

同济外语学术论丛

流沙上的博弈

——哈罗德·品特早期戏剧研究

Pinter's Games on a Quicksand

孙琦 著

外语教学与研究出版社

FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING AND RESEARCH PRESS

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总序

凝结着同济外语学人辛勤劳作与智慧结晶的《同济外语学术论丛》即将陆续出版了。这套论丛不仅仅是近年来当代同济外语学人学术研究的成果汇聚，更是百年同济人文研究薪火相传的历史延续和见证。

同济大学人文教育与研究历经沧桑，源远流长。早在1914年，后来成为美学大师的宗白华入读同济医工学堂，1915年有了法政科毕业生。“五四”时期，同济人的文学创作和学术探讨更是颇具影响，如在“五四”前诞生的“少年中国学会”的活动中，魏时珍、宗白华等同济学生曾是《少年中国》月刊的主要撰稿人。1927年秋天，诗人殷夫考取同济大学德文补习科，半年后即翻译出裴多菲的名诗《格言》，成为当时的高材生。1936年，冯至和杨晦先后任教于同济，冯至任德文教授兼附中校长，40年代初西迁昆明时才转入西南联大。1945年，同济大学正式设立法学院。1946年，从四川返沪后即准备创建文学院，先扩理学院为文理学院，增设哲学、外国语文学、中国文学三系。1948年文理分院，文学院增设历史学系。至此，同济大学已构建起由理、工、文、法、医五大学院组成的综合性大学的完整框架体系，并聚集了一批在国内外有较大影响的人文社科学者，如中文系主任郭绍虞，哲学系主任熊伟，外文系主任陈铨，历史学系主任吴萍，法律系主任吴歧等。另外，章士钊、郑寿麟、杨一之、陈康、冯契、廖馥君等著名教授都曾执教于同济。

50年代初院系调整，同济大学文学院、法学院等先后转入复旦。外国语文学系最先于1949年迁入复旦，而后部分教师转至南京大学。经过这番院系调整，同济大学原有的文、理全部学科和医、机、电、船、水利等多种优势学科，连同一大批出类拔萃的人才全部调出。与此同时，同济大学也汇聚了国内多所院系土木建筑等的学科力量，成为我国规模最大的土木建筑等工程类高等学校。

多年来，同济大学的土木建筑在国内外一直保持其优势学科地位，但重建同济文科和医科始终是海内外同济人的一个夙愿。改革开放以来，同济大学实施恢复对德交往和综合性大学的发展战略，文科自然成为学校整体建设与发展的重要组成部分。

在这一大背景下，同济外语学科秉承“同舟共济、自强不息”之精神，脚踏实地，认真谋划，积极进取，1998年在原德语系、外语系的基础上组建外国语学院。近年来，在学校鼎力支持下，学院外引内促，全球招聘，贤才毕至，实力弥进。2006年，获批外国语言学及应用语言学二级学科博士授权点。2010年，又顺利通过外国语言文学一级学科博士点自审，至此形成了从本科到硕士再到博士、学术型学位和专业性学位兼备的、完整的学位培养体系。

辉煌同济，百年外语。自1907年同济德文医学堂德文科初创，1946年设立外国语言文学系，至1998年外国语学院成立，我们一路走来，承继传统，前贤后学，矢志不渝，为建设和发展同济外语奉献自己的绵薄之力。

与历史上蜚声学界的同济学人相比，当代同济外语学术研究的水平尚有一定差距，但我们抱定了以学科发展为目标，以弘扬学术为己任的宗旨，近年来随着学院各项工作步入正轨，努力建设与发展同济外语事业已成为当代同济外语学人的共识。《同济外语学术论丛》中的每一部著作都凝聚着作者们的心血、汗水与智慧，都是为实现再铸同济外语历史辉煌这一目标做出的奉献。我们在努力，我们在进步，相信这些成果会得到学界同行的接受和认可，也衷心希望各界学者对我们的工作给予批评、支持和帮助。

是为序。

马秋武
同济大学外国语学院院长、教授
2011年1月30日于外院汇文楼

PREFACE

One of the most important British playwrights in the later 20th century and the Nobel Prize laureate for literature in 2005, Harold Pinter, leaves his distinctive mark in the topography of the world theatrical landscape, which was in transition from the grim post-war silence to the cluttered post-modern voices. For his nearly half-century playwriting career, he had written a total of 32 plays from *The Room* and *The Birthday Party* in 1957 to *Remembrance of Things Past* in 2000. His 29 plays fall into three phases of different thematic focuses, respectively, “comedies of menace”, memory plays, and political plays. The book will focus its study on the plays of his first phase, the comedies of menace.

Manifested in the plays throughout his three phases, his idiosyncratic style is irreducibly *sui generis* so that an adjective lexis has to be coined out of his own name to represent his original dramatic discourse, Pinteresque. This word gets listed in the *Oxford Dictionary* with connotations for his combined use of high-fidelity quotidian language and oblique speech of ambivalence, gestures avoiding communication and endeavors dropsical with intentions, hollow words said and meanings unsaid. All the paradoxical overtones are more significant of his drama in relation to the consternation aroused by the mystic intrusion of those from the outside and the violent reflexes provoked out of those inside. All this solicits the commendation from Nobel Prize Committee on Pinter’s status, “Pinter has perforated conventionally realistic drama with taciturnity’s mystery.”

Between the silence of the depleted post-war wasteland and the multi-vocal forum of the post-modern world, Pinter studies the pathology of the

contemporary world and diagnoses it to be a prevalence of misgivings and insecurity developed in the absence of attestable authenticity of language and of people's unified identity. His philosophical supposition of the ambiguous nature of modern society marks a positive progress over the fatalistic post-war theories that describe the world as absurd and present a bleak prospect for modern people. So there has always been a dispute over whether he should be classified as one playwright of the Theater of the Absurd, cheek by jowl with Eugène Ionesco, Jean Genet, even Samuel Beckett, who, though Pinter evidently admires the latter, are diacritically the post-war generation under the influence of existentialism. The preliminary contention of this book starts by rectifying a wide-spread fallacy in the common reference to Pinter as a playwright of the Absurd. To argue against the classification, it rivets its thesis on the ground of Pinter's central theme of ambiguity in his drama, a theme asserting that the existential meaning of modern people is never fixed, but in the process of becoming. Pinter's characters demonstrate this by putting out all exertions to procure meanings for their own existence in the quicksand-like situations of fluidity and uncertainty. The particular dramatic action of his plays works its way forward with a concealed dynamic propelled by a function of the diverse individual forces, or "conflicting allegiances", in the word of Austin Quigley. In effect, the overtone of ambiguity, or the function of conflicting intentions in the motivating mechanism stands out as a hallmark of Pinteresque discourse throughout his three phases of playwriting, though the book, based on a doctoral thesis, is mainly concentrating on a study of Pinter's plays in the first phase. The innate uncertainties and the alternative scenarios they pose also stand as prerequisite for the games played by the characters as strategists.

Yet concluding Pinter's drama with the concept of ambiguity does not rule out the possibility of interpreting his plays with any lucidity. To do that, one primary task is to explore what are the odds available to the characters

to survive the dilemma of the drowning ambiguity. The book makes a major contribution in this sense by introducing “game theory” analysis into the study of Pinter’s characterization and offering a pragmatic insight into his plays.

First, it sets out to delineate the theatrical layout of Pinter’s drama in terms of time and space. Based on an inter-textual comparison between Beckett and Pinter, despite their common views on synchronicity of time, their different dramatic exegeses bear out the contention that Beckett regards time as being discontinuous and proposes that past is never to be recaptured; on the contrary, Pinter perceives time as an accumulative vessel in which past, present and future are stored. To Pinter, the past re-emerges sooner or later no matter where one hides away and it can be retrieved and reorganized in conformity with each person’s purpose. There is no way of proving the authenticity of the past; it is a creation born in negotiations among all those involved. “We model the past to respond to the demands of the present and to form our future.” The symbiotic attribute of the temporal context gets further materialized in the synergistic use of space, conspicuous in Pinter’s later stage setting and scene shifting. The lattice structure of time and space foregrounds the continual genesis of meaning as well as the relationship of symbiosis among Pinter’s independent-minded characters, which is the focus of Chapter Two.

The symbiotic exposition of time and place goes in harmonious terms with Pinter’s design of independent interdependence in his characterization. One myth about Pinter’s characters is that they tend to have more than one name in the plays and propose to be in different epithets by different characters. Given their volatile identities, they rely on inter-subjective institution to define their own identity in the light of specific situations, hence to set limit to their own solipsistic tendencies. To put it theoretically, they have to have their subjectivity objectified by others in their rapport. All readers must find that there are no real lone wolves, nor real strangers in

Pinter's plays. Each person is set in a matrix of power relationship and gains his/her identity in a battle of wit and will by virtue of a combination of diverse factors, including his own wish and his choice of strategy. The symbiotic relationships amongst characters hinge on the rational strategies of individual agents in the game-like interactions.

To support all the theses presented above, Chapter Three makes in-depth studies of three major plays of Pinter's first phase, *The Dumb Waiter*, *The Caretaker*, *The Homecoming*, to illustrate the relevant game paradigms decodable of the leading characters. In *The Dumb Waiter*, the self-annihilative nature of the two professional killers dooms themselves in a prisoner's dilemma as a result of their failure in communicating in spite of their long-standing partnership. The deviated strategic tenet of Davies in *The Caretaker* to drive a wedge between the brothers seals his destiny when he places himself at the sway of a zero-sum policy. In the champion example of the puissant Ruth in *The Homecoming*, she makes it to domineer the all-men jungle-like family with her iron-like mind-power, serenity, wisdom and especially her win-win principle of democratic morals. She embodies Pinter's faith in all-embracing love in tying a bond among independent individuals.

Chapter Four of the book concludes by elucidating the synergistic mechanism of motivations and strategies for Pinter's characters. The characters' strategic calculations and efforts are aimed at winning a better chance of surviving their dilemma and beyond that, achieving the maximal utility allowable for themselves. Nevertheless, they also know better than just heading towards their aim without regard for the possible retaliation they may elicit from others involved. In account of the chain reactions of one's initial decision, they have to strategize in speculation of possible moves or countermoves of others. Exemplified in Pinter's drama, some figures prove crude and parochial by appealing to physical or verbal violence in order to gain or maintain their power, and some shrewd in

dissembling their real motives but deficient in achieving them as consequence of their prime policy that is determined by their ethical priority, while others demonstrate themselves as sophisticated strategists with their developed wits in adopting strategies of tolerance and compassion that are found to be superior in the power games.

To provide a remedy to the modern pathology, Pinter initiates his soul-searching interrogations on us all by his superb dramatic clout in the whole range of moral issues with the advent of Goldberg and McCann in the seaside boarding house in *The Birthday Party*. The depth he explores in humanity endows his works with “uniquely strong and inspiring” “international and inter-human impact” for half a century.

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Introduction

“There are no hard distinctions between what is real and what is unreal, nor between what is true and what is false. A thing is not necessarily either true or false; it can be both true and false.”

Harold Pinter

On December 10, 2005, two months after the 75th birthday of Harold Pinter to the day, the chairman of Nobel Committee and member of the Swedish Academy, Per Wästberg, awarded the Nobel Prize for literature to the laureate of the year, Harold Pinter, who was absent from the ceremony for health reason. Per Wästberg said in the presentation speech in the name of the Academy, “Harold Pinter is the renewer of English drama in the 20th century. ‘Pinteresque’ is an adjective listed in the Oxford Dictionary. Like Kafka, Proust and Graham Greene he has charted a territory, a Pinterland with a distinct topography.” With due respect, Pinter sent his videotaped lecture, “Art, Truth & Politics,” to the awarding ceremony and this lecture proves to have made a bigger splash even than his prize winning itself because he finally let the dumb volcanoes lying low in his theatre explode and fume with outrage at an epitome of social injustice and foul play in the present world, the government of United States.

Since his first play was premiered in London, *The Birthday Party*, in 1957, until 2000 when Pinter wrote his last play, *Remembrance of Things Past*, and later pronounced his suspension of playwrighting, Pinter has totally written 29 plays that make his drama a landmark in the theatrical landscape

of contemporary British literature, “a Pinterland with a distinct topography”. He shines out in the British theatre of the second half of the 20th century through his whole-range devotions to constructing a new form of drama by challenging and subverting the decayed customs and morals that have perniciously seeped into the depth of people’s mind. The neologism of his name is given in honor of his courageous endeavor and also lent in credit for his revolutionary and pungent dramatic style. He “uncovers the precipice under everyday prattle and forces entry into the oppression’s closed rooms.”¹ His strategy to cut through the fragmented quotidian conversations carries us to approach the core of modern existential plight and the kernel of humanity. Therefore his works are noted for such an intrinsic attribute of universality that “at any given moment somewhere in the world your plays are reinterpreted by new generations of directors and actors,”² Wästberg addresses Pinter over the air. The interpretative interest in Pinter’s works is not confined to his audience, but prevails among the literary critics and students as well.

To review the most influential critical opinions on him, the author attempts to place Harold Pinter in a broader historical context of the modern British theater in justice to the major literary influences on his own playwriting. To contour his growth from the Depression childhood and conscientious objector youth to his repertoire acting career, his biographical history will also be briefed to bear out how his thematic choice of people’s gaming wisdom in strategic confrontations for his drama had been incubated in the course of his life. Ensuing the literature review, an apology for the organization of the book will be made at the end of the introduction.

1 See the press release of the Nobel Committee on October 13, 2005, on announcement of conferring the prize to Harold Pinter.

2 Quote from Wästberg’s presentation speech (<http://nobelprize.org/literature/laureates/2005/presentation-speech.html>), in which Wästberg thus addresses the delegate of Pinter who was absent from the presentation ceremony for the reason of health.

0.1 The Dramatic Setting for the Entrance of Harold Pinter

In an age of disillusionment, the British stage where Harold Pinter came on the scene, was preceded by a preliminary phase of British modernism, which is known as the theatre of ideas under the banner of George Bernard Shaw. British modernist theatre actually started in 1880 when Henrik Ibsen's *The Pillar of Society*, adapted by William Archer (1856–1924) under the title of *Quicksands*, was first staged in London. The show was as brief as a single matinee performance, but the quicksand started to flow in the British theatre. To the mid-1950s, a series of important theatrical events marks another watershed for contemporary British drama, Samuel Beckett's return to London with *Waiting for Godot* in August, 1955 and John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* in 1955. The *Anger and After* author John Russell Taylor says of the 1955/56 season, "one would have been quite justified in regarding the year as something very much like the end of an era."¹ This season is both an "end of an era" and a start of a new epoch as well, for it also heralds a second wave of British theatrical movement, the new drama or theatre defined by Hinchliffe in 1967, in which the hot-blooded young playwrights protested and experimented like those of the first phase. But many of them shot like meteors and dimmed out after a couple of decades though; only a few still glow like stars in the sky of the night. Harold Pinter emerged as one of them from obscurity and outlives as one of the few of lasting glamour. A study of Pinter necessitates a view of the soil in which a seed was sowed: the soil is the dramatic milieu in the 20th century England and the seed is the import of genesis from the European continent.

The Theatre of Ideas, or the drama of thought, named variedly, marks the beginning of a new century's theatrical quest of sincere truth and also

1 Quote from Tom Philips' "Fifty Years of British Theatre" (*Contemporary Review*, Gale Group, August, 2002).

sets the tone for modern British theater. As a watershed from the Romantic drama, Shaw made the manifesto to depart from the age-long story-telling tradition, "Drama is no mere setting up of the camera to nature; it is the presentation in parable of the conflict between man's nature and his environment; in a word, of problem."¹ As a practitioner of his own words, Shaw wrote problem plays featuring stage discussions, defensive confessions and long exhortations, and inverted expectations to fulfill his goal of writing "a play with a purpose", the idea of a thesis play, rather than a well-made play.² This dramatic discourse with lesser plotting and more political involvement, either explicit or implicit, in the stance of strong social conscience, less narrative and more polemical, started to run deep in most of the British contemporary plays as a new legacy.

After the Second World War, the young generation of British theatre artists became more assertive than consultative, more liberated than deliberative, more disillusioned than apprehensive, in their artistic crusades. Kenneth Tynan makes a famous assessment of the playwrights after the 1950s. He thinks that the dramatists of the post-war generation fall into two categories: "the hairy men—heated, embattled, socially committed

1 "The era" refers to the realist theatre in the beginning of the 20th century. Emerging out of the Victorian Age, that "age of ideals", as Lady Blacknell said in Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest*, the British literary world at the turn of the new 20th century entered an intractable age in which exploring the naked reality stripped of self-deception set the theme of the 20th century, and woke up to a growing and unflinching awareness of the futility of the creeds that had been anchored to the traditional morals and were unveiled to be false. Such a background offered the stage for such playwrights as George Bernard Shaw, Harley Granville Barker, John Galsworthy, Laurence Houseman, and W. B. Yeats. With their anti-establishment tendency, they recoiled from the mainstream middle-class and realized that the crude life of the grass-root class without unnecessary embellishments is closer to the prototype of human existence. These playwrights took kindly to the art of biting irony and sarcasm and were much influenced by the socialist thoughts, so George Bernard Shaw confessed that "Karl (Marx) made a man of me." This age also marks the British indispensable position in the "manifesto" phase of the international modern drama movement between 1880 and 1940, and its *conge* cleared the way for the generation of new dramatists like Pinter and Osborne. (何其莘, 1992: 420)

2 According to J. L. Styan, "Shaw believed that all great drama must teach." What preoccupies Shaw is not the "manufactured story", but the dilemma confronting the people in the real life. Shaw never pretends to hold his audience with an intrigue or keeps the long-craved-for solution to a problem to the last. See J. L. Styan's *Modern Drama in Theory and Practice Volume 1, Realism and Naturalism* (57–62) of his three-volume series on critical theories for modern theatre.