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Spatial Psychology/ Psychological Space: Psychological Impact of Space in the Creation of Semantic 'Uncertainty' in Pinter's Early Plays

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ABSTRACT

*The major motif in Pinter's drama is the desire for power, coupled with the achievement of dominance. Pinter attacks the policies of oppressive regimes practicing violence and torture, and his political dramas concentrate on the struggle between the individual and the authoritative power. Pinter's *The Birthday Party* (1957) examines the significance of power and identity in spaces of self and power relations. In *One for the Road* (1980) and *Mountain Language* (1988), Pinter deals with incarceration and torture, using the theatrical space of prison to highlight and examine the narratives of authoritative control and violation of human rights. Space as a motif in Pinter's plays, serves as a site for discourse and aims to mark the interaction between power and identity. In this*

paper, I will attempt to examine how Pinter uses the idea of space and to what extent space can be read and decoded as a site for struggle for power and identity. My aim is to show that how an ordinary physical space of a room become a site for recreation of new spaces for exercise of power and maintaining identity. However, I aim to delve into these spaces of conflict, exploitation and subjugation showing the significance of power and identity. This paper, therefore, concludes that Pinter's theatre of power constitutes a polyphony of political rhetoric within the spaces, all competing for approval or control.

KEYWORDS: *Uncertainty, Psychology, Space, Absurd, Pinter*

AUTORE

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The theme of 'uncertainty' has been a prominent feature in the plays of Harold Pinter and the trend of criticism of his plays. Indeed, as Tener argued in 1973, "*Everything is uncertain*," and Pinter uncovers "*the semantic uncertainty which underlies experience*." (Tener 1973) In 1971, Rickert described a trend:

there is a growing body of Pinter criticism full of contradiction. Everyone has his explanation of a Pinter play, and the problem of puzzling Pinter has become so great that some critics have taken the position that it is impossible for us to know a Pinter play. We cannot explicate his work; we can only react to it, because he consciously and deliberately constructs his plays to create an unknowable world. (30)

Though Pinter's work has continually developed in stylistic and thematic terms, London has remained central to his dramatic imagination, so that a discussion on space of the city in Pinter's drama sheds much light on his evolution as a playwright. In Peter Rabey's essay "*Tales of the City: Some Places and Voices in Pinter's Plays*", he makes the point that "*Pinter is... the dramatist of the city, and specifically of London*." (60) This view has been reflected repeatedly by critical opinion over the years. Almost all the early plays of Harold Pinter are situated in the physical space of the room, apparently in London, which, as Wyllie and Rees point out, serves as a *place of refuge for a frightened central character, and which then is invaded by an external entity – a threat to the sanctuary*. (68) Rabey also observes that the rooms are clearly London-based, although he stretched the notion of London to the universal in order to accommodate the psychology of the characters. The room thus determines the psychology of the characters inside the room. In turn, the space of the room is shaped by the psychology of the characters. Pinter has craftily developed this dramatic pattern to fit the thematic shift in the plays. In studying the thematic change of Pinter's plays, Gale (1971) remarks that "*when Pinter wrote 'The Room' in 1957 he was interested in exploring the effect of fear, of physical menace, on an individual*." By the time he completed his play, the subject of his works has become a "*psychological need*" (188). Pinter has achieved this shift in subject matter by applying the dramatic technique of macrocosmic intrusion on the microcosmic character.

The constant use of the space of the room represents the microcosm, whereas the macrocosm is represented by all the physical and psychological effects that come from all the space outside the room. The microcosmic human relationship can be stable or unstable, satisfactory or unsatisfactory. A macrocosmic intrusion will either destroy or reinforce the microcosmic situation: A dramatic presentation revealing the destruction of the apparently satisfactory relationship between Rose and her husband, Bert Hudd, occurred by the intrusion of Mr. and Mrs. Sands and the Negro in *The Room*; Stanley's refuge in *The Birthday Party* is invaded by Goldberg and McCann and reconfigures the relationship between Meg and Petey. On

the other hand, the intrusion made by Davies in the psychological space of the room stabilizes and perhaps develops the relationship of Mick and Aston in *The Caretaker*. *The Homecoming* demonstrates a positive intrusion by Teddy and Ruth on the other characters in the play. In his book *Butter's Going Up: a Critical Analysis of Harold Pinter's Work* (1977), Gale notes an important shift in the function of the various rooms in a trend that he sees as having begun with *A Slight Ache*: "*The Caretaker... continues the thematic direction started in 'A Slight Ache', in which the menace is no longer outside the room... but is a part of the characters within the room and is carried by them.*" (81)

This mutual relationship between the spatial psychology and the psychological space is brought forth by the semantic uncertainty, which invites the audience to participate in the process of meaning-formation. The nature of audience's participation in Pinter's plays is aptly illustrated by Leonard Powlick, who refers to the reaction of a spectator of Pinter's '*Old Times*' as he cries out at the end of the play – "What the hell was *that* all about?"

The reaction gains significance in that Powlick has mentioned that the audience has responded throughout the play. Pinter's plays are characterised by their sense of mystification, suspense and ambiguity. This springs from the gap between the text and the subtext-surface action and underlying meaning, built-up illusions and hidden realities, and a multiplicity of meanings and significance. Pinter gives little background information about the character and the space, which often find no specific answer. According to Peacock (1997: 48) "*By lowering language's informational potential Pinter makes the audience aware of the strategic employment of language as a mode of defense, but at the same time he also reveals its potential as a weapon*". The language used for these purposes is often impolite. Pinter takes the presentness of Schiller's characterisation of the medium of drama in impressing it upon the world his characters inhabit. In that world, the past that we derive from the assertions and disclosures of its inhabitants is as unreliable and uncertain as the future. What was Stanely and what really happened to him before he came to rest with Petey and Meg in *The Birthday Party*? What were Goldberg's relations with his father? (What indeed is his right name?) What is imagined, what is revised, and what is remembered in the erotic rivalry of *Old Times*? ('ANNA... *There are things I remember which may never have happened but as I recall them so they take place*'.) Characteristic of the revelations and confidences that come through Pinter's characters is the absence of a seal of authenticity, a note of conviction, a validating circumstance, an authorial accreditation which allows the audience to accept the truth of what it hears concerning what is not present, not immediate. In the absence of proper information, which the audience has been accustomed to by the well-made play, the audience is forced to participate in the action of the play which brings forth multiple meanings, as per

their response to the spatial psychology and the psychological space, which Pinter creates. This performance of various aestheticizations in turn dramatizes sensation within the bodies of readers/ spectators, those which ultimately register as sadness, joy or derivatives of these basic 'emotions'.

In the programme brochure of the performance of Pinter's *The Room* and *The Dumb Waiter* at the Royal Court Theatre on 8th March, 1960, there lay a single, unsigned, printed sheet of paper, clearly Pinter's own attempt to forewarn the audience:

Given a man in a room and he will sooner or later receive a visitor. A visitor entering the room will enter with intent. If two people inhabit the room the visitor will not be the same man for both. A man in a room who receives a visit is likely to be illuminated or horrified by it. The visitor himself might as easily be horrified or illuminated. The men may leave with the visitor or be may leave alone. The visitor may leave alone or stay in the room alone when the man is gone. Or they may both stay together in the room. Whatever the outcome in terms of movement the original condition, in which a man sat alone in a room, will have been subjected to alterations. A man in a room and no one entering the lives in expectation of a visit. He will be illuminated or horrified by the absence of a visitor. But however much it is expected, the entrance, when it comes, is unexpected and almost always unwelcome. (He himself, of course, might go out of the door, knock and come in and be his own visitor. It has happened before). (Esslin1, 40)

This statement contains the germ of quite a number of Pinter's plays beyond the two which it introduced: certainly *The Birthday Party*, *The Caretaker*, *The Homecoming* are already present in embryo in the permutation of possibilities arising from someone waiting in a room, gazing constantly at the door, apprehending the arrival of a visitor, who may or may not stay with him, may or may not leave. This gaze might correspond to a somewhat autonomous, subjectively felt/expressed, both psychic and corporeal view, according to Romantic, Symbolist, and some Phenomenological theory. The plays can be conceived as a set of material forces, as it comes into contact with and effectively *affects* the audiences who engage with it in varying contexts; audiences conceived of as both a set of forces open to being affected in the first place and as the material necessary for Pinter's work in each medium to take on its proper meaning, which is to say its dramatic, and in many cases political, life.

Pinter's early plays are usually set in a single room, "*a safe haven, menaced by an intrusion from the cold outside world*". The occupants of the rooms are threatened by unknown outside forces. But, each play explores new characters and situations. *The Room* (1957) displays many of the elements that would characterize his later plays- namely a room; a commonplace situation gradually turns into a menace and mystery through various forms of intrusions. For many scholars, space in Pinter's

work has involved distinct and limited interpretations of 'the room.' However, *The Room* formulates at the start Pinter's idea of the room as symbolic space: it is not an ordinary room but a '*psychic space, a speck of consciousness cursed with a vivid awareness of its own significance and insecurity in a world ruled by forces outside itself*' (Katherine Worth, 32), which he has repeatedly used in his early plays. The room represents the microcosm of the characters which complements and in turn is complemented by the macrocosm that is the psychological and physical outside the room. The reaction of the microcosm is shaped by the nature of intrusion of the macrocosmic outside. The nature of intrusion of the macrocosm is, in turn, shaped by the psychological space of the microcosm. The play grounds its enigmatic action in the rising tides of anxieties, set against a pathology that reveals itself in the sudden violence that explodes in the end. Rose, unlike her silent, lorry-driving husband, Bert, keeps to the room that is her space, safe from the inhospitable cold outside. '*We're very quiet,*' she repeatedly claims. '*We keep ourselves to ourselves. I never interfere. I mean, why should I? We've got our room. We don't bother anyone else. That's the way it should be.*' However, behind this apparent sense of satisfaction and security of the private world of Rose's room, the audience becomes aware of her sense of insecurity as she comes to know about the man in the basement who has been waiting to see her without Bert, and will not leave until he does. Her resistance to meet the stranger fails, as the stranger, who is a blind Negro, Mr. Riley, summons her home, on behalf of, or perhaps, as her father. Her fears of Bert encountering the Negro, Mr. Riley, turn true as he enters the room and in a violent conclusion, he kicks Riley into unconsciousness, perhaps to death, as Rose goes blind. The reasons for violence are not shared; nor are the reasons for Rose going blind in the aftermath of the violence. As Wyllie and Rees observe, "*Rose is ... doubly confounded in her search for safety.*" Not only does she carry her fears within her, as pointed by Gale, but in Quigley's view, she is married to an externalisation of those very fears.

As has already been pointed out at the outset, the participation of the audience, which Pinter has provoked through his plays, is attributable to, in the words of Austin Quigley, 'the (semantic) uncertainty...', which, according to Robert Tener, 'underlies experience'. The experience leads to the discovery of deliberate structures which serve to involve the audience in the proceedings in any number of ways. The notion of audience "involvement" is linked to the idea that throughout the early plays of his career Pinter attempted - with varying degrees of success - to manipulate the distance between the audience and the play, which determines the success of his early plays. Examples include such terms used by critics as 'unsettling experience', 'impact', 'anxiety', 'emotional intensity'. All these are the creation of, in the words of Tener, "Semantic uncertainty" which is his label for "the Pinter formula."

As if the metaphor *formula* could help *predict* structure, texture, and theme in Pinter's plays, its usage militates against this perception of ambiguity. Like any formula, *semantic uncertainty* results from an aim to reduce *thematic* uncertainty to *critical* certainty. This formula "contains two conflicting themes": (1) "a bare sketch of values anchored to a middle or lower social class perception of reality and of human behaviour by the monotonous linguistic habits of the speakers and the commonplace situations"; and (2) "a rich texture of ambiguity sutured to the primitive, inner, dark, mysterious, emotional biological man by what he fears, often some unknown external hostile force or agent reflected in a line or action or situation ultimately affecting all the characters." Pinter's "situations" occur "within a room," with "both" the room and the situations interacting with the characters and the audience. Their "linguistic habits" reveal "this interaction." The "result" is "a room-situation-character-language relationship which is continually developing throughout the time of the play" (176). Thus, Quigley contends that the ending of *The Dumb Waiter's* "final tableau" is "climaxed not by a gunshot, nor by the lowering of Ben's gun, but by a long, silent stare."

Pinter presents his characters at a critical juncture of their life – the point at which the microcosm and the macrocosm come in direct contact with each other. The existential aspect of the dramatist takes the lead in depicting the macrocosm as cold and mysterious of which the microcosmic selves of the characters are scared of. The apprehension of the intrusion of the macrocosm is conveyed mostly through the silences and pauses in the plays. A few examples may suffice. The action in *The Birthday Party* opens with a small talk between Meg and Petey, an old couple in their sixties:

Meg: Is that you, Petey?

Pause.

Petey, is that you?

Pause.

Petey?

Petey: Yes, it's me.

Petey: What?

Meg: Is that you?

Petey: Yes, it's me.

Meg: What? (Her face appears at the hatch.) Are you back?

Petey: Yes.

Meg: I've got your cornflakes ready. (She disappears and reappears.) Here's your cornflakes. (He rises and takes the plate from her, sits at the table, props up the paper and begins to eat. Meg enters by the kitchen door.)

Are they nice?

Petey: Very nice.

Meg: I thought they'd be nice. (She sits at the table.) You got your paper?
Petey: yes (I, 19).

This dialogue proves Pinter's concern about language as a device that conceals rather than communicates ideas. Pinter's use of pause creates a sort of theatrical vacuum. Meg's repetition of the same questions, although with a shift in emphasis, is both a source of tension and a challenge to establish her presence. Silence throws a person's words back on himself or herself. Pinter's plays pose the challenge in realizing that many of his major positions are presented through indirect communication, a form of communication to which silence contributes.

In an early statement on his craft, Pinter writes that the language his characters speak, like that we also speak, 'is a highly ambiguous business. So often, below the word spoken, is the thing known and unspoken.' But from speech acts rooted in the habits of evasion, unreliability, and defensive obstruction, 'a language arises... where under what is said, another thing is being said'. As a consequence, the act of speaking is rife with its nominal opposite. In effect,

There are two silences. One when no word is spoken. The other when perhaps a torrent language is being employed... The speech we hear is an indication of that which 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 stratagem to cover nakedness. (Writing for the Theatre': Speech at the National Student Drama Festival, 1962).

The Birthday Party compels the audience into a process of continual vacillation. We are led in the first Act to experience the play as an almost perfect example of naturalistic drama. The conversations, the dynamics of the relationships, the mise-en-scene, all contribute to a sense of naturalism, and may stand as examples of what leads Beckerman in his "The Artifice of 'Reality' in Chekhov and Pinter" to see a Chekhovian inheritance in Pinter's drama. The first act, in Pinter's own terms, might be labelled eminently "recognizable". Part of the purpose of this study is to understand what happens to the audience as it begins to experience the second and third Acts of *The Birthday Party*. From the first to the second and third Acts we have, to use Ben Chaim's term, a "style shift"; where the first Act was seen as largely naturalistic, the second and third Acts begin to be seen as increasingly absurd. We must, of course, ask ourselves the following question: is this style shift at the service of the manipulation of distance, or the cause of a distance fatal to the success of the play?

The intrusion of McCann and Goldberg is employed as a destructive force that reduces Stanley to a cipher by the end of Act III. When Goldberg asks Stanley about

his opinion of “such a prospect” (p.94), Stanley responds with nonsense and meaningless sounds that reveal his psychological condition. But Goldberg and McCann insist on Stanley to say something while they are watching him break down: “He [Stanley] concentrates. His head lowers, his chin draws into his chest, he crouches.” (p. 94). Thus Stanley vanishes from the old couple’s life. The old couple, Meg and Petey are reborn.

When Pinter’s *The Birthday Party* is compared to the well-made-play format, its reliance on the tradition becomes obvious. Indeed, as Taylor has pointed out, “*What else is ‘The Birthday Party’ but a well-made drawing-room drama complete in every detail, even down to the meticulously realistic dialogue, except that the exposition is left out altogether.*” (163) This is an important point about the conventional and unconventional features of the play. Taylor focuses on the latter feature in greater detail:

It would be easy to write in the necessary explanations: how Stanley came to be living in this boarding house, what his secret is and why McCann and Goldberg came to get him. But of course this is not what the play is about: it is the process that interests Pinter, the series of happenings, and not the precise whys and wherefores. These are totally incoherent, as necessarily they have to be in so much of life, where no explanations are offered and we must make the best we can do of it. (163)

The explanations are never always easy. They are not necessarily convincing either. However, the action that culminates in the precipitation of the transformation of Stanley is indeed interesting. The conclusion, as is the case with *The Room*, reveals the impersonation of the fear that Stanley carries with him. The microcosm manifests itself as the macrocosm. The room transforms into an interrogation room that seeks to reveal the hidden aspect of the working psychology of Stanley’s mind. At the end, as Stanley ‘crouches’, he stands exposed as the psychogeography of his room is revealed and he is humiliated. Simultaneously, the geography of the boarding house undergoes a change as does its inhabitants, Meg and Petey, who are reborn, as Meg sees herself, as ‘the belle of the ball’.

The geography of the boarding house gets altered by means of real life small stories, which acquire importance in the context of plot development. This is revealed at the end of the play, when Petey is alone with Meg in the same domestic context as at the start: -

Meg: Wasn’t it a lovely party last night?
Petey: I wasn’t there.
Meg: Weren’t you?
Petey: I came afterwards

Meg: Oh.

(Pause)

It was a lovely party. I haven't laughed so much for years. We had dancing and singing and games. You should have been there.

Petey: It was good, eh?

(Pause)

Meg: I was the belle of the ball.

Petey: Were you?

Meg: Oh Yes. They all said I was.

Petey: I bet you were, too.

Meg: Oh, it's true. I was. (Pause). I know I was.

The dramatic impact of this conversation is radically altered by the fact that the audience has already witnessed the events which are being recounted. Thus, while for Stanley, the room of the boarding house turns into an interrogation room wherein his psychological space is exposed; on the other hand, the spatial psychology of the room gives space to Meg and Petey to be reborn, as they collaborate (perhaps for the first time, considering the indifference of Petey towards Meg's conversations in the beginning of the play) strongly in the construction of the story. *The Birthday Party*, Esslin says, manages to deliver elements of 'mystery' and 'horror' despite 'omitting the melodramatic, supernatural element' (p. 239). Esslin's statement is validated by Stanley's struggle with his mysterious past, his unsettling present and his vague future. According to Esslin, absurdity in Pinter comes from the horror and the arbitrariness of events, which for Stanley are life-changing, while for Meg and Petey, are of lesser significance as their psychological space is restricted to the room and their interactional present.

The Birthday Party (1957) was described by Irvin Wardle in 1958 as a comedy of menace, along with Pinter's *The Dumb Waiter* (1960) and *The Caretaker* (1960). The initial 'comedy of menace' description is based on the conception that Pinter is a playwright who writes with limited theatrical themes and a limited number of images in his mind. Wardle, and later Susan Hollis Merritt, agreed that Pinter has the habit of portraying a small, dark room as a womb while ridiculing traditional familial relations. Pinter's 'menace' usually creates a feeling of ambiguity surrounding the events of the play, because they are open to many interpretations. Ambiguity is statement that indicates more than one meaning, which leads to vagueness, confusion and probably humour. Ambiguity arises from the fact that what Pinter portrays might not be what he intends the audience to understand, which in turn causes a misunderstanding of his intentions.

Pinter's early drama repeatedly explored a London inhabited by those on the periphery of society. The central character of *The Caretaker* (1960) is what was

called in those days a tramp, scraping a living cleaning the floor in an all-night café and complaining of the '*Poles, Greeks, Blacks... all them aliens*' who are encroaching on his territory. There is some doubt as to whether he is a native Londoner himself, especially given the various names he volunteers, which include Bernard Jenkins and Mac Davies, but the furthest edges of the city now seem to circumscribe his movements. His travels have taken him west to Acton, and North to Hendon and Watford, though the journey south to Sidcup, where he claims his papers are being kept for him, is too much to undertake, at least until the weather breaks. Characteristic of the revelations and confidences that come through Pinter's characters is the absence of that seal of authenticity, that note of conviction, that validating circumstance, that authorial accreditation which allows an audience to accept the truth of what it hears concerning what is not present, not immediate. Paranoid, bigoted and fearful (of being exposed of his lies?), Davies eventually alienates those who offer him shelter and ends the play once more facing exile on the dark streets of London. As he waits in vain for a response to his question, '*where am I going to go?*', we feel sympathy for Davies' plight despite the selfishness and ingratitude he has shown. The play, as with Pinter's other early plays (*The Room* and *The Birthday Party*), concludes with the personification of the very inner fears that prompted the psychology of Davies to create division between the two brothers. Martin Esslin in *Pinter the Playwright* (1982) puts the point thus:

Aston's attempts at making his room habitable have been seen as an image of man's struggle for order in a chaotic world; it has been said that Pinter is preoccupied with the age-old human instinct to fight for territory and that therefore his preoccupation with rooms and homes to be defended or to be conquered reflects man's deep instinctual nature. (112-13)

Fear of the other translates into hostility, and hostility translates into the deployment of verbal weaponry, all in a struggle to revert to a solipsistic oneness in which human contact must necessarily threaten the continuing existence of the unsullied self. In Michael Billington's *Harold Pinter* he adds his voice to others who have made a similar point about the deployment of geographical knowhow as a weapon in *No Man's Land*, in Brigg's Bolsover Street speech:

As with Mick's geographical tour de force to Davies in *The Caretaker*, it is largely designed to cow and impress the recipient; to prove to Spooner that Briggs, for all his crudeness, is a man who understands the Byzantine mysteries of life. (2007, 249)

Davies tries to impress Aston with his boastings of self-importance, when he says

All them toe-rags, mate, got the manners of pigs. I might have been on the road a few years but you can take it from me I'm clean. I keep myself up. That's why I left my wife. Fortnight after I married her, no, not so much as that, no more than a week, I took the lid off a saucepan, you know what was in it? A pile of her under-clothing, unwashed. The pan for vegetables, it was. The vegetable pan. That's when I left her and I haven't seen her since.

However, as the play concludes, Davies' apparent obsession with cleanliness of his physical self converts into an obsession with the primal instinct of occupying the room of the two brothers, thereby casting into doubt all that he had said about himself on earlier occasions. This desire for power depicted by the space of the room is however thwarted by the two brothers, as they unite and throw Davies out of the room, exposing him to the harsh and threatening outside. The room evolves as the psychological space which bound the two brothers together so that they are able to thwart the threat posed by the intrusion of Davies. In concluding the play thus, Pinter conveys a clear sense of the unforgiving nature of life on the capital's streets and the emotional damage it can inflict, simultaneously emphasising the sense of security associated with the psychological space called room.

Aston narrates an incident to Davies:

Aston: You know, I was sitting in a cafe the other day. I happened to be sitting at the

same table as this woman. Well, we started to... we started to pick up a bit of conversation. I don't know... about her holiday, it was, where she'd been. She'd been to the South Coast. I can't remember where though. Anyway, we were just sitting there, having this bit of a conversation... then suddenly she put her hand over to mine... and she said, how would you like me to have a look at your body?

Davies: Get out of it.

(Pause)

Here, Aston focuses on the sequencing of the past events (*I happened to be sitting...; we were just sitting there*), brings the story back to the present (*I can't remember where though*) and signals which aspects of the content should receive attention (*Anyway, then suddenly*). Despite the hesitancy and repetition, the story has an internal structure – important events such as *then suddenly she put her hand over to mine* are given greater salience. The episode also has a status of *dramatic discourse*. Although the dialogue resembles ordinary speech, it is not a transcript of a real conversation but a carefully crafted comedy with stylistic features designed to fit the dramatic context. It helps to define the relationship between the speakers not only in this scene but in the play as a whole.

Pinter's *The Homecoming* presents an interesting point of the internal/external dynamic. It relates to the power relations among men in the play of which Quigley presents a very singular view:

Wearing a chauffeur's uniform [Sam] immediately manifests the kind of expertise that Max lacks; Sam has a clearly established function in the world outside. [182-3]

From this perspective, we can view Max as being confined to an interior domestic role and is accordingly disempowered and feminised. This theme of internal refuge is summarized by Arthur Ganz in his introduction to *Pinter, a Collection of Critical Essays* (1972):

The room becomes for Pinter a way of blocking out the diffuse claims of the external world and concentrating on the central facts of existence as he conceives of them.(12-13)

If his rooms tend to enclose worlds characterised by retreat and inaction, by passivity and sexlessness, then the powers that intrude upon them are usually vital and sinister, potent and cruel. (14-15)

In his consideration of the play, Quigley in *The Pinter Problem*, goes on to comment on the significance of Lenny having his room downstairs, next to the sitting room, before reflecting on the difference between the physical house and the psychological home:

But the key point in this exchange is its relationship to Teddy's concern for continuity in the London home. Lenny's place in this structure is no longer what it was when Teddy left. (192)

Teddy and Ruth have both returned to the same house in London, but the kind of home they discover here is not the same for both of them.(215)

Thus, for Quigley, the functional disposition of the rooms both on stage and off stage provides a useful if mute commentary on the nature of the home in *The Homecoming*. The very title of the play suggests a direct opposition to the previous play, *The Caretaker*. While for Davies, the room was a shelter, in the present play, the room is owned. The title also has multiple implications: on a literal level, the title suggests the coming back to home of Teddy, while at another level, it is the homecoming of Ruth. She evolves as the central character of the play – it is, after all, her homecoming to a far greater extent that it is Teddy's, even if it is literally his home to which they return. Ruth returns to a metaphysical home, and unlike Teddy, she

stays there, and on her own terms, acting both as mother and a whore. At still another level, it is the homecoming of all the characters in their confrontation with the Freudian Id, their dark sides revealing sexual lust.

Ruth's encapsulation in one body of the two contradictory patriarchal mytho-categories of woman as Madonna and as whore is insupportable, and hence has the effect of exploding the myth. She evolves as the new woman of the 1960s, as she empowers herself over the men around her by using her body to undermine the old patriarchal categories of woman. In doing so, Ruth destabilises the spatial psychology of the room where the males dominated and creates a new psychological space within the same room in awarding herself the freedom to renegotiate the category of mother, both for herself and for her generation. Enthroned like Shaw's *Candida*, the ending of Pinter's play, where Ruth sits '*relaxed in her chair*' as the newly installed queen-mother-mistress and off-site sex worker, is a curious but perhaps not entirely fortuitous echo. The final configuration takes shape as Joey, the youngest son, a burly boxer, walks across the room, *kneels at her chair. She touches his head, lightly. He puts his head in her lap.* Lenny, also a son, pimp and voyeur, stands silently by, while Sam, Max's ineffectual brother, lies unconscious on the floor. Moving about, anxious and mistrustful, Max makes a final bid to exert his authority. Failing,

He falls to his knees, whimpers, begins to moan and sob.

He stops sobbing, crawls past SAM's body round her chair, to the other side of her.

I'm not an old man.

He looks up at her.

Do you hear me?

He raises his face to her.

Kiss me.

She continues to touch JOEY's head, lightly.

LENNY stands, watching.

Curtain

While Max rigorously tries to enter into a conversation with Ruth, her silence and lack of response is significant. In terms of the turn-taking process outlined by Sacks et al., there are three rules governing the interaction:

Rule 1: Current speaker selects the next speaker (Max tries to include Ruth into the conversation)

Rule 2: Next speaker self-selects (Ruth decides not to participate in the conversation).

Rule 3: Current speaker may (but does not have to) continue (Max grows desperate to involve Ruth into the conversation, with a view to assert his masculine superiority).

This semantic uncertainty is characteristic of Pinter's plays. The uncertainty posed by the semantics of the play has led critics to define the play as an 'unholy' family configuration, in which Pinter provides opportunity to exploit recollections of the iconography of the Virgin enthroned and worshipped by pious donors and saints. The male characters seem to succumb to the matriarchy, as Ruth emerges as the matriarch of the family, dominating the male members of the family, suppressing their ego by silencing them.

Powlick rightly points out that 'There is in Pinter's work a crucial element that accounts both for his importance as an artist and for his ability to affect the audiences: that is his ability to zero in on one basic metaphor, basic because it strikes all of us somewhere in the center of our being.' Peter Hall speaks of this quality when he says that 'Anyone who has lived in a family and has been with that family at, say, Christmas, and understood that this is an opportunity for murder, must understand *The Homecoming*.'

It has repeatedly been pointed out by critics that the early plays of Harold Pinter present the room as a psychological space, which, in turn influence the psychic behaviour of the characters who inhabit the physical space of the room. The variety of responses, as elaborated above, evoke a semantic uncertainty, not only in the characters of the play, but also in the audience, who are invited to participate in the course of the action and provide the response. This variety, presented by what Guy Debord called 'psychogeography', is the source of the universalism of his plays. As applied to the early plays of Pinter, the term 'psychogeography' evolves not only as being about the physical geography and specifically London and its effects on the individual but also about his evocation of widely shared fears and worries. In so doing, the characters engage themselves in a semantic game, giving rise to a sense of 'uncertainty', which can also be perceived through the psychogeography. Thus, for instance, the 'real' Goldberg in *The Birthday Party* can be perceived only in the appalling moment when words fail him:

And you'll find – that what I say is true.
Because I believe that the world... (*Vacant*)...
Because I believe that the world... (*Desperate*)...
BECAUSE I BELIEVE THAT THE WORLD... (*Lost*)...
He sits in chair.

The loss of words by Goldberg acts as an indication of the psychic world in which Stanley is going to be shown soon, as Goldberg, along with McCann takes dressed up

and nicely shave Stanley, now reduced to utter silence, away. The psychological space and the spatial psychology merge as the functional distinctions between the various modes of expression, *expressing, impelling, revealing*, blur and create a semantic void.

Notwithstanding the same, the audience understands the action of the play and its basis (at a psychic level perhaps) as Powlick describes the audience response to Pinter's *Old Times*. The audience understands, Powlick contends, with their guts as well as with their minds. The physical space evoked on the stage is occupied by characters whose experience of the space is so disparate as to render it a different space altogether. As Quigley points out, with reference to Pinter's *Landscape*, the characters do respond to each other, if only subconsciously:

Not everything they say derives from what the other has said – indeed, it derives often from what they themselves said in their previous remark – but the words the other person speaks do affect the development of each other's speech. There is verbal contact, albeit rather oblique. (236)

From this point of view, the psychogeography of the characters is in a state of change, created by the semantic uncertainty – being driven in part at least by an awareness of the other's presence as a speaking character. It serves as a common function in its evocation of loss or dispossession. Existential angst in the plays produces not only the need for a reassuringly secure physical space but is itself both the cause and the product of the invasion of that reassuring space by the ever-present psychic threat.

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