Mountain Language Study Guide

Mountain Language by Harold Pinter

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Introduction

When *Mountain Language* opened at the National Theatre in London on October 20, 1988, the audience was shocked by the play's stark look at the machinations and effects of totalitarianism. Employing the characteristic structure and style of his previous plays, Harold Pinter focused on new subject matter. Drawing his inspiration from the long history of oppression the Kurds suffered under Turkish rule, Pinter centered his play in a prison controlled by unnamed guards in an unnamed country. As the Turkish did to the Kurds, the guards ban the prisoners' native language as they incarcerate them for unnamed crimes against the State. This enigmatic play employs the innovative techniques found in Pinter's earlier plays, blending absurdism and realism in illustration of the harsh reality of modern society and the individual's isolated and powerless state within that society.

Commenting on Pinter's distinctive style in his plays, Tish Dace writes in her article in *Reference Guide to English Literature* that his plays are "so rich" with "inscrutable motivations and ambiguous import that an international industry has arisen to explicate his art, and his name has entered the critical lexicon to deal with those derivative dramas now termed 'Pinteresque.'" While *Mountain Language* can definitely be labeled "Pinteresque," it also has been recognized for its author's compelling political subject matter.

Author Biography

Harold Pinter was born on October 30, 1930, in Hackney, a working-class neighborhood in East London, the only child of Hyman (a tailor) and Frances (Mann) Pinter. Although Pinter seemed to have a relatively happy childhood, he also experienced terror during World War II, during Germany's air attacks on London. Pinter's Jewish heritage also caused problems for him while he was growing up. Gangs would continually menace anyone with Jewish features. Pinter, however, often was able to talk his way out of these confrontations. Feelings of terror caused by an inescapable menace, along with the manipulative power of language later became prominent themes in his works.

Pinter's love for the theatre emerged in his grammar school days when he played the title roles in Macbeth and *Romeo and Juliet*. He also revealed his literary talents during this period. The *Hackney Downs School Magazine* published Pinter's essay on James Joyce and two of his poems that showed the beginnings of his distinctive literary style. In 1948 Pinter began his acting studies at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art (RADA) but soon left. For the next ten years, he wrote poems and short prose pieces and acted on the stage and on television under the pseudonym David Baron. He has noted that his acting experience gave him valuable insight into how successful plays are structured and provided him with a sharp ear for dialogue.

In 1957, over a four-day period, Pinter wrote *The Room,* a one-act play, for a friend's student production. The successful production of the play sparked his interest in playwriting and soon after he wrote the full-length play entitled *The Birthday Party.* Although some reviewers took note of Pinter's innovative style in *The Birthday Party,* the initial popular and critical response was overwhelmingly negative. Two years later, he gained accolades from the public and the press with *The Caretaker,* which signaled his emergence as one of the British theater's new breed of playwrights. Pinter continues his successful writing career as a playwright, a scriptwriter for radio and television, and a screenwriter in the early twenty-first century. He has won several awards, including the *Evening Standard's* drama award in 1961 and the Newspaper Guild of New York award in 1962, both for *The Caretaker;* the New York Film Critics Award in 1964 for *The Servant;* the British Film Academy Award in 1965 and 1971; and the New York Drama Critics Circle Award for *The Homecoming* in 1967. He has also received honorary degrees from many universities in Great Britain and the United States.

Plot Summary

Act I: Prison Wall

The play opens with a line of women standing up against a prison wall. An elderly woman cradles her hand while a young woman stands with her arm around her. A sergeant and an officer enter. The sergeant points to the young woman and asks her her name. The young woman replies that they have given their names. The two repeat this dialogue until the officer tells the sergeant to "stop this s—."

The officer then turns to the young woman and asks her if she has any complaints. The young woman responds that the older woman has been bitten. When the officer asks the elderly woman who bit her, she slowly raises her hand but remains silent. The young woman tells him that a Doberman pinscher bit her. Again he asks the elderly woman who bit her hand, as if he had never heard the young woman's reply. The elderly woman stares at him and remains silent. The younger woman, redefining her response, tells him "a big dog." When the officer asks the dog's name, he is met with silence, which agitates him to the point that he insists "every dog has a name" given by its parents. He informs them that before dogs bite, they state their name. He then tells the young woman that if the dog bit the elderly woman without stating his name, he will have the dog shot. When he is met again with silence, he barks, "silence and attention."

The officer then calls the sergeant over and asks him to take any complaints. When the sergeant again asks for complaints, the young woman tells him that they have been standing all day in the snow, while the guards have taunted them with the dogs, one of which bit the woman. The officer again asks the name of the dog. The young woman looks at him and answers, "I don't know his name."

The sergeant then abruptly changes the subject, informing the women, "your husbands, your sons, your fathers, these men you have been waiting to see, are s—houses" and "enemies of the State." The officer steps forward and identifies the women as "mountain people" and tells them that since their language is forbidden, it should be considered "dead." They are only allowed to speak "the language of the capital." He warns that they will be "badly punished" if they try to speak the mountain language. He reiterates that this is the law and that their language is dead, and ends by asking whether there are any questions. When the young woman responds that she does not speak mountain language, the sergeant puts his hand on her "bottom" and asks, "What language do you speak with you're a—?" When the officer warns the sergeant to remember that the women have committed no crime, the sergeant asks, "but you're not saying they're without sin?" The officer admits that was not his point, and the sergeant concludes the young woman is full of sin, that "she bounces with it."

The young woman then identifies herself by name and tells them she has come to see her husband, which she claims is her right. When she presents her papers, the officer notes that she and her husband do not come from the mountains, and realizes that he

has been put "in the wrong batch." The sergeant concludes, "she looks like a f— intellectual to me."

Act II: Visitor's Room

The scene opens with the elderly woman sitting next to a prisoner. When she speaks to him in a rural accent, the guard jabs her with a stick, insisting that the language is forbidden. The prisoner tries to explain to the guard that the woman doesn't know the language of the capital but is met with silence. When the elderly woman tells the prisoner that she has apples, the guard again jabs her and shouts that her language is forbidden. The prisoner admits that the woman does not know what the guard is saying. The guard refuses to accept responsibility and concludes, "you're all a pile of s—." When the prisoner does not respond to the guard's questions, the guard calls the sergeant and reports, "I've got a joker in here."

The action freezes and, in a voiceover, the audience hears a conversation between the elderly woman and the prisoner, who identifies himself as her son. He voices concern for her bitten hand. She tries to encourage him, telling him that everyone is looking forward to his homecoming. The sergeant then appears, asking "what joker" and the scene abruptly ends.

Act III: Voice in the Darkness

The scene opens in a corridor where a guard and the sergeant are holding up a hooded man. When the sergeant sees the young woman there, he demands to know who let her in. The guard answers that she is the hooded man's wife. The sergeant first asks whether this is a reception for "Lady Duck Muck" then apologizes to her, saying that there must have been "a bit of a breakdown in administration," and so she was sent through the wrong door. He then asks if there is anything he can do for her.

The characters freeze again. In a voiceover conversation, the hooded man and his wife, the young woman, speak lovingly about their lives together and imagine they are on a lake holding each other. When the action starts again, the hooded man collapses, and his wife screams, calling him by name. He is then dragged off. The sergeant reiterates that she has come through the wrong door and informs her that if she has any questions, she can ask the "bloke" who comes in "every Tuesday week, except when it rains." She asks whether "everything [will] be all right" if she has sex with this man, and the sergeant replies "sure. No problem." The scene ends after she thanks the sergeant.

Act IV: Visitor's Room

This act returns to the visitor's room where the prisoner sits next to his mother, trembling with blood on his face. The guard informs them "they've changed the rules." Until "further notice," they can speak in their own language. When the prisoner translates this to his mother, she does not respond, as if she no longer understands her own language.

The prisoner's trembling grows until he falls to his knees, shaking violently. The sergeant appears, sees him and says, "you go out of your way to give them a helping hand and they f—it up."

Act 1, A Prison Wall

Act 1, A Prison Wall Summary

Mountain Language is a brief four-act play which starkly presents the inhumane treatment and depersonalization of those imprisoned by the state in a remote mountain area in Europe.

There is no set direction provided so the reader assumes an austere environment for all acts of the play. As the first act opens, a young woman and an elderly woman are standing outside a prison wall. The younger woman has an arm around the elderly woman who is cradling a bitten hand.

A sergeant abruptly asks the young woman her name to which she replies more than once that they have already given their names. Finally the sergeant tires of this word game and tells the young woman to "stop this shit."

The sergeant asks the young woman if she has any complaints and the young woman informs the officer that the elderly woman has been bitten by one of the guard dogs. The elderly woman does not speak but simply raises her injured hand. The young woman offers that the hand was bitten by one of the guard's Doberman Pinschers and the guard addresses the elderly woman again but still she refuses to say anything.

The officer wants to know the name of the dog which bit the old woman and the two women have no reply for such a question. The officer is irritated now and yells that every dog has a name and that it is the dog's responsibility to provide his name before biting. Any dog not complying with this rule will be shot

The two women have no response at all to such a statement and the officer barks at them to be silent and stay at attention.

The officer asks if there are any more complaints and the young woman tells him that the women were ordered to arrive at nine o'clock this morning and it is now five o'clock. The women have been standing in the snow all day and have not yet been able to see their husbands. All day the women have been freezing and harassed by the guards and their attack dogs.

Again, the officer asks the name of the dog which bit the hand of the elderly woman and still the women are silent until the young woman musters the courage to say that she does not know the name of the offending dog.

The sergeant is tired of this game and turns the topic to that of the women's husbands who he calls "shithouses" and "enemies of the state." Moving closer to the women to intimidate them, the officer tells the women that because they are mountain people, their language is dead and they are not permitted to speak it any longer. The mountain language is outlawed and the women must speak to their husbands, sons and brothers

only in the language of the capital. Any attempts to speak the mountain language will be met with severe punishment.

The officer asks if there are any questions and the young woman states that she does not speak mountain language and the sergeant grabs her bottom and asks what language she speaks with her arse. The young woman does not respond and the officer reminds the sergeant that the women are not criminals.

The sergeant clarifies that the officer does not mean that the women are not without sin to which the officer agrees. That is not the officer's point but the sergeant is happy to point out that the young woman "bounces" with sin.

The young woman moves herself away from the offensive sergeant and turns to address another sergeant and the officer. The young woman identifies herself as Sara Johnson and she would like to see her husband who is imprisoned here. The papers that the young woman produces indicate to the guards that Sara's husband is not from the mountains and is in the wrong group of men. The sergeant declares that Sara looks like a "fucking intellectual" and the officer contends that he thought her arse wobbled and the sergeant replies that intellectual arses wobble the best.

Act 1, A Prison Wall Analysis

Man's inhumanity to man is an important theme established early in the play. There is no compassion for the women who wait hours in the snow to see their husbands, sons, fathers and brothers. The women are treated as objects and the guards feel free to abuse them verbally and physically. There is no valid communication and the guards even inform the women that their mountain language is dead. It is not clear exactly in what country the play is located, but mountain language represents any local cultural aspects, no matter the location.

The guards represent a new regime, "the capital", and their goal is to obliterate the old regime and its way of life. One of the ways the guards attempt to accomplish this is by alienating the women through intimidation and absurd dialogue. The situation with the elderly woman whose hand has been mauled is the best example of absurdity in that the guard declares that each dog must announce its name before biting. Any dog not following this rule will be shot. The women cannot argue with such absurdity and the guards know it.

Act 2, Visitors Room

Act 2, Visitors Room Summary

The act begins with the elderly woman speaking with a prisoner while one of the guards stands by. The conversation between the woman and the prisoner is in a rural dialect and the guard jabs the old woman with a stick, reminding her that the old language is no longer allowed. The guard tells the prisoner to let the old woman know that the old language is forbidden and that she must speak the language of the capital.

The old woman cannot speak the language of the capital and tells the prisoner in the rural dialect that she has brought apples. Once more the guard pokes the old woman for speaking the rural language. The prisoner tries to explain to the guard that the old woman does not understand the guard. The old woman stares blankly at the guard who taunts her. Finally the guard tires of the situation and declares that it is not his fault, that he has a wife and three children, and that the prisoners and the women are all "a pile of shit."

The prisoner replies that he, too, has a wife and three children and the guard thinks he is being smart and phones the sergeant to report that there is a joker in the prison. The action freezes and the voices of the prisoner and the elderly woman are heard as the old woman tells the prisoner, who is her son, that all the family is waiting for him and that there will be a celebration when he is released. The prisoner expresses concern for the old woman's hand which has been bitten.

The lights come up again on the scene and the sergeant enters the room demanding to see the "joker."

Act 2, Visitors Room Analysis

Themes of censorship and alienation are prominent in this act. The new regime wants total control over the people including what they say and in what dialect. The fact that the old woman cannot understand the language of the capital further alienates her from her son, the prisoner, because now she is helpless, unable to communicate with him in this situation.

The author provides a voice-over conversation between the old woman and her son in which they declare their mutual love and concern for each other. It is as if this conversation slips past the restrictions of the guards as two hearts communicate in a language all their own.

Act 3, Voice in the Darkness

Act 3, Voice in the Darkness Summary

The sergeant demands to know who the "fucking" woman is and who let the "fucking" woman through the "fucking" door. A guard answers that the woman is the prisoner's husband.

The lights come up on a scene where a hooded man is being held up by the sergeant and another guard. The sergeant is still annoyed that the woman is there and makes snide remarks about the situation being a social reception. The sergeant approaches the young woman and apologizes because she must have been sent to the wrong door.

The action freezes and voices of the hooded man and the young woman are heard declaring their love for each other and speak as if they are out on a lake in the springtime.

The lights go up again and the young woman screams at the sight of her husband, Charly, who has obviously been tortured. Charly is dragged away and the sergeant asks Sara if she has any questions. Any questions can be answered by the "bloke" named "Joseph Dokes" who comes in every Tuesday except when it rains.

The young woman is desperate at this point and offers to have sex with this Joseph Dokes in exchange for her husband's safekeeping. The sergeant replies that that will be fine. The young woman thanks the sergeant and the scene ends.

Act 3, Voice in the Darkness Analysis

In order to show their power, the guards attempt to intimidate Sara by showing her the body of her badly beaten husband, and then snidely apologize for someone showing her into the wrong door. It is still not clear the location of the action but location does not matter to the author. The use of modern day American names like Sara and Charly indicate the possibility that people anywhere in the world are subject to totalitarian treatment. The guard's smart remarks about the character with whom Sara may lodge any complaints is more of the same insulting tone and demeanor the guards have exhibited throughout the play. Sara's desperate offer to have sex with someone in authority is poignant but most probably futile.

Act 4, Visitors Room

Act 4, Visitors Room Summary

The prisoner and his mother are back again in the visitors room where a guard watches over them. The prisoner has a bloody face and is visibly trembling as he sits near his mother. The guard casually informs mother and son that the rules have changed and they may now speak in their own language.

The prisoner tells his mother that she may speak in mountain language again but the old woman does not utter a sound despite her son's urging. The guard reiterates the new policy that the mountain language is allowed for the time being but still the old woman remains silent.

The prisoner begins to shake more visibly now and falls to the floor gasping and convulsing. Witnessing the prisoner's condition, the sergeant says only that despite his own attempts to go out of his way to help them, these people always "fuck it up."

Act 4, Visitors Room Analysis

Perhaps the old woman does not speak out of fear but another perspective is that she refuses to play the games of the guards with their arbitrary rules. Silence is the only weapon the old woman holds in the face of so much horror and injustice and it is she who has control at the end. Even though her son is visibly tortured and tormented, the old woman will not concede defeat to his captors because they will not take one more person from her, that of herself. This is the language of strength and the courage of convictions and it transcends any dialect, whether it is mountain language or the language of the capital.

Characters

Charley

Charley is one of the prisoners. His affection for Sara, his wife, becomes evident during a voiceover, when he and Sara talk lovingly about their union and imagine being together in the future. Toward the end of the play, he collapses in front of her, suggesting that he has been tortured.

Elderly Woman

The elderly woman is referred to as a mountain woman. She has come to the prison to see her son. While she is waiting in the snow for eight hours, a guard dog bites her hand so severely that her thumb is almost detached. She shows her capacity for compassion and nurturance when she brings food to her son. She also tries to comfort him and fill him with hope by telling him that everyone at home is looking forward to his return. Her inability to understand the official language, and therefore the warning against speaking her own language (mountain language), results in her being beaten by the guards.

She ends the play in silence, in an almost catatonic state. When her son tells her that the prison officials have changed the rules and they are now allowed to speak in their language, she does not respond. It is not clear whether she is too afraid to speak or has lost the ability to do so, perhaps due to her son's condition.

Guard

The guard exhibits cruelty when he repeatedly jabs the elderly woman with a stick when she speaks mountain language. He tries to justify his treatment of her by saying that he has responsibilities and that he has a family. The guard refuses to recognize that his prisoner also has a family, and in an effort to punish him, the guard informs the sergeant that the prisoner is a "joker."

Sara Johnson

Sara comes to the prison to see her husband, Charley. Although she is not a "mountain woman" and obviously is from a higher social class, she forms a bond with the elderly woman. She illustrates her compassionate nature when she comforts the older woman after she has been bitten by the dog and tries to get help for her. Sara reveals her courage when she stands up to the sergeant and officer on several occasions. She refuses an order to give her name a second time and often meets absurd questions with silence.

Sara is smart enough though to answer some of their questions patiently, as when the sergeant asks her again the name of the dog who bit the elderly woman, and she answers that she does not know, which of course should have been obvious to him. When the women are asked whether they have any complaints, she speaks up, noting that they have been standing all day in the snow, waiting to see the prisoners. She insists that it is her right to see her husband.

After accidentally coming across her hooded husband and realizing that he has been tortured, she breaks down. At the end of the play, she admits that she is willing to sleep with a prison official in order to save her husband.

Hooded Man

See Charley

Officer

The officer is the person in charge of the prison. At times, he appears to follow reasonable guidelines, but his behavior quickly dissolves into the absurd, along with that of the sergeant. Sometimes he chastises the sergeant for repeatedly asking the women the same question, and he seems to show concern for the elderly woman's hand. However, that concern quickly vanishes in a silly discussion of dogs' names. While he directs the sergeant to ask the women whether they have any complaints, he never acts on those complaints. He reminds the sergeant that the women are not criminals, but he cannot acknowledge that they have not sinned. When the officer discovers that Sara's husband is not a mountain person, he admits that he has been placed in the "wrong batch" but does not question his guilt. He tries to assert his authority, and points out the absurdity of his rules when he insists that if the dog that bit the elderly woman did not give his name, he will be shot. He reveals his need for control when, as the women are standing silently, he tells them to be silent.

Prisoner

The prisoner illustrates his compassion when he shows great concern about his mother's hand. He also tries to explain to the guard that she cannot understand the official language in the hopes the guard will stop hitting her. In an effort to encourage the guard to feel compassion and a sense of brotherhood, he explains that he too has a wife and three children. His boldness, however, is punished when the guard determines him to be a "joker." The blood on his face in the next scene suggests that he has been beaten. When, at the end of the play, his mother appears in an almost catatonic state, he collapses on the floor, gasping and shaking violently, seemingly experiencing a mental and physical collapse.

Second Guard

Second Guard The second guard appears in the corridor, holding up Sara's husband.

Sergeant

His cruelty and desire for power is exhibited throughout the play. He repeatedly categorizes the prisoners as "s—houses," and he tries to demean Sara, whom he considers a "f—intellectual." In order to assert his power over her, he puts his hands on her and claims, "intellectual a—s wobble the best" and that she "bounces" with sin. At other times, he professes to be carrying out the law, as when he tells them that mountain language has been forbidden. Later, he appears in the guise of a public servant when he asks Sara what he can do for her after she accidentally appears in the corridor where she sees her husband with a hood over his face. She does not respond, knowing he will do nothing to help her or her husband. He pretends to be magnanimous at the end of the play, suggesting he engineered the change in the rule forbidding anyone to speak in mountain language but then reveals his true nature when he shows no compassion as he watches the prisoner collapse, exclaiming "you go out of your way to give them a helping hand and they f—it up."

Young Woman

See Sara Johnson

Themes

Meaninglessness

Pinter illustrates the play's major theme, meaninglessness, in his adroit construction of the play. In the absurd prison world, nothing makes sense. The prisoners, referred to as "s—houses" and "enemies of the state" are being held for unnamed crimes. The narrative suggests that they have been imprisoned because they are "mountain people" who speak an outlawed language. When the officials discover that Charley, Sara's husband, is not a mountain person, they decide he has been put into the "wrong batch" but do not question his guilt.

The play presents an existentialist vision of the condition and existence of men and women as it deconstructs the traditional view that humans are rational beings existing in an intelligible universe. The characters repeatedly question the prison rules, trying to determine a logical structure to the system but are continually thwarted because there is no logic behind a world that contains neither truth nor value. As they face this meaninglessness, they experience isolation and anguish.

Pinter illustrates this sense of meaninglessness in his presentation of the breakdown between language and meaning. Sara continually tries to communicate with the prison officials in order to convince them to treat her and the others humanely and to allow her to reunite with her husband, but her dialogue with them continually degenerates into pointless babble. For example, when she tries to get someone to tend to the elderly woman whose hand has been torn by a dog bite, the officer and sergeant begin a nonsensical discussion about the dog's name and never offer assistance.

Social Protest

Pinter constructs scenes like the one concerning the dog as a form of social protest. Through his characterizations and dramatic structure, he presents a compelling indictment of totalitarian regimes. Pinter has suggested the oppression the Kurds have experienced as a minority group in Turkey inspired his writing of the play (as mentioned by Charles Spencer in the *Daily Telegraph,* but his use of Anglo names like "Sara Johnson" and "Charley," along with the indeterminate setting, suggests Pinter is condemning any government that oppresses its people.

Censorship

One of the main ways the prison officials oppress the characters in the play is to censor them. In order to strip them of their cultural identity, they decree that "mountain language" is forbidden, that it should be considered "dead," and those who speak it will be severely punished. This censure not only denies the characters a sense of self but

also serves to isolate each from the other because communication within the community becomes impossible.

Sexual Abuse

When the officials realize that Sara is not a mountain woman and so cannot control her due to her social status, they find another way to exercise their power over her. After the sergeant identifies her as a "f—intellectual," he abuses her to assert his power over her. When she admits to the sergeant that she does not speak mountain language, he puts his hands on her and asks, "What language do you speak with you're a—," thus effectively undermining her position in the prison hierarchy. Later, he insists to the officer that Sara is full of sin, that she "bounces with it."

Resistance

Sara makes attempts to resist the authority of the officials through her questions and her silences. She insists that something should be done to help the elderly woman after the guard dog bites her, and she insists it is her right to see her husband. She meets the officials' repeated, foolish questions (for example, "What is the dog's name?") with silence, refusing to participate in meaningless dialogue. Yet, by the end of the play, her spirit has effectively been broken by the totalitarian system. She finally sees her husband but is powerless to prevent his torture through rational means. As a result, she agrees to prostitute herself so that she can save him.

Style

Structure

Pinter fragments the structure of the play to illustrate the sense of isolation and alienation that the characters experience. The acts present separate vignettes of the women trying desperately to see their men. Act I centers on the women, who have stood in the snow for eight hours, and their interaction with the sergeant and the officer. The absurd dialogue in which Sara must engage with the two officials reinforces her sense of alienation as does the fact that the scene ends before she can see her husband. This opening scene sets the tone of the play and suggests that the women will not be able to be truly reunited with the men.

Acts II and IV center on the elderly woman and her son. In act II, the two try to talk to each other, but their communication is continually broken off by the guard, who jabs the elderly woman with a stick every time she tries to speak to her son. This sense of broken communication is reinforced in the last act, when the elderly woman does not respond to her son, either due to her fear of being beaten or to her son's shocking physical condition.

The third act takes place in a corridor where Sara accidentally comes upon her husband. The claustrophobic atmosphere of the entire scene suggests that neither Sara nor her husband, who has obviously been tortured by the guards, can escape the absurd world in which they find themselves.

Language

Pinter's unique use of language, or lack of it, also reinforces the play's themes. Most of the dialogue between the guards and the women and prisoners appears to make little sense, reflecting the play's focus on communication breakdown and the absurdity of their position. Pinter also uses silences throughout the play to illustrate this theme as well as his focus on the power plays that occur in the prison.

Historical Context

Theatre of the Absurd

This term, coined by Martin Esslin who wrote *The Theatre of the Absurd* (1961), is applied to plays that focus on and reflect the absurd nature of the human condition. The roots of this type of literature can be found in the expressionist and surrealist movements as well as in the existential philosophy that emerged from the theories of nineteenth-century Danish theologian Søren Kierkegaard, and German philosophers Martin Heidegger and Friedrich Nietzsche. Dramatists associated with this group include Samuel Beckett, Eugene Ionesco, Günter Grass, Jean Genet, Edward Albee, N. G. Simpson, and Pinter.

Absurdist plays portray a specific vision of the condition and existence of men and women and an examination of their place and function in life. They reject the notion that humans are rational beings operating in an intelligible universe that maintains a logically ordered structure. Absurdist playwrights present characters who strive but ultimately fail to find purpose and meaning in a world that contains no truth or value. As a result, the characters experience isolation and anguish in the face of the inherent nothingness in their world.

These plays typically lack a conventional structure. Often they incorporate silences and scenes of miscommunication to reinforce the sense of isolation and alienation experienced by the characters. A loose plot is often strung together as a series of fragmented scenes, disconnected images that reflect the characters' experiences.

Repression of the Kurds

Pinter has noted that *Mountain Language* is based on the oppression the Kurds have experienced as a minority group in Turkey. The Kurds, numbering about twenty-five million, are primarily located in a mountainous region in the Middle East, stretching from southeastern Turkey through northwestern Iran. They have had a long history of conflict with Turkey, heightened at the end of World War I with the Treaty of Versailles, which gave the Turkish government the right to rule over them. Tensions heightened in 1937, when Mustafa Kemal Ataturk decreed that religious and non-Turkish cultural expression would be outlawed in Turkey, including the word *Kurd.*

During the next decade, Kurdish schools, organizations, and publications were banned, and any references to Kurdish regions were removed from maps and documents. After the word Kurd was outlawed, the Kurds were officially referred to as "mountain Turks who have forgotten their language." They were denied government positions, and the Turkish government confiscated land and property. Kurds launched a series of revolts against the Turkish government, trying to gain widespread support by appealing to traditional religious beliefs and cultural practices. However, Kurdish leaders could not

get the cooperation of the various Kurdish tribes. After the revolts were suppressed in 1925 and 1930, the government handed out harsher and more repressive measures. The Kurds remain an impoverished and culturally oppressed minority in Turkey.

In 1996, eleven Kurds, while rehearsing Mountain Language with plastic guns, were arrested by London police. They were held until authorities could establish what was actually occurring in the community center where they were rehearsing. Pinter suggests that this incident is a case of life imitating art.

Critical Overview

When *Mountain Language* opened at the National Theatre in London on October 20, 1988, it earned mixed reviews. Some commentators praised the play's compelling subject and themes, while others found the play to be too political. In an overview of Pinter and his work in *Contemporary Dramatists,* Lois Gordon applauds the play's "frightening images" of totalitarianism. Douglas Kennedy, in his review of the play in *New Statesman & Society* writes that *Mountain Language* is "a highly condensed guided tour through state tyranny" presented through "a series of stark, rather atypical images of political repression." While he commends its "tight" construction, he considers it to be "uncomfortably hollow," arguing that it is "terribly predictable in its vision of state terror." Kennedy claims that the play "could be ultimately seen as more of a pronouncement of Pinter's new-found political activism than as a polemical statement about the brutal grammar of totalitarianism." While he praises Pinter's use of silence, a characteristic device in his plays, Kennedy concludes that*Mountain Language* is an unsettling mix of artistry and politics "and the result leaves one wondering whether Pinter wasn't a far more effective political writer when he left you baffled, but unnerved."

Spencer, in his review for the *Daily Telegraph* insists that the play is "sketchy, paranoid and selfrighteous." Spencer also concludes that "the characters are types, not people, meaning that audience reaction is one of generalized concern rather than specific sympathy." He also criticizes the play's political themes, concluding that Pinter tries to create parallels between the play's totalitarianism and the current government in Britain. He writes that Pinter's "suggestion that Britain is indistinguishable from more oppressive regimes seems shrill and impertinent, not least to those who have suffered under real state tyranny."

Criticism

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Critical Essay #1

Perkins is an associate professor of English at Prince George's Community College in Maryland. In this essay, she examines Pinter's effective mix of realism and the absurd in Mountain Language.

Harold Pinter has admitted that *Mountain Language* is based on the long history of oppression the Kurds have suffered as a minority group under Turkish rule. Critics have praised the play for its realistic depiction of the victims and oppressors in a totalitarian state. In an overview of Pinter and his work in *Contemporary Dramatists*, Lois Gordon applauds the play's "frightening images" of oppression. Douglas Kennedy, in his review of the play in *New Statesman & Society writes that Mountain Language* is "a highly condensed guided tour through state tyranny" presented through "a series of stark . . . images of political repression." Yet, Pinter's dramatic structure is not purely realistic. He combines realism with elements of the absurd in an effort to highlight and reinforce the reality of totalitarianism and the meaninglessness at its core. The result is a compelling and shocking portrait of political terrorization.

The play presents a real and quite menacing situation. In an unnamed country at an unnamed prison, women wait all day in the freezing cold for the chance of seeing their men, who are incarcerated in the prison. Vicious guard dogs surround them, taunted by the guards, until one lunges forward and almost severs the thumb of an elderly woman. The inmates, held as "enemies of the state," are beaten and tortured as their women are prevented from offering them solace. This narrative could represent an accurate depiction of the horror of any totalitarian state, a point Pinter illustrates by refusing to name the country, the prison, or any of the officials. As the narrative unfolds, Pinter adds elements of absurdity to heighten, for his audience, the nightmare of totalitarian barbarism.

Tish Dace, in her overview of Pinter for the *Reference Guide to English Literature,* explains the playwright's motive for his unique structural devices that contain elements associated with plays of the Theatre of the Absurd. She notes that traditionally writers "feel obliged to explain their characters' behavior." The structure of one of Pinter's plays, however, "suggest[s] further exposure to the situation will merely compound the conundrum, heighten the obscurity, elaborate the elusive hints at sources for his characters' anxiety." She continues, "Where most playwrights bring clarity, shape, and order to what they dramatize, Pinter delights in slyly selecting what will appear most cryptic, vague, or even contradictory" as he substitutes "hints for exposition and intangible menace for explicit confrontation."

One of the main ways Pinter subverts "clarity, shape, and order" in *Mountain Language* is to present fragmented vignettes, offering only snapshots of the prisoners and the women who come to see them. The effect of these brief scenes, with no chronological or expository clues to help the audience piece together a coherent narrative, is to illustrate the sense of isolation and alienation that the characters experience. Throughout the entire first act, the women are separated from the men and are

tormented by the prison officials. The remaining three acts present brief, truncated portraits of the women's visits with the men, characterized by broken communications, suggesting no possibility of permanent reunification.

Pinter explains his use of theatrical economy in a speech originally delivered in 1970 in Hamburg, and published in the fourth volume of his *Complete Works:* "The image must be pursued with the greatest vigilance, calmly, and once found, must be sharpened, graded, accurately focused and maintained." He notes that in his plays "the key word is economy, economy of movement and gesture, of emotion and its expression . . . so there is no wastage and no mess."

As Pinter constructs his economical scenes, he inserts elements of the absurd to reinforce the sense of meaninglessness and barbarity. The absurdity emerges in the dialogues between the prison officials and the inmates and the women who come to see them. The language in these scenes operates principally on a subtextual level; meaning lies not in the words themselves, which are often nonsensical, but in how and why the characters use language. Pinter's incorporation of scenes of miscommunication also reinforces the sense of isolation and alienation experienced by the characters.

In the opening conversation, Pinter creates verbal plays that point to the absurd situation in which the women find themselves. The sergeant appears and demands the names of the women, which they have already provided. This fact, however, makes no difference to the sergeant, who continually repeats the order, suggesting that he does not regard them as individuals, only as a group that needs to be controlled.

The second inane conversation in the play relates to the elderly woman who has been severely bitten by one of the guard dogs. When Sara asks the officers to help the woman, they become incensed, not by the seriousness of the injury but by the fact that the dog did not give his name before he bit her. This irrational response provides the first example of the problems inherent in the totalitarian system. The officials' treatment of the women and the prisoners has no logical cause, and, therefore, they can offer no logical defense for their actions.

The officer, however, tries to appear official in his explanation of the "formal procedure" dogs must follow when they bite someone. He also attempts to suggest an orderly system of rules and regulations when he insists that he will shoot the dog if the dog did not give his name before he bit the woman. The absurdity of his stance reinforces the sense that the officials in this system follow no logical plan as they carry out their duties.

One of the official decrees, the censure of the mountain people's language, is a tactic that many oppressive regimes have used on their victims. By denying a community its language, and therefore a crucial part of its cultural expression, a totalitarian government can effectively remove that community's identity and therefore any threat to the system. Yet, when Sara confirms that she is not a mountain person, nor is her husband, the officers prove the arbitrary nature of the decree, deciding her husband is still guilty of being "an enemy of the state" but offering no evidence of the specificity of his crimes.

The final absurd confrontation between Sara and the officials in this act comes at the end of the scene when they recognize that she is not a mountain woman. In order to reassert his power over her, the sergeant objectifies her sexually, placing his hands on her, asking "what language do you speak with you're a—?" and claiming that she fairly "bounces" with sin. Noting that she comes from a higher social class than do the other women and prisoners, the sergeant determines that she is a "f—intellectual" and that "intellectual a—s wobble the best." As a result of this sexual objectification, the sergeant successfully removes her identity and therefore does not need to treat her humanely.

The absurdity of the ban on mountain language becomes apparent in the second act when the guard jabs the elderly woman as she tries to communicate with her son. The ban causes a breakdown in communications not only between the woman and her son but also between the woman and the guard. When the guard tells her that her language has become officially "dead," she cannot understand what he is saying to her and so continues to speak her language as the guard persists in beating her.

Pinter uses the technique of silence in this scene, as he does in others, as a form of language that reflects the characters' interaction with each other. Pinter often uses silences in his plays as verbal acts of aggression, defense, and acquiescence that often speak more loudly than words. In the first act, Sara shows her defiance and points to the absurdity of the officials' questions when she refuses to answer the sergeant's questions about the dog. In act II, the guard meets the prisoner's declaration of his mother's inability to understand the official language with silence, as an act of defense. If he does not acknowledge what the prisoner is saying, he will not have to admit the absurdity of the decree, and he can keep on abusing the elderly woman. An example of silence as acquiescence occurs at the end of the play when the elderly woman does not respond to her son's questions. At this point she has given in to the system, either due to her fear of being beaten or her despair over her son's condition.

Pinter uses a different form of silence in an absurd way. He explains this technique in a speech delivered at the 1962 National Student Drama Festival in Bristol and published as the introduction to *Complete Works One.* Pinter explains that there are two types of silences, one when nothing is said and the other "when perhaps a torrent of language is being employed. This speech is speaking of a language locked beneath it. That is its continual reference." He notes the subtext of this type of silence when he comments, "the speech we hear is an indication of that which we don't hear. It is a necessary avoidance, a violent, sly, anguished or mocking smoke screen which keeps the other in its place."

One example of this type of verbal subterfuge occurs during the third act when Sara accidentally stumbles upon her husband in a corridor. He shows clear signs of having been tortured. Flustered, the sergeant ejects a barrage of nonsense in an attempt to distract Sara from the reality of the situation. He tells her that she has come in the wrong door, due to the computer's "double hernia." He then assures her that if she wants any "information on any aspect of life in this place, we've got a bloke comes into the office every Tuesday week, except when it rains."

Pinter allows no closure or resolution at the end of the play. The last image he leaves with the audience is an absurd one: the sergeant is complaining about the prisoners' failure to respond positively to an arbitrary change in the rules. Pinter's creative interweaving of realistic and absurd narrative elements throughout the structure of *Mountain Language* creates a gripping narrative of the workings and consequences of the tyranny of political systems.

Source: Wendy Perkins, Critical Essay on *Mountain Language,* in *Drama for Students,* The Gale Group, 2002.

Critical Essay #2

In the following overview, the author discusses Pinter's Mountain Language and the devices he is known for using in his plays, particularly nameand language-play.

Mountain Language concerns a group of women who have been waiting all day outside a prison in the hope of seeing their menfolk inside. They have to endure abuse from an intimidating sergeant, and in one case an elderly woman has almost had a thumb severed by a guard dog. On admission to the prisoners "mountain language" is forbidden, and prisoners and visitors must use the language of the capital. It was assumed that Pinter had written a barely veiled critique of Turkey's suppression of the Kurds and their language, but he resisted the identification, suggesting that the play has a certain significance for an English audience. Pinter's very short work of less than a thousand words can be seen in both a literal and metaphorical way.

From a literal point of view an audience is likely to make the connection with the plight of the Kurds, though Brian Friel's play of 1980, *Translations,* reminded a British audience of the English encroachment on the Irish language in the nineteenth century. Friel's play was well attended in Wales, where it is not forgotten that England attempted to prohibit the speaking of Welsh in the last century. Throughout the performance of *Mountain Language* Pinter, as director, created a particular uneasiness in the audience by exploiting a specific condition of audience reception. The soldiers are dressed in regular battle fatigues, and the foulmouthed sergeant spoke with a strong London accent. British television screens have made British audiences long familiar with such images—in the Northern Ireland of the "H" blocks, no-go areas, proscription on broadcasting interviews with representatives of the IRA. By having political and geographical reference undetermined, but suggested, Pinter creates a polemical space in which the question arises just how far the United Kingdom could be said to have taken such a direction.

Pinter signals this in a fashion that is peculiarly his own. No British dramatist has used names and naming so consistently throughout a whole career as Pinter has. Let one example stand for many. In *Betrayal* the only time that the married name and titles of Robert and Emma are mentioned is precisely when Robert comes across Jerry's letter to Emma in the American Express office in Venice and intuitively realizes the nature of the contents: "I mean, just because my name is Downs and your name is Downs doesn't mean that we're the Mr. and Mrs. Downs that they, in their laughing Mediterranean way, assume we are." Approximately halfway through *Mountain Language* one of the women reveals that her name is the very English "Sara Johnson." In contrast to the names in One for the Road, this comes as a shock if it is automatically assumed that such abuses could only happen in places like Turkey.

The first word of *Mountain Language* is "Name?" and this aspect of bureaucratic officialdom is cruelly parodied when one of the women complains of the older woman's injury from the dog. The officer in charge insists that he can only initiate disciplinary procedures if he is given the name of the animal: "Every dog has a *name!* They answer

to their name. They are given a name by their parents and that is their name, that is their *name.* Before they bite they state their name. It's a formal procedure." Beyond this overt bullying there is a certain kind of profundity.

The old woman is forbidden to speak her mountain language, and, unlike her prisoner son, she does not speak the language of the capital. Then the decision is reversed, and mountain language is allowed. But now the old woman is traumatized by the sight of blood on her son's face and her own pain and is speechless. At this the son is reduced to a voiceless shuddering. The logic of totalitarianism always seeks to suppress speech—by book-burning, torture, murder, or exile—because speech is itself symbolic of freedom. To speak is to name things like truth and tyranny, to speak is to give one's voice in a vote, in antiquity, or to mark a ballot paper in modern democracies. The final tableau of mother and son indicates the end of democracy—the body politic made speechless. Thankfully, after sound mountains echo; that is their "language."

The sketch "New World Order" appeared as a curtain raiser for Ariel Dorfman's acclaimed play *Death and the Maiden.* Set in post-Pinochet Chile, Dorfman's work concerns a woman's revenge against her past torturer. In Pinter's sketch two interrogators gloat over their blindfolded victim, swapping obscenities, until the almost sexual sadistic climax with one sobbing and the other congratulating him for "keeping the world clean for democracy." These words were those used by the youthful Pinter and friends in ironic response to the dropping of atom bombs on Japan. As in *Mountain Language,* the victim is rendered literally and symbolically speechless: "Before he came in here he was a big shot, he never stopped shooting his mouth off, he never stopped questioning received ideas. Now—because he's apprehensive about what's about to happen to him—he's stopped all that, he's got nothing more to say." Similarly, upon Victor's second entrance in *One for the Road* he has difficulty speaking because his torturers have mutilated his tongue.

Source: Ronald Knowles, "*Mountain Language* (1988) and 'New World Order' (1991)," in *Understanding Harold Pinter*, University of South Carolina Press, 1995, pp. 192-95.

Critical Essay #3

In the following essay, the author discusses Pinter's use of the power of love, the opposite of love, and language in portraying questions of human nature and brutality in Mountain Language.

After *One for the Road* there might seem little more to say about the brutalities of torture. But *Mountain Language,* which continues to explore the conflict between Eros and Thanatos, offers further insights into the causes for such brutality and strengthens insights into further links between love and violence. Love or its opposite, fractally referenced and infused in each moment, drives the play's conflict. Love, devalued and deployed in brutal language and acts of the torturers as one weapon in the arsenal to destroy, is also a bond which can sustain the tortured and their families. Inspired by the plight of the Kurds who were forbidden to speak their language, *Mountain Language* is the bleakest, most pitiless, and remorseless of Pinter's plays.

The action in the play alternates between women in line waiting outside to see their men being held prisoner inside and the brief visits they are permitted: between a mother and son, a husband and wife, a woman and her lover.

The initial focus on the waiting women throws a spotlight upon their men being held prisoner and tortured. The play levels distinctions between age, education, and class: the young intellectual wife who has come to see her husband and the old peasant mother, to see her son. Both are equally humiliated, both, equally courageous. The near hopelessness of the women's plight, their stoical defiance of authority to support their men dramatizes a courage informed by love.

That love, which sustains the men and women through some of the worst outrages remains, however, impotent to save the men. Love without power is not enough.

As the play opens the Young Woman at the head of the line exhibits defiance as soon the Sergeant demands "Name?" She repeats her reply, "We've given our names," each time he asks. Her refusal to comply with his senseless demands prompts the Officer who enters to engage in the familiar "good cop/bad cop" ploy by turning upon the Sergeant with, "Stop this s—." He then asks the Young Woman, "Any complaints?" Momentarily releasing tension and raising hope, he notices the Elderly Woman's wounded hand and asks, "Has someone bitten your hand?" The term "someone," one of the few grimly humorous turns in the play, both relieves and heightens tension. When the old peasant woman fails to answer his repeated question, the Young Woman finally says, "A Doberman pinscher."

Full dread begins to dawn when the Officer observes, "I think the thumb is going to come off," as he again asks the Elderly Woman (whom we will only later learn does not understand his language), "Who did this?" Her failure to answer his question again prompts the Young Woman to reply, "A big dog." He instantly demands, "What was his

name?" and with another desolate trace of humor lights into the Young Woman with a lengthy diatribe:

Every dog has a *name!* They answer to their name. They are given a name by their parents and that is their name, that is their name! Before they bite, they state their name. It's a formal procedure. They state their name and then they bite.

In contrast to the dogs who have names, the men being tortured and women waiting in line to see them remain nameless. The point of the Sergeant's repeatedly requesting the women's names serves only to remind them that they have none.

The Sergeant, with permission to speak, pronounces the men they have been waiting to see "s—houses" and "enemies of the State." The Officer reminds the line of waiting women that by "military decree" and by "law" they are forbidden to speak their language: "Your language is dead."

The Young Woman tries to identify herself as apart from the others: "I do not speak the mountain language." The Officer levels any distancing she attempts even in his "good cop" role; when he reminds his subordinate, "These women, Sergeant, have as yet committed no crime," he allows himself to be corrected by his Sergeant who says, "Sir! But you're not saying they're without sin?"

Their denying the equation of "crime" and "sin" only melds the values of church and state for the persecutors. The Officer agrees and the Sergeant further concurs, "This one's full of it. She bounces with it." When the Young Woman declares, "My name is Sara Johnson. I have come to see my husband. It is my right," the word "right" is stripped of all meaning as she is asked for her papers, then informed, "He's in the wrong batch." The Sergeant remarks, "So is she. She looks like a f—ing intellectual to me," adding, "Intellectual a—s wobble the best." His remark, which cuts at her softer life, also reduces her to a slab of meat, reminding her that she is without distinction from the other women in line and that neither her mind, education, nor knowledge of the law can privilege her above the other women. This enforced leveling of hierarchy by those in command does not destroy hierarchy but distills it to the simple dichotomy of an us vs them duality.

The introduction of her Anglo name, which must garner greater sympathy from an Anglo-or Eurocentric audience, also functions to ambush the audience, reroute and subvert any distancing belief, "This could never happen to me." Her name all by itself also gives weight to her individuality to enhance audience sympathy. (But would a name such as Gingra Razzu serve the same function as Sara Johnson?) This second central Sara in Pinter's plays (though a variant spelling on Sarah of The Lover) serves to emphasize the biblical connotations not only of Sarah's lost children, but here, Sara's lost husband, and through his death, of their lost children.

The Elderly Woman with the wounded hand, now in the visitor's room with her son, is twice jabbed by a guard and forbidden to speak her language when once she says, "I have bread—" and another time, "I have apples—" Only then does the Guard realize

she does not understand him. Nevertheless his message has been effectively conveyed —she does not speak again.

Pinter departs from his customary realism, transmitting to the audience the thoughts of the prisoners and visitors which they have been forbidden to speak. We hear in the Elderly Woman's thought/ voice attempts to encourage her son as she sits mutely across from him to "tell" him in her mind that the baby is waiting, that everyone looks forward to his homecoming. The Prisoner's thought/ voice also conveys love and concern as he notices that his mother's hand has been bitten. This invention conveys the depth of feeling the characters bear one another and the significance of their meeting—of her having made the visit and his having survived despite all odds. Their acts of love that sustain them endure to stand in stark contrast to the lack of any human kindness from those in authority.

But beneath their different exteriors and opposing circumstances, Pinter links the prisoners and the guards by a common thread of humanity: family. When the Guard remarks, "I've got a wife and three kids," the Prisoner volunteers the information that he does, too. Even though the prisoner's attempt to form a human connection only prompts the Guard to telephone in the complaint, "I think I've got a joker in here," and though The Guard refuses to recognize any commonality between himself and the man he holds prisoner (as, to continue his work, he must), the link has been forged for the audience.

In the penultimate scene, "Voice in the Darkness," when a Young Woman enters, the Sergeant barks "Who's that f—ing woman?" conveying anti-erotic sexual overtones which nevertheless parallel the thought/voice erotic communion between the Young Woman and her lover, who stands before her supported by two guards and with a bag over his head. The Young Man's and Young Woman's intertwining "voices" recall making love. Even here at the edge of the abyss their love sustains them as his thoughts import their past lovemaking into the present, sustaining him to withstand this intolerable situation and transforming it: "I watch you sleep. And then your eyes open. You look up at me about you and smile." The Young Woman's voice in perfect consort responds: "You smile. When my eyes open I see you above me and smile." Even though the hooded Young Man collapses without seeing his young lover, this scene of awakening to love transmits the larger point of the play.

The Sergeant terminates her visit: "Yes, you've come in the wrong door. It must be the computer. The computer's got a double hernia." The horror of that mistake, the irreversible human damage perpetuated upon a man wrongly imprisoned, resonates on the larger scale with the horror of the irrevocable human error in the whole situation: the imprisonment and torture of people who have committed no crime.

The Sergeant tells the Young Woman to come back in a week to see a man who comes in to answer questions. "His name is Dokes. Joseph Dokes." The authority, masked by a protected John Doe identity, reminds us that the only names the guards and officers bear in this play are their anonymous titles: Guard, Officer. Torturers and tortured alike are equally stripped of identity.

The brief moment of love between the young woman and man is quickly supplanted by the Sergeant's returning to his opening level of discourse: addressing love only as f—ing. Sex further reduces merely to an animal act to be bartered. When the Young Woman asks of Dokes, "Can I f—him? If I f—him, will everything be all right?" Though the Sergeant replies, "Sure," the audience knows that no human currency these women tender can release their men from their suffering.

The final scene, image, action, and language all conspire to reinforce the split between the destructive animality of the term "f—" as the authorities deploy it and the love between those linked by mutual affection, family bonds, and marriage. The mother and son are brought back together and this time told that the law has been changed, that they are now free to speak their language: "New Rules. Until further notice."

But when the son, now with blood on his face, tries to translate this news to his elderly, wounded, silent mother, she no longer speaks. The earlier action of the guard to prohibit speech speaks more forcefully than any words.

The son finally collapses to the floor in his effort to make his mother understand as the play closes with the Sergeant's, "Look at this. You go out of your way to give them a helping hand and they f—it up." The double cliché "helping hand" and "f—it up" seal into a single image the love/violence connection—referring focus both to the mother's wounded hand and to all the violence perpetuated in the name of love for a cause. The word "f—" here, stripped of all sexual and erotic connotation, any connection to love, reduces it to its function as an intensifying epithet in the weaponry of language and finally means almost nothing at all.

The violence in Pinter's plays, as entertainment, raises ethical questions. Pinter's admission that he opens himself to that charge and that at some level the audience takes some pleasure in the absolute power of the authorities does not divert the charge. Drama as a voyeuristic medium even encourages that, and some argue it provides an escape valve for real aggression. But Pinter's aim is obviously other. The responsibility, since it cannot be claimed or borne by the innocent victims, again transfers to the audience. But how? By raising consciousness.

At the very least these plays serve to raise conscious awareness of the plight of a great many innocent people worldwide. But the insight they offer into the impulse to violence and torture raises even larger questions about human nature which is portrayed as so easily brutalized to become brute. Pinter does that here by fairly conventional means. Nowhere else in Pinter's work are dominant characters drawn with so few or without any redeeming qualities, nor are the characters forced into submission, so wholly pure.

The question of responsibility thrown at the audience requires examination. It is not enough merely to *know* that such things happen. Pinter's recent plays are a call to action. But what action? What direction do I offer students when I teach, audiences, when I direct Pinter's plays? What ought I call upon myself to do in my writing and life? No doubt some classicists will ask of his work, but is this art? Is any call to action art? I

would have to wait until *Moonlight* to fully answer these questions. *One for the Road and Mountain Language* cannot be lumped with and dismissed as mere diatribe.

In the subtext and the thematic connections between love and justice, the issues Pinter is raising are much larger: his plays provoke in audiences not merely specific emotional and intellectual responses to the injustice in the specific acts of torture but an attitude of sympathy, an empathy, a regard for the other as the self—even the torturer in the self. Without that perspective, humans who hold radically different views can be encouraged to continue to regard themselves as superior to all others who hold different religious or political views and can treat those others as vermin, lice to be smudged out and erased. Interestingly, such an attitude must also extend to the torturers. By extension, a happy ending to the torture plays would hardly be to see the torturers merely dead or themselves tortured but to see them awakened; the extermination of a torturer, even all those in such positions of power, resolves little beyond the moment.

Consistently Pinter's work reveals that how one regards the other remains a measure of how one regards the self. But again in this play we see that love is not enough. Love must assert itself in taking power necessary to defend itself or else the death loving forces "triumph." Because power is not something asked for, given, or granted, it must be seized. But before it can be exercised to promote the life-enhancing forces of growth and development rather than death and destruction, it must develop at that private level where awakening begins in self-knowledge.

What enhances the power of Pinter's work is that he acknowledges the dark, destructive but passionate Dionysian powers and weds them to the Apollonian, coolly rational quest for order and authority. He gives them equal play, blurring the traditional boundaries of each so that in the end, except for the torture plays, the two forces end in a stand-off. But brute physical power will always claim victory over mere love until love can develop its own sources of power and reclaim that power of attraction that death has appropriated as its own.

Pinter's portrayal of his authority figures' claims of doing good raises the ultimate issue, What does it mean to be good? What are the qualities necessary?

Pinter offers no easy answers. The virtues portrayed as admirable, when inner awareness and lesser strengths remain undeveloped and informed only by insecurity and fear, turn, in excess, to destructive forces loosed upon others that also turn inwardly against the self and outwardly on, the society it seeks to preserve and promote.

Death does not promote life, but the destructors in these plays remain blind to that and to what is mutilated, destroyed, and dead in themselves. Yet love remains powerless to contain, restrain or counter the forces of destruction. Like Good Deeds in *Everyman,* love's power seems nearly extinguished. What is necessary to reawaken love as a life-enhancing power which is justice? Perhaps the simple awareness that Pinter's work evokes and with that awareness action may follow.

Source: Penelope Prentice, "*Mountain Language:* Torture Revisited," in The Pinter Ethic, Garland Publishing, Inc., 1994, pp. 285-91.

Critical Essay #4

In the following essay, the author discusses Pinter's use of the "voice-over" technique in his play Mountain Language to articulate the political elements of "communicating beyond language through language."

Inspired and appalled by his visit to Turkey in 1985, Harold Pinter in *Mountain Language* (1988) attempts to re-create the linguistic oppression he witnessed. Like the Turkish government which considers the language of Kurdistan subversive and so prohibits its usage, Pinter's torturers outlaw the "mountain language" of their victims. Clearly such a situation presents a difficult dilemma for a playwright. How can one represent the absence of language through language? Specifically, how can Pinter represent the effects of such oppression when the means for that representation, the convention of dramatic dialogue, is denied by the real-life situation which gave rise to the dramatic idea?

Pinter has made a career out of dramatizing such absences. His casts are filled with the verbally inept: characters pause, stop, stutter, and remain silent. As a matter of fact, Pinter often leads us down the garden path in terms of signification: just when we think his characters will say something—anything—to explain their unusual situations, their speeches become filled with elliptical interruptions. The people of Kurdistan, as well as many postmodern theorists, who argue that language is non-referential—that words do not "mean," they "signify"—could not ask for a better dramatist to illustrate their positions.

Despite his linguistic gymnastics, however, Pinter has resolutely remained a worker of words, a playwright and screenwriter. Unlike his mentor, Samuel Beckett, Pinter has not resorted to pantomime as Beckett did in, for example, *Act Without Words* (1957). Pinter's previous attitude toward language, then, can be best described as ambivalent: clearly aware of language's limits, the fact that what is left unsaid is often more important than what is actually articulated, Pinter continues to write, thereby implying a faith in language despite its weaknesses.

Mountain Language, however, presents a new situation for and from Pinter, and perhaps even marks a crisis in his career, a crisis brought about by the tension between his recent political interests and his prior aesthetic. As many have noted and Pinter himself admits, his dramatic concerns and even his readings of his earlier plays have shifted from the apolitical to the political. Such a shift may also imply a change in Pinter's attitude toward language. That is, given the fact that the victims in this play do not even have the opportunity to miscommunicate, that their lack of their own language is cause for concern, can Pinter avoid a sentimental or nostalgic view of language, a view he has spent his entire career subverting? In this play, Pinter attempts to reconcile these contradictory forces through a variation on the cinematic technique known as the "voice-over."

The relationship between cinematic sound and image is characterized by oppression; the image is privileged over the soundtrack. One reason for this relationship is based on the history of film itself. In the beginning, film did not have sound. When compared to the theatre, which clearly synchronized image and voice through dramatic dialogue, and radio, which relied on sound alone, motion pictures were defective. When sound did appear, the image was subordinate to the sound. Films were called "talkies." Even the logo of a major movie studio, RKO, boldly proclaimed that it now offered not "movies," but "radio pictures." Film, then, suffered and continues to suffer from an inferiority complex. Today, Rick Altman argues, film still attempts to repress the scandal of its defect by privileging the image over the voice.

While some historians psychoanalyze the history of the film medium, Mary Ann Doane and Stephen Heath psychoanalyze the effects that such privileging has upon the audience. According to Doane, the filmic image presents a "fantasmic body," a completely unified and uncomplicated representation of human existence to its audiences. Using the work of Jacques Lacan, particularly his formulations on the "mirror stage" and the "gaze," Stephen Heath argues that spectators gain a sense of mastery when they view the filmic image: the eye literally captures the object, whereas the ear cannot master sounds as effectively. For both the historians and the psychoanalytic critics, the image represents an uncomplicated view of reality; spectators need not question their ideologies, political beliefs, biases, etc. In effect, the filmic image is neatly framed. Sound, on the other hand, violates such framing devices and thereby violates the certainty the "fantasmic body" image provides. Consequently, all the recent technological developments in film soundtracks have been toward enhancing sound's ability to uphold the image. In Doane's words, such innovations elide the "material heterogeneity of film", the fact that film is not an uncomplicated "reality" but, instead, an illusory construct.

Traditional theater privileges the image similarly. The proscenium arch even mimics a picture frame. Like contemporary films, however, recent drama has experimented with the acoustic in order to challenge both the image's status and the existential security it provides through acoustical experiments, most notably Samuel Beckett's *Krapp's Last Tape* (1958) and *Rockaby* (1981). Pinter's interest in the auditory, perhaps influenced by Beckett or his own work in BBC radio during his early career as an actor, has, in fact, become his trademark: vituperative speeches, manic monologues, and commonplace queries are all punctuated by his notorious silences and pauses.

The following speech by Ruth in *The Homecoming* exemplifies Pinter's skill at accentuating both sound and image, as well as language's limitations. In the scene, Teddy and Lenny have been arguing about philosophy while Ruth remained silent. Suddenly she interrupts, saying:

You've forgotten something. Look at me. I . . . move my leg.

That's all it is. But I wear . . . underwear . . . which moves with me . . . it . . . captures your attention. Perhaps you misinterpret. The action is simple. It's a leg . . . moving. My lips move. Why don't you restrict . . . your observation to that? Perhaps the fact that they

move is more significant . . . than the words which come through them. You must bear that . . . possibility . . . in mind.

Silence.

Teddy stands.

I was born quite near here.

Pause.

Then . . . six year ago, I went to America.

Pause.

It's all rock and sand. It stretches . . . so far . . . everywhere you look. And there's lots of insects there.

Pause.

And there's lots of insects there.

Silence. She is still.

Clearly, Ruth makes herself the object of both the audience's gaze and that of her male counterparts. She is the object to be viewed, the image. As Joan Navarre notes, Ruth is a film, a "moving picture." It would appear, then, that Ruth's physical positioning, as well as her reminder to Lenny and Teddy regarding the limits of words, privilege the image, transferring their search for philosophical certitude from language to her, the image. If, however, Ruth is a "moving picture," the soundtrack is faulty, the dictum being that sound must prevail uninterrupted in order to uphold the image's status throughout a film. Here, however, frequent pauses and silences subvert the image's powerful position. Further, it is the sound of her voice which first captures and then retains the men's attention. Sound—both its presence and its absence—punctures the privileged but illusory status of the image.

Pinter's more recent work, moreover, highlights the importance of the voice even further. *Family Voices* (1981), for example, is a "radio play" which, to borrow Beckett's phrase, gives the audience the experience of "a text written to come out of the dark", a description which bears a close resemblance to the titles of two of Pinter's scenes in *Mountain Language.* As Stephen Gale notes, the play is "a series of disembodied voices." And, in *One For the Road* (1985), though we see the effects of physical torture on the victims, we never see the act of physical abuse; we only hear the insidious taunting of their oppressor and the victims' often muffled responses. Pinter's clear fascination with cinema, then, may not be restricted to the visual elements; instead, it may prompt him to reevaluate such emphasis.

The cinematic techniques of the "voice-off" and the "voice-over" threaten to undercut the filmic image's supremacy, as well. Simply, the "voice-off" is the moment when a character's voice is separated from his or her image. In most films, however, the voice and body are united during prior or subsequent scenes. Similarly in theater, the offstage voice is frequently followed or preceded by the appearance of the character whose voice we heard. In both instances, sound and image are neatly reunited, so no disruption occurs. As Doane argues, there is no interruption of the "fantasmic body" in such films; on the contrary, the technique actually expands "the affirmation of the depicted unity and homogeneity of depicted space."

Frequently used in documentary films, the "voice-over" is a disembodied voice which rarely unites the image with the speaker. Though sound and image remain separated, in traditional documentaries "this voice has been for the most part that of the male, and its power resides in the possession of knowledge and in the privileged, unquestioned activity of interpretation." In this way, though the image is momentarily deprived of its status, the faith in a fantasmic body is unquestioned, since the voice-over leads the audience to presume that there is some "body" out there who represents the certitude the spectators seek.

In *Mountain Language,* Pinter offers a variation on these two cinematic techniques, a variation which privileges neither sound nor image but does highlight its disjunction in order to challenge his audience's position of authority. In effect, Pinter "voices-over" the "voice-off" by transmitting the characters' thoughts over the theater's sound system while they are still present on stage. The title of the two scenes in which this method is employed underscores Pinter's ability to balance the position of the image and sound, thereby producing a grim depiction of such oppression's effects: "voices in the darkness."

To some extent the technique resembles traditional dramatic conventions such as monologues, soliloquies, and asides: we are presented with the characters' inner thoughts. Such conventions, however, imply that the subversion of political oppression may be possible; the victims, after all, would speak in their "mountain language," even if it is only to the audience. Hence, the audience's quest for comfort would not be threatened. By using this technique, Pinter apparently resolves the paradox created by his recent political interests and his prior attitudes towards language. By broadcasting his characters' speeches over their physical presence, Pinter shows us that the torturers disembody their victims in more than physical ways. We see that the victims' voices are not in their possession; they are above and beyond them. Through this disjunction, this rupture between word and image, actor and dramatic dialogue, we see that the victims' bodies and voices have been as effectively severed as the Old Woman's thumb was torn from her hand.

The speeches themselves, moreover, are not filled with revolutionary fervor, nor do the victims even express a coherent understanding of their imprisoned state. Instead, their speeches contain memories and commonplace desires which highlight the pain of political oppression in personal terms. By the end of the play, moreover, even these disembodied voices are absent. When, for example, the elderly woman is finally

permitted to speak in her own language, she cannot or will not. Whether the guards have literally taken her tongue is unclear, but Pinter, in any case, does not provide us with the reassurance a reunion of the body and voice would create. In this way, it would appear that Pinter succeeds in representing language's absence through language, without conjoining political power upon language through its absence.

And yet, during these moments of the "voiceover," Pinter does indicate that while language may not provide the means for social change, it does create the possibility for such subversion. In the scene, for example, between the young woman and man, the characters may not talk about revolution, but they do seem to be able to construct an almost psychic connection which transcends their imprisonment and linguistic restrictions. Like Ruth in *The Homecoming,* they express a means of communicating beyond language through language. They, for instance, coincidentally remember the same comforting memory from their past:

Man's voice: I watch you sleep. And then your eyes
open. You look up at me and smile.
Woman's voice: You smile. When my eyes open I see
you above me and smile.
Man's voice: We are out on a lake.
Woman's voice: It is spring.
Man's voice: I hold you. I warm you.

Despite their oppression, their silence does "speak," just as the elderly woman's silence at the end of the play speaks of the cruel and arbitrary nature of political oppression.

In this way, Pinter does not entirely avoid idealizing the possibility of change through language. Pinter cannot exorcise from the play a spectral faith in linguistic power. Pinter's decision to write the play in the first place indicates that his political interests cannot allow him to remain silent. He may not know exactly what to say, but he must convey the heinousness of such oppression.

An interview with Pinter upon his return from Turkey may further illustrate this point. He says:

I believe there's no chance of the world coming to other than a very grisly end in the next twenty-five years at the outside. Unless, God, as it were, finally speaks. Because reason is not going to do anything. Me writing *One For the Road,* documentaries, articles, lucid analyses, Avrell Harriman writing in the *New York Times,* voices here and there, people walking down the road and demonstrating. Finally it's hopeless. There's nothing one can achieve. Because the modes of thinking of those in power are worn out, threadbare, atrophied. Their minds are a brick wall. But still one can't stop attempting to try to think and see things as clearly as possible.

Here, too, Pinter cannot resolve his political concerns with his ambivalence towards language: the situation is hopeless, yet he continues to write. In *Mountain Language,* then, we not only witness an oppressed people in crisis but a playwright in crisis as well,

who even identifies with his victims' separation from linguistic power. Language cannot communicate or bring about political change, yet something must be said. We are headed for selfdestruction, and Pinter clearly doubts the written word's ability to stop such an end. As in the play, during this interview, Pinter invokes the "voiceover" through his parenthetical reference to the divine, the ultimate "voice-over," the supreme "disembodied voice," which he hopes will speak, like his characters, out of the darkness.

Source: Ann C. Hall, "Voices in the Dark: The Disembodied Voice in Harold Pinter's *Mountain Language*," in *Pinter Review: Annual Essays 1991,* 1991, pp. 17-22.

Topics for Further Study

Create a "Pinteresque" conversation between two people that employs language techniques similar to those found in Pinter's works.

Read another play by Pinter and write a paper comparing its style and themes to that of *Mountain Language.*

Research Pinter's political writings, especially noting his critique of British government. Do you think he was making a statement about Britain in the play? Why or why not?

Investigate the lives of the Kurds. Why did the Turkish government ban their cultural practices? Did the Kurds give up their culture or find ways to hide expressions of their tradition? Explain.

Compare and Contrast

1930s: In the new republic of Turkey, president Mustafa Kemal Ataturk works hard to "Europeanize" his people, including the adoption of surnames and giving women the right to vote. This change also includes the abolishment of religion within Turkey, which greatly affects Kurds.

1980s: Torn by internal strife, Turkey's Council of National Security seeks to restore public order through the capture of terrorists, the confiscation of large caches of weapons, and a ban on political activity. A state of emergency is declared in 1987 to deal with the uprising the of the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK).

Today: The number of deaths from terrorism drops significantly as Turkey seeks involvement with the European Union. A state of emergency still exists in the six southeastern states that are native to Kurds.

1930s: Theater sees enormous growth in Turkey after the formation of the republic. The first Children's Theater is opened. *The Halkevleri* (people centers), established by the State, play a large role in the spread and development of theater through publications, tours, and courses.

1980s: Drama continues to be popular in Turkey as more theaters open all over the country.

Today: The Turkish government is trying to provide financial support to private theaters in the interest of preserving artistic expression, but this backing is not regulated and is therefore subject to political whim.

1930s: A latinized Turkish alphabet is now the basis of the official written language of Turkey, a nation recently assembled from the remains of the Ottoman empire and including a variety of ethnic groups.

1980s: The constitution adopted in 1982 preserves democratic government and protects basic human rights, including freedom of expression, thought, and assembly.

Today: Twenty percent of Turkey's population is ethnically Kurdish; the remaining eighty percent is Turkish. Ninety-nine percent of the population is Muslim. Turkish is the official language, but Kurdish, Arabic, Armenian, and Greek are also spoken.

Further Study

Armstrong, Raymond, *Kafka and Pinter Shadow-Boxing: The Struggle between Father and Son,* Palgrave, 1999.

Armstrong provides a fascinating look at Kafka's influence on Pinter's plays.

Gale, Steven H., ed., *The Films of Harold Pinter,* SUNY Series, Cultural Studies in Cinema/Video, State University of New York Press, 2001.

This volume contains essays by ten film scholars on Pinter's screenplays, including *Lolita, The Remains of the Day, and The French Lieutenant's Woman.*

Gussow, Mel, *Conversations With Pinter,* Grove Press, 1996. Gussow, a *New York Times* drama critic, collects a series of interviews he conducted with Pinter between 1971 and 1993 on the nature of Pinter's work.

Taylor, John Russell, "Harold Pinter," in *British Writers:* Supplement I, edited by Ian Scott-Kilvert, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1987, pp. 367-82.

Taylor presents a thematic study of Pinter's earlier plays.

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Kennedy, Douglas, "Breaking the Silence," in *New Statesman & Society*, Vol. 1, No. 21, October 28, 1988, pp. 38-39.

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Spencer, Charles, "An Interminable Slog through Pinter's Politics," in *Daily Telegraph,* June 28, 2001.

BOOKRAGS

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Drama for Students (DfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's□For Students□ Literature line, DfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on □classic□ novels

frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of DfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of DfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of □classic□ novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in DfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by DfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an □at-a-glance□ comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

DfS includes □The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,□ a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Drama for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the DfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the DfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Drama for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Drama for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from DfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

□Night.□ Drama for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from DfS (usually the first piece under the □Criticism□ subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Drama for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of DfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Drama for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

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Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

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