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RESEARCH ARTICLE

AMBIGUITY IN THE SILENCES AND PAUSES OF PINTERESQUE DRAMAS.

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Abstract

This paper aims at highlighting, by means of a synthetic approach in combination with analytical elements, some of the elements and peculiarities of Pinter's dramas, which made him one of the most important playwrights of postmodern era. We will mainly focus on his silences and pauses he is so famous for, which became a trademark of his dialogue otherwise called the "Pinter Pause". We will explore how failure in communication and the breakdown of human relations paved the way for ambiguity, nebulousness and menace. Our aim is to make clear Pinter's ideas on silences and pauses when he used them, what he meant and we will reveal that the uttered and spoken word is important, but the most important is what is left unsaid, the idea understated beyond silences. Elements of postmodern literature found in his work made it difficult to understand and analyze Pinter's work, often referred to and classified as illogical and irrational. Finally, we will try to restate once again the importance of silences and pauses expressed by 3 dots(...) in the Comedies of Menace, as the only way to penetrate through the real hidden significance of these dramas.

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Introduction:-

This paper will deal with peculiarities of Pinter's absurd dramas so as to reveal his influence on audience and explore how his ambiguity paved the way for multiple readings leaving his plays open-ended. One of the main elements of an absurd drama is the dramatic conflict in the traditional meaning. It is thought that conflicts of personality clashes are closely related to a temporary and strict attitude, in a meaningless world, these kind of conflicts are meaningless too. The absence of a traditional dramatic conflict in an absurd play can be explained with the absence of events and movements on the stage which is totally different to what frequently happens in a traditional play. For the very same reason we could say that the absurd plays can be given the name of the Situational Theatre's plays. Despite the fact that Pinter was first criticized by both the audience and the critics for the nature of his plays which appeared to be a combination of bestial language and characters as well, he was one of the most distinguished playwrights who dominated the second half of the 20th Century and one of the most influential since George Bernard Shaw. Bock and other critics agreed on one point that all of Pinter's plays written after "*The Homecoming*" never had the quality of his very first plays (Bock.H. 2008). The originality of his fiction and the greatest impact of his works was seen in his early years with his early plays despite the first rejection of his peculiar approach.

Pinter's positioning in the british drama was gradual, but at the same time very influential and strong once the critics were introduced to the Plays of the Theatre of Absurd, which in 1960 became a separate dramatic literary movement, coined by Martin Esslin (Schumacher, C. 1990). The sense of evasiveness, aggressiveness, violation of identity and the self were major themes depicted in his plays. Many critics tried to classify them as plays of menace,

identity, memory, and political plays which all aimed at highlighting and exploring the specific principles of the human existence, but Pinter did not like being classified and being part of any literary movement. He tried to deploy the characteristics of the Theatre of Absurd which "strived to express the anguish and the uselessness of the human condition, the inadequacy of the rational approach by the deliberate abandonment of rational devices and discursive thought. (Esslin, 2004)

Pinteresque plays and ambiguity:-

His plays were given the name of naturalist, realist, existentialist and impressionist dramas (Randisi. J. L.1984). He was very much distinguished for his style and ability to use certain elements in a versatile style that his themes were accepted as his trademark in the history of Playwriting. As far as his artistic personality was concerned, he was well-known for the frequent use of such elements:

- Absence of deliberate or accidental communication between characters
- Decoded conversations and silence
- Lack of logic, coherence and rationality in the dramatic narration
- Characters' fixations and jealousy
- Use of pauses and silences to express what was left unsaid
- Characters' outer fearfulness
- Characters' isolation
- The unknown threat that was at the very center of their lives
- Their mental anguish, their neurosis and psychosis
- The abandonment of language and rationality as means of communication
- The benefit from elements of traditional drama
- Everyday language, slang
- Lifelike characters and situations
- The difficulty of reaching and understanding the immediate meaning

As Esslin puts it, the most important thing for Pinter was to reveal to the audience that what we spoke every day was illogical and senseless (Esslin. M. 1965)

Truth in drama is forever elusive. You never quite find it but the search for it is compulsive. The search is clearly what drives the endeavor. The search is your task. More often than not you stumble upon the truth in the dark, colliding with it or just glimpsing an image or a shape which seems to correspond to the truth, often without realizing that you have done so. But the real truth is that there never is any such thing as one truth to be found in dramatic art. There are many. These truths challenge each other, recoil from each other, reflect each other, ignore each other, tease each other, are blind to each other. Sometimes you feel you have the truth of a moment in your hand, then it slips through your fingers and is lost.

Harold Pinter (Pinter. H : 2005)

According to him, everything said or unsaid can be either true or untrue or it can be both. You never know for sure which is which. Truth is relative. There are no hard distinctions between what is real and what is not, what is true and what is false. A thing is not necessarily either true or false because it can be both at the same time. These assertions still make sense and do apply to the exploration of reality through art. So as writers we can stand by them, but as citizens we cannot, as citizens we must ask: What is true? What is False? He created lifelike situations where characters, their actions and dialogue came out to be unreal at the end. Firstly, he set his characters in a concrete environment: a room, a house or an enclosed shelter which symbolized "warmth and coziness towards the threatening outer world", which on the other hand served as a prison itself (Bock, H.1981).

In that room, characters were dominated by a feeling of “loneliness, aggressiveness, separation and loss” which served as Pinter's main themes in his Comedies of Menace. They were given such a name because they perfectly combined humor and threatening elements. They were unique works of art and you can never find similar dramas elsewhere, he can't be compared to any other contemporary playwright. Pinter's characters were totally paralysed, afraid of the outer world and its intruders. Through the character of Rose in “*The Room*” Pinter wanted to reveal to both readers and the audience, the sense of insecurity given through her fear of going outside the room she inhabited (Gale.S. H. 1996). They were totally scared from the world outdoor and they preferred to create their own worlds/ realities with their own rules and live peacefully there better than observe the rules outside the room. The element of Room was very much used by Pinter in most of his works. What draws our attention as readers and audience is the ambiguity and we do not understand where it came or derived from. This sense of ambiguity creates tension, a sense of insecurity and menace which is given in the text by the use of the 3 dots (...), pauses, silences or the deliberate lack of communication among characters, whose autonomy, the sense of past and future were unstable.

Another very important element that threatens these characters and makes ambiguity stronger is the idea of an intruder coming from the outside without being invited. The feeling of being threatened leads us to another issue, the one of power and violence, which are powerfully given through dramatic elements of theatre for example the total darkness, poor lightning and lights fade. In those few moments of darkness, the familiar environment became threatening and hostile. Despite the high load of aggressiveness and shadows of doubt of his dialogue, he tried to come to terms with a comic model in his plays. Such a model was first used in his first play “*The Room*”. Some of the main features of this model were incongruity, illogical outcomes, frequent repetition and restating over and over what we already knew as an audience. Two of these elements were clearly visible in the dialogue between Rose and Mr. Kidd, the landlord- incongruity as far as the term Bed-Room of his sister was concerned and an illogical and irrational conclusion of the conversation. The first intrusion occurred with the entry of the landlord, Mr. Kidd, whose evasiveness and vague answers to Rose's inquires served, as much as Bert's silence, to increase Rose's uncertainty about the world outside and undermine the security of her room.

- Rose: How many floors you got in this house?
- Mr. Kidd: Floors? (He laughs). Ah, we had a good few of them in the old days.
- Rose: How many have you got now?
- Mr. Kidd: Well, to tell you the truth, I don't count them now. Oh, I used to count them once... I used to keep a track on everything in this house... That was when my sister was alive, but I lost track a bit after she died.
- When Rose asks him if anyone lived upstairs, “Up there?” Mr. Kidd ponders, “There was one but gone now.”
- 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... [

The conversation is vague, unclear and it gives us the impression that what Mr Kidd is referring to are people not floors. It eventually becomes a series of attacks and counter-attacks and Mr. Kidd seems very keen on pinpointing Rose's vulnerabilities when he says that Rose's room has once been his bedroom. This fact inevitably reminds Rose of her status as tenant and temporary occupant of the room. Comicity in this and other plays comes as an important feature of the conflict itself. What still remains important to pinpoint as a trademark of Pinter are these three elements: Pauses, silences and 3 dots (...) instead of one full stop. They have a different meaning, not the one we expect them to have (Pinter.H in Gussow 1994). Pause is a pause because of what has just happened in the mind and guts of the characters... and a silence means that what happened before made everybody unable to speak for a while until they recover from what had happened before the silence took place.

Silences carry upon the importance of pieces of dialogue. They create an island of sounds and have their own dramatic significance. They become more powerful when they are in isolation, pause in itself does not mean that the action is over; in fact it implies that the character is still active, looking for new words to use, a new way of being saved or a new interactional approach. On the other hand *Silence* is a defense tactic which signals the end of communication. What Pinter had in mind was that words were not the only way to communicate with the world, we often notice other elements when we make use of silence. Through silence we can transmit much more, we can become deaf because of such deafening silence which carries and conveys more meaning and significance than

words can. We have to read through the lines and uttered words, we communicate more by staying silent. Since communication among characters has failed, it can open ways to a multiple of readings and interpretations on Pinter's plays. This makes his plays ambiguous, unclear and difficult to decode and interpret. They are open-ended plays and one can interpret them from their view point.

Pinter thought that if we stay silent we highlight our actions. We could perfectly communicate only by means of our movements and gestures, so in this way words get replaced by gestures, as it frequently happens in Pinter's works. His plays rarely start with uttered words, but we see the opening of the curtains and the appearance of one or two actors are standing up, sitting or lying down. Silences are broken by their utterances but they will soon give way to silence once again, and this time it will prevail. Pinter knew these small tricky details perfectly well since he was both an actor and art-director and he knew how to manipulate the dramatic action to make the audience experience what was happening on stage. In this and other plays like *"The Birthday Party"* and *"The Dumb Waiter"*, he used certain techniques borrowed from Alfred Hitchcock's melodramas, so as to increase suspense and tension.

What seems to be a sinister and evil situation, in fact it is not and vice versa. This viewpoint was adopted by Hitchcock. Paranoia was intertwined with ambiguity, evasiveness and a spark of black humor. His plays still remain enigmatic, encoded and very mysterious. We never really understood who Riley was, or who were McCann and Goldberg and who they worked for, and we never got to know the previous profession of Stanley in *"The Birthday Party"*. All these enigmatic elements and unanswered questions increase the symbolic significance of his works. His plays depict characters with a disoriented personality. Even nowadays, his plays remain ambiguous, unclear, doubtful and full of mystery. His most enigmatic play was considered *"The Homecoming"* since Monna Lisa (Carpenter. Ch. A). Characters were not given a proper identity and we cannot understand if the story they narrate is true or not.

"The Homecoming" is full of implications, vagueness, uncertainties and ambiguity. Max is a butcher, but Lenny calls him "a dog who cooks", his "driver" Sam cannot drive, Teddy who is a philosophy lecturer cannot answer a philosophical question which makes us doubt about his profession. When things are not well defined, it leaves room for multiple interpretations and readings and brings forth ambiguity in his plays. Apart from ambiguity and fear, he also made use of absurd elements and because of this, his plays started in a funny or comic way and ended up in physical or psychological violence. Menace is hidden behind the front door and it can dress up in different forms and ways. One such technique Pinter used to create panic and terror was absence of concrete physical violence on stage, but characters and the audience perceived it was in the air, in the circumstances and in everything surrounding them.

Conclusion:-

So in Conclusion we could say that the master of the absurd and ambiguity had a very unique style, full of ambiguity and uncertainty which made his work impenetrable for a period of time and even nowadays. It will always be like this if human communication fails and people do not communicate, they eventually will just listen but they will never hear what the others have to say. We often communicate through a different means of communication and this is Silence. It seems a paradox but, it may be true because we say more when we say nothing at all. We reflect and meditate better if in pause, otherwise it will result a useless process. The master of pauses and silences helped us view the world from a different perspective through his plays.

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