

The Reflection of Direct and Indirect Politics in Pinter's *The Birthday Party* and *One for the Road*

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ABSTRACT

This paper deals with the interplay of the direct and indirect politics in Pinter's *The Birthday Party* (1958) and *One for the Road* (1984). Harold Pinter, a twentieth century leading British playwright, was always a public annoyance due to his obscure ideas as a citizen and his political canon which in the 1980s led critics to make re-interpretations of the changes in Pinter's political views. The politics of Pinter's drama significantly differs from those in the canons of the other playwrights what, in fact, made us exhibit the gradual shift from the indirect politics to the direct politics in *The Birthday Party* and *One for the Road*.

Keywords: *Indirect and Direct Politics, The Birthday Party, One for the Road, Pinter, Drama*

Pinter'in *The Birthday Party* ve *One for the Road* Oyunlarında
Dolaylı ve Dolaysız Siyasi Yansımalar

ÖZET

Bu çalışma, 20 yy. en önde gelen İngiliz oyun yazarlarından Harold Pinter'in *The Birthday Party* ve *One for the Road* adlı oyunlarındaki dolaylı ve dolaysız siyaseti ele almaktadır. Pinter'in siyasi görüşlerini dolaysız yansıtmaması 1980'li yıllarda birçok eleştirmenin sıkça eleştirdiği ve oyunlarını defalarca yorumladıkları bir yazar olmuştur. Pinter'in oyunlarındaki siyaset o dönemin tiyatro geleneğinden kayda değer oranda farklılıklar göstermektedir. Pinter'in, *The Birthday Party* ve *One for the Road* adlı oyunlarındaki dolaylı siyasetten dolaysız siyasete geçiş kademeli olarak ele alınmıştır.

Anahtar kelimeler: Dolaylı ve Dolaysız Siyaset, The Birthday Party, One for the Road, Pinter, Drama

Introduction

For ages the political views and canons of playwrights have been of great interest not only to the common public but also to the critics. The playwrights have been categorized as political and apolitical according to their political stands. Accordingly, it has been challenging for the critics and those in drama circles to label Pinter as a political playwright or an apolitical one. The thing that makes it too difficult to put Pinter into any category is that his drama seems to be apolitical while his plays transform from the indirect politics to the direct one, which, in fact, differed him from the other playwrights of his time. In addition, as some scholars point out such kind of change of his political worldlook develops in an atmosphere of mystery¹.

Focusing on ideological nature of language means committing ourselves to the view that language use is socially determined and rests upon common-sense

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¹ Charles Vincet Grimes, "A Silence Beyond Echo: Harold Pinter's Political Theatre", *New York University, Department of English Language and Literature, Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, New York University, Department of English Literature, New York, 1999, p. 47.*

assumptions. In terms of the author's ideology in the polyphonic structure, the multiplicity of voices is in no way a strong stance against its being of authoritarian nature, though in the polyphonic novel, the characters are more liberated as they achieve voices and express their points of view, it does not challenge the validity of the authorial position.

The Two Plays under Discussion

The Birthday Party

The Birthday Party (1958) was Pinter's full-length play and it was a watershed in Pinter's political work². This watershed results from its multiple interpretations at various times. At the very beginning of Pinter's career, *The Birthday Party* was not regarded as a political play because Pinter always emphasized his dislike for any form of politics and his play's disconnection from politics during the 1950s and 1960s.³ The politics of the 1950's and 1960's was mainly dominated by the clashes between communism and capitalism, especially in the Northern Hemisphere after the devastating effects of the Second World War. However, from the mid-1980s on, with his move into overtly political plays, he admitted that his early plays were political in spite of the fact that they were seen as apolitical.⁴ This situation led critics to make re-interpretations of Pinter's early plays: e.g., *The Birthday Party* had previously been labelled as an apolitical one. When *The Birthday Party* was dealt with from a political point of view, its political nature did not meet its political ends. In fact, *The Birthday Party's* political stance is obvious throughout the play and even its inspiration is political. Pinter himself did not hesitate to put it as follows in a conversation with Gussow.

...It was inspired by two things. I met this fellow in a seaside boarding house when I was on tour as an actor. He lived in this attic and used to play the piano on the pier. He was a totally lonely man. That's all I knew about him, but his image remained with me for some years. I thought "what would happen if two people knocked on his door?" That knock was the second thing. The idea of the knock came from my knowledge of the Gestapo*. I'll never forget: it was 1953 or 1954. The war had only been over less than ten years. It was very much on my mind.⁵

Peacock suggests that in *The Birthday Party*, side by side with direct references to the Gestapo or Holocaust there are also metaphorical references to them which are: the two implied signals to. Pinter creates Stanley as a helpless Jew and his intruders Goldberg and McCann as merciless representatives of the Gestapo. If it is habitual for the Gestapo to knock on the door of Jews and takes them away never to be seen again, Goldberg and McCann also behave in a similar way – they knock on the door of the seaside boarding house and take Stanley to the unknown without giving any reason. Even though the play has many allusions to the Holocaust or the period after World War II, it does not only allude to the Nazi persecution in the past.

² Ibid., p. 47.

³ Charles Grimes, *Harold Pinter's Politics: A Silence Beyond Echo*, Madison: Farleigh Dickinson University Press, 2005, p. 16.

⁴ Ibid., p. 21.

⁵ Mel Gussow, *Conversations with Pinter*, Nick Hern Books, 1994, p.71.

*Gestapo, German Secret police during the Nazi regime, known for their brutality and cruelty.

In one of his interviews, Pinter refers to the oppression in *The Birthday Party* by saying “I don’t consider this an unnatural happening. I don’t think it is all surrealistic and curious because surely, this thing of people arriving at the door has been happening in Europe in the last twenty years. Not only the last twenty years, the last two to three hundred”.⁶

The oppressions, in *The Birthday Party*, are recurring events preserving their actuality at any time; Pinter tactfully shows that the play’s frame is much broader than this or that particular event. Besides, the play does not refer to one specific political situation happening at one time; it also has many references from past to present. For these reasons, we can label it as a metaphorical or an indirect political play. It is not certain whether Stanley tells the truth about his past or not but it is clear that he believes there is a conspiracy against him and he seems to be hiding from someone. When Meg tells him about the new lodgers, Stanley gets nervous and inquires about the men, which supports the idea of his hiding from someone. He forecasts before they come: “They are coming today...They are coming in a van...they’ve got a wheelbarrow in that van...They are looking for someone. A certain person...Shall I tell you who they’re looking for?”.⁷

The play’s political component firstly exhibits itself in Stanley’s hopelessness about the absence of a place to go. Grimes interprets Pinter as showing with these words the ‘political discontent’ and the impossibility of protesting against the established ethos in a ‘one dimensional society’ If a dissident happens to object to society, the society will reintegrate and assimilate him or her.⁸

What we see here is that Harold Pinter creates an ‘irony’ by making Goldberg, the ‘Jew’ character, into the ‘Gestapo’, so that the ‘oppressed’ becomes the ‘oppressor’. Malkin’s definition of the oppressors clearly shows the fact that while Goldberg deals with the organizing part of the mission. McCann symbolizes the brute force.⁹ The main purpose of the oppressors are defined by Martin Esslin in *Harold Pinter’s the Theatre of Cruelty*. “They may be the emissaries of an underground terrorist organization, or they may be the agents of a society that forces Stanley, the potential artist, into the straightjacket of a bowler-hatted, nine-to-five job that effectively castrates his creative impulses”.¹⁰

Dukore defines “the organization’ as ‘society’ and labels Goldberg and McCann as ‘organization men’ whose aim is to ‘mould Stanley into a collective pattern’”.¹¹ What we infer here is that the oppressors are agents suitable for the political nature of the play. Dukore furthers the claim that Goldberg and McCann are agents of society. It seems that their sole aim is to reintegrate a dissident, Stanley, into

⁶ D. Keith Peacock, *Harold Pinter and the New British Theatre*, Greenwood Press, 1997, p. 57.

⁷ Harold Pinter, *The Birthday Party: A Play in Three Acts*, Samuel French, 1960, p. 14.

⁸ Charles Grimes, *Harold Pinter’s Politics: A Silence Beyond Echo*, Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2005, p. 40.

⁹ Jeanette R. Malkin, *Verbal Violence in Contemporary Drama: From Handke to Shepard*, Cambridge University Press, 1992, p. 55.

¹⁰ Katherine H. Burkman, John L. Kundert-Gibbs (eds.). *Pinter at Sixty*, Indiana University Press, 1993, p. 31.

¹¹ Bernard Dukore, “The Theatre of Harold Pinter”, *The Tulane Drama Review*, vol. 6, no. 3 (1962), p. 53.

a one dimensional society. It definitely demonstrates the political oppression in the play.

GOLDBERG: Mr Webber, sit down a minute.
STANLEY: Why should I do?
GOLDBERG: Sit down.
STANLEY: No
MCCANN: ...Do you mind sitting down?
STANLEY: Yes I do¹² (qtd. in Rosengarten 27).

At the end, it is shown once again that Stanley is a hopeless loser and he sits down. Under everyday circumstances, it doesn't matter who sits down or stands up. However, when it comes to power relations, there is no question that the seated one is always in a submissive role while the standing one is in a more authoritarian role.¹³ Goldberg's and McCann's intentions start to reveal themselves even in this trivial game which aims to make him submit to them. However, making him sit down may be regarded as just the beginning. They begin to interrogate him:

GOLDBERG: Webber, What were you doing yesterday?
STANLEY: Yesterday?
GOLDBERG: And the day before. What did you do the day before that?
MCCANN: Why did you leave the organization?
MCCANN: Why did you betray us?¹⁴

As just mentioned above, Pinter does not name a specific organization or tell us with what crime Stanley is charged. It leads us to think about the universality of the play. Although the struggle seems to be between Stanley and his intruders, Goldberg and McCann, the reality is far from this because the real struggle is actually between Stanley and the institution whose representations are Goldberg and McCann¹⁵ and this broadens the play's boundaries from a personal issue to a political issue and the only thing we can be sure about in this situation is that there is an individual who is suppressed by a higher institution or society.

Goldberg and McCann's references to higher institutions by way of asking questions are also a part of their brainwashing method. As Peacock states, although the questions they direct to Stanley, are apparently illogical, they refer to institutions such as the Church, religion, the I.R.A, morality which are higher institutions and people can feel guilty about and they all require collaboration and renunciation of individuality for the sake of the group. When Stanley leaves the organization, he defiantly objects to the group identity and this situation creates a crisis for Goldberg

¹² Wong-Rosengarten - Yeang Chui. "The Affirmative Absurd in Harold Pinter's Plays", University of Hawaii Unpublished Master's Thesis, p. 27.

¹³ Ibid., p.27

¹⁴ Harold Pinter, *The Birthday Party: A Play in Three Acts*, Samuel French, 1960, p.35.

¹⁵ D. Keith Peacock, *Harold Pinter and the New British Theatre*, Greenwood Press, 1997, p.65.

and McCann.¹⁶

We can also state that Stanley's leaving the group and turning to individuality, is totally unacceptable for such institutions since they are necessary and responsible for the continuity of a state. The oppressors, Goldberg and McCann, are necessary for performing the reintegration of Stanley. For Peacock, Goldberg and McCann first destroy Stanley's current independent identity by brainwashing and making him conform to society by interrogating until he becomes totally silent and has a nervous breakdown. After that, his identity is ready to be reshaped by the organization to become an 'anonymous' part of it again.¹⁷

In the Third Act, we witness the resurrection of Stanley and invulnerability of the oppressors. Goldberg's sentences about himself claim our attention. From the beginning of the play, Goldberg can be characterized as a conformist citizen totally attached to the rules of society, tradition and religion. Dukore shows how his words are full of clichéd 'ideals of middle class conformity'.¹⁸

"What's happened to the love, the bonhomie, the unashamed affection of the day before yesterday, that our mums taught us in the nursery (...) "What is old is good, take my tip".¹⁹ This quote demonstrates that Goldberg and Stanley are completely opposite characters. Whereas Goldberg is a conformist adhering to society, Stanley is a nonconformist rejecting his bonds with society. Goldberg's utterances about his way of life and himself also show us the cliché of middle class values of conformity:

GOLDBERG: ...You know what? I've never lost a tooth. Not since the day I was born. Nothing's changed. (He rises and moves down C) That's why I've reached my position, McCann. Because I've always been as fit as a fiddle. All my life I've said the same. Play up, play up and play the game. Honour thy father and thy mother. All along the line. Follow the line, the line, McCann, and you can't go wrong. I sat where I was told to sit. I kept my eye on the ball. School? Don't talk to me about school. Top in all subjects. And for why? Because I'm telling you, I'm telling you, follow my line? Follow my mental? Learn by heart. Never write down anything. And don't go near the water. And you will find that what I say is true. (Vacant) Because I believe that the world ... (Desperate) Because I believe that the world ... (Lost) Because I believe that the world...(...) Do your duty and keep your observations. Always bid good morning to your neighbours. Never, never forget your family, for they are the rock, the constitution!....²⁰

He only thinks or does what other authorities and society tell him to do. In short, he feels obliged to act and do as his family, his teachers, his organization

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 66.

¹⁷ Ibid., pp.66-67.

¹⁸ Bernard Dukore, "The Theatre of Harold Pinter", *The Tulane Drama Review*, Vol. 6, no. 3, (1962), p. 53.

¹⁹ Harold Pinter, *The Birthday Party: A Play in Three Acts*, Samuel French, 1960, pp. 42, 52.

²⁰ Ibid., pp.61, 62.

dictate. This can mean that the oppressors are the oppressed, too. Billington states "What, however, gives *The Birthday Party* its political and philosophical complexity is the sense that Goldberg and McCann are themselves victims. They represent not only the West's most autocratic religions, but also most persecuted races..."²¹ To Billington, Pinter attributes religious and ethnic features to Goldberg, the Jew, and McCann, the Irishman. We know that human history played a dirty game with the Jews and the Irish. These people suffered a lot. The Jews suffered from anti-Semitism and the Irish paid a heavy price for their patriotism and fierce resistance to the British rule. In the following quote we see that Dukore, in a way, agrees with Billington's views on Goldberg and McCann.

Goldberg and McCann are exactly the right people to this particular job, for they are representatives of the two traditional religions of Western civilization, Judaism and Catholicism. It would be highly inappropriate to send a Protestant to make Stanley conform, but Goldberg and McCann, representatives of tradition and conformity, demonstrate the use that society makes of the forces of religion to insure the conformity of its members.²²

Throughout the play, we see that Stanley is unable to defend himself; he cannot ask what crime or offence he is accused of. He is always silent and towards the end of the play he almost completely loses his speech ability. Pinter puts forward the reasons for Stanley's silence as follows:

...Stanley cannot perceive his only valid justification -which is he I what he is -therefore he certainly can never be articulate about it... We have agreed the hierarchy, the establishment, the arbiters, the socio-religious monsters arrive to affect censure and alteration upon a member of the club who has discarded responsibility (that word again) towards himself and others. (What is your opinion by the way, of the act of suicide?) He does possess, however, for my money, fiber-he fights for his life. It doesn't last long, this fight. His core being a quagmire of delusion, his mind a tenuous fuse box, he collapses under the weight of their accusation — an accusation compounded of the shitstained strictures of the centuries of 'tradition' ...between you and me, the play showed how the bastards... how religious forces ruin our lives. But who is going to say that in the play? That would be impossible.²³

What we see here are the negative effects of religion, tradition and responsibility on individuals. To Grimes, it also shows how Pinter's politics "...anticipates his anti-right-wing politics of the 1980s, when tradition and morality became ideological and political tools of New Right".²⁴ We could claim that the play

²¹ Michael Billington, *The Life and Work of Harold Pinter*. Faber and Faber, 2001, p. 80.

²² Bernard Dukore, "The Theatre of Harold Pinter", *The Tulane Drama Review*, vol. 6 no. 3, (1962), p. 52.

²³ Charles Grimes, *A Silence Beyond Echo: Harold Pinter's Political Theatre*, Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, New York University, Department of English Literature, New York, 1999, p. 53.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 53.

is also a direct criticism of the Right Wing politics since it exploits the concepts of tradition, morality, hierarchy and religion.

Although, on the surface, the play seems to be about a struggle between a man and his oppressors; in actuality it has many allusions to the politics of the period such as the Cold War, Holocaust, and welfare state directly or indirectly. To be more precise, *The Birthday Party* depicts indirect political elements while *One for the Road* alludes to the direct politics.

Pinter's Transition from Supposedly Apolitical to Overtly Political Plays

Here, we could claim that Harold Pinter purposely avoided politics and political writing at the beginning of his career and in the 1980s, he decided to employ his dramatic reputation to "bring political injustice to public attention".²⁵ In an interview with Nicholas Hem, Pinter described his early plays as metaphorical and his later plays as direct:

(...) So all these considerations were alive in my mind over those years, 1957-60 or so. Certainly the plays use metaphor to a great extent, whereas in *One for the Road* the deed is much more specific and direct. I don't really see *One for the Road* as a metaphor. For anything. It describes a state of affairs in which there are victims of torture. You have the torturer, you have the victims. And you can see that two of the victims have been physically tortured.²⁶

Pinter clearly states that *The Birthday Party* is indirectly political play but *One for the Road* is an overtly political one. Some scholars claim that Pinter's later plays are much more purposeful and have direct meanings; they are not polysemic; everything is clear in them. *One for the Road* and *Mountain Language* do not have metaphorical political references, but *The Birthday Party*.²⁷ They directly portray political situations. *One for the Road* is a direct political play dealing with torture since Pinter refers to torture in it as "the official torture subscribed to by so many governments".²⁸ So the play is about state sponsored torture which is done in the name of state and by people commissioned by the state. "The confrontation between extreme power and extreme powerlessness"²⁹ is another issue noticeable in the deep structure of the play. One can easily see the dirty side of power; how it corrupts the individual and the state; how it gives rise to the helplessness and hopelessness of the powerless in the face of the powerful.³⁰

One for the Road

One for the Road is set in an unnamed country and this strengthens the idea of the universality of the play. Though all the characters in the play have British names, the

²⁵ D. Keith Peacock, *Harold Pinter and the New British Theatre*, Greenwood Press, 1997, pp. 134-135.

²⁶ Harold Pinter, *One for the Road*, Methuen, 1985, p. 8.

²⁷ Katherine H. Burkman - John L. Kunder-Gibbs (eds.), *Pinter at Sixty*, Indiana University Press, 1993, p. 35.

²⁸ Harold Pinter, *One for the Road*, Methuen, 1985, p. 12.

²⁹ Charles Grimes, *A Silence Beyond Echo: Harold Pinter's Political Theatre*, Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, New York University, Department of English Literature, New York, 1999, p. 2.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 3

setting could be any place.

Peacock claims that Nicolas, the torturer, makes some references to cricket in the play which also broadens the play's implication bringing to mind that such a play can also happen in Britain if the 'conflict in Northern Ireland' is taken into consideration.³¹ All these once more show that the play is not just about torture committed in a specific country but it signifies the presence of torture in most of the countries of the world as well.

The characters in an unknown country are Nicolas, the torturer and the members of a family tortured by Nicolas: Victor, the father of the family; his wife, Gila, and their son, Nick. 'What the family's crime is why they are remanded or why they are incarcerated or tortured by Nicolas' is not revealed in the play. It only reminds the reader of Stanley's situation in *The Birthday Party*.³² Nicolas's references to the country's leader show us that whatever he does he thinks that he gets the full support of the state. He is most probably charged by the leader with this mission and the thing which Victor and Gila may presumably have done is something which is seen as a crime by the state. Grimes names them as "political dissidents".³³ The 'reasonable' proof to it is: Nicolas, turning to the leader of the state, gives the impression of acting for the interests of a certain group. Nicolas's ill treatment of Victor and Gila shows their ideas differ from the ones of those who are in charge of the state or from the mainstream of society and this makes them dissidents.

In the First Scene, Nicolas talks to Victor:

What do you think this is? It is my finger. And this is my little finger. This is my big finger and this is my little finger. I wave my big finger in front of your eyes. Like this. And now I do the same with my little finger. I can also use both...at the same time. Like this. I can do absolutely anything I like. Do you think I am mad? My mother did...Do you think waving finger in front of people's eyes is silly? I can see your point...but would you like the same view if it was my boot-or my penis?³⁴

By performing such acts Nicolas seems to be enjoying the absolute power he has. It is in line with Pinter's phrase "power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely".³⁵

NICOLAS: (...) I run the place. God speaks through me. I'm referring to the Old Testament God, by the way, I'm a long way from being Jewish. Everyone respects me here. Including you, I take it? I think that is the correct stance.³⁶

³¹ D. Keith Peacock, *Harold Pinter and the New British Theatre*, Greenwood Press, 1997, p. 141.

³² Charles Grimes, *Harold Pinter's Politics: A Silence Beyond Echo*, Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2005, p. 80.

³³ *Ibid.*, 81.

³⁴ Harold Pinter, *One for the Road*, Methuen, 1985, p. 33.

³⁵ Charles Grimes's *A Silence Beyond Echo: Harold Pinter's Political Theatre*, Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, New York University, Department of English Literature, New York, 1999, p. 101.

³⁶ Harold Pinter., *One for the Road*, Methuen, 1985, p.36.

Declaring himself as a religious and a respectable person, he blames Victor for being nonreligious.

NICOLAS: (...) Everyone else knows the voice of God speaks through me. You are not a religious man, I take it? *(Pause)* You don't believe in a guiding light? *(Pause)* What then? *(Pause)* So.. .morally...you flounder in wet shit. You know...like when you've eaten a rancid omelette.³⁷

Nicolas's oratory helps us understand both his character and the motives of his actions. By referring to God as 'God speaks through me', he shows that he believes the things he does are right, he does these things in the name of God. Nicolas goes on his verbal torture by sharing his ideas about death: "What about you? Do you love death? Not necessarily your own. Others. The death of others. Do you love the death of others as much as I do?"³⁸ Even though Nicolas never tortures his characters physically, he tends to torture his victims by his language using fear of death as a tool of torture. He even treacherously threatens Victor that he will kill his family.

Nicolas may seem to be the most powerful character in the play, but in fact, he isn't even half of it. We see the first sign of his powerlessness in his constant drinking and toasting in *One for the Road*. 'One for the road' is an idiom referring to the last drink before leaving. Nicolas drinks more than one and calls each one "one for the road". To Prentice, his drinking and calling it one for the road is regarded as a sign of his restlessness and dislike for his own behaviours.³⁹ The second sign of his powerlessness is his constant need for confirmation of his actions. We see it in the first scene when he demands respect from his hostage. The third sign of his powerlessness is his reference to higher authorities such as God and the State to make himself believe he has an important role and the things he does are right:

Do you know the man who runs this country? No? Well, he's a very nice chap. He took me aside the other day, last Wednesday, I think, it was, he took me aside, at a reception, visiting dignitaries, he took *me* aside, *me*, and he said to me, he said, in what I can only describe as a hoarse whisper, Nic he said, Nic (that is my name), Nic, if you ever come to anyone, whom you have good reason to believe is getting on my tits, tell them one thing, tell them honesty is the best policy.⁴⁰

As we understand from all his references his reference to God in his earlier utterances and quoting his leader here, it is certain that Nicolas takes its authority from God and state. As stated in *Harold Pinter and The New British Theatre*, his taking power from higher authorities shows that "like Gus and Ben, Goldberg and McCann, and Roote and his staff, Nicolas is again a servant of his oppressive organization (...)".⁴¹

Nicolas, being a disillusioned man with a brainwashed mindset, constantly sticks to the misconceptions of the state and religion.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 41.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 45.

³⁹ Penelope Prentice, *The Pinter Ethic: The Erotic Aesthetic*. Garland Publishing Inc., 2000, p. 277.

⁴⁰ Harold Pinter, *One for the Road*, Methuen, 1985, pp. 47, 48.

⁴¹ D. Keith Peacock, *Harold Pinter and the New British Theatre*, Greenwood Press, 1997, p. 142.

I'm not terribly fond of Nicolas. I could do without him. Nevertheless, I recognize the plight he is in. Don't forget Nicolas is a deluded man: he is a man possessed, religiously really. He's enacting a religious and political obsession, and I feel very sorry for him. He's an absolute disaster, but the society he's speaking for is in itself a disaster.⁴²

The quote shows both the characteristics of Nicolas and the society of the hypothetical state. The state exploits his committed faith in God and his patriotism. The analysis of human histories clearly shows that society can easily be blinded by religious dogmas and politics.

Quigley interprets it as follows:

(...) Nicolas, the interrogator, derives some of his legitimacy and authority from his conviction that he speaks for a national consensus. Citing his country's leader, he portrays himself as one acting on behalf of a unified group against a lone dissenter and existence of that larger unity suffices to convert the dissenter into a traitor.⁴³

In all his actions, Nicolas believes that he is right because "he is acting for his country legitimately and properly. When he refers to the country's values, those are his values. And because of those values, he will kill, allow rape, everything he can think of. And torture. In order to protect the realm, anything is justified".⁴⁴

One can clearly see how Nicolas has a deep loyalty for the country and the values of the country. He acts in the name of them without questioning anything. The following lines prove how torture is justified when it is done in the name of the majority.

NICKY: Were they your soldiers?

NICOLAS: They are your country's soldiers.⁴⁵

Nicolas's emphasis on the fact that the soldiers are the country's soldiers supports the idea that the torture done here is a state instituted torture. This becomes the first and last presence of Nicky on stage.

Gila, wife of Victor, becomes Nicolas's next victim.. When Gila talks about her father in the third scene, Nicolas gets angrier.

Your father? What is your father to do with it? *Pause*. Your father? How dare you? Fuckpig. *Pause*. Your father was a wonderful man. His country is proud of him. He's dead. He was a man of honour. He's dead. Are you prepared to insult the memory of your father? *Pause*. Are you prepared to defame, to

⁴² Harold Pinter, *Various Voices: Prose, Poetry and Politics*, Faber and Faber, 1998, p. 62.

⁴³ Peter Raby (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Harold Pinter*, Cambridge, 2001, p. 10.

⁴⁴ Harold Pinter, *One for the Road*. Methuen, 1985, pp. 16, 17.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 58, 59.

debase, the memory of your father? Your father fought for his country. I knew him. I revered him. Everyone did. He believed in God. He didn't *think* like you shitbags. He *lived*. He *lived*. He was iron and gold. He would die, he would die, he would die for his country, for his God. And he did die, he died, he died, for his God (...) How do you dare speak of your father to me? I loved him, as if he were my own father.⁴⁶

According to Grimes, "Pinter's political villains disdain thinking, regarding it as a threat to a natural, harmonious, ordered way-of-life-and to the State that preserves that way-of-life".⁴⁷

Grimes' ideas reveal the fact that the state actually demands unquestioning, conformist citizens; that is why it doesn't like political dissidents such as Victor and Gila. Nicolas's obsession with religion and politics emerges more than once in his speech. He defines himself not only in respect to religion and politics but also to others.

After his comments on Gila's father, Nicolas switches our attention to Gila's being tortured by soldiers. From the beginning of the play Nicolas makes sexual references about Gila, violates her private life, and reminds Victor of his wife's helplessness: "(...) Does she...fuck? Or does she...like...you know....what? What does she like? I'm talking about your life. Your *wife* (...)Your wife and I had a very nice chat but I couldn't help noticing she didn't look her best. She's probably menstruating. Women do that".⁴⁸

NICOLAS: Do you think we have nuns upstairs? *Pause* What do we have upstairs?

GILA: No nuns

NICOLAS: What do we have?

GILA: Men

NICOLAS: Have they been raping you? *She stares at him.* How many times have you been raped? *Pause* How many times?

GILA: I don't know.

NICOLAS: And you call yourself a reliable witness?⁴⁹

Gila's being raped by the soldiers highlights "the powerlessness of the individual in the face of a totalitarian regime in which any means are permissible for the maintenance of the state power".⁵⁰

It clearly shows the hypocrisy of states and the corruption of morality. Throughout the play, Nicolas emphasizes the social bonds that bring society together

⁴⁶ Ibid., p.65-66.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 85.

⁴⁸ Charles Grimes, *Harold Pinter's Politics: A Silence Beyond Echo*, Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2005, pp. 46-48.

⁴⁹ Charles Grimes, *Harold Pinter's Politics: A Silence Beyond Echo*, Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2005, p. 69

⁵⁰ D. Keith Peacock, *Harold Pinter and the New British Theatre*, Greenwood Press, 1997, p. 141.

but when it comes to dissident individuals, these social bonds lose their validity and any kind of violation of these bonds is justified.

“Questioning and interrogations are acts of power, which by nature exalt the questioner and demean the questioned, and personal freedom consists largely in having a defence against questions. The most blatant tyranny is the one who asks the most blatant questions.”⁵¹ Nicolas reinforces his power over his victims by asking them bizarre and obvious questions.

Nicolas says: “Their daddies are in our business. Which is I remind you to keep the world clean for God”.⁵²

The political stance of these plays and Pinter’s pessimist approach to the politics support the idea that the silence of the character is the symbol of conformity to the state.

Conclusion

In terms of the author’s ideology in the polyphonic structure, the multiplicity of voices is in no way a strong stance against its being of authoritarian nature, though in the polyphonic novel, the characters are more liberated as they achieve voices and express their points of view, it does not challenge the validity of the authorial position. Pinter’s politics from a different perspective was the main concern of the paper. Our analysis also shows that Pinter’s implied politics was the decisive factor in his “revealing” the roots of it, which finally “inspired” him to judge openly, i.e. directly of the politics of the ruling power and its “servants”. What we have clearly observed in his later plays is: the more overtly political his plays are, the more outspoken he becomes. Another striking point concerning Pinter’s political views is that there is a gradual shift from the implied politics to the direct politics in his works. We could say that Pinter was always a political playwright from the very beginning of his career to the very end of his career.

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⁵¹ Charles Grimes’s *A Silence Beyond Echo: Harold Pinter’s Political Theatre*, Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, New York University, Department of English Literature, New York, 1999, p. 102.

⁵² Harold Pinter, *One for the Road*. Methuen, 1985, p. 78.

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