

Name of Scholar: Sina Tavassoli

Name of Supervisor: Prof. Baran Farooqi

Topic of Research: Space as a Motif for Power and Identity in Selected Plays of Harold Pinter

### Abstract

The objective of the thesis “Space as a Motif for Power and Identity in selected Plays of Harold Pinter” is to examine how Pinter uses the idea of space as a symbol of struggle for power and identity. This dissertation attempts to examine four selected plays of Harold Pinter and uses a methodology that focuses on the way Pinter draws attention to the theatrical spaces and the discourse of power and the way it controls the performance of identity. These are theatrical spaces made neutral and brutal by discourse of power and authority that exist in Pinter’s theatre. The study, based on critical readings of plays: *The Birthday Party (1957)*, *The Homecoming (1966)*, *Old Times (1970)* and *One for the Road (1984)*. The thesis aspires to examine how Pinter uses the idea of space and to what extent can space be read and decoded as a site for struggle for power and identity. These are theatrical spaces of violence, menace, dreams, exploitation, subjugation and victimization which are made pregnant and brutal and exist both on and off the stage.

The thesis also employs ideas about power and identity given by Michel Foucault, Henry Lefebvre and other critics to discuss the dynamics of these plays. Pinter’s plays can be read in conjunction with these theories of power, identity and space which reveal undercurrents of politics and authority. Space is used as a motif and it is symbolic of power and identity.

Pinter’s plays can be read as plays about power equations where he sets the conflict within various kinds of spaces to produce discourse. Pinter dramatizes space as an important tool for power control and domination. At first glance, Pinter’s early plays seem absurd, ambiguous and complex to demystify, but an analysis of those plays performed with the help of Foucauldian notion of space as a motif for power and identity, soon unravels the plays, exhibiting clear meanings. One can see that the plays are plays of intrusion and oppression and in different situation characters intrude and impinge upon spaces of memory (the past), the present as well as the future course of action. A study of the plays also shows how identity depends upon the space that is assigned to the entity.

The thesis comprises six chapters and a conclusion. The first chapter of the thesis “**Introduction: Harold Pinter and the Understanding of his Drama**” deals with the aesthetic of Pinter’s oeuvre regarding thematic concerns, dramatic techniques and dramatic sensibility as has been expressed by scholars and critics. This chapter also tries to locate the playwright’s role in the growth of society as well as his interaction with drama and culture.

The second chapter of the thesis “**Pinter’s Theatre from Theoretical Frameworks of Power and Space**” deals with the theoretical foundation that this thesis has been built upon using theories of power, identity and space of social theorists. Space is a complex phenomenon and its analysis decodes several unseen areas in the play as well as the intention of the dramatist. Space in drama is multidimensional, thus it is in close association with what a dramatist has in mind to encode and convey coupled with the perception of the audience or a critic to decode the message. Space is an important place to shape social identity, for example, to reinforce or to deconstruct

the public opinion. Space is also crucial in the construction of political, ethical and cultural discourses. Above all, space is a site for exertion of power in every field. Therefore, this chapter explores the extensive use of ideas about space and power which are given by social theorists such as Michel Foucault, Henry Lefebvre, Una Chaudhuri, Michael Issacharoff and Edward Soja to discuss the dynamics of Pinter's work.

The third chapter of the thesis “**Reading *The Birthday Party* as Drama of Intrusion, Invasion, and Interference**” presents the study of Pinter's *The Birthday Party* as a play of intervention into the individual's space employing the metaphoric significance of the womb, the lodge, and the socio-cultural realms of control and authority. The play traces and examines the significance of space where individuals are involved in a power game either to overcome one another or to fulfill the desire of a higher institution. *The Birthday Party* also deals with the theme of menace concerned with the individual's fears in society and the consequences which lead to problems of identity.

The fourth chapter of the thesis “**Gender, Power and Space in Pinter's *The Homecoming***” examines the terror of identity, ambiguity of language and the relationship between lust and power. This chapter discusses the ways in which Pinter's men invade space and the various ways in which men emotionally or physically try to dominate one another, but eventually fail to possess a female character. Thus *The Homecoming* remains the most forceful and ironic play which dramatizes the mechanism of defensive aggressive behavior of human beings in spaces of the self and divided identities.

The fifth chapter of the thesis “**Mapping *Old Times* as a Quest for Power and Identity in the Spaces of Memory and Sexuality**” employs subtle workings of the conscious and the unconscious mind representing heterosexual and homosexual conflicts in characters of their reminiscences from the past and the present memories. The play depicts the past memories of people which are built in a manner that leads to emotional explosions within the circle of power game among the people who love one another. The spaces provided by memory are taken as a device for psychological dominance over others for control and approval. However, *Old Times* demonstrates a drama of love triangle between three characters who strive for love and affection of a woman.

The sixth chapter of the thesis “**Politics of Brutality: Spaces in Harold Pinter's *One for the Road***” presents a study of a play which shares the sense of despair experienced by victims and illustrates the realities of state-sponsored torture. Pinter's *One for the Road* is about the persecution of a family who is politically at variance with the State. This play also uses the theatrical space of prison to highlight and examine the narratives of authoritative control. The play explores the manner in which the interrogator uses language to spread the sanctioned ideology. This language of power serves as a device for psychosexual torture for control and authority.

The conclusion of the thesis entitled “**Spaces of Approval, Authority and Control of Power and Identity**” provides a comprehensive discussion of the findings of the present research as well as examines theatrical forms of space as a motif for power and identity in selected plays of Harold Pinter.