

The Politics of Violence in John Arden's and Harold Pinter's Selected Plays

Ihsan Alwan Muhsin Al-Sweidi

University of Baghdad / College of Languages

Amir Abdul Zahra Khamis Al-Azraki

University of Basrah / College of Arts

I. Introduction:

The causes and consequences of political violence have become major topics of research in an era of history weighed down by seemingly continual warfare, revolution, and other violent acts of every description. The study of the politics of violence, on the other hand, has drawn upon theoretical perspectives and forms of analysis from all the social and political sciences. The problematic of violence and its justification is a concern not only for scientists and politicians but also for artists and playwrights. Many playwrights have endeavored to display the argument of violence and its politics in their works. Among those playwrights are John Arden and Harold Pinter.

Accordingly, this paper attempts to delineate the politics of violence in selected plays by two playwrights: John Arden and Harold Pinter. It tries to present a new interpretation of political violence and address the question of "when can violence be justified?" Hence, it will show how these playwrights look into violence and its rationalization. Moreover, it will testify the plays as productions of the political theatre. To achieve such an aim, the paper will mainly hinge on Marxist and post-Marxist thinkers like Karl Marx and Louis Althusser. Their theories of power, subjugation, and violence will be the approach of the paper to decipher the complex manipulation of violence in these plays.

II. The Problematic of Violence.

II.1. The Quintessence of Violence:

The Latin root of the word 'violence' is a combination of two Latin words—the word 'vis' (force) and the past participle 'latus' of the word 'fero' (to carry). The Latin word 'violare' is itself a combination of these two words and its present participle 'violans' is a plausible source for the word 'violence'—so that the word 'violence', in its etymological origin, has the sense to carry force at or towards. An interesting feature of the etymology is that the word 'violation' comes from this very same source as the word 'violence',

The Politics of Violence in John Arden's and Harold Pinter's Selected Plays

Ihsan Alwan Muhsin Al-Sweidi , Amir Abdul Zahra Khamis Al-Azraki

“which suggests to us the interesting idea that somehow a violation of something: that carrying a force against something constitutes in one way or another violation of it” (Galer 1-2).

The issue of force being connected with violence is a very powerful one. There is no question that in many contexts the word ‘force’ is a synonym for the word ‘violence’. But in human relations violence can not be equated with force. Violence is not the same thing as force. Clearly, force is often used on another person’s body and there is no violence done. For example, if a man is drowning—thrashing around and is apparently unable to save himself—and you use the standard Red Cross life-saving techniques, you will use force against his body although certainly you will not be doing any violence to him (Galer 3).

The idea of violence in human relations is much more closely connected with the idea of violation than it is with the idea of force. What is fundamental about violence in human relations is that a person is violated. Violating a person presupposes a person has rights which are indissolubly connected with his being as a person. The very idea of natural rights is contentious as it is aromatic of Scholasticism, but we find ourselves forced to accept natural rights in order to understand the moral dimension of violence. One of the most fundamental rights a person has is a right to his body—to determine what his body does and what is done to his body—because without his body he would not be a person anymore. The most common way a person ceases to exist is that his body stops functioning. Apart from the body what is essential to one’s being is his dignity in something like the existentialist sense. The dignity of a person does not reside in his remaining prudish or dignified, but rather in his making his own decisions (Galer 12). More importantly, another feature that is essential to human dignity is, as Kant calls it, “autonomy”. The right to one’s body and the right to property are doubtlessly the most essential natural rights of persons.

Overt physical assault of one person on the body of another is the most obvious form of violence. Mugging, rape, and murder are types of crimes of violence. In these cases, an attack on a human body is an attack on a person and thus illegal. But some acts of violence are considered as a defence of law or a benefit to the person whose body is beaten. For example, ordinary police activity (not the police brutality) and the corporal punishment of children by teachers and parents have institutional aspects that surpass the purely personal one (Viri 20). These institutional overtones make a great deal of difference but they can not obliterate that there is violence done (Viri 5). The institutional violence could be ‘ideological violation’ where the ideological state apparatus uses violence to impose its own ideology. Thus, whenever you do something to another person’s body without his/her agreement you are attacking not only his/her physical entity but also you are attacking a person. In this respect, violence is really visible. This kind of violence can be clearly seen in Arden’s *Sergeant Musgrave’s Dance* where Musgrave tries to indicate to the strikers and

The Politics of Violence in John Arden's and Harold Pinter's Selected Plays

Ihsan Alwan Muhsin Al-Sweidi , Amir Abdul Zahra Khamis Al-Azraki

to the audience that the army's violation against the natives' property and bodies are the real violence that should be considered illegal.

Another kind of violence is the psychological violence where there is no apparent physical force used against a person's body. This type of violence occurs in interrogations, investigations, brainwashing...etc. Pinter's plays are saturated with this kind of violence. *The Birthday Party* and *One for the Road* are regarded as examples where psychological violation is exerted. Such violence involves a kind of terrorism and degradation.

Consequently, we would like to highlight an essential aspect of violence. The concept of violence is a moral concept, but not one of absolute condemnation. Very often psychologists and sociologists and other scientists and students of animal behaviour avoid the word 'violence' since it has a moral undertone. They instead use the word 'aggression' in most of their literature.¹ Thus, violence is a moral concept since the moral elements come through a violation of a person.

II.2. Politics and Violence:

The relationship between violence and politics has been regarded as an age-old one. To understand this kind of correlation it is necessary to deconstruct the two concepts of violence and politics. The concept of violence is a controversial issue for researchers, thinkers, scientists, and even for politicians. Violence has been given so many definitions and realizations that it is very hard to provide a conclusive identification here. However, in this paper, we will consider only the definitions that are interrelated with ethics and politics.

Violence could be seen as an ethical issue which is analysed according to two ethical systems: deontological ethics (rule ethics) and utilitarianism (the ethics of consequences):

The clearest definition of violence in deontological ethics gives a list of rules, the breaking of which is (whatever the consequences) violence. Gert, for instance, has given a definition of this kind. Unlike the process of defining violence in deontological ethics, in the utilitarian we pay attention to the outcome of intentional influence relations, its goodness or badness, utility or disutility (Gronow and Hilppo 312).

Galtung does not intentionally consider different ethical systems, but he follows the transition which has taken place in everyday westerns ethics: from rule ethics to the ethics of consequences. Galtung's first definition is more modern than Gert's definition or some definitions based on the illegal use of force. Galtung classifies violence according to the dimensions of the object of violence and takes account of the consequences (Gronow and Hilppo 312).

Moreover, Galtung realizes violence in terms of physical and psychological, negative and positive, subject and object, and intentional and

¹ See K. Lorenz, *On Aggression* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1966).

The Politics of Violence in John Arden's and Harold Pinter's Selected Plays

Ihsan Alwan Muhsin Al-Sweidi , Amir Abdul Zahra Khamis Al-Azraki

non-intentional. Moreover, he postulates that violence is a negative influence in the influence relations (Galtung 168). Therefore, violence is an exertion of influence with negative effects. By defining violence as a negative influence, Galtung makes a transition to utilitarianism where violence is ethically conceived as the cause behind unwanted, bad, wrong, or unjust outcome. In fact, the terms 'positive' and 'negative' are also polemical since they are relatively determined and they sometimes both are involved in the same influence relations. Gronow and Hilppo elaborate on this idea saying:

In everyday discourse we use the concepts of negative and positive influence quite understandably. By negative influence we can mean for instance that some action(s) is prevented by punishing the actor. Rewards and punishments are, however, relative. So the distinction between positive and negative influence based on everyday life is vague, reflecting our values, norms and interests. A definition which does not analyse these is not exhaustive. (Ibid 113)

Furthermore, Galtung's theory of intentionality and subject/object is systematically criticised by Jean-Pierre Derriennic. He indicates that if violence does not target an apparent object, it can be categorized as potential or psychological violence whose influence may be indirectly effective (Derriennic 362). He also questions the idea of intentionality and regards it as misleading. He instead highlights the utilitarian ethical hypothesis:

In our opinion the problem of morality is not whether people are good or bad, but whether the consequences of their deeds are good or bad. And it is not so important to know whether they intend what they do, as it is to know whether they are aware of it (Derriennic 363).

Eventually he puts forward three dimensions of understanding violence: direct and indirect, organized and unorganized, and actual and potential (Derriennic 363).

Nonetheless, Galtung mentions a very important issue which is social injustice. He describes social injustice as a form of structural violence. But what is social injustice for Galtung? Galtung states that "the violence is built into the structure and shows up as unequal power and consequently as unequal life chances. Above all the power to decide over the distribution of resources is unevenly distributed" (Galtung 171). On the other hand, it is clearly the unequal distribution of power that causes the differences between the actual and the potential violence. Hence, Jukka and Hilppo state that by social injustice Galtung means "unequal distribution of power" (Jukka and Hilppo 314). As such Galtung's theory of violence implies a political goal: equality of power distribution.

Power is really a key concept for understanding politics and political violence. Power, in a broad sense, involves "the control of human behaviour for

The Politics of Violence in John Arden's and Harold Pinter's Selected Plays

Ihsan Alwan Muhsin Al-Sweidi , Amir Abdul Zahra Khamis Al-Azraki

particular ends through open or implied threat of punishment to those who refuse or fail to comply” (Odegard 76). Since power in general refers to the capability to make and implement decisions, “political power is the ability to make and enforce decisions on matters of major social importance” (Singh 59). On the other hand, the ability to resist and withstand is encapsulated in a form of counter-power. Many people misunderstand the concept of power as authority or force. But power is institutionalized and organized force meant to rule and govern, and force is the tool for implementing power. While power is an end in itself, violence is an essential part of force which is the tool to maintain power (Singh 60). It is worth mentioning that Foucault sees power in the modern world as a positive means for producing useful persons.

For Karl Marx, power starts mainly in economic production. Thus, Marx develops the concept of power to subsume not only politics but economics and society. Like Galtung, Singh understands power as the exertion of control where there is socio-economic unfairness in a stratified society. In such a society “certain dominant groups possess more resources than others who have either no resource at all or too inadequate resources to be effective” (Singh 61). In this situation political activity manifests itself as the struggle between the competing groups. In spite of being sometimes a sphere of public activity and philosophical enquiry, politics, in a narrow sense, can be identified here as “ the art of influencing, manipulating or controlling major groups so as to advance the purposes of some against the opposition of others”(Wright 130). To control or influence, therefore, is to use power, and to sustain power is to use force or violence. Notably, power need not be always physical, since in the modern world surveillance, for example, needs no physical activity. Nevertheless, surveillance is only effective if there is a threat of force against anyone seen breaking a rule.

However, violence as a tool may be used by both sides, the government and its opposition. Thus, we have power and counter-power or resistance. The notion of the State is very relevant to our discussion of politics and violence, since both of them are interrelated with the notion of the State. Most political and sociological thinkers approve, in one way or another, the use of violence as a means in the hands of the state. Auguste Comte, for instance, postulates that the state is an integral part of society and that government's function is to maintain peace, order and stability in the society. Comte agrees with Hobbes that government must rest on force if it is to be effective in ensuring peace and security (Knuttila 37). We have to differentiate between two types of peace: peace as the absence of active conflict and peace as a general contentment. But the term ‘peace’ is contentious in the sense that it may be perceived differently by both the state and its people. For example, whereas Saddam Hussein's proponents and other people think that peace was prevailing during Saddam's time, many people believe the contrary. On a different level, Emile Durkheim

The Politics of Violence in John Arden's and Harold Pinter's Selected Plays

Ihsan Alwan Muhsin Al-Sweidi , Amir Abdul Zahra Khamis Al-Azraki

identifies the state from a functionalistic point of view in that it serves various functions for the social collectivity or the social organism. He argues that occupational groups, corporations, and secondary groups are required to maintain flows of communications between individuals and the state to counterbalance the potential abuse of power by those in state institutions (Giddens 61). This really suggests some sort of reduction in the use of violence. Furthermore, the state is realized by the American pluralists as “multiple centres of power” (Dahl 24). In this sense, coercion, which is the strongest form of power, is reduced. For Max Weber, the state is “a human community that claims the monopoly of legitimate use of physical force within a given territory” (Mills and Gerth 78). Also, the word ‘legitimate’ is controversial since its identification is relative.

On the other hand, Gaetano Mosca and Karl Marx highlight the role of the ruling class in the state-power dominance. The classical Elite theorist Gaetano Mosca conceives the state as the exertion of power (more or less arbitrary and violent) by the ruling (first) class on the second class (Mosca 50). For Marx, the state is “a machine of repression which enables the ruling class to ensure their domination over the working class, thus enabling the former to subject the latter to the process of surplus-value extortion” (Althusser 92). It works through two apparatuses: ideological state apparatus (ISA) and repressive state apparatus (RSA).² While the Ideological State Apparatuses (ISA) “function massively and predominantly by *ideology*, but also function secondarily by repression,” the Repressive State Apparatuses (RSA) “function massively and predominantly by *repression* (including physical repression), while functioning secondarily by ideology” (Althusser 97). Therefore, these two apparatuses are complementarily interlinked.

II.3. Violence and Revolution:

Generally speaking, violence is associated with revolution perhaps more than any other attribute. Since revolution and violence have a long mutual history, we will focus only on the revolutionary activity in the twentieth century. This section, therefore, examines the use of violence by the counter-power or revolutionary leaders.

Fanon, Sorel and others see the use of violence in revolution as something positive. They describe violence as a purifying force which, whenever used in revolution, unifies the revolutionary group by tying them together and making them willing to sacrifice everything for the cause. This does not mean that these theorists justify the use of violence. They see violence as such in a condition where the unfairness against the disadvantaged and deprived could not be eradicated without the use of violence. Essentially, Blacky and Paynton account for the employment of violence in revolution by what they call

² Louis Althusser is a post Marxist thinker. He develops Marx's concept of the state, ideology, and power. See his essay “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses.”

The Politics of Violence in John Arden's and Harold Pinter's Selected Plays

Ihsan Alwan Muhsin Al-Sweidi , Amir Abdul Zahra Khamis Al-Azraki

'dehumanization'. They assume that "the tendency to define inter-group relations in terms of 'we-they' is essentially a method of dehumanizing members of the opposition group [out-groups]" which thus "obviates the need to justify acts of violence" (Blacky and Paynton 13). But does this in fact justify the use of violence? The legitimacy of using violence is again a debatable point. Most of the revolutionary figures justify the use of violence for the 'good goals' of revolution. Mao, for example, accentuates the use of armed force as the highest form of revolution. For Marx, political revolution and violence are associated; political revolution refers to the shift from one economic system to another. For Marx and Engels, the bourgeois state exerts force, and only by violence will it be replaced. The revolutionaries must use force since it is "the midwife of every old society which is pregnant with the new, that it is the instrument by the aid of which social movement forces its way through and shatters the dead fossilised, political forms." (Engels 275). As for Lenin, he, as Bienen puts it, "was against the spontaneous use of violence and thus turned against a strain in the Russian revolutionary movement which had stressed either spontaneous violence by masses or individual acts of terrorism" (Bienen 71). In short, there are three main justifications for violence: social change, progress, and modernization. Bienen responds to these claims by categorizing three points:

(1) Most social and political change does not result from violent revolution. (2) Where violent revolutions have occurred they constitute much more of a watershed in a slower process than an immediate and radical reordering of society. Moreover, watersheds can be found in non-revolutionary societies too. (3) Large-scale violence can be associated with "the more things change, the more they remain the same," (Bienen 78).

In conclusion, we think it would be rational to understand violence as destructive and to assess it on the basis of its expected results. As nonviolence is not in all conditions 'good', violence is not always 'bad'.

III. The Politics of Violence in Modern British Drama.

III.1. John Arden's *Sergeant Musgrave's Dance*:

Arden's *Sergeant Musgrave's Dance* presents the dialectics of pacifism and violence. Even though put on in a historical situation, *Sergeant Musgrave's Dance's* meaning transcends its immediate context. The dramatic juxtaposition of such binary opposition as pacifism and violence sharpens the audience's awareness. As a matter of fact, there are two possible readings for this play. The first reading, which is somehow superficial and common, understands Musgrave's action as treating violence with violence. The other reading sees Musgrave's doing as disclosing the reality of violence. Both interpretations reinforce the same implied message, anti-violence.

The Politics of Violence in John Arden's and Harold Pinter's Selected Plays

Ihsan Alwan Muhsin Al-Sweidi , Amir Abdul Zahra Khamis Al-Azraki

Apparently the writer articulated his main stance when he declared, "I am a timid man" (Arden 7). His inclination towards anti-war or anti-violence makes the play applicable for many instances happen in the world like the war in Vietnam. However, there is a controversy as to whether this play is political. For us, as for many critics and audiences, the play deals with violence in a political situation. On the surface level, the play is considered as anti-imperialist, since it criticizes the British presence in foreign lands. Based on the Cyprus incident in 1959, the first simple message this play attempts to deliver is to attack "the complacency with which the British public was prepared to regard actions undertaken by the British Army in foreign parts" (Trussler 22). Eric Keown accentuates the idea of anti-imperialism by saying "A play that was anti-Empire and anti-Army would conceivably have its appeal in Sloane Square" (Trussler 23). On the implied level, the play questions the use of violence. The question that raises itself is: does Musgrave have the right to use violence against the strikers? Is his 'logic' logical? It sounds that the justification of violence here to bring the town to its stable condition is not approved by the playwright. The Parson, Mayor, and Constable do not use the alternative to calm the strike. Even Musgrave does not apply peaceful means to solve the problem. He, instead, resorts to violence. He, as an army sergeant, would end killing by killing, the end justifying the means. In fact, the play questions the nature of all theoretical values, when they become embodied in a passionate urgency towards social reformation. The playwright's pacifism is very clear in Attercliffe's sentence, "you can't cure the pox by further whoring" (*Musgrave* 102). The play's message opposes the use of political violence by the State or the Army. From a Marxist point of view, Musgrave could be seen as a 'repressive machine' whereby the ruling class (Mayor, Constable, and Parson) spread and ensure their domination over the working class (strikers). Thus, in Comte's sense, it is Musgrave's violence that functions to maintain peace, order and stability in the society. In fact, Musgrave's function here is to maintain the power of the ruling class. The playwright seems to reject the Comtean kind of state where violence is the only solution to sustain peace and stability. But the play ends with the control of the dragoons. Such an end makes the play more obscure. On other hand, the play may be 'apolitical' since it leaves the problem of political violence where it finds it, offering no prescriptions or treatment. It leaves the problem of violence to those agencies, outside art, to deal with it. It indicates that in certain circumstances the use of force is inevitable. It seems that Arden had paid less attention to the arrival of the dragoons than to the fate of Musgrave. Although he does not predict a direct impact on his audience, Arden writes the play as a kind of protest against the use of violence and unjustified wars:

The Politics of Violence in John Arden's and Harold Pinter's Selected Plays

Ihsan Alwan Muhsin Al-Sweidi , Amir Abdul Zahra Khamis Al-Azraki

Protest is a sort of futile activity in the theatre... It's highly unlikely, for instance, that supposing President Johnson and Mr. McNamara came to see this play, they would say, 'Oh dear, We've got to pull out of Vietnam'. ... The only thing you can do is to keep on saying what you don't like about the society in which you live, so that even if the forces that one objects to, in this case the forces that are continuing the wars of the world, even if they finally win and we do have another world war, one will at least be able to say, "Well, I did get up and say no before it was too late" (Trussler 22).

From a different perspective, Musgrave's action could be seen as a revelation of the reality of violence. The arrival of Musgrave and his soldiers is a matter of coincidence. He does not want to oppress the strikers, "Who told you we'd come to break the strike?" (*Musgrave* 32). Further, he addresses the strikers with 'brother'. His 'Logic' is not necessarily understood as violence. His duty, along with his soldiers', is to show the people of the town the unjustified cruelty and violence of the army and the wars of the Queen. He calls this duty as a "deserter's duty" (*Musgrave* 36). In this case, Musgrave does not represent the power of the state; rather he goes against the state's power. His opposition to the state is indicated in many occasions. His opposition to the Queen's war and thus his desertion from the army stands for his rejection of the policy of Britain. At the end of the play, Musgrave, pointing the gun towards the Mayor and the Constable, regards them the main targets. Also, the last gesture of Musgrave in the end is that he points the gun towards the dragoons. This gesture might be considered a kind of rebellion against the power of the state. His logic to kill twenty five of the people might not be the real intention of Musgrave since he may want this 'Logic' serve as an exposure of the outcome of violence. When Hurst wants to shoot the strikers or the real audience, Musgrave stops him saying "The wrong way. The wrong way. You're trying to do it without Logic" (*Musgrave* 96). The use of skeleton as a tool of intimidation is at the same time Musgrave's Logic to show the reality of violence. Therefore, his supposed duty to recruit for the army turns up side down. Being a deserter's duty, it should show the audience and the people of the town the army's "dishonor, greed, and murder-for-greed" (*Musgrave* 36). The revelation of Billy's skeleton is a shocking reality of violence. At the first time the people of the town do not believe that the skeleton is Billy's. It is Annie who recognizes him. Musgrave tells the people that Billy was here among them and now no more than a skeleton. To dress the skeleton in an army uniform suggests an ironic sign of the soldier's identity and fate. Furthermore, Musgrave's action could be seen as a kind of warning for the strikers whose strike is a potential violence against the town's authority. The authority might use the dragoons to oppress the strikers which, in turn, lead to violence.

The Politics of Violence in John Arden's and Harold Pinter's Selected Plays

Ihsan Alwan Muhsin Al-Sweidi , Amir Abdul Zahra Khamis Al-Azraki

Because of its anti-war standpoint, the play was renovated in the US in 1967 as a sign of dissent of the Vietnam War. Nevertheless, the play could be seen, as Gilman states, as “an extreme bafflement precisely to those viewers who persist in seeing it that way [as an anti-war play].” Gilman insists that the play is about ‘purity’. But such interpretation is really a narrow conclusion in the sense that the critic concentrates only on Musgrave from within and ignores the surrounding political motivations. Apparently, the play shows that beating ‘war by its rules,’ or using violence to end violence, agitates the problem instead of solving it. The justification of using intimidation by Musgrave may be misunderstood by both the characters in the play and the audience of the play. As for the characters, Mrs. Hitchcock says, “... We’d got life and love. Then you came in and you did your scribbling where nobody asked you... There was hungry men, too—fighting for their food. But you brought in a different war” (*Musgrave* 102). So, the workers, hinging on Mrs. Hitchcock’s speech, have the right to strike since they are ‘hungry’ and feel exploited. Mentioning the strikers, Arden could not avoid glancing at the problem of the working class. It seems that Arden refuses the revolutionary idea of using violence to create a change. Though at the beginning it is peaceful, the strike may be categorized as potential violence. The initiator of violence is usually the authorities which, trying to end the strike, use violence. Also, violence could be set off by the strikers who may attempt to exclude temporary replacement workers. But what should such workers do if they can not even strike? How could they get their rights? If their voices can not be delivered to the people in charge, they have no choice but to strike.

However, *Sergeant Musgrave’s Dance’s* main argument may be applicable even to the situation in Iraq. Iraq may not be an old-fashioned colonial war, but it is turning into one. Arden recently said “you write to show people there are things that need to be stopped” and has lately joined a movement against the war in Iraq. Accordingly, Albert Hunt sees the play as “a critique of the kind of the liberal imagination that sees complexities as ‘not material’; and of a crude pacifism that isn’t aware that we live in a world in which, if we’re hit, we very easily hit back” (Hunt 62).

III.2. Harold Pinter: *The Birthday Party*, *The Mountain Language*, and *One for the Road*:

Produced in 1958, *The Birthday Party* is considered the first full-length play written by Harold Pinter. Criticizing him for his artiness, amateurism, his pretension, his use of low comedy and pro-Semitism, the *Financial Times* found Pinter guilty of decadent Continental formalism as well as a kind of low, unwanted, ethnically coded realism described as ‘Jewish banter’ (Begley 41). However, the play could be read as a mixture of naturalism and stock comedy on the one hand, and comedy and catastrophe on the other (Begley 42). Since

The Politics of Violence in John Arden's and Harold Pinter's Selected Plays

Ihsan Alwan Muhsin Al-Sweidi , Amir Abdul Zahra Khamis Al-Azraki

the purpose is to explore the political meanings in the play, we will not elaborate on naturalism and low comedy.

Far from the comedy of menace³, *The Birthday Party* shows violence is implicated in many other issues. The first issue is the repetition of violence throughout all history. The second issue is the co-optation and absorption of resistant discontent by the 'faceless violence' of the state. Grimes explains the co-optation in the play as follows:

Violence (recall Stanley's attempts to control his situation physically, from the attack on Goldberg to the assault on Lulu) is no longer a viable outlet for rebellion or social dissatisfaction by the oppressed. There is "nowhere to go" with any feeling of political discontent. In our one-dimensional society, there is no place from which to contest society's values, modes, and ideologies. What "protest" may exist is co-opted and absorbed by society itself (Grimes 40).

The other connected idea is the depersonalization of the individual through integrating him into society. The violence used against Stanley has a transformative purpose. By using 'mental torture' to integrate Stanley into a mass or into middle-class society of consumers and conformists, Goldberg and McCann try to evacuate the any resistant desire from their victim.

In fact, the idea of Holocaust can not be avoided in this play. There are many allusions to the Holocaust. Goldberg tells Petey that Stanley needs "special treatment" (85). This phrase refers to the official Nazi euphemism for gassing Jews. The other allusion is mentioned when Goldberg says "You will be integrated" (84). This refers to the integration process done by the Nazi when everything in life (political, social, economic, artistic, and philosophical) is regulated according to Hitler's vision. Even the name of van might insinuate the Nazi's use of vans to kill the Jews as gas chambers. Also, the reference to the 'Albigensienist', in McCann's question to Stanley "What about the Albigensienist heresy" (51), may hint to the Medieval Church's torture to the Catharists. This suggests that the use of violence is really rooted in the European history and it has been reiterated throughout history through various disguises. As such, the institutionalized religious torture had progressed from violence used against heretics and their protectors to a weapon of mass terrorism (Grimes 43). Significantly, the idea of 'integration' and 'cooptation' had been also applied to the Communists in the US during the 1949 and 1950s. Stemming from the thought that Communists and their affiliations with Soviet spies represent a threat to the federal government, Joseph McCarthy, a Republican US Senator, called for a "witch hunt" against the Communists. Moreover, theatrically, the

³ Comedy of menace is a term used to describe the plays of David Campton and Harold Pinter by drama critic Irving Wardle, borrowed from the subtitle of Campton's play *The Lunatic View: A Comedy of Menace*, in reviewing their plays in *Encore* in 1958.

The Politics of Violence in John Arden's and Harold Pinter's Selected Plays

Ihsan Alwan Muhsin Al-Sweidi , Amir Abdul Zahra Khamis Al-Azraki

idea of (compulsory) integration and cooptation is well shown in Eugene Ionesco's *The Lesson*. Funny and frighteningly direct, Ionesco's play creates a meaningful narrative that investigates the corruptive nature of power in society. In particular, Ionesco addresses the oppressive personality of conventional schooling. A close examination of the play and the relationship between Ionesco's "Professor" and "Pupil" draws attention to important humanistic themes, especially the distasteful reality that schooling is controlled by a collection of elite societal caretakers who use power and knowledge to 'integrate' and absorb individuals to the same level of meaninglessness and non-existence.

Following the Althusserian premise, the investigation of Goldberg and McCann to Stanley could be seen as a pre-subjugation process. In refusing to say 'sorry' or 'please', the linguistic forms of politeness, Stanley refuses his being as an unquestioning docile body within the social order . His refusal to be 'interpellated' by Goldberg and McCann is regarded an evasion from the law. So, to subject him to the ideological state apparatus both investigators use what is generally called 'brainwashing'. The assaults are not merely brainwashing but an attempt to reduce Stanley to the silence of a 'pre-subject'. To do so, they deplete the linguistic resources through which he could counter their charges and thus prelude their intent of reinscribing Stanley's subjectivity as a model citizen: "You will be oriented... You will be adjusted" (92) (Kane 38).

Trying to explicate the meaning of the play, Catherine Itzin divides the play into four levels wherein Stanley represents the pivot. In the first level, Stanley is the non-conformist whom society (in Goldberg and McCann) claims back and forces to conform. The second level presents Stanley's symbolic loss of identity which is a painful process of dying. In third phase, Stanley is born, expelled from the womb and forced to face adult sexuality. The other last level through which the play could be seen is that the fear and guilt of Stanley's subconscious become concretely dramatized and consume him (Trussler 15).

One should not ignore the absurdist elements in the play. Pinter is said to be influenced by the Absurd traditions in general and Samuel Beckett in particular. The humdrum quality of Stanley's life and his underlined perception of the necessity and futility of opposing the status quo show a Beckettian view of the Absurd.

On the other hand, *Mountain Language*, produced in 1988 at the National Theatre, is Pinter's harrowing distillation of the horrors inflicted by war upon ordinary people – mothers, daughters, fathers, and sons. In twenty minutes and four short, sharp scenes, ushered in by the sounds of barking dogs, helicopter drones and metallic clashes, he contrasts the victorious bullies, led by a sergeant, and the vanquished mountain people, women huddled in a line outside the prison where they have been waiting for eight hours in the snow to see their prisoner husbands. In the visitors' room, an elderly mother attempts to speak to

The Politics of Violence in John Arden's and Harold Pinter's Selected Plays

Ihsan Alwan Muhsin Al-Sweidi , Amir Abdul Zahra Khamis Al-Azraki

her imprisoned son, but is prevented by the guard because her mountain language is forbidden. In a second visit, the rules have been reversed; she is permitted to speak but she does not.

In 1985, Pinter paid a visit to Turkey as a member of PEN International to investigate the situation of the writers there. Upon returning home, Pinter tried to reflect the plight of the Kurds in Turkey. But the play was not only about the Kurds, it is a general depiction of victimization through the suppression of language:

The spring board...was the Kurds, but this play is not about the Turks and the Kurds. I mean, throughout history, many languages have been banned—the Irish have suffered, The Welsh have suffered, and Urdu and the Estonians' language banned....My own view is that the present government [British] is turning a stronger vice on democratic institutions that we've taken for granted for a very long time (Trussler 87-88).

On one level, the play shows the attempt of the State or the law of the State to impose fixity of linguistic forms, meanings, and practices by using force and violence. Marc Silverstein unearths the significance of this attempt:

At issue here is the attempt to eradicate cultural diversity by imposing a central language (the language of the capital) on a heterogeneous population, transforming the many into "one" by criminalizing any recourse to a local language (the mountain language of the play's title) that would introduce the disruption of difference into unanimity of the people (Kane 39).

Actually, the governmental violence and prejudice against those people (mountain people) are arbitrary, irrelevant, and paradoxical. In the play, the tormented prisoners are prohibited from speaking their language. In the last scene the constraint is arbitrarily reversed. The Guard's arbitrariness "should be understood as deeply wounding, not as an expression of mercy or reform" (Grimes 92). The other contradictory aspect is that if the mountain language is dead, efforts to outlaw it are redundant and silly (Watt 109). Seeing the state "as a machine for repression"⁴, the regime in *Mountain Language* has untied itself from the rule of the law; it exists to oppress. In this case law is used as a tool of oppression at the hands of the state.

The other significant issue is the silence of the old woman in the final scene. Though her silence is ambiguous and obscure, it is given two possible interpretations. Francis Gillen understands her silence as a 'final defiance'; it is deliberate rebellious action against the government's imprisonment (Gillen 4). The second meaning of the old woman's silence is to envisage her as defeated and crushed. However, Charles Grimes sees her silence as a moral indictment:

⁴ Karl Marx's notion of the state

The Politics of Violence in John Arden's and Harold Pinter's Selected Plays

Ihsan Alwan Muhsin Al-Sweidi , Amir Abdul Zahra Khamis Al-Azraki

The old woman's corporeal reality, emphasized through her final silence, thus serves to demonstrate the disjunction between her suffering and our experience of it. This silence can be seen as a moral indictment of the audience achieved metatheatrically (Grimes 100).

For Pinter, understanding is not enough. Values like sympathy, decency, concern, and awareness are all futile in the face of what actually happens in the world. For Grimes, the final scene of the play reveals the feebleness of the hope to take the right action:

While political theatre in general tries to make one see, to understand, with the assumption that accurate seeing can be the precursor to right action, Pinter's political theatre exposes the fragility of this hopeful assumption (Grimes 100).

As for *One for the Road*, it is a violent play, not through actions dramatized on stage but through the allusions to violence that occurs off stage and that is continually implied. The protagonist Victor, who has obviously been tortured, is being kept prisoner by a totalitarian regime and its willing officer Nicolas. The play does not discuss the violence substantively; Pinter implies it through the confined space and the non-verbal cues. The story of the play begins with the interrogation by Nicolas, a supposedly religious man-in-authority, of Victor who is just an intellectual. The title "One for the Road" is a reference to the glasses of whisky that Nicholas keeps pouring to himself: "I think I deserve one for the road." As he drinks, he keeps on chatting to himself mostly since Victor remains silent most of the time. He starts telling Victor casually how his books were kicked about, his rugs were urinated on, and also he begins mentioning Victor's wife and son. He simply says how hot the wife is and how everybody is falling in love with her, and asks Victor about whether his son was alright. Victor asks Nicholas to kill him but the latter refuses to do so. Here there's a blackout followed by a heart rending interrogation of Victor's seven year old son Nicky. Then he interrogates the wife Gila and keeps torturing her with his stupid questions till she tells him what he wants to hear; that is not the truth of course:

NICOLAS: Do you think we have nuns upstairs?

Pause.

What do we have upstairs?

GILA: No nuns.

NICOLAS: What do we have?

GILA: Men.

In this play, however, the kind of violence the audience sees here is mostly psychological or moral. Nicholas shows signs of megalomania as he tells Victor how important he is and how terrible the latter's situation is. He suggests to him that his wife is being raped over and over again and tells him that his son,

The Politics of Violence in John Arden's and Harold Pinter's Selected Plays

Ihsan Alwan Muhsin Al-Sweidi , Amir Abdul Zahra Khamis Al-Azraki

in the eyes of the state, is just a damnable brat who dared to spit on the country's soldiers. Interrogation could be seen as brainwashing, a clear example of violence. Defined as a negative influence, psychological violence, like any other violence, undoubtedly limits "the individual freedom" by accompanying physical auxiliaries (Derriennic 366).

However, because Victor is an intellectual, who does not seem to believe in violence, he remains silent. After all, no matter how important you and your family think you are, you might be as good as nonexistent to your country. Nicholas seems to be bloated with his fake beliefs of how the country and its president should be first, and what is even worse is that he pretends, or actually thinks, he is a religious man. He plays the role of the detective who is willing to do anything just to get information. He succeeds in forcing Gila to change events completely, just through repeating his irritating questions to her. He tells her husband before questioning her: "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." Of course, the possibility that she is not feeling well just because she was raped by a whole regiment is completely out of the question. Yes, it's the same stereotypical image, if the woman is nervous then she must be menstruating; no other reason, her whole life revolves around this.

The play could be interpreted in terms of power relations or the politics of the gaze. For example, Victor's final gaze at Nicolas is described as a stare not look, a "difference which may indicate either a shock or the beginnings of a subversion of Nicolas's system" (Roof 15). In fact, Victor's gaze is not defiance at all since Victor's face expresses fear and subjugation. His gaze is really, as Grimes puts it, "framed and subsumed by Nicolas" (Grimes 85).

Pinter's play shows how totalitarian regimes are suspicious of intellectuals. Nicolas's disdain of thinking stems from his belief that it constitutes a threat to a natural, harmonious, and ordered way of life the State has preserved (Grimes 85). Essentially, the terror of the play resides in its tragedy of utter victimization and the inexorable way this victimization is particularized in terms of bodily effects: Victor's tongue being cut out, Gila's is being raped, Nicky's murder. Ronald Knowles points out that Pinter's political morality stems from the literal, actual consequences of oppression, the corporeal truth of torture, pain, and death (Knowles 72).

Silverstein argues that Nicolas's position is subject to a kind of internal schism and that no subject position has a monolithic, unshakeable hold on power. He concludes that in Pinter's plays, "the cultural order" and its "forms of power" are "unshakably homogenous and monolithic" to the extent that "the totalizing nature of the plays' analysis of cultural power tend to reify that power" (Silverstein 152). Silverstein argues that by reifying power, Pinter's drama cannot be categorized as political since it does not either provide tools for change or at least establish a hope for change. In answering such a claim,

The Politics of Violence in John Arden's and Harold Pinter's Selected Plays

Ihsan Alwan Muhsin Al-Sweidi , Amir Abdul Zahra Khamis Al-Azraki

Grimes indicates that Pinter not only reifies power but also “creates images of it in action that are extraordinarily painful and forceful.” For Grimes, Pinter’s theatre is politically “heterodox” simply because it “obliges by rebelling against the prevailing definition and procedures of that political theatre” (Grimes 89).

IV. Conclusions

Though violence is almost condemned by all these playwrights, it is dealt with differently. Arden’s *Sergeant Musgrave’s Dance*, following a Brechtian technique of dialectical reversal, manipulates violence in a tricky way. The ethics of political violence in the play may consist in the fact that it presents a caveat to those who invest ideals with the status of religious dogma and justifies violence in the hope that their worthy motives constitute protection against the chaotic force that they raise (Dahl 112). Contrastively, while most critics and scholars agree that the play is pacifist in nature, *Sergeant Musgrave’s Dance* may implicitly support violence, the army, and war throughout the play. Arden explores both the positive and negative aspects of military life. Many critics point to this duality as a hallmark of Arden’s developing style — though they also claim that it bogs down the play’s true meaning. In this sense, pacifism loses in the play, and while the audience could walk away believing that pacifism should win, Arden does not do much to give hope that it will. He seems to be showing that the military is important: there is a point to fighting and there is a time when violence should be justified. Furthermore, the use of violence by Musgrave could be interpreted as the only means to show the brutality of wars and violence.

As for Pinter, he sees the world as a violent place and the theme of violence is “essential and inevitable factor” in his drama. He understands violence as an expression of “the question of dominance and subservience.”⁵ He creates a panoptic atmosphere where the victim and the victimizer are the object and subject for violence. In both *The Mountain Language* and *One for the Road*, Pinter depicts the authoritarian state as always guilty for unjustifiable use of violence. His manipulation of violence is not complicated as he all the time portrays violence as negative tool at the hands of the repressive state apparatus. He does not create a dialectical or a profound argument about violence. Also, both plays might not be regarded as highly dramatic pieces as they lack the real artistic or fictional touches; they amount to be verbatim taken from a prisoner or prisoner’s family. Though these two plays deal with such political issues as censorship, centralization, standardization and normalization, it is hard to categorize them as real examples of the true political theatre⁶.

Regarding *The Birthday Party*, whereas much ink has been spilt on the play as being political, its main issue, ‘co-optation’, seems a more general

⁵ Personal interview, *The Art of Theatre* No.3, 1966, p.20.

⁶ By ‘true political theatre’ I mean that kind of political theatre which, through a dialectical treatment of a certain political issue, creates an objective awareness in the audience and provoke them to take an action or to make a judgment.

The Politics of Violence in John Arden's and Harold Pinter's Selected Plays

Ihsan Alwan Muhsin Al-Sweidi , Amir Abdul Zahra Khamis Al-Azraki

problem than merely a political one. The 'co-optation' of the 'defiant' Stanley could be seen as an authoritarian procedure applied against those who alienate themselves from the current milieu. *The Birthday Party* is usually perceived as a comedy of menace or an offshoot of the Absurd Theatre. Nonetheless, applying Althusser's theory of subjugation to the idea of 'co-optation' in *The Birthday Party* indicates that the process of co-opting implies political motives: violence may be employed by the state to subjugate those who are politically discontent or rebellious. Stanley can be regarded as a victim of any authoritarian institution: Goldberg and McCann function as state agents, officers of establishment tyranny, as much as existential avengers. "Stan, don't let them tell you what to do," is Petey's piece of advice to Stanley. This line appreciates individual integrity over flawed processes of democratization, a more mundane and subtle presentation of challenging will than the one displayed by the internees in the political plays. Eventually, Harold Pinter was seen by his contemporaries as a young, rebellious playwright who succeeded in his anti-establishment *animus*, eschewal of personal identifications and deracination of ontological certitude.

Works Cited

- Althusser, Louis. *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*. London: New Left Books, 1971.
- Arden, John. *Sergeant Musgrave's Dance*. New York: Grove Press, 1960.
- Begley, Varun. *Harold Pinter and the Twilight of Modernism*. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 2005.
- Bienen, Henry. *Violence and Social Change*. Chicago: Chicago UP, 1968.
- Blackey, Robert and Clifford Paynton. *Revolution and the Revolutionary Idea*. Cambridge: Schenkman Publishing Co., 1976.
- Dahl, M. Karen. *Political Violence in Drama, Classical Models, Contemporary Variations*. Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1987.
- Derriennic, Jean-Pierre. "Theory and Ideologies of Violence." *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol.9, No.4, 1972.
- Engels, Friedrich. *Herr Eugen Duhring's Revolution in Science (Anti-Duhring)*. Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1947.
- Galer, Hare. *Violence in Perspective*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1986.
- Gillen, Francis. "From Chapter Ten of the Dwarfs to Mountain Language: The Continuity of Harold Pinter." *Pinter Review*, 1988.
- Grimes, Charles. *Harold Pinter's Politics: A Silence Beyond Echo*. Madison: Fairleigh Dickenson UP, 2005.
- Gronow, Jukka and Jorma Hilppo. "Violence, Ethics, and Politics." *Journal of Peace*
- Hunt, Albert. *Arden: A Study of his Plays*. London: Eyre Methuen, 1974.
- Kane, Leslie, ed. *The Art of Crime: The Plays and Films of Harold Pinter and David Mamet*. London: Routledge, 2004.

The Politics of Violence in John Arden's and Harold Pinter's Selected Plays

Ihsan Alwan Muhsin Al-Sweidi , Amir Abdul Zahra Khamis Al-Azraki

- Knowles, Ronald. "Harold Pinter 1991," *Pinter Review*, 1991.
- Marx, Karl. *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*. Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1977.
- Mills, C.W. and Hans Gerth, eds. *From Max Weber*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1958.
- Mosca, Gaetano. *The Ruling Class*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1939.
- Odegard, Peter H. *Political Power and Social Change*. New Jersey: Rutledge UP, 1956.
- Patterson, Michael. *Strategies of Political Theatre*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003.
- Pinter, Harold. *The Birthday Party*. London: Eyre Methuen, 1965.
- , *Death etc.* New York: Grove Press, 2005.
- Roof, Judith. "Staging the Ideology Behind the Power: Pinter's *One for the Road* and Beckett's *Catastrophe*," *Pinter Review*, 1988.
- Silverstein, Marc. *Harold Pinter and the Language of Cultural Power*. Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell UP, 1993.
- Singh, Gopal. "Politics and Violence." *Social Scientist*, Vol.4, No.11 (Jun., 1976).
- Trussler, Simon, ed. *Arden on File*. London: Methuen, 1985.
- , ed. *File on Pinter*. London: Methuen Drama, 1993.
- Viri, Weis. "Violence and Law." *Essays on Violence*. New York: Grove Press, 1988.
- Watt, Stephen. *Postmodern/Drama: Reading the Contemporary Stage*. Ann Arbor: Uni. of Michigan P, 1998.
- Wright, Quincy. *The Study of International Relations*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1955.