps thinking about Jerry, as she herself confesses. The dots and pauses in their conversation mark moments of hesitation, moments when they feel rather uneasy. On such occasions, which uncover their “nakedness,” they employ the other kind of silence, “a torrent of words.” These keep their real feelings hidden. After a burdening and threatening pause, they often change the subject and start talking about Emma’s work in the gallery (14), Jerry asks about Robert (15), Emma about Jerry’s son while Jerry about Emma’s (16) and Emma mentions meeting Jerry’s daughter, Charlotte, in the street (18). Their dialogue proceeds, centring round Charlotte:

EMMA

[ . . . ] She remembers you, as an old friend.

JERRY

That’s right.

*Pause*

Yes, everyone was there that day, standing around, your husband, my wife, all the kids, I remember.

EMMA

What day?

JERRY

When I threw her up. It was in your kitchen.

EMMA

It was in your kitchen.

*Silence*

JERRY  
Darling.  
EMMA  
Don't say that.  
*Pause*  
It all . . .  
JERRY  
Seems such a long time ago.  
EMMA  
Does it? (20–21)

The purpose of Pinter's use of pauses and a silence in this short excerpt seems quite clear. The first pause, belonging to Jerry, which breaks up his utterance, follows the reference to his being "an old friend," and seems slightly, at least, ironic in the context of his having been Emma's lover. To avoid his/their "nakedness" being exposed, he employs "a torrent of words" and refers to the incident in the kitchen, which has been discussed earlier in their conversation. Emma does not seem to be involved in real communication, either. She is lost in her thoughts, absent-minded, which is highlighted by her question "What day?" Their inability to establish real contact is marked by the silence which comes soon afterwards. Then, after Emma's refusal to being referred to as "darling," a pause and her "It all" are followed by three dots. These indicate her being ill at ease. Only then does the dialogue proceed more smoothly. But, not for a long time. Trying to get out of an awkward situation, Jerry suggests another drink. When he comes back, she repeats the sentence she uttered some time earlier: "I thought of you the other day" (21, 12). As she does not get any response from Jerry, this being indicated by a pause, she delivers a short monologue, only momentarily interrupted by Jerry's "Yes" (21).

Harry Burton, an actor sensitive to the musical quality of Pinter's writing, thus comments on the beginning of the drama, in which he played the part of Jerry:

I think that the first scene in *Betrayal* is particularly difficult, because it begins with an exchange of apparently extremely commonplace, mundane, apparently "ordinary" stuttering comments. It's an almost embarrassed reunion between two people who have had an affair but who haven't seen each other for two years. To find the right way to play Jerry in that single scene was the hardest thing for me in the rehearsal period, because again and again I would be losing concentration. (Smith 215)



Scene Three, even though it is the same length as Scene One, contains a smaller number of pauses (only 12 compared to 36) and a considerably larger number of silences (7 and not only 1). This is indicative of the emotional state of Emma and Jerry at the moment their love affair ends. The scene presents Emma and Jerry in their rented meeting place:

*Silence*

JERRY

What do you want to do then?

*Pause*

EMMA

I don't quite know what we're doing, any more, that's all.

JERRY

Mmmm.

*Pause*

EMMA

I mean this flat . . .

JERRY

Yes. (49)

The scene is unquestionably characterized by great tension, this being signalled by its opening, when, for a long time, we are given the chance to watch two silent people. What follows are attempts by Emma to start a conversation, Jerry's unresponsiveness and the accompanying shorter (dots) and longer (pauses) in which there are moments of a complete lack of sound. The scene continues, and Emma argues that there is no point in getting another electric fire as:

[ . . . ] we're never here.

JERRY

We're here now.

EMMA

Not really.

*Silence*

JERRY

Well, things have changed. You've been so busy, your job, and everything. (51)

At the beginning of this episode, Jerry seems to be unaware or not willing to confess that he realizes it is all over. Then, however, he confirms that continuing the affair is pointless, at first accusing her of having too lit-

tle time to keep it going, and then slightly later on placing the blame partly on himself and, then, finally on them both being married:

JERRY

It would not matter how much we wanted to [meet] if you're not free in the afternoons and I'm in America.

*Silence*

Nights have always been out of the question and you know it. I have a family.

EMMA

I have a family too.

JERRY

I know that perfectly well I might remind you that your husband is my oldest friend.

EMMA

What do you mean by that?

JERRY

I don't *mean* anything by it.

EMMA

But what are you trying to say by saying that?

JERRY

Jesus. I'm not *trying* to say anything. I've said precisely what I wanted to say.

EMMA

I see.

*Pause*

The fact is that in the old days we used our imagination and we'd take a night and make an arrangement to go to an hotel.

JERRY

Yes. We did.

*Pause*

But that was . . . in the main . . . before we got this flat.

EMMA

We haven't spent many nights . . . in this flat.

JERRY

No.

*Pause*

Not many nights anywhere, really.

*Silence*

EMMA

Can you afford . . . to keep it going, month after month?

JERRY

Oh . . .

EMMA

It's a waste. [ . . . ] It's ridiculous.

*Pause*

It's just . . . an empty home.

JERRY

It's not a home.

*Pause*

I know . . . I know what you wanted . . . but it could never . . . actually be a home. You have a home. I have a home. With curtains, etcetera. And children. Two children in two homes. There are no children here, so it's not the same kind of home.

EMMA

It was never intended to be the same kind of home. Was it?

*Pause*

You didn't ever see it as a home, in any sense, did you?

JERRY

No, I saw it as a flat . . . you know.

EMMA

For fucking.

JERRY

No, for loving.

EMMA

Well, there's not much of that left, is there?

*Silence*

JERRY

I don't think we don't love each other.

*Pause*

EMMA

Ah well.

*Pause*

What will we do about all the . . . furniture? (54–55)

From the above scene it transpires that the affair is over. Furthermore, the masterly use of pauses and silences indicates that, even though Emma herself suggests ending the affair, she is, in fact, reluctant to do so. She did want to make the flat a home, her having brought a tablecloth from Venice, which is mentioned in the scene, being indicative of this. There was a moment, too, immediately following her return from Italy, when she hoped they could change their lives, an idea which was immediately rejected by Jerry (127–28). Jerry, on the other hand, wants to make it absolutely clear that it was only a passing episode, and while parting, cynically hurts Emma by reminding her that Robert is his friend.

Another scene in which there are a great number of silences is Scene Five, where the truth of what really happened in Venice is revealed. It is not astonishing because, as the parting scene, it presents an emotional climax for the its participants. It could come as a surprise, though, that Scene Seven,

which presents the meeting of the two friends after Robert's return from Italy, is absolutely devoid of silences and contains only 4 pauses. Taking into account the fact that Robert has just discovered that he has been betrayed not only by his wife but also by his best friend, one could expect his violent reaction. However, none comes, at least in the dialogue between them. Nevertheless, Robert vents his anger by showing impatience towards a waiter in addition to his subsequent outburst concerning him being a bad journalist. One explanation for his strange behaviour might be the fact that he himself is also having a love affair, thus betraying his own wife.

Alrene Sykes discusses the affinities between the art of Pinter and that of Strindberg, claiming that both playwrights "share a common emphasis on psychic conflict as the essence of drama" and that "Pinter's practice in dialogue in many ways fulfils quite precisely Strindberg's theory" (98). She finishes her comparison of the two artists by saying:

And if a character from a play may be taken for once as an author's mouthpiece, one might quote the Old Man of *The Ghost Sonata* as expressing a sentiment identical with Pinter's: "OLD MAN: . . . Silence cannot hide anything—but words can." (Sykes 99)

Similarly, Ruth in Pinter's *The Homecoming* argues that the very act of speaking is sometimes of greater importance than the message conveyed by the words uttered: "My lips move. Why don't you restrict . . . your observation to that? Perhaps the fact that they move is more significant . . . than the words which come through them. You must bear . . . that . . . possibility . . . in mind" (69).

In the context of Pinter's theatre of silence, it is worth recalling the experiments conducted by Stanislavsky in the Moscow Art Theatre, who gave his opinion on and definition of the clues for actors hidden beneath the surface of the dialogue. He called them the subtext of a play:

The subtext is a web of innumerable, varied inner patterns inside a play and a part, woven from the "magic ifs," given circumstances, all sorts of figments of the imagination, inner movements, objects of attention, smaller and greater truths and a belief in them, adaptations, adjustments and other similar elements. It is the subtext that makes us say the words we do in a play. (qtd. in Styan 13)

Stanislavsky stressed the importance of an idea which is crucial to Pinter's artistic conception—the co-existence of the spoken word and that which is hidden beneath. This is very significant, perhaps even more so

than the one which is actually uttered. Arguing that there are two levels of language, Pinter does not allow a real silence to last too long. Even if a character is silent, the subtext is still present. Thus, the silence is not merely an absence of sound. James Hollis also stressed this notion when he wrote: “Silence is more than an absence and Pinter’s gift has been to create dramatic representations of silence as a presence” (17).

The second type of silence mentioned by Pinter, when “a torrent of language is being employed,” as “a constant stratagem to cover nakedness,” is often encountered in Pinter’s drama for example, the aforementioned reference in the scene when Jerry picked Charlotte up, threw her up in the air and caught her in the kitchen, is repeated twice. Pinter’s dialogue can be viewed, and discussed, from the point of view of the language games which people play in order to avoid the horrors of true intimacy. A reference to these ideas is expressed by Eric Berne in his book *Games People Play*. His characters play talking games as a means of escaping the feeling of loneliness, as well as games of pretended polite conversation as a smoke screen to hostility, in addition to games of deception, lying and cheating. In most cases, the dialogue between Pinter’s characters is a form of dissimulation. While having a conversation, the characters are simultaneously playing a game of hide and seek—each of them is trying to find the meaning the other has hidden beneath the words that have actually been spoken, the subtextual stream of reference. In Pinter’s plays, language games often function as metaphors for the battle in which the characters are involved. His people frequently become wily players seeking to gain the upper hand in their social interactions, in order to belong to “the larger field of *social dynamics*” (Berne 46). The linguistic quarrel between Gus and Ben concerning the correctness of such phrases as “light the kettle” and “light the gas” in *The Dumb Waiter* (141) and the one between the Sands’ over the question of whether Mr. Sands was “sitting” or “perching” in *The Room* (116), are examples of this kind. Such contests of wills indicate which of the characters is dominant. In this context, it is worth mentioning James Hollis. Paraphrasing von Clausewitz’s definition of “war,” Hollis argued that language may be called “a continuation of tension by other means” (Hollis 123). Characters often play a game of questions and answers, which may follow one of two modes: the phatic, which consists of a series of irrelevant questions and seeks to establish contact between the characters, and the rhetorical, the dividing mode, where one of the partners aims at establishing his domination over the other. Both modes can be seen in Pinter’s output. Sometimes they appear separately, at others one changes into the other. The most obvious examples of the phatic mode changing

into the rhetorical occur in the interrogation scenes in *The Birthday Party* (57–63) and throughout nearly the whole of *One for the Road*.

Unquestionably, Pinter's language possesses a number of characteristic features, which makes the term "Pinteresque" fully justifiable. The playwright, however, detested the phrase and objected to its use in an interview conducted by Bensky: "That word! These damn words and that word. *Pinteresque* particularly—I don't know what they're bloody well talking about!" (Pinter, "Art"). A few years earlier, however, he said:

I'm speaking with some reluctance, knowing that there are at least twenty-four possible aspects of any single statement, depending on where you're standing at the time or what the weather's like. A categorical statement, I find, will never stay where it is and be finite. It will immediately be subject to modification by the other twenty-three possibilities of it. No statement I make, therefore, should be interpreted as final and definitive. One or two of them may sound final and definitive, they may be *almost* final and definitive, but I won't regard them as such tomorrow, and I wouldn't like you to do so today. (Pinter, "Writing" 9)

The above words were uttered by Pinter in the context of him not being a theorist or a critic, and were meant to be a qualifier for what he wanted to say about his playwriting. The notion of the relativity of meaning and the multiplicity of its ensuing interpretations is a characteristic feature of many artistic enterprises, including Pinteresque art. Pinter began his Nobel lecture "Art, Truth & Politics" by saying:

In 1958 I wrote the following:

There are no hard distinctions between what is real and what is unreal, nor between what is true and what is false. A thing is not necessarily true or false, it can be both true and false.

I believe that these assumptions still make sense and do still apply to the exploration of reality through art. So as a writer I stand by them but as a citizen I cannot. As a citizen I must ask: What is true? What is false?

The relativity pertaining to the seemingly obvious juxtaposition of truth and lies is also applicable to Pinter's theatre, which may justifiably be called both the theatre of language and the theatre of silence, especially if one takes into account the playwright's distinction between the two kinds of silence. This feature, characterizing the artist's output, is probably discernible in the

critical term “Pinteresque.” Even though Pinter objected to its application, it has become a part of critical terminology. Peter Hall, an expert in Pinter’s dramatic language, has stated:

He makes us realise that poetic drama could be mined out of real speech. . . . I think Harold is a masterly poet. And that’s why he finally towers above everybody else, whatever their merits. “Pinteresque” is simply the label of his style. He has created an entire world out of Cockney speech. (qtd. in Billington 391)

The playwright, Per Wästberg, a Member of the Swedish Academy, and Chairman of its Nobel Committee, said in his Noble Prize Presentation Speech on December 10, 2005: “Harold Pinter is the renewer of English drama in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. ‘Pinteresque’ is an adjective listed in the Oxford Dictionary. Like Kafka, Proust and Graham Greene he has charted a territory, a Pinterland with a distinct topography.”

400

#### WORKS CITED

- Berne, Eric. *Games People Play*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968. Print.
- Billington, Michael. *The Life and Work of Harold Pinter*. London: Faber, 1996. Print.
- Brewer’s Theatre. A Phrase and Fable Dictionary*. London: Cassell, 1994. Print.
- Esslin, Martin. *The Peopled Wound: The Work of Harold Pinter*. New York: Doubleday, 1970. Print.
- Fraser, Antonia. *Must You Go? My Life with Harold Pinter*. London: Weidenfeld, 2010. Print.
- Fraser, G. S. *The Modern Writer and His World*. London: Andre Deutsch, 1964. Print.
- Gale, Stephen H. *Butter’s Going up. A Critical Analysis of Harold Pinter’s Work*. Durham: Duke UP, 1977. Print.
- Hall, Peter. “Directing Pinter.” *Harold Pinter: You Never Heard Such Silence*. Ed. Alan Bold. London: Vision, 1985. 19–28. Print.
- . “Directing the Plays of Harold Pinter.” *The Cambridge Companion to Harold Pinter*. Ed. Peter Raby. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2001. 145–54. Print.
- Hayman, Ronald. *Harold Pinter*. London: Heinemann, 1968. Print.
- Hollis, James. *Harold Pinter. The Poetics of Silence*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1970. Print.

- Merritt, Susan Hollis. *Pinter in Play. Critical Strategies and the Plays of Harold Pinter*. Durham: Duke UP, 1990. Print.
- Nightingale, Benedict. "Anti-Clockwise." *New Statesman* 24 Nov. 1978: 717–18. Print.
- Norwall, Ove, ed. *Lutosławski*. Copenhagen: Wilhelm Hansen, 1968. Print.
- Pinter, Harold. "The Art of Theater No. 3." Interview by Lawrence M. Bensky. *The Paris Review* 3 (Fall 1966): n. pag. Web. 5 Oct. 2014.
- . *Betrayal*. New York: Grove, 1978. Print.
- . "Nobel Lecture. Art, Truth & Politics." *Nobelprize.org*. Nobel Media AB 2005. Web. 5 Oct. 2014.
- . "The Birthday Party." *Complete Works: One*. New York: Grove, 1978. 17–97. Print.
- . "The Dumb Waiter." *Complete Works: One*. New York: Grove, 1978. 127–65. Print.
- . "The Homecoming." *Complete Works: Three*. New York: Grove, 1978. 19–98. Print.
- . "The Room." *Complete Works: One*. New York: Grove, 1978. 99–126. Print.
- . "Writing for the Theatre." *Complete Works: One*. New York: Grove, 1978. 9–16. Print.
- Smith, Ian, comp. *Pinter in the Theatre*. London: Hern, 2005. Print.
- Styan, J. L. *The Elements of Drama*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1976. Print.
- Sykes, Alrene. *Harold Pinter*. St Lucia: U of Queensland P, 1970. Print.
- Taylor, John Russell. *Anger and After*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1963. Print.
- Wästberg, Per. "The Nobel Prize in Literature 2005—Presentation Speech." *Nobelprize.org*. Nobel Media AB 2005. Web. 10 Jan. 2013.

**Jadwiga Uchman** (Professor) is the head of the Department of Studies in Drama and Pre-1800 English Literature, University of Łódź. She specializes in modern English Drama, especially poetic drama, the Theatre of the Absurd, T. S. Eliot, Samuel Beckett, Harold Pinter and Tom Stoppard. She is the author of numerous articles and three books: *The Problem of Time in the Plays of Samuel Beckett* (Łódź, 1987), *Reality, Illusion, Theatricality: A Study of Tom Stoppard* (Łódź, 1998) and *Playwrights and Directors: Samuel Beckett, Tom Stoppard and Harold Pinter* (Łódź, 2011).

**jagodauchman@wp.pl**