

FACULTY OF AL ALSUN
AIN SHAMS UNIVERSITY

1-1

127C

THE THEME OF POSSESSORS AND DISPOSSESSORS
IN HAROLD PINTER'S PLAYS

By
KARMA MOHAMED SAMI FARID



AN M.A. THESIS
SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH
IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS OF
THE M.A. DEGREE

822.09 914

K.M.

33771

Under the Supervision of
ASSOC. PROF. MOHAMED SHEBL EL KOMY



1990

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The candidate wishes to express her gratitude to her supervisor Assoc. Professor Mohamed Shebl El Komy for his observations, erudition, understanding and patience.

Thanks are also due to Prof. Ibrahim Maghraby for his encouragement throughout her under-graduate and post-graduate studies.

Finally to her friend Mohamed Nassar for his un-failing help and illuminating remarks.

May God preserve them all for the benefit of their country.



C O N T E N T S

	page
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.	ii
INTRODUCTION.	1
Part One: THEORY:	
Chapter I: NATURE AND FUNCTION OF DRAMA	6
Chapter II: THEMES	37
Chapter III: TECHNIQUE.	56
Part Two: PRACTICE:	
Chapter I: The Room	100
Chapter II: THE CARETAKER.	151
Chapter III: THE BASEMENT	248
CONCLUSION.	324
WORKS CONSULTED	329

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of the present thesis is to indicate Pinter's critical theories and their effect on his plays as far as the theme of possessors and dispossessors is concerned.

The thesis is divided into two parts, three chapters each. Part One depicts Pinter's critical theories. Part Two investigates the application of these theories through analysing three of Pinter's plays: The Room, The Caretaker, and The Basement.

Part One, "Theory", is divided into three chapters. Chapter I examines Pinter's theories as related to the nature and function of drama. Pinter expresses his distrust in theories. He alienates himself from the present conditions of the theatre which he considers to be mainly cheating, and static.

Pinter believes that playwrights mar the nature and consistency of plays by complying with demands other than those of the work itself. Those writers are trapped in hypothetical schools of writing; thus, they are not given free hand to portray life according to their own beliefs.

Pinter is not in favour of categorizing plays into comedy, tragedy, melodrama, ...etc. He believes that a fusion of different elements is inevitable. Thus, he refrains from subordinating drama to its theories.

Concerning the function of drama, Pinter asserts that a playwright writes for his own benefit, not the others'. For him a

play is a play not an article. A writer is not a politician or a social worker. If a writer wants to insert a moral, then, according to Pinter, the theatre will become a soap-box.

Pinter is not against teaching morality through his plays. He admits to be a committed writer, yet not in the usual sense. His aim is to show the absurdity of man's behaviour, indirectly, and without deforming the nature of a work of art.

Pinter later develops a political conscience which is apparent in his last two plays: One For The Road, and Mountain Language. Politics is used as an arena into which he delves to show more of the absurdity of man's behaviour.

Chapter II unfolds Pinter's main themes as related to his basic dramatic situation. Pinter's basic situation demonstrates the relationship between a host and an intruder in a room. The situation triggers questions related to love, search for identity, time, memory, possessions and women. Pinter's themes are interwoven as they are related to a primitive violent struggle for power and subservience. In this struggle, the individual defies his peers as well as the Establishment.

Chapter III depicts Pinter's technique. Pinter's writing process depends mainly upon spontaneity. Pinter is both traditional and innovative in his dramaturgy. He is a dramatist who knows how to use his dramatic tools moderately. His use of props is significant. His stage directions are illuminating. Both are complementary for the benefit of the dramatic situation.

Pinter's use of language is one of his dramatic landmarks. He is fascinated by the use of extremely lifelike diction and structure. Yet he does not let the words subdue him. Pinter's use of silence on stage is remarkable. He shows the difference between a meaningful and a meaningless silence. Communication is not conditioned by language. His characters can communicate better through silence. Here lies his talent as a writer. Pinter's career began with an admiration for language which shortly turned to a fascination. This attachment receded as Pinter's experience in TV and film making grew wider. The image became a more important element on his stage rather than the word.

Pinter's characterization depends upon spontaneity. He declares that he holds the ropes of the characters. Yet, he admits that they grow out of his proportions sometimes. He would not jeopardize their consistency, nor make any claims on their past, present, or future.

Part Two "Practice" applies Pinter's theories to three of his plays as far as the theme of possessors and dispossessors is concerned. Chapter I "The Room" investigates the apprehensions of Pinter's theories in the play. Pinter's characterization grows out of his proportions. The delineation of the characters is not flawless. The use of silence and language marks Pinter's growing admiration for the verbal capabilities of the theatre.

The theme of possessors and dispossessors takes its initial form: the struggle for power and subservience permeates the rela-

tionships. The characters fight mainly for security in a room. The other issues that flourish later in Pinter's plays are not successfully used in The Room. The sense of time and memory is tragically represented. The question of identity is ambiguous. The love triangle of a husband, a wife, and a lover is unconvincing. The play is far too ambiguous to be called realistic. Pinter's basic situation bears the germ of other plays to follow.

Chapter II "The Caretaker" is a development in Pinter's career. The menace of the dramatic situation is heightened as the intruder is invited this time. The escalation of events is effected by the intruder who lays his hand on more rights. The possessors act positively unlike other Pinteresque characters. They use both physical and verbal violence. Other themes are used more effectively in this play except for the absence of women.

Pinter's fascination by language is easily tracked. The word and the image form a suitable environment on stage for the theme. Yet, Pinter's land is primarily language. The characters are multi-dimensional. They represent a more mature Pinter.

The form of the play is related to the traditional Pinter. A full-length play form proves to be successful with Pinter's theme of possessors and dispossessors. It gives an opportunity to the intrinsic relations on stage to flourish.

Chapter III "The Basement" represents the peak of Pinter's career regarding the theme. The characterization is more abstract. The play is a divorce from the influence of language on Pinter.

The patterns of the possessor-dispossessor struggle are all represented more forcefully. The form is an innovation due to the influence of Pinter's career as a screen writer on his dramaturgy. The play proves that the theme of possessors and dispossessors serves as a melting pot to other themes. Thus the characters fight over women, love, material possessions and memories of the past. The struggle is fiercer at the end as Pinter tends to show the ferocity of individuals in society.

Pinter's aim is to show the absurdity of man's behaviour and portray an image of social living so as to help it be better. The conclusion follows.

This thesis offers a word-by-word analysis of the plays. Despite the drawbacks of such an analysis, it shows the fine texture with which Pinter portrays a world of irrelevancies, hesitation, violence, subservience, evasiveness and dispossession. A study of any play by Pinter necessitates this kind of analysis as Pinter creates his dramatic dialogue with the craftsmanship of a poet. Thus, a word-by-word analysis reveals the cohesiveness which moulds the intrinsic Pinteresque elements all into one form.

P A R T O N E

Chapter I : Nature and Function of Drama

I'm not a theorist. I'm not an authoritative or reliable commentator on the dramatic scene, the social scene, any scene. I write plays, when I can manage it, and that's all.¹

Harold Pinter believes in his duty as a writer only. Thus, he refrains from undertaking any responsibility outside the boundaries of writing plays. Yet, Pinter is unaware that those plays represent his comments regarding the dramatic scene, the social scene, any scene. However, this chapter attempts to show that behind Pinter's unwillingness to theorize lies an earnest desire to distinguish his works from the present conditions of the theatre in order to be able to show the absurdity of man's behaviour, and to make life worth living.

Pinter's endeavour to rule out theorizing is an attempt on his part to preserve his originality as a writer. He refuses to become a salesman. He also refuses to become a public figure and consequently be treated as one. Thus, he points at the dangers awaiting any public figure "You become an exhibitionist, self-important, pompous. Before you know where you are you're having make-up put on, your eye-lashes are being tinted."²

The voice of truth would fade out because according to Pinter "this is an age of such overblown publicity and overemphatic pinning down."³ Pinter himself is part of this on-going process.

Yet, he warns the reader that "there are at least twenty-four possible aspects of any single statement."⁴ He illustrates "No statement I make, therefore, should be interpreted as final and definitive. One or two of them may sound final and definitive, but I won't regard them as such tomorrow, and I wouldn't like you to do so today."⁵ Pinter is thus confessing his inconsistency. He does not regard it as a flaw but rather a factual necessity. However, this inconsistency permeates most of his literary views. Thus, one may deduce that Pinter is reluctant to theorize because he finds no truth other than the work of art itself.

Pinter is not in favour of theorizing either on his part or on the others'. He does not hold professional criticism in a high esteem. He asserts "Praise and insult refer to someone called Pinter. I don't know the man they're talking about. I know the plays, but in a totally different way, in a quite private way."⁶ Pinter's words express his complaints regarding criticism. According to him, Harold Pinter is "someone else's creation."⁷ Thus, only his plays can guarantee his true existence.

He also does not approve of many critical views that built up his fame. As a matter of fact he regards Pinteresque as remote from him as Arnoldian, Eliotian, or Shavian. He expresses his exasperation:

That word! These damn words and that word Pinteresque particularly - I don't know what they're bloody well talking about! ... I've seen very little evidence of it,

anyway; other people seem to see more evidence of it than I do.⁸

Therefore, it is preferable for Pinter to analyze his plays as they stand for themselves without attempting to identify them with the sacred undefined principles of the Pinteresque. Or else, the work of any researcher would be like an identikit that is based on what the others have already seen for themselves.

Harold Pinter is also dissatisfied with categorizing his plays as the comedy of menace. He even rejects the title granted by the critics: "I never stuck categories on myself, or on any of us."⁹ He rejects categorization and believes that there is more to his plays than this dramatic genre. Thus he declares:

if what I understand the word menace to mean is certain elements that I have employed in the past in the shape of a particular play, then I don't think it's worth of much more exploration.¹⁰

Pinter deliberately misled the critics in retaliation for their alleged critiques. He confesses:

Someone asked me what my work was 'about'. I replied with no thought at all and merely to frustrate this line of enquiry: 'The weasel under the cocktail cabinet.'
That was a great mistake...¹¹

Pinter's statement as he confesses may signify nothing, yet it proves Pinter's intention, which is to invite both the reader and

critic to confine themselves to the work itself rather than the man behind the work.

Pinter is not only dissatisfied with the critics' dramatic principles, but the present norms of the theatre as well. He believes that they imply what is against his nature as well as the nature of his plays. Thus, he declares:

The theatre is a large, energetic, public activity. Writing is, for me, a completely private activity, a poem or a play, no difference. These facts are not easy to reconcile. The professional theatre, whatever the virtues it undoubtedly possess, is a world of false climaxes, calculated tensions, some hysteria, and a good deal of inefficiency.¹²

Thus, Pinter presupposes that any theatre has its virtues, while stamping out the vices of the professional theatre which are: falsity and incompetence. Pinter is also hinting at the deterioration of the theatre which coincides with his own stability of ideas and beliefs, as he adds "basically my position has remained the same."¹³ Pinter's advantage over the professional theatre is likely to be attributed to his amateurism. He writes his plays for pleasure not commercial profit.

The privacy which Pinter necessitates for the art of writing adds a sacred quality to the process. This insularity prompts the playwright to become the only contributor to the work. Thus, Pinter relates:

What interests me in the theater is firstly, a play written by one writer, and of course, done to a degree of excellence. As a director myself I appreciate that. Group theater that I've seen, creation by a group, very, very rarely interests me.¹⁴

Pinter would find extreme pleasure in being responsible for his work entirely, without the meddling of others. He confirms his point of view "I find in so much group theatre, under the sweat and assault and noise, nothing but valueless generalization, naive and quite unfruitful."¹⁵ Pinter's plays thus become his own possessions.

Pinter allows no room for improvisation in his plays. Modern trends in drama do not interest him as he confesses "I'm a fairly traditional person."¹⁶ Thus, it is likely of him to announce "I don't at all believe in the anarchic theater of so-called 'creative' actors - the actors can do that in someone else's plays."¹⁷ He would allow no anarchy in his theatre, that is to say that his theatre is characterized by order and restraint.

According to Pinter, each writer should realize the nature of plays and the relationship that takes place between the writer and his writings. He states:

A play is not an essay, nor should a playwright under any exhortation damage the consistency of his characters by injecting a remedy or apology for their actions into the last act, simply because we have been brought up to