

Harold Pinter's Monologue: Form Explains Meaning

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ABSTRACT :

It is not for nothing that the core of drama (from the Latin word dran- to do) is action. Pinter's *Monologue* is a drama which is bare of or of little action. The "man" appears alone on the stage to open and close the play. So lonely, he is torn between his self-esteem and company so he chooses monologue. The aim of this study, as a result, is to shed light on this technique: the dramatic monologue (one-sided speech) as a means of illustrating this apartness. The monologist is addressing, not uncaring silent listener, but an empty chair. This loneliness, which is suggested by the choice of the title itself, moves from the private level to struggle to the form itself: the form explains the content. Hence, it requires a fresh vision, a fresh way of seeing both this play and this technique, dramatic monologue, which frames its theme and the question with which it leaves the audience.

Key Words : *Modernism, Harold Pinter, The monologue, Dramatic Technique*

المستخلص :

ليس من قبيل المصادفة ان يكون محور المسرح والمشتق من الكلمة اللاتينية التي معناها ان يفعل هو الحدث. مسرحية هارولد بنتر "المنولوج" هي مسرحية يمكن ان توصف بأنها مسرحية بدون حدث او بحدث بسيط جدا. تبدأ المسرحية وتنتهي برجل يتوسط خشبة المسرح وحيدا. بوحده يتمزق بين تقديره الذاتي وبين الرفقة فيفضل استخدام المنولوج. لهذا كانت هذه الدراسة والتي تهدف الى تسليط الضوء على هذا التكنيك المسرحي "المنولوج" والذي هو ذاته كان عنوانا للمسرحية كوسيلة لتوضيح المعنى المراد توصيله وهو العزلة. ان المنولوج استخدم لمخاطبة كرسي فارغ بدل مستمع غير مهتم. بذلك فان الوحدة التي ابتدأها العنوان امتدت لتنتقل من المستوى الشخصي للصراع الى شكل المسرحية لتحقيق الفرضية المطلوبة وهي ان الشكل يفسر المعنى. ولهذا فان نظرة متفحصة للمسرحية وللتكنيك المستعمل وهو المنولوج يوضح اهميته حيث يثير اذهان القارئ للسؤال عن ارتباط التكنيك المستعمل بالعنوان وبالمعنى المراد توصيله من قبل الكاتب.

INTRODUCTION :

A long description is given for what is called "The Dramatic Monologue". In reality, no novelty is claimed for this technique, for it belongs to a tradition that begins with the early Greeks, and it is one of the forms reoccurring in drama, as well as the works of the romantic and the modern poets. But it was not firmly recognized as a technique until the time of Robert Browning whose poetry marked a new phase not as a separate

form but as a stylistic element or technique which emerged into other forms. Indeed, in the modern view, the dramatic monologue is of somehow unusual structure: an inclination to show rather than to tell and thus giving a chance for a speech which lacks context and a character missing the presence of a dramatic situation. That taste, in a modified form, has perhaps been revived by modern literary criticism to the point

where Ina Beth Session can say that this type emerges "...in response to a need for a new form of literary expression which would reveal more directly and forcibly the new phases of modern culture and experience." (Session, 1947: 505). In effect, the dramatic monologue is a privileged way to deal with social issues as well as the multiple positions. From these multiple positions, the individual experience can be situated with an emphasis on the question of representation. Considerably, this very device of representation causes a lot of misunderstanding and interpretation to differentiate between this technique and others in literature. For instance, both of the soliloquy and monologue fundamentally embody some revelation of character. M.H. Abrams argues that "In a play when a character utters a monologue that expresses his or her private thoughts, it is called a soliloquy." (Abrams, 2005: 70). So, to varying degrees, they are interrelated. But *The Oxford Advanced Learners' Dictionary of Current English* puts it right by defining soliloquy as "a speech in a play in which a character who is alone on the stage, speaks his or her thoughts", and the latter as "a long speech by one person during a conversation that stops other people from speaking or expressing an opinion." (Hornby, 2010: 991). Drawing upon that, monologue is distinct from soliloquy by aiming at stimulating the listener emotional states both as characters or audience. Relatively, uttering one's thoughts aloud without aiming at altering any person is something which causes, for instance, a misunderstanding of Shakespeare's dramaturgy. Those "confessional

moments" (Gill, 1998: 122), in Shakespeare's dramas, lack the speaker's "ostensible purpose of persuading or manipulating a silent auditor." (Shaw, 1997: 303). Considerably, they supply information in a prefatory note. Although there is character revelation, they are part of the context. Simply it leaves no chance for the reader to stand, this is why it belongs to a different technique. It seems that unless the auditor never speaks, the reader cannot determine his reaction. The unspoken answer obliges that reader himself to provide it and in this way s/he "hypostasize a meaning beyond the periphery of the persona's intention." (Everett, 2012: 1). Hence, monologue appropriateness for Philip Hobsbaum invades "three conditions: First, it should appear to be spoken by a person other than the poet. Secondly, it should reveal some aspect of character. Thirdly, it should feel like drama." (Hobsbaum, 1975: 227-8). Besides, there are definite qualities that could be allowed in the form of the dramatic monologue. For example, the passivity of action is denied. It must be dynamic and even though character revelation sometimes demands the narration of past life, it worth noting that this is more than remembrance: from the very beginning, the defined present directs the dramatic situation.

METHODS

The paper is going to adopt the formalistic approach as a tool of analyzing the selected play. The formalistic approach is the fittest critical approach since the paper is tackling the form and the content relation in Pinter's "*The Monologue*".

Results

Pinter's *Monologue* is an outstanding dramatic monologue which presents content precisely the same as the form. Even from the title selection, one can get a hold of some idea of its range and variety. In Pinter's words "My plays are about what the titles are about." (Quoted in Dukore's *Pinter Staged Monologue*, 1980: p. 499). An awareness of this statement appears in Pinter's works like *The Room*, *The Birthday Party*, *The Dumb Waiter* and *The Caretaker*. In a sense, his work from the very beginning has concerned itself with the individual's failure to communicate with others. But outstandingly, this failure is not a matter of inability but a matter of unwillingness. They prefer to isolate themselves. "They live", Bernard Dukore Comments, "in a closed, womblike environment. They keep to themselves as if they are afraid to go outside their little world, afraid that their ordinariness, or sheer emptiness will be seen and exposed in all of its nakedness" (Dukore, 1962: 47). But *Monologue*, which is itself a dramatic monologue, occupies a particular position because awareness to this apartness moves from the private level to the form itself. Nevertheless, before start discussing the monologue closet, it worth mentioning that this drama was first performed on radio. Ineffectual it proved to be for the audience couldn't see the empty chair and they misidentify it to be a soliloquy other than monologue. The character is alone, talking but not to himself something which the radio medium fails to show. First and foremost, Pinter makes a purposeful use of ordinary details. The original event happened in the long ago

and now the protagonist, a moody man who has lost his beloved to his friend, is trying to regain his friendship. There is little action but surprises supply the knowledge of character. The speaker refers to the empty chair and says "I think I'll nip down to the games room... Fancy a game? How would you like a categorical thrashing? I'm willing to accept any challenge" (Pinter, *Monologue*, 1973 cited in *Harold Pinter Plays Four*) 121. ⁽¹⁾ Here the game motif refutes the suggestive friendliness. Simply because it, considering the aforementioned little action, allows the revelation of conflict "by having someone break the accepted rules." (Peacock, 1997: p. 70) However, ambiguity is created by the apparent absence of background and his menacing utterances. In a wild oriental manner he moves from subject to another and mood to another. He is addressing the empty chair, maybe the place where his friend or his beloved had formerly been there. But the chair is now desolate, he cries out upon her disloyalty and upon his weakness in still being affected by her: "Well ... she did ... can ... could..." Pause. (124). To varying degrees, the most striking feature of the form of the dramatic monologue is the variety of emotions that run through in a short period. The man insists on his durable affection with both: "I was the best friend either of you ever had and I am still prepared to prove it, I am still prepared to wrap my braces round anyone's neck, in your defense." (123) But when this offer is denied by the addressee's silence, the man discloses his hatred and jealousy: "... I know you were much more beautiful than me But I'll

tell you one thing you don't know. She loved my soul." (123). (1)- (Subsequent reference will be to this edition and will be cited by page number). Moreover, when the contrast, which shows the variety of his emotions, emerges, it allows the audience to maintain intense focus on his private loss of love and self-esteem. Practically, in his unique medium, Pinter succeeds in drawing attention to that many phases of emotions, a crucial characteristic of the dramatic monologue namely character revelation, by the use of repetition and pauses. Through the device of repetition a definite function is fulfilled in the action. For instance, at the beginning of Monologue, the speaker declares: "You look bold in black. The only thing I didn't like was your face, too white, the face stuck between your black motoring helmet, and your black hair and your black motoring jacket." (121). So this short passage of no more than two or three lines contains the repetition of four "black". Here repetition is not for the sake of mannerism, it is considerably a vehicle of action. Besides, his insistence on those too many "black" indicates that the speaker is not really talking about those things as much to the atmosphere they added on that person with the "too white" face whom he envies for being "much more beautiful than me" (123). Finally he confesses: "you should have had a black face." (127). In another instance, the monologist states: "... I've always love scenes, ..., the sweet ... the sweet ... the sweet farewell at Paddington station" (125). However, the boring purposeful repetitions serve as a dramatic information. Plainly, the lover of the speaker is turned to be

"Black as the Ace of spades" (120), and she leaves him for that friend. Relatively, Pinter makes best use of pauses and silence. The critic, Cole states: "A pause in Pinter is as important as a line. They are all there for a reason. Three dots is a hesitation, a pause is a fairly mundane crisis and a silence is some sort of crisis." (Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia: 3). This technique appears in *The Oxford English Dictionary* as Pinteresque (meaning an awkward silence suggesting some kind of hidden menace). The monologist pauses for 26 times with one silence. Consequently, Pinteresque -the speaker's affirmations and unanswerable indictments- serves to deepen his sense of loneliness:

The thing I like, I mean quite immeasurably, is this kind of conversation, this kind of exchange, this class of mutual reminiscence. Pause.

Sometimes I think you've forgotten the black girl, the ebony one. Sometimes I think you've forgotten me.

Pause. (122). Along the same line, the playwright, August Strindberg has maintained an identical "pregnant pauses" (www.telegraph.co.: p. 1) during the long monologue of Mrs. X in *The Stronger*. The core vision is revealed through the sharing point between the two plays. Much of the action lies in the past and it is reconstructed through her account of it. The two female friends are rivaling for the love of the same man, one speaking all the time and the other silent and listening all the time. What's more, the subservient conflict and the unspoken meaning are marked as "pause":

Perhaps you were after him yourself. I didn't use to trust you any too much. But

now I know he never bothered his head about you ... (Pause. They look at each other in a puzzled way.) I don't know, but I think it would be uncomfortable to have you as an enemy. (Jovanovich, 1974: 194). Fundamentally, those pauses and silences harmonize with the requirements and themes of each play. Yet, although dispossession may have occurred in previous situation, Strindberg employs expulsion as the climax of the major action. Pinter employs it as exposition. Thus he permits the audience to see more clearly the consequences, the revelation of helplessness and despair. At the beginning of the monologue, the man sits alone and he doesn't move until the end. His eye is fixed upon the spot of happiness and friendship, and his head upon the cold intonation of loneliness, and he must make his choice between them. He chooses the first: I'm your children's uncle. Pause I'll take them out, tell them jokes. Pause I love your children. (127). But since he doesn't confront either the woman or his friend only the empty chair- the temple of loneliness and isolation- there is no chance for "reverse dramatic movement" (Dukore, 1980: 50). This may be the key to the matter, nothing will happen because nothing has changed. The speaker is caught in repetition and pauses as a way of prolonging his obsession with self-pity and sense of loneliness and his pleas for company and friendship fly in the air leaving no trace behind.

CONCLUSION :

Perhaps to be threaten by the external world and the preferred loneliness is not of any novelty in Pinter's canon, and it is through the exchange between his men

and women that this significant aspect revealed. Unique among Pinter's plays which contain the same theme, the dramatic element of *Monologue* explores the passionate heart of a man whose addressee is personified by an empty chair.

Admittedly, it seems that Pinter adopts this form of writing because it seems to bring out certain aspects of the conception of the isolated individual. However, this technique contributes to his skill simply because the form and the title reveal the content with interesting suggestiveness. More interestingly, the absence of the listener, in the last analysis, obliges the audience to take part in the action, perhaps a direct challenge to their private interpretation, and it allows them to let a penetrating eye, more clearly than elsewhere, at once into a man's soul and solitude.

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