

Politics in Harold Pinter's One for the Road

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Abstract

Pinter's play One for the Road (1984) is considered one of his important plays because it focuses on political issues, which he has not presented overtly before. Generally speaking, Pinter's early plays describe man's existential fear of an unnamed danger which might be represented by an intruder who invades the characters' solitude, threatens their peace, and brings their hidden fears to the surface. Pinter began to write political plays as a result of his political attitudes and his involvement in political activities over the last three decades.

Pinter's One for the Road deals with the oppressive and authoritarian operations of state power. This play and Pinter's political plays which followed it, like Mountain Language (1988), Party Time (1991), and Ashes to Ashes (1997) were greeted by reviewers and critics alike as signaling a shift in his career and showing his concern with the more public terrain of politics.

In One for the Road, Pinter presented a character that is accused of an unnamed crime by an unnamed government and that is exposed to physical and psychological torture. Through the play, Pinter criticized modern political systems which he accused them of practicing similar ways of torture.

The present study throws light on Pinter's One for the Road as a political play. Besides, it explores Pinter's political views and how they contributed to making a shift in his theatrical career. Part one of the study deals briefly with Pinter's early plays. Part two deals with his political activism and part three is an elaborate discussion of Pinter's One for the Road as a political play.

السياسة في مسرحية هارولد بنتر ادهم للطريق

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الخلاصة

تعتبر مسرحية بنتر ادهم للطريق (1984) احدى مسرحياته المهمة لانها تركز على القضايا السياسية التي لم يطرحها بشكل علني مسبقا وبشكل عام فان مسرحيات بنتر الاولى تصف الخوف الوجودي للانسان من خطر غير محدد وهذا الخطر قد يتمثل بشخص دخيل يفتح كيان الانسان ويهدد احساسه بالسلام ويثير مخاوفه، وقد بدأ بنتر بكتابة مسرحياته السياسية نتيجة لأرائه السياسية ولنشاطاته السياسية خلال العقود الثلاث الماضية. وتدور مسرحية بنتر حول الاجراءات القمعية والتعسفية للسلطة الحاكمة وقد استقبلت هذه المسرحية والمسرحيات التي اعقبها مثل لغة الجبل (1988) ووقت الحفلة (1991) والرماد الي الرماد (1997) ترحيبا من قبل النقاد لانها تشير الى انتقاله في نشاطه المسرحي والى بداية اهتمامه بلقضا السياسية العامة. وتدور المسرحية بموضوع الدراسة حول شخص يتهم بجريمة لم يتم الاشارة اليها في المسرحية ويكون الاتهام موجها من قبل حكومة لم يتم الاشارة اليها ايضا ويتعرض الشخص الى تعذيب جسدي ونفسي ومن خلال المسرحية ينتقد بنتر الانظمة السياسية الحالية ويتهمهم بممارسة اجراءات قمعية مماثلة. تسلط الدراسة الحالية الضوء على مسرحية بنتر ادهم للطريق كمسرحية سياسية وكذلك تستكشف الدراسة آراء بنتر السياسية وكيف اسهمت هذه الآراء في احداث نقلة في نشاطه المسرحي، ويسلط الجزء الاول من الدراسة الضوء باختصار على مسرحيات بنتر الاولى بينما يسلط الجزء الثاني من الدراسة الضوء على نشاطات بنتر السياسية اما الجزء الثالث من الدراسة فيتعلق بمسرحية بنتر ادهم للطريق كمسرحية سياسية.

Introduction

- Harold Pinter's Early Plays

Harold Pinter is one of the influential playwrights in the world. He was born in 1930 at Hackney, East London.¹ His family suffered like many other families, because of the outbreak of World War II. This traumatic experience influenced Pinter's anti-war writing and contributed to the shaping of his political attitudes. Pinter and his family were evacuated to the country because of the war. It was hard for Pinter to leave his house and to adapt himself to a new way of life. He experienced a sense of insecurity by his removal from his house which was reflected in the plays, the sketches, and the poems which he wrote

Pinter showed his condemnation of the war when he was eighteen years old. He was called "a conscientious objector."² He said, "I was aware of the suffering and of the horror of war, and by no means was I going to subscribe to keeping it going. I said no."³ This incident reflects Pinter's independent attitudes concerning politics which developed later on and it also reveals the radical stance that has characterized his literary career and political activities during the last three decades.⁴

In Pinter's early plays like The Room (1957), The Birthday Party (1958), A Slight Ache (1958), The Dumb Waiter (1957), The Caretaker (1959), The Dwarfs (1960), Monologue (1970), No Man's Land (1974) and Victoria Station (1982), Pinter tried to

Create an air of mystery and uncertainty. The situations

Involved are always very simple and basic, the language which the characters use is an almost uncannily reproduction of everyday speech lined, in this respect Pinter, far from being the least realistic dramatist of his generation, is arguably the most realistic and yet in these ordinary surroundings lurks mysterious terrors and uncertainties- and by extension, the whole external world of everyday realities is thrown into question. Can we ever know the truth about everybody or anything? Is there any absolute truth to be known?⁵

Pinter's early plays "all take place in confined surroundings, in one room in fact, which represents for their protagonists at least a temporary refuge from the others (it is tempting, but not really necessary, to see it in terms of Freudian symbolism as a womb-substitute)⁶. The characters in these plays seek protection in these rooms. Danger comes from outside, from an outsider whose presence disturbs their comfort and "any intrusion can be menacing, because the elements of uncertainty and unpredictability the intruder brings with him is in itself menacing."⁷

In Pinter's plays The Collection (1961), The Homecoming (1966), The Lover (1963), Old Times (1970) and Betrayal (1978), he turned from writing plays which present outside threats and stresses which are inflicted upon the individual to writing plays which presented the effects of sexual consciousness, which came as a result of the increasing importance given to female's role in any human relationship. In these plays, he portrayed male's and female's attempts to cope with the change of the female's role in society. The female in these plays is no longer submissive and inhibited by the traditional role of women in society. She becomes domineering.⁸

In 1984 Pinter began a new period in his career as a playwright. His plays One for the Road (1984), Mountain Language (1988), and Party Time (1991) describe the oppressive and cruel operations of state power. These plays mark a shift in Pinter's writings from writing plays which describe characters that withdraw from the outer world into a private one in which they are exposed to threats from an outside intruder, to writing plays which are concerned with political issues. Although one can see political aspects in his early plays

which appear in the characters' struggle for domination and their attempts to marginalize the others, these political aspects were not overt. Pinter's main concern in his early plays was the description of the existential fear which the characters feel. Though his early plays do not criticize political systems or international wars, the political aspects of these plays appear through Pinter's description of the relationship of the individuals, the relationship between an individual and an organization, and the power struggle for preserving the individual's identity in a world which is full of threat. In his late plays, the struggle for domination which one finds in his early plays extends from the personal side to the public side and the political aspects are more evident as a result of his attitudes towards wars against innocent people, the corrupted political systems, the violations of human rights, and the exploitation of people all over the world. His plays such as Mountain Language (1988), One for the Road (1984), Party Time (1991) and Ashes to Ashes (1996) are all about the political issues which occupied his mind during this period.

Pinter's political activism

Pinter did not only use his plays to expose the existing social problems and to show the bad consequences of such social problems, but he also participated in social activities to protest against the policies of the western countries. He, "in his last phase of life established himself as an outspoken political activist who is observed in his political plays and war poetry."⁹ Pinter's interest in political issues began to develop before writing political plays. He expressed his reaction towards the corrupted political systems courageously in an interview "I'll tell you what I really think about politicians. The other night I watched some politicians on television talking about Vietnam. I wanted very much to burst through the screen with a flame-thrower and burn their eyes out and their balls off and then inquire from them how they would assess this action from a political point of view."¹⁰ His participation in political activities came as a result of his belief that the individual as well as society is responsible to change everything which is bad and corrupted. Penelope Prentice points out that "The year 1984 represented a public turning point for Pinter when he visited Turkey at the request of PEN to intervene on behalf of academics being held as political prisoners."¹¹

Pinter publically showed his pacifism, his concern for the human suffering, and the violation of the human rights and his

condemnation of the political systems. Besides, he was "a supporter of the British Anti-Apartheid Movement (1959-1994)."¹² Penelope Prentice points out that

During the decades of the late eighties and nineties, Pinter started a political campaign for Nuclear Disarmament and Amnesty International, later he joined the International Committee for the Defense of Salman Rushdi, the British Defense and Aid Fund for Southern Africa petitioning for the freedom of Nelson Mandela. He also campaigned for the freedom of many other political prisoners including Vladimir Bukovsky, Abbas Cheblak and Mordechai Vanunu.¹³

Besides, he condemned the brutalities of the Intifada. Yet, in his Nobel Prize Speech he said: "I would be very irritated with myself if I said I was a political writer."¹⁴ He believed that his work is not didactic stressing the fact that his work has been from the beginning "anti-authoritarian."¹⁵

Part of Pinter's political attitudes was his condemnation of the American policy in Salvador, in his article "The U S and Salvador" which was published in The Observer in 1993, referring to the US cruel practices there which included "skinning alive, castration and

dismembering, " ¹⁶ Pinter was not only criticizing the American intervention in Salvador, but he criticized the American policy in the wide world generally. He believed that the U S has done really well since the end of the Second World War. It has exercised a sustained, systematic, remorseless and quite clinical manipulation of power worldwide, while masquerading as a force for universal good. ¹⁷

As it has been pointed earlier, one of the reasons behind Pinter's involvement in political activities was his condemnation of the cruelty and the inhumanity of those who are representatives of authority and his sympathy for their victims . He points out that " It's quite impossible to cease to inflict pain. One's very presence inflicts pain. I think there is no end to the respect one must give to other people." ¹⁸ What disturbs Pinter most was the violence which the representatives of authority inflict on their victims. In this context Prentice points out that Pinter

takes that most disturbing area of human interaction as his subject and dramatizes insights into its root causes in the human psyche and action, exploring what may be possible to awaken and change in ourselves and in others. He also appreciates how changing what is darkest and most destructive may also require changing what is most pleasurable and productive- the way we love. ¹⁹

One of the important reasons for Pinter's involvement in politics was his suffering during his childhood and the deep-rooted fear which he felt . The traumatic experience of the holocaust and World War II influenced his political orientations. Prentice points out that Pinter started his career as a dramatist

out of the ashes of World War II to light a way for others in the twenty-first century . He transformed childhood war trauma, terror, loneliness, and rage into courage and compassion to become a fearless conscience of the world. No other Western dramatist better understands causes of human violence or dramatizes conflict with such far reaching, illuminating insight to confront and resolve it. He deploys his global fame to question received ideas of power and responsibility everywhere. ²⁰

Pinter's biographer Michael Billington pointed out that

What is commendable about Pinter is that his political anger gets more, not less, intense with the years. In his mid-sixties, by which time most people have retreated into private life, he seems to feel the pain of the world more acutely than ever. ²¹

He showed his protest against certain issues in which he believed that Britain and the west were responsible for the suffering of people all over the world. Moreover, he believed that the U S played the main role in directing the west countries to have similar attitudes. He pointed out that "The United States supported and in many cases engendered every right wing military dictatorship in the world after the end of the Second World War." ²² Furthermore, Pinter unleashed his anger on the United States after it invaded Iraq in

2003. He believed that the invasion of Iraq was " a bandit act, an act of blatant terrorism, demonstrating absolute contempt for the concept of international law."²³Pinter's political orientations are reflected in his political plays such as One for the Road which is discussed in this paper.

Politics in Pinter's One for the Road

Pinter's One for the Road made a shift in Pinter's career as a dramatist because in the nineties he began to write plays which were overtly dealing with politics. In an interview Pinter said that he "wanted to get out in the world,"²⁴ which shows his desire to write about the political issues which he is most concerned about.

The play was written in 1984. It is divided into four short scenes. Pinter pointed out that the idea of the play emerged after a conversation at a London cocktail party. He asked two Turkish women what they thought about political repression in their country and he was amazed by their answers:

They said "Oh, well it was probably deserved.
They were probably Communists. We have to protect ourselves against Communism." I said, "When you say 'probably' what kind of facts do you have?"
They of course had no facts at their fingertips. "But what do you have to say about torture?" I asked.
"Oh, you're a man of imagination," I said "Do you mean it's worse for me than for the victims ?" They gave another shrug and said, " Yes, possibly."
Whereupon instead of strangling them, I came back immediately, sat down, and it's true, started to write One for the Road.²⁵

The playwright provided a realistic atmosphere for the play. He placed the action in a non-specific setting, where a character is accused of an unnamed crime by an unnamed government. By deliberately making the events of the play take place in a non-specific setting, Pinter made the play reflect the procedures which any government followed in the past or the present when that government investigates people. By generalization, Pinter accused any government and created the tension of unexpected threat. Dilek Inan points out that in this play " space is unspecified, deliberately unlocalised; it is global, because Pinter did not want to reduce the play's meaning to certain countries, but rather he integrated borders and boundaries in an alarming, vast, incomprehensible world."²⁶

In this setting , Pinter presents the character of Victor. His clothes are torn and it is evident that he has been exposed to torture. In the first scene, Nicolas, who represents an ambiguous political investigator, uses various ways in interrogating Victor, his wife Gila, and their son Nick. In this scene Nicolas is not focusing in his interrogation with Victor on the nature of his crime as much as he focuses on instilling fear within Victor. Nicolas behaves as if the existence of the victim was an offence, something which he should get rid of. Thus, Nicolas is a representative of the dictatorial political systems, which Pinter stood against. In this respect, Pinter said in an interview: " There is no such a thing as an offence, apart from the fact that everything is-Their very life is an offence , as far as the authorities go."²⁷ In fact, what Nicolas condemns is not a crime which Victor has committed, rather, it is Victor's attempts to impose his own individuality in a world in which everyone should conform to the rules of the state. In this context, Austin Quigley pointed out that in One for the Road. Pinter reveals "the procedures by which political imperatives can produce attempts to reduce individuality to mere enmity."²⁸ Thus, Victor's longing for imposing his individuality is walled in by Nicolas, who is determined and oppressive.

In the play, the victims of this unspecified abusive political system are exposed to torture, their house is vandalized. But violence is kept off stage and is referred to by the characters throughout the play. Varun Begley points out that

One for the Road refrains from depicting torture and focuses instead on purposeless, digressive conversations at torture's periphery. Despite its apparent realism, the play's links to real violence remain equivocal. Again, Pinter's subject is the presentation of violence; the play exposes aggressions inscribed in speech, intimations of violence deprived of spurious visible consummation.²⁹

Nicolas employs verbal rather than physical torture in which he "conjoints erotic and political violence in the language of fantasy."³⁰ In the opening scene, Nicolas speaks to Victor: "Hello : good morning. How are you? Let's not beat about the bush. Anything but that. D'accord? You're a civilized man. So am I. Sit down."³¹ Nicolas's words reflect his absolute power, which he imposes on his victim. In this scene, Pinter creates an atmosphere of ambiguity, because Nicolas does not tell Victor who he is or what he represents. This sense of ambiguity and evasiveness arouse fear in the heart of his victims. By doing so, Nicolas exposes the various kinds of the cruelty and the injustice of the political systems through language. In this respect Inan points out that the language which is used by the interrogator is "a diseased language that causes nausea both for the abused and the abuser."³² Victor is not only exposed to physical torture but he is exposed to psychological torture, which is inflicted on him through the oppressor's use of language. In fact, Nicolas's language "paralyses Victor. But the torturer too becomes more and more mixed up, he estranges and deranges language to create terror to the point where he stands on the border of madness himself."³³

In scene one, Nicolas addresses Victor by asking him :

What do you think this is? It's my finger.
This is my big finger. And this is my little finger.
This is my big finger and this is my little finger.
I wave my big finger in front of your eyes. Like
this. And now I do the same with my little finger. I
can do absolutely anything I like. Do you think I'm
mad? My mother did. *He laughs.*³⁴

waving his fingers, though a simple act, gives Nicolas joy. It shows that he enjoys his absolute power and that he believes that he is acting for his country legitimately and properly. He wants to be loved and respected. The language that he uses here is an expression of dominance which is driven from his sense of legitimacy and authority and from his conviction that he speaks for a national consensus. Nicolas "portrays himself as one acting on behalf of a unified group against a lone dissenter, and the existence of that large unity suffices to convert the dissenter into traitor."³⁵ He addresses Victor saying: "We are all patriots, we are as one. We all share a common heritage. Except you, apparently. Pause. I feel a link, you see, a bond. I share a commonwealth of interest. I am not alone. I am not alone."³⁶ The repetition of the phrase "I am not alone" reflects Nicolas's desire to emphasize the legitimacy of his actions. He wants to emphasize the idea that what he is doing is justified socially and that Victor is condemned by society.

One of the important strategies which Nicolas uses to subjugate his victim during the interrogation is his use of language. Nicolas's language is violent but there are certain lines which are poetic. Sometimes his "brutality is matched by fantasies of landscape, too."³⁷ He tells Victor "I do love other things, apart from death. So many things. Nature, trees, things like that. A nice blue sky blossom."³⁸ Sometimes his language is metaphoric, ironic, and

poetic.³⁹For example, he compares his dreadful job to a cricket game. He tells Victor, "I chat away, friendly, insouciant, I open the batting, as it were, in a light hearted, even carefree manner, while another waits in the wings, silent, introspective, coiled like a puma."⁴⁰Through his use of metaphoric language, Nicolas describes the political system he belongs to and the cruel and silent operations and procedures which they used with their victims. In this context, Peter Hall comments on Pinter's language in his mid-period drama, saying that Pinter's vocabulary is all the time hostile and violent, whose characters act "as if they were all stalking round a jungle, trying to kill each other but trying to disguise from one another the fact that they are bent on murder."⁴¹This can be seen clearly in the way in which Nicolas interrogates his victims. Besides, during the process of interrogation, Nicolas gives the impression that he is not seeking any kind of information or confession from his victims as much as he is enjoying torturing his victims psychologically.

Furthermore, while Nicolas uses language to exert more oppression on his victims, he gives a justification for his behavior. He believes that he represents the divine power of God. He says: "I run the place. God speaks through me. I am referring to the Old Testament God, by the way, although I'm a long way from being Jewish. Everyone respects me here. Including you, I take it? I think that is the correct stance."⁴²By connecting himself with God, Nicolas reveals his egocentric personality which is connected with position which is socially and politically important.

In the play, Nicolas tells Victor, "Do you love death? Not necessarily your own. Others. The death of others. Do you love the death of others, or at any rate, do you love the death of others as much as I do? Pause." ⁴³ Nicolas's reference to death is one of the strategies which he utilizes in the process of the interrogation for the sole purpose of attaining blind obedience. It is similar to the strategy which he has used earlier of linking himself to the divine power. His purpose of using these strategies is to instill fear in his victim and to control him.

The process of interrogation which Nicolas follows reflects the conflict of "power and powerlessness, between voice and voicelessness."⁴⁴Nicolas tries to impose his power on his victim who remains quiet most of the time. Victor's personality is entirely different from Nicolas's. Victor is an intellectual man and a father of a family. The reasons for his torture, according to Nicolas, is that he is not a patriot. For that reason Nicolas believes that Victor should be excluded from society and he should be deprived of his civil rights . It is clear that Victor could no longer endure the psychological pressure which he is exposed to and he is finally defeated after being confronted with the brutality of Nicolas. In the final scene in the play, Victor is dumb because his tongue has been cut out :

Nicolas: I can't hear you.

Victor: It's my mouth.

Nicolas: Mouth?

Victor: Tongue.

Nicolas: What's the matter with it?

*Pause.*⁴⁵

It is evident that the reason for Victor's torture is his intellectual and non-conformist political attitudes and his critical views concerning the state's values which a dictatorial regime would consider as necessary to protect the state. In this aspect, Nicolas becomes a representative of all politicians, who use language as one of the strategies to control their victims. In Pinter's 2005 Nobel Prize acceptance speech, he described the politicians who are mainly interested in power rather than truth hence they maintain the state of ignorance of the people:

Political language , as used by politicians, does not venture into any of this territory since the majority of politicians , on the evidence available

to us, are interested not in the truth but in the power and in the maintenance of that power. To maintain that power, it is essential that people remain in ignorance, that they live in ignorance of the truth, even the truth of their own lives.⁴⁶

Nicolas behaves typically like these politicians mentioned in Pinter's speech. He wants to maintain power over his victims and to keep them ignorant of the truth.

During the process of Interrogation with Victor, Nicolas refers to the rape of Victor's wife. By doing so, Nicolas wants to humiliate Victor and to break all his defenses. But Nicolas also reveals his desire to be loved by Victor's wife when he tells him "I think your wife is. Beginning. She is beginning to fall in love with me." ⁴⁷ But this is not the truth, because "If there is any victory for Gila and Victor in the play, it may remain in Gila's unspoken love and respect for her husband which Nicolas cannot wrest from Victor." ⁴⁸ Before the end of scene one, Victor asks Nicolas to kill him. This reflects Victor's extreme despair which comes as a result of the pressure which Nicholas exerted over him.

In scene two, Nicolas begins to interrogate Nicky, Victor's seven-year old son who appears for the first and last time. In this scene, Nicolas affirms his own identity as the cruel interrogator who has appeared in the first scene. He interviews the boy in the same way that he does with the adults. The interview seems like a psychological game which aims at instilling fear in the child. Nicolas asks Nicky "Do you like your mommy and daddy? Pause. Why?"⁴⁹Nicky fearlessly asks Nicolas "Where's mummy?"⁵⁰When Nicolas asks him if he likes to be a soldier, he replies "I don't mind."⁵¹His answer shows that the child is "in no way inculcated by his parents' political views."⁵²When Nicolas chides Nicky for spitting at, kicking, and attacking the soldiers who have come to arrest his family, Nicky challenges Nicolas more than his father does in the first scene and responds with childish honesty "I didn't like those soldiers." ⁵³ Nicolas answers him "They don't like you either, my darling."⁵⁴ Prentice argues that "'darling' a term of endearment, here ominously conveys the child's death sentence."⁵⁵

In scene three, Nicolas violently interrogates Gila, Victor's wife and Nicky's mother. She is exposed to physical and psychological torture before the beginning of the interrogation. As he has done earlier, Nicolas uses violent language to bring Gila down. In this way, his violent language becomes as powerful and operative as the offstage physical cruelty. He asks Gila how she has met Victor, and when, she answers, at her father's, Nicolas unleashes his rage at her: "Your father? How dare you?"⁵⁶He praises her father, describing him as a patriotic man. This shows his indignation against Gila because by marrying Victor she embraces values which are different from her father's. His language implies that she is to be punished for making this mistake.

When he asks her about who might be upstairs, she replies "no nons"⁵⁷His question reveals that she has been exposed to different kinds of torment before she comes to the interrogation, her answer shows that she "stands her ground without cowering before his verbal onslaught."⁵⁸ When he says to Gila, "You're of no interest to me. I might even let you out of here in due course. But I should think you might entertain us all a little more before you go.Blackout."⁵⁹His statement represents a kind of threat to Gila which increases her fear and the blackout allows the audience to visualize what is going to happen to Gila. Finally, he tells her that she encourages her son to behave badly with the "soldiers of God."⁶⁰

In the fourth and final scene, Nicolas interrogates Victor again. Prentice points out that in the final scene of the play, Victor is totally defeated for "so complete is the violation inflicted upon him and his wife."⁶¹ Nicolas tells Victor,

We can have a first class brothel upstairs, on the sixth floor chandeliers, the lot. They'll suck you in and

blow you out in little bubbles . Their daddies are in our
business . Which is, I remind you, to keep the world
clean for God.⁶²

This speech shows that Nicolas wants to convince himself that the torture which his victim receives is for "a higher cause and gives transcendent meaning to his life."⁶³ According to Nicolas, there is nothing that he has done or said that makes him feel guilty or brings him any sense of remorse. On the contrary, he believes that he is serving his country in the best way possible.

At the end, Victor and Gila are released. Nicolas tells Victor "You can go(Pause)You can leave. We'll meet again. I hope. I trust we will always remain friends. Go out. Enjoy your life. Be good. Love your wife."⁶⁴ Nicolas's words may give a hope to his victims but in fact , they are not. On the contrary, what he says gives a gloomy picture of what is awaiting them. Then he tells Victor that his wife will be joining him in about a week. These words imply that they will be under threat for the rest of their lives.

When Victor asks about his son, Nicolas says, "Your son? Oh, don't worry about him. He was a little prick."⁶⁵ Prentice argues that "The simple past tense makes unnecessary explicit statement of the child's death, which is made all the more horrifying by omission."⁶⁶ It seems that the child's death comes as a result of his courageous behavior with Nicolas and the soldiers. This makes Nicolas believe that the child might represent a potential threat to the state in the future and he orders the soldiers to kill him. What is interesting about the murder of Nicky is that he was killed although he has not committed any crime . On the other hand, Nicolas has committed a horrible crime, but he is not punished for his actions. On the contrary, perhaps he might be praised by the state because his leaders might think that he is serving his country in the best way possible.

Though Nicolas does not kill the child himself, he orders his soldiers to kill him . In fact, all violent actions are done off stage and the audience comprehends the horror of the situation through Pinter's use of violent language. D. Keith Peacock argues that "in this play the violence remains off stage; its threat and results are, nevertheless, very clearly represented by the physical condition of the detainees who have evidently undergone torture."⁶⁷

The play does not have a happy ending, because Victor's tongue is cut, Gila is raped and is kept in the office to entertain the soldiers and the child is killed. Through this tragic end Pinter demonstrates the reality of the corruptive and abusive power. The play reveals Pinter's interest in political issues through exposing the violent practices of contemporary political systems. In an essay which is entitled "Eroding the Language of Freedom," Pinter points out that a political system is evaluated

not by what it says it is, or by what says it intends,
but by what it does. Because language is discredited
and because spirit and moral intelligence are fatally
undermined, the government possess care blanche
to do what it likes. Its officers can bug, break in, tap,
burgle, lie, slander, bully and terrorize with impunity⁶⁸

The play had a shocking effect on the audience. Susan Merritt describes the performance she saw: "several people walked out midway through performances of *One for the Road* that I attended in New York City and Portland, Oregon[...] apparently some could not tolerate the physical violence on stage."⁶⁹ By exposing violence, Pinter intends to make the audience aware of the dangers of the political powers which violate individual freedom in the name of patriotism. Furthermore, Pinter recognized that in addition to the horror which the audience feel , the actors face difficulty while they perform their roles. Pinter says that the actors: "found themselves in danger of being taken over by the characters. Because there's no escape once you're in there."⁷⁰

To sum up, in this play Pinter succeeds in presenting his political ideas. Throughout the play, the playwright condemns the abuse of power, state terrorism, cruelty, and torture. Pinter wants to convey the idea that what happens in the play could happen in any place in the world. By not mentioning the name of the country in which the events take place, he wants to give a universal message about the sadism of contemporary political systems.

Notes

1. Martin Esslin, Pinter: A Study of his Plays, (London: Eyre Methuen, 1977), P. 11.
2. Ibid., P.13.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
5. John Russell Taylor, Anger and After, (London: Methuen & Co Ltd., 1971), pp. 325-326.
6. Ibid., P. 326.
7. Ibid.
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