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Beyond Pragmatism: A Study of Harold Pinter's Plays

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Abstract:
The present research work aims to study Harold Pinter's pragmatic views in his plays. Some of the British life, Harold Pinter, looked thick like John Osborne and Arnold Wesker, but incredibly wonderful among the most pragmatic modern British players. Pinter shares the realistic social obligations and the people of the same era. This is a situation, character, completely realistic language. His dramatic situations are common: the tramp discusses with two brothers the opportunity to become a career for their round-world apartment; The young man loses his composure during a party on the occasion of his anniversary of the presence of two men whom he does not know; The couple reflect on the seller of the match outside their bungalow and, finally, invites them inside. The characters are as common as situations: non -heroic people of the city's intermediate and lower classes. And the conversations were carefully and accurately transcribed versions of ordinary conversation. It was from this grain that the realists of the Osborne school made the leaven of social protest. But behind the realistic prose of Pinter's plays lurks the spirit of a poet, transforming the same dreary material into something closer to poetry than anything else we bear the name for.

Keywords: Pragmatism, realistic views, dramatic situations.

Research Methodology:
Present research work is analytical in nature. So the method of research is analytical. Original texts are used for textual interpretation and relevant references are used to support the comments.

Pragmatism in Harold Pinter's Plays:
Other playwrights who wrote in prose have been described as having poetic attributes. Shaw is labeled as a "poet" due to his dialogue's nearly musical arrangement; Synge and O'Casey, because of the Irish lilt and imagery in their language; Tennessee Williams, because of his frequent use of symbolism. Poetry emerges unexpectedly in the works of these playwrights due to their themes, settings, and linguistic skills. Pinter always relies on two main sources of dramatic poetry: scenarios where the usual meanings of words fall short and language that expresses more than just the literal meanings of the words. The essence of poetry lies in situations that go beyond what prose language can express. T. S. Eliot states that:
"The poet is occupied with frontiers of consciousness beyond which words fail, though meanings still exist." (Eliot *4)*

The characters in Pinter's works consistently inhabit these boundaries. In contrast to genuine social realists, who may exhibit similar superficial traits, Pinter refrains from providing resolutions to the tensions that affect his characters. Issues such as unemployment, poverty, prejudice, and mental illness are present in the narrative of The Caretaker, yet the pursuit of social advancement is not a component of the resulting drama. The underlying dramatic action is rooted in the acceptance of the established rules of the game rather than in a sense of outrage towards them. Problems are not presented as challenges to be resolved, as seen in protest plays; instead, they serve to unleash the characters' drives towards the "frontiers of consciousness."

" Here there are no solutions or resolutions, but motives that defy definition and feelings that elude classification. Martin Esslin, noting Pinter's preoccupation with these frontiers, cites a radio interview in which Pinter located his characters "at the extreme edge of their living, where they are living pretty much alone." (Pinter 2)

The use of symbolic language can serve as a highly effective means of communication at the "fringe of existence." The complexities of human fears and desires, often obscured or only partially comprehended, are challenging to express through conventional prose. It is only through imagery that evokes the relevant emotions that meaningful communication can occur. Consequently, dramatists frequently employ nonverbal symbols, which can generate a remarkably "poetic" impact in their own right. Numerous plays characterized by prosaic dialogue attain a *"poetry of situations"* solely through the use of gestures.

Nonverbal elements in Pinter's works frequently convey deeper symbolic meanings amidst actions that appear realistic. These elements can be described as "poetic" due to their distinctive capacity to express unarticulated sentiments. In a particular scene from The Caretaker, Davies desperately attempts to reclaim a bag that contains all his possessions, while Mick and Aston repeatedly wrest it away from him. As the three engage in this pantomime, the bag continually slips from Davies' reach, transforming his struggle into more than a mere contest over an object. The overwhelming sense of frustration that arises suggests that the bag symbolizes the challenge of maintaining one's individuality in an unwelcoming environment. The scenario remains only partially articulated, relying on the symbol to convey its meaning.

Similarly, in The Birthday Party, McCann breaks Stanley's glasses during a game of blind man's bluff, highlighting a deep sense of vulnerability. This act may represent the individual's helplessness against the oppressive forces of conformity. In the ending of A Slight Ache, Flora takes the match tray from the impoverished match seller and hands it to her husband, indicating a shift in how she perceives their identities. This symbol creates a sense of confusion, encouraging reflection on how well we truly understand our own identities. These subtle symbols transcend the limits of pragmatism; however, Pinter's tendency toward the supra-realistic is most effectively showcased through his use of language to convey symbolism. When language is woven into the action, symbolism functions on multiple levels. Pinter consistently shows a dedication to incorporating language into his stories, allowing words to act as vessels for significant symbols.

The representation of the room, both visually and verbally, has been identified by Esslin and other scholars as a pivotal poetic motif in Pinter's oeuvre. In his inaugural play, titled The Room, the symbolism is quite apparent. For Rose and her spouse, their small, unkempt room serves as a sanctuary of comfort and safety amidst the external threats and chill. In comparison to the basement, which is described as having "running" walls, the room assumes the dimensions of Paradise for Rose.

"No, this room's all right for me. I mean, you know where you are. When it's cold, for instance".(Pinter 113)

At the hint of eviction Rose reacts with terror. After a visit by two callers who tell her they understand her room is for rent, she says to the landlord:

There were two people in here just now. They said this room was going vacant. What were they talking about? What was it all about? Did you see those people? How can this room be going? It's occupied. Did they get hold of you, Mr. Kidd? (Pinter 113)

The depth of her fear transcends the mere possibility of being forcibly removed from her dilapidated room. This space, which has served as a powerful symbol, embodies a deeply felt sense of warmth, camaraderie, and safety that can only be grasped at the "frontiers of consciousness." In The Birthday Party, the setting transforms into an inexpensive seaside boarding house that accommodates Stanley, who represents the artist in flight from societal constraints. The arrival of Goldberg and McCann, two enigmatic figures, disrupts Stanley's established routine, thereby highlighting the significance of the boarding house as a "room"—the sole refuge for Stanley. Similar to Rose, Stanley responds with intense dread when the landlady consents to host the two visitors for the evening.

"I'm afraid there's been a mistake. We're booked out. Your room is taken. Mrs. Boles forgot to tell you. You'll have to find somewhere else". (Pinter 4)

In both A Slight Ache and Night School, the setting assumes a significant role as a poetic image from which the narrative derives its significance. Even in The Dumb Waiter, where the symbolism of the room is less pronounced, it is notable that Gus's exit from the basement room coincides with the loss of his gun—an emblem of security—ultimately leading to his demise. Pinter further enriches his works with a diverse array of images that form a sophisticated symbolic framework. For instance, in The Caretaker, the character Davies, a vagrant, engages in extensive dialogues concerning the "papers" that validate his identity. He has entrusted these documents to an individual in Sid Cup, and much of his focus is directed towards acquiring a suitable pair of shoes to enable him to travel to Sid Cup, "if only the weather would improve." The motifs of the papers, the shoes, and the weather are intricately developed, imbued with a sense of longing that suggests Davies will never reach Sid Cup. This intricate symbolism ultimately reflects humanity's timeless pursuit of identity and the inherent challenges in achieving it:

"DAVIES. If only I could get down to Sid cup! I've been waiting for the weather to break. He's got my papers, this man I left them with, it's got it all down there, I could prove everything".(Pinter 5)

A notable feature of Pinter's symbolic language is the distinct terminology associated with commerce, marketing, and bureaucratic institutions. The compelling nature of this jargon conjures an illustration of the impersonal network that society crafts to entrap the individual. In The Caretaker, the accumulation of technical expressions from bankers and real estate professionals forms a disorienting labyrinth within the dialogue. Mick says to Davies:

"So what do you say? Eight hundred odd for this room or three thousand down for the whole upper storey. On the other hand, if you prefer to approach it in the long-term way I know an insurance firm in West Ham'll be pleased to handle the deal for you ... twenty per cent interest, fifty per cent deposit; down payments, back payments, family allowances, bonus schemes, remission of term for good behavior, six months lease, yearly examination of the revel ant archives, tea laid on, disposal of shares, benefit extension, compensation on cessation… Who do you bank with?"(Pinter 38)

The specialized terminology of finance—such as "long-term," "down payments," and "disposal of shares"—transforms into an intimidating verbal maze for Davies, who struggles to establish his identity, let alone engage in lease negotiations. Furthermore, the context surrounding a speech can elevate it beyond mere naturalistic writing. The circumstances surrounding the dialogue imbue it with additional significance that would otherwise be absent. Pinter skillfully utilizes the situation to enhance the dialogue, as exemplified in a scene from The Birthday Party, where Stanley is compelled by the visitor, McCann, to engage in an extensive discussion about his own life:

"STANLEY. I used to live very quietly-played records, that's about all. Everything delivered to the door. Then I started a little private business, in a small way, and it compelled me to come down here-kept me longer than I expected. You never get used to living in someone else's house. Don't you agree? I lived so quietly. You can only appreciate what you've had when things change. That's what they say, isn't it? Cigarette? MCCANN. I don't smoke". (Pinter 43)

The statement "I don't smoke" serves not merely as a rejection of cigarette consumption but also as a repudiation of the various tentative assertions made by Stanley. This declaration effectively undermines the legitimacy of Stanley's entire existence. By functioning on multiple levels simultaneously, it surpasses conventional prose. Nevertheless, symbolism constitutes only a fraction of Pinter's linguistic effects. At its most effective, his dialogue facilitates the conveyance of symbols through rhythm, tempo, and sound structure. Yeats posited that rhythm "serves to keep us in that state of perhaps real trance, in which the mind liberated from the pressure of the will is unfolded in symbols." Similarly, Eliot acknowledged the significant impact of rhythm and tempo on the audience's subconscious. In terms of rhythmic composition, Pinter's dialogue aligns more closely with poetry than with a precise representation of everyday conversation in Charing Cross Road. This dialogue exhibits two notable qualities: it is distinctly attuned to the rhythms of common speech, and it strategically employs tempo, stress, and phrasing to elicit specific effects, thereby becoming integral to the overall drama.

John Russell Taylor advocates for the interpretation of Pinter's dialogue as akin to poetry, asserting that it is arranged similarly to a musical composition. He highlights elements such as "overtones," "reminiscences," and "unexpected resonances," which contribute to a "tightly knit and intricate texture." A comparative analysis of the rhythmic structures in two speeches illustrates this point effectively. The first excerpt is from The Birthday Party, featuring Goldberg, a mysterious visitor, who speaks to his partner McCann. Goldberg exhibits a rapid, scheming nature, characterized by an abundance of nervous energy and restlessness. Ironically, he advises McCann to relax: "The secret is breathing. Take my tip. It's a well-known fact. Breathe in, breathe out, take a chance, let yourself go, what can you lose? Look at me. When I was an apprentice yet, McCann, every second Friday of the month my Uncle Barney used to take me to the seaside, regular as clockwork...." (p. 119) Goldberg's speech pattern, however, is anything but calm. The use of short phrases, both rhythmically and syntactically, underscores his inherently anxious and rapid character. The energetic quality of his dialogue accentuates the irony of his advice to McCann. Additionally, the phonetic structure enhances this effect, as evidenced by the frequent appearance of clipped "k" sounds in words such as "secret," "take," "fact," "look," "McCann," "second," "Uncle," and "clockwork." In contrast, one can examine an excerpt from Aston's speech in The Caretaker for further comparison:

". . . The trouble was . . . my thoughts . . . had become very slow ... I couldn't think at all . . . I couldn't . . . get . . . my thoughts ... together ... uuuhh ... I could ... never quite get it ... together. (Pinter 60)

The elements of syntax, diction, and punctuation contribute to a deliberate slowness in the speech. This measured pace is fitting, as it reveals Aston's lack of mental acuity, a consequence of a surgical procedure on his brain. The inherent lethargy of his character is further emphasized by the indistinct consonant sounds found in words such as "trouble," "couldn't," "thoughts," and "together." The elongated vowel sounds prolong the delivery, while the imprecise syntax and punctuation create a blending of phrases that evokes a dream-like flow of subconscious thought. Consequently, the rhythmic quality of this speech stands in stark contrast to that of Goldberg.

Pinter's scripts resemble a meticulously composed orchestral score, meticulously detailing the precise moments and durations of pauses. In The Caretaker, for instance, the stage directions specify a total of 189 pauses across its three acts. Pinter's acute auditory sensitivity allows him to differentiate among brief pauses, standard pauses, silences, and extended silences. Pinter demonstrates a particular affinity for constructing rhythmic crescendos within his works. The dialogue escalates in volume, speed, and pitch, culminating in a peak that often evokes a sense of terror. This technique is exemplified in Act II of The Birthday Party, where Goldberg and McCann interrogate Stanley regarding various alleged transgressions. Their inquiries inexorably build towards a violent denouement. Beginning with seemingly innocuous questions such as "What were you doing yesterday?" the intensity of their questioning accelerates, leading to more confrontational inquiries like "Why are you wasting everybody's time?" and "Why do you behave so badly?" Ultimately, the logical coherence of their questions disintegrates, propelling the scene forward through sheer rhythm and tempo:

GOLDBERG. Speak up Webber. Why did the chicken cross the
road?
STANLEY. He wanted to--he wanted to-he wanted to....
MCCANN. He doesn't knowl
GOLDBERG. Why did the chicken cross the road?
STANLEY. He wanted to--he wanted to ....
GOLDBERG. Why did the chicken cross the road? (Pinter 54-55)

Conclusion:

The rhythm may appear artificial, yet the patterns of speech remain entirely authentic. In his creation of symbols and manipulation of rhythms, Pinter consistently adheres to colloquial language. His dialogue undoubtedly fulfills the requirement for a dramatic language that merges, as Eliot articulated, the speech of modern individuals with the profound significance typically associated with poetry. Although Pinter's works exhibit a layer of pragmatism, they distinctly diverge from the mere faithful representations of life that characterize many of his peers. Particularly through his linguistic choices, Pinter reveals an inherent surrealistic quality. Each line of dialogue could be perceived as realistic prose; however, when considering the overall structure of the play, the words exhibit a coherent rhythmic framework and a symbolic resonance that transcends traditional pragmatism.

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