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'YOUR LANGUAGE IS FORBIDDEN': LANGUAGE NEGATION AS POLITICAL OPPRESSION IN PINTER'S MOUNTAIN LANGUAGE

Summary. This paper examines Harold Pinter's late play *Mountain Language* as a depiction of political oppression specifically rooted in linguistic oppression. The play presents a "mountain people" who have been forbidden to use their "mountain language" by a coercive state authority. The play contrasts the brutality of the officers and guards with the humanity (represented through two still-life 'tableau' scenes) of the victims, the "mountain people." The paper notes, however, that there is an unsettling linguistic twist to the play, in that the "mountain language" and the "language of the capital" are both English in performance. The paper suggests that this is partly motivated by Pinter's expressed desire to make the play disturbingly recognizable to western audiences, thus removing the spectator's or reader's ability to judge such oppressions as being exotic, irrelevant, or encountered only in distant unstable countries. The paper argues that Pinter's focus upon linguistic prohibition, linguistic discrimination, and linguistic denigration is rendered unexpectedly universal through the reliance of the text upon English as the medium for both the prohibited language and the language of authority.

Keywords: Harold Pinter; *Mountain Language*; linguistic prohibition; language policy; oppression.

Harold Pinter's 1988 play *Mountain Language* is one of the renowned dramatist's late, explicitly political plays. Eschewing the traditional 'Pinteresque' circumstances of confused and uncertain menace, in which two or three people manipulate one another in small suburban rooms, *Mountain Language*—along with the slightly earlier play *One for the Road* (1984)—examines the political violence that undergirds the apparent orderliness of many modern societies. In both plays Pinter uses a lack of geographical or linguistic specificity to generalize the dramas; they could be taking place in South American juntas, the mountains of Turkey, in Kandahar or, potentially, even in Chicago or Manhattan. What seems to motivate the dramatist is less a desire to indict a specific government or policy, but rather the urge to expose the variety of inhumane suppressions of individual rights that occur regularly, even in nominally democratic societies. Both plays are powerful, brief, and confront their audiences with a sense of complicity: the implication being that

the powerful are permitted to abuse their power because we moderate civilians tolerate these excesses. These people, Pinter insists, act in our name, and with our authority, or tacit compliance. They wear the uniforms we give them.

Mountain Language is a play about linguistic negation as a means of cultural negation. The drama focuses particularly upon the cultural value of language, and the enormous deprivation involved when people are forced to abandon or neglect their own tongue. Similarly, the play investigates the power relations inherent in having an enforced official language, particularly in regard to minority populations, in terms of the denial of justice. Pinter exposes, with a brutal clarity of purpose, the ways by which the powerful may deny justice—even deny access to justice—to minority populations based on linguistic oppression, negation, or invalidation. The word “brutal” in regard to this play is Pinter’s own, for in his Nobel Prize acceptance speech he refers to *Mountain Language* as “brutal, short and ugly” (Pinter, 2006, p. 3). It is a play of both aggression and defense; here, as Alina-Elena Rosca has noted more generally of Pinter’s plays, “Characters struggle to defend themselves against threats posed to their autonomy, to their territorial and psychological security and finally to their identity” (Rosca, 2009, p. 92). This paper therefore seeks to investigate how he conveys this critique of linguistic negation through the medium of performed language and seeks to understand the precise contours of his political and linguistic criticism.

The main actions of the play are easily described. *Mountain Language* is presented in four passages of roughly equal length, each corresponding to approximately 5–7 minutes of stage time. The entire play requires little more than twenty minute to half an hour of performance time, even allowing for Pinter’s characteristic pauses and silences. The scenes represent the transference of setting from outside the walls of a prison into the prison itself, to the hall outside a torture chamber, then back once more to the general areas of the prison. These four acts or chapters are entitled “A Prison Wall,” “Visitors Room,” “Voice in the Darkness” and “Visitors Room” again. There are almost no other details provided to establish a location, an era, or an empire; props are reduced to such basic items as a stick and a basket. The play is minimalist, in the sense that it is a concentration of location, event, and character, with minimal elaborations. Indeed, there are only eight characters in the play, most of whom are not identified by name – “Young Woman,”

“Elderly Woman,” “Sergeant,” “Officer,” “Guard,” “Prisoner,” “Hooded Man,” and “Second Guard.”

In the first segment of the play, “A Prison Wall,” the Elderly Woman and the Young Woman wait outside the prison, to visit someone who is the Elderly Woman’s son and the Young Woman’s husband. During the first section, they are confronted by the Sergeant and the Officer. In the second segment, “Visitors Room,” the Elderly Woman sits with a prisoner, the son, and both are berated by a guard. In the third segment, “Voice in the Darkness,” the Young Woman inadvertently enters a prison room that is forbidden to her—a corridor where she by chance sees a tortured prisoner. The Sergeant and the Guard here have apparently been tormenting a hooded man, who is likely the Young Woman’s husband. Finally, in the fourth segment, “Visitors Room,” the Elderly Woman and the Prisoner again sit together—he bloodied, presumably by the previous torture—and the guard informs them that they may speak their language until further notice: yet the Elderly Woman now cannot, or will not, speak her own language. The play ends here.

As has been noted above, the play has a deliberate lack of locational precision and specificity. It might transpire anywhere. Yet, as Mark Batty cautions, “He [Pinter] was keen to dismiss any notion of his recent plays functioning metaphorically, as now he was dealing in the documented reality of torture and abuse.” (Batty, 2005, p. 72). There can be little doubt, however, that the play is deliberately constructed to elide distinctions between the third and the first world, and between democracies and more overtly repressive states. Pinter provides almost no specific detail to locate the events of the play, other than that it involves a society in which the mountain people are denigrated by the more powerful people in the capital city. The play is commonly believed to have been primarily motivated by Pinter’s interest in the Turkish treatment of the Kurdish minority; as Nursen Gomceli notes, “having established themselves as the ‘outcome’ of Pinter’s close observation of the Turkish political scene in the 1980s, *One for the Road* and *Mountain Language* openly dramatize political oppression at different levels” (Gomceli, 2014, p. 158). In order to disrupt any contentment or placidity that western audiences may feel, however, the names of the characters are not exotic, but are shockingly common English names: Sara Johnson, Charley, Joseph Dokes. This creates a sense of unease and dislocation, as one does not usually

associate military decrees, political prisons, and torture cells with the Anglophone west. Pinter aims to shatter that western complacency. As Pinter’s biographer Michael Billington comments, “For all his protestations, I don’t think Pinter is literally equating England—or Britain—with Turkey. What he is trying to do in *Mountain Language* is shock us into a realization that there is no longer an automatic division between Them and Us; between morally bankrupt tyrannies and supposedly superior Western democracies. The play offers a bleak vision of the tendency towards the suppression of any views that contradict the prevailing orthodoxy. It also implies that there is an instinct inside all of us to banish, negate, or deny what we cannot comprehend” (Billington, 2007, p. 309). That is likely accurate, but it should be emphasized again that part of Pinter’s approach here utilizes the disturbing familiarity of what the audience observes; it may not be openly transpiring in the home countries of the English-speaking audience, but it is enabled in the proxy states of those countries.

What is first notable about the foregrounding of the language question in *Mountain Language* is simply the title; for a writer as widely renowned for linguistic preoccupation as was Pinter, it is notable that *Mountain Language* is his only play to mention language explicitly in the title itself (assuming that one excludes the absence of language, as invoked by the title of the play *Silence* from 1968). This alerts us as a viewing or reading community to focus particularly upon the role and function of language in the play, yet this banal observation conceals a more unexpected revelation in the play itself: we never hear the mountain language of the title spoken. More precisely, we hear the old woman speaking with a ‘strong rural accent,’ (Pinter, 2005, p. 258) but in perfectly understandable English. When in the final act the prisoner assures us that he is speaking the mountain language to his mother, it is clearly English. This apparently curious dramatic decision may have two different causes, both plausible and each complimentary to the other: 1) this means that the language forbidden in the play is never spoken on stage, thus illustrating the effectiveness of the linguistic suppression being enacted, and thus making the play disconcertingly monolingual, and 2) by having all spoken dialogue delivered in English, one has the dislocated sense of place, time, and culture mentioned previously.

The play begins with aggression, bureaucracy, and an absurdity. Outside the prison, the sergeant at the door asks the Young Woman three times "Name?" and receives the repeated reply, "We've given our names" (Pinter, 2005, p. 251). In a play this brief, it is worth noting that the very first six lines of the play already demonstrate a failure to communicate between these "mountain people" and the bureaucracy of the people oppressing them. As Austin Quigley observes, "the language of a Pinter play functions primarily as a means of dictating and reinforcing relationships" (Quigley, 1975, p. 52). The officer in charge then intervenes with the vulgar order "Stop this shit," (Pinter, 2005, p. 251) bringing in one of Pinter's convictions that coarse and crude language often coexist with violent and politically repressive individuals in positions of authority (the sergeant later calls the young woman a "fucking intellectual," comments on her "arse," and calls the husbands of the women "shithouses;" see also *One for the Road* where the oppressor Nicholas represents another exploration of the same phenomenon). The officer begins to pose a series of questions about the Young Woman standing with the Elderly Woman outside the prison. She is, however, intimidated by the situation, and offers only the short answers that 'a Doberman pinscher', 'a big dog' (Pinter, 2005, p. 252–253) bit the older woman's hand. Yet even this answer provokes the officer into a ranting, illogical demand for information that cannot be given: "Every dog has a name! They answer to their name. [...] Before they bite, they state their name. It's a formal procedure. They state their name and then they bite. What was his name?" (Pinter, 2005, p. 253–254). This insistence on an unprovided name cleverly and unexpectedly dehumanizes the two women, for they—like the police dogs—have names that the officer insists must be given if official action is to be taken. It is unanswerable, because it is determinedly illogical; yet as a series of statements, it cannot be contradicted with impunity, coming as it does from a person in authority.

Although these short initial encounters of the sergeant and the officer with the two women suggest themes to come, it is the formal declaration of the officer that establishes the crucial theme of the play to be political repression via linguistic oppression. He states, in full: "Now hear this. You are mountain people. You hear me? Your language is dead. It is forbidden. It is not permitted to speak your mountain language in this place. You cannot speak your language to your men. It is not permitted. Do you understand? You may

not speak it. It is outlawed. You may only speak the language of the capital. That is the only language permitted in this place. You will be badly punished if you attempt to speak your mountain language in this place. This is a military decree. It is the law. Your language is forbidden. It is dead. No one is allowed to speak your language. Your language no longer exists. Any questions?” (Pinter, 2005, p. 255–256). This is one of the richest monologues in Pinter’s late drama, and merits close attention.

First, it should be noted that nothing clearly provokes this monologue; the people outside are not speaking the mountain language and, indeed, the young woman answers his decree with the assertion “I do not speak the mountain language” (Pinter, 2005, p. 256). He implements a policy of linguistic negation and prohibition because it is in his power to do so, and it disadvantages those gathered outside the prison. Secondly, it is largely illogical, or at least inconsistent with itself. One has no need to forbid people to speak a “dead” language that “no longer exists.” Of course, here Pinter endeavors to unravel the simultaneous contempt and fear the officer has for the power of a language that he does not control. Yet the speech also moves rhetorically, with frightening ease, between statements of language prohibition and language elimination (“your language is forbidden”; “your language no longer exists”). It is not difficult to associate the potential fate of the people with that of their language, particularly given that they are identified immediately before this decree with the bald declarative statement “you are mountain people” and the only two concepts mentioned as being related to the “mountain” in the entire play are the “mountain language” and the “mountain people.” If the language is proclaimed dead, the people may not be far behind.

This passage clearly establishes the primary theme of the play as being political repression as imposed through linguistic prohibition. Yet it appears the Young Woman, and her husband, may not be these “mountain people” at all. She immediately affirms that she does not speak the mountain language, and the scene ends shortly thereafter when the officer concedes that her husband “doesn’t come from the mountains. He’s in the wrong batch” (Pinter, 2005, p. 257). At this point in the play, it may theoretically be that this prisoner and his wife are not “mountain people,” and have been entirely innocently swept up in a misidentification. It may, however, also be that this husband and

wife are the urban relatives of a previous generation of "mountain people," probably including the Elderly Woman who accompanies the Young Woman, who seems to be the prisoner/husband's mother, and thus the Young Woman's mother-in-law. The fact that this couple is identifiable as not being "mountain people" has again two important consequences. Firstly, we recognize that this aggressive, condemnatory "military decree" is entirely arbitrary as a use of power; the young woman does not even speak the language or claims she does not. Secondly, it indicates the apparent effectiveness of such linguistic prohibition as a policy of cultural or political negation; the young couple are possibly ethnically "mountain people" who have perhaps forgotten or neglected the "mountain language" because it was, at the least, not advantageous or useful in the cities. This is a type of language pressure recognizable to members of traditional cultures who migrate to cities in which a different language is spoken.

We should also attend to the fact that this is the language of orders, of prohibition, and of declaration. There are no pauses for answers or replies because the whole intention of such speech is to prevent or invalidate any reply other than silent acquiescence. It also, of course, shows the illogic of state power as used against people. Seen from the point of view of the law—and presumably of this officer—the people must not use their language when speaking to the men, apparently to make monitoring their discussions in the prison easier. But the basic tactical value of making the prisoners and their wives and mothers speak the language of the capital (and, one assumes, of the government) almost immediately elides into the negation of the language itself: "Your language is forbidden. It is dead. No one is allowed to speak your language. Your language no longer exists."

Finally, before leaving this passage, we observe additionally the psychology of crudity being used to denigrate and dehumanize. This is nothing new, yet what is fascinating in Pinter's exploration is the way in which the crudity of a speaker is an almost default or automatic prophylaxis against recognizing another's humanity or equality. Consider the immediately precedent passage, in which the sergeant states of the prisoners, "Your husbands, your sons, your fathers, these men you have been waiting to see, are shithouses. They are enemies of the state. They are shithouses." (Pinter, 2005, p. 255). This is literal dehumanization; instead of being husbands,

fathers, or sons—the three main identities of most men—they are relegated to the category of objects, and spoken of with a vulgar word implying worthlessness. Notice also that the people being denigrated are not even present. The men being called “shithouses” cannot hear what is being said of them. It suggests that this is the automatic vulgarity and verbal aggressiveness of someone long accustomed not to listen to, or expect, objections or protests, and who instinctively addresses “mountain” people with verbal profanity and crudity.

The second scene of the play moves us inside the prison, a transition that has perhaps a transgressive symbolism value; we are now seeing behind the walls of what is usually concealed by those in authority. The scene begins with a guard watching the old woman speaking to her son, a prisoner, in what is evidently the “mountain language.” Yet this is perplexingly unclear—she speaks in what Pinter describes as “a strong rural accent,” yet the words are perfectly clear English: “I have bread—” (Pinter, 2005, p. 258). Here again Pinter unsettles the potential complacency of the audience by having the “mountain language” be essentially a rural English. Her remark is immediately interrupted with physical resistance from the guard, who “jabs her with a stick,” and gives the asyntactical order “Forbidden. Language forbidden.” (Pinter, 2005, p. 258). It is a powerful moment, in that the old woman is evidently going to speak accented English, but she makes no clear errors, while the guard automatically resorts to physical compulsion (he uses his stick before giving the command), and his language usage is reduced to basic, ungrammatical command: “Forbidden. Language forbidden.”

The guard then proceeds to order the prisoner to translate for his mother—“Tell her to speak the language of the capital” (Pinter, 2005, p. 258). But this instruction is met almost immediately by the information that “She can’t speak it” and “She doesn’t speak it,” which may be substantively different in semantic meaning. Of course, “can’t” and “doesn’t” are often colloquially used synonymously, yet the first assertion may mean that she lacks the ability to speak the language, whilst the second may be either 1) a conscious determination not to speak the language or 2) a reluctance for social or political reasons to speak the language. In either instance, she is identified for the audience as someone who does not speak the language of the capital,

despite the fact that she, the guard, and the prisoner are all speaking English, however varied by rural accent.

Part of Pinter's analysis of language questions in this second scene is the relentlessly aggressive language of the guard, who represents the power of the government. His speech is neither polite nor cultured, but is merely angry and repetitive: "Forbidden! Forbidden forbidden forbidden! Jesus Christ!" (Pinter, 2005, p. 259). He then asks the prisoner whether or not the old woman understands—note, he does not ask the old woman whether or not she understands; he is entirely working through translation at this point—and he proclaims that her lack of understanding is not his fault. In his logic, that is a correct assertion: there is a language of power, and she does not speak it, or apparently understand it. Yet it is also a gesture of power to insist upon one language being used, and to fault those who cannot use it.

Pinter then interjects the first of two strange interludes, in which the actors freeze as in a tableau, and the voices of several characters are heard. In this instance, it is the Elderly Woman's voice and that of her son, the prisoner. In this tableau, the guard cannot interrupt, and the dialogue is profoundly human. All the abuse has vanished, and the audience hears only a sympathetic family discussion. The Elderly Woman notes that "The baby is waiting for you," to which the prisoner replies, "Your hand has been bitten." She then states that "they are all waiting for you," but the prisoner again comments on the abuse his mother has suffered when her hand was bitten. Finally, her promise that "everyone is waiting for you" (Pinter, 2005, p. 261) brings the end of this particular piece, at which point the sergeant enters the room and ends the scene. Although this tableau is brief, it has an important dramatic function, as it represents the only time in the play in which the Elderly Woman expresses herself substantively. Her remarks are human, loving, and reassuring. By this, the audience sees that the Elderly Woman is not a foolish mute, or even an incapable language user, but is a kindly and maternal figure whose focus is upon the comforting and the familial. The contrast between her humanity, and the belligerence of the guards in the play, is startling.

The third section, "Voice in the Darkness," again keeps the audience in the prison, but this time the action takes place in a corridor. The voice in the darkness appears to refer to the sergeant, who calls aloud before the lights rise, "Who's that fucking woman? What's that fucking woman doing here?"

Who let that fucking woman through that fucking door?” (Pinter, 2005, p. 262). Here again we note the sheer ugliness and aggression of the language of authority. The second guard’s answer that “She’s his wife” (Pinter, 2005, p. 262) positions the audience again in the world of linguistic crudity; that natural human relation of man and wife is reduced, in the literal “corridor” of the powerful authorities, to a profanity-laden denigration.

The raising of the lights reveals an unpleasant vision: that of a hooded prisoner, being supported by the guard and the sergeant, and the Young Woman. For the first time in the play, someone in authority speaks relatively civilly to one of these mountain people. It emerges that, through some error, the Young Woman has been allowed into an internal corridor to which she should not have had access: “Hello, miss. Sorry. A bit of a breakdown in administration, I’m afraid. They’ve sent you through the wrong door. Unbelievable. Someone’ll be done for this. Anyway, in the meantime, what can I do for you, dear lady, as they used to say in the movies?” (Pinter, 2005, p. 262–263) The contrast between the friendly language, and the presumable tortures endured by the prisoner at this man’s order, is shocking. As Mark Taylor-Batty notes, “Political oppressors appear accommodating, upholding the rules and regulations of human rights, but they are ultimately tyrants” (Taylor-Batty, 2014, p. 249).

The actors then freeze for the second of the tableaux, and this time the voices heard are those of the Young Woman and the man. He begins with domestic love: “I watch you sleep. And then your eyes open. You look up at me above you and smile,” to which she replies, “You smile. When my eyes open I see you above me and smile.” They then share a memory, or perhaps a reverie: he notes “We are on a lake,” she answers that “it is spring,” he replies that “I hold you. I warm you,” and she finally notes that “When my eyes open I see you above me and smile” (Pinter, 2005, p. 265). This is the closest we come to a romantic depiction of marital love in the play. It is unforced, gentle, and stands in marked contrast with the insistent description of the woman being thrice described as “that fucking woman.” Again, Pinter directly juxtaposes the humanity and decency of the voices heard during the tableaux with the violence of language and situation in the prison.

This becomes most notable when this second tableau unfreezes, at which point the hooded prisoner collapses, and the woman screams

"Charley!" (Pinter, 2005, p. 263). We note again the startling use of an extremely common English name to disrupt any potential intellectual distancing the audience may wish to impose between what is being watched safely in London or New York and what is being depicted on the stage. This is reinforced by the sergeant's mention that a person named Joseph Dokes—again, a characteristically Anglo-Saxon name—is available "every Tuesday week, except when it rains." The Young Woman then replies, startlingly, "Can I fuck him? If I fuck him, will everything be all right?" (Pinter, 2005, p. 264). She feels that she must, in a sense, prostitute herself to this Joseph Dokes person, in order perhaps to secure some mercy for her husband. Yet this puts a notable point upon the initial description of her as "that fucking woman," for the audience initially presumes this expletive merely to serve an amplifying or emphatic function, but the cruelty of the prison will reduce it to the function of a verb; she will be reduced to "fucking" Joseph Dokes in order to obtain some manner of leniency for her husband. The direct comparison that Pinter creates between the vulgarity and shame of "fucking" a random prison functionary and the loving discussion with her husband about watching her sleep is stirring. It again reinforces the interventional power of the state authorities, whose work disrupts the most basic human relationships. It reduces recognizably family-oriented people to victims of a state system.

The final scene returns the audience to the "Visitors Room" of the second scene. Here, briefly, the now bloodied prisoner sits again with his mother, and the guard addresses them: "They've changed the rules. She can speak. She can speak in her own language. Until further notice" (Pinter, 2005, p. 265). No reason is given for this, and she is not told directly that she can speak; again, the guard gives an unreasoned instruction and makes no attempt to communicate with the Elderly Woman, speaking to her through the translation of her son, the prisoner. Yet when the prisoner says to his mother, "We can speak. You can speak to me in our own language," she does not reply. His repeated attempts to encourage her to speak are met with silence, until the prisoner begins shaking and collapses. The Elderly Woman does not answer, enigmatically; it is unclear whether her silence is an act of submission to the previous rules, or an act of defiance. Whatever one's interpretation, she has been rendered effectively mute by the state: her son has previously established that she does not speak the language of the capitol,

and now—for whatever her reasons—she does not, or cannot, speak the mountain language. What remains certain is the continuing power of the state to intervene. The sergeant enters and ends the play with the remark “Look at this. You go out of your way to give them a helping hand and they fuck it up.” The play concludes with language that is contemptuous, profane, and dismissive.

Susan Hollis-Merritt has expressed the opinion that the Elderly Woman’s silence is an act of resistance, or is at least an expression of individual will in the face of coercive authority. As she notes, “the final silence of the Elderly Woman in *Mountain Language* —an unauthorized *refusal* to speak—subverts linguistic oppression by ‘the state’” (Hollis-Merritt, 1990, p. 186). That is compelling, but this paper suggests that Pinter leaves her silence more ambiguous than that interpretation permits. This paper instead suggests that the silence is intended to be uninterpretable, perhaps implying the resistance of nonconformity (as advocated by Hollis-Merritt) or, with equal plausibility, a fearful compliance with linguistic prohibition, even when that prohibition has been lifted. It may be that, even when the restriction on the mountain language is lifted, she is simply too scared to speak a word. The point is one of importance, as upon it depends one’s interpretation of the conclusion of the play: either her willful silence suggests a hopeful individuality and willingness to persevere against oppression, or it is the result of complete linguistic capitulation before language prohibition. It is the suggestion of this paper that Pinter does not want one interpretation or the other to predominate, but for it to be an unresolvable interpretive question.

As should be evident by this point, *Mountain Language* is an extremely carefully constructed series of vignettes, based upon the use of language policy and language negation to control and delegitimize a people. It is somewhat open-ended, as suggested immediately above, in the sense that it does not provide a clear understanding of the Elderly Woman’s reason for silence. But what is certain is that it is disturbingly widely applicable in structure. The authorities, or the people, could be anywhere, at essentially any time. Pinter wanted to create the impression that the events depicted could happen—indeed, do happen—in many locations, and repeatedly. We know this because he said as much in his Nobel Prize acceptance speech: “*Mountain Language* lasts only twenty minutes, but it could go on for hour after hour, on and on

and on, the same pattern repeated over and over again, on and on, hour after hour" (Pinter, 2006, p. 3).

The play is unsettling precisely because Pinter de-specifies the languages being spoken, the government involved, and the political views (Communist, Democratic, Socialist, etc.) of the country depicted. What appears to be a political play about distant juntas is, through the repeated insistence upon English usage and English names, made inescapably present. It serves to support Arnold Hinchcliffe's assertion that "Pinter's terror and menace are greater [than Beckett's] because they exist in the house next door." (Hinchcliffe, 1967, p. 41). The audience is forced to confront the fact that both the language of the capital and the "mountain language" are both, in this play, English. It creates the deeply disquieting sense of being unfixed in time and location, because the characters and their location seem foreign, but have English names and speak English. This phenomenon in Pinter's work was described by John Fuegi: "Characters in Pinter often do not inhere in a coherent system of space-time coordinates. We cannot place them with any certainty at any fixed point in space-time" (Fuegi, 1986, p. 205). In this sense, let us also recall here Walter Kerr's observation that Pinter forces the audience to share in the confusion and uncertainty endured by the characters: "the one thing that Mr. Pinter steadfastly refuses to do is to offer his audience—or his characters—any information whatsoever about the forces they come to feel as hostile" (Kerr, 1967, p. 14).

It is perhaps also worth noting that Pinter, in his Nobel address, drew attention to the role of the guards and sergeants in *Mountain Language*, rather unexpectedly observing that "the soldiers in the play do get some fun out of it. One sometimes forgets that torturers become easily bored. They need a bit of a laugh to keep their spirits up" (Pinter, 2006, p. 3). This is unexpected simply because nowhere in the play do they seem to be having fun, except perhaps in the overly cordial courtesy with which the sergeant speaks with the Young Woman in "Voice in the Darkness." That might conceivably be performed as originating in a distorted sense of humor and fun. It is an intriguing question perhaps best left to artistic directors in theaters; do the guards in *Mountain Language* "get some fun out of it"? That would seem to be a viable interpretation—on the strength of Pinter's observation alone it must be considered seriously—yet it would also appear reasonable to direct those actors

to play the roles as bored, aggressive people doing a distasteful job among a despised minority. Again, it is a mark of the quality of the accomplishment that two radically different ways of presenting the authority figures are allowable by the text, and could imply different motivation for the actions the guards undertake.

As a concluding observation, we remark that Pinter was explicit, on multiple occasions, in his expressed beliefs that language and oppression are often interlinked by politicians and figures in authority. His essay “Eroding the Language of Freedom” makes this connection plain: “Because language is discredited and because spirit and moral intelligence are fatally undermined, the government possesses *carte blanche* to do what it likes. Its officers can bug, break in, tap, burgle, lie, slander, bully and terrorize with impunity” (Pinter, 1998, p. 173). Marc Silverstein has written that “Pinter would not deny that violence *is* a language in Barthes’s sense that its signs combine to form a system or code” (Silverstein, 1991, p. 433). That argument is correct, but it in a sense merely contextualizes, to the reality of violence, Martin Esslin’s earlier observation that “in drama dialogue is, ultimately, a form of *action*” (Esslin, 1976, p. 215). In this sense, Pinter’s significant achievement in *Mountain Language* is to demonstrate that language contact often becomes language conflict, and that violence communicated *through* language can often become violence *to* language, and therefore to the culture and identity of the people who speak it. Pinter’s linguistic protest is that language can be manipulated by those in power—or their agents—in order to eliminate discussion, undermine critical thinking, to suppress individual understanding and expression, and to diminish human dignity. In *Mountain Language*, however, he carries this to the terrifying conclusion that such language manipulation, language prohibition, and language denigration, can be applied to an entire people. The implication is dreadful: language is one of the strongest tools of resistance to oppression (it enables, among other things, the creation and performance of the play itself) but, Pinter suggests, language can be modified, banned, or twisted into a tool of oppression that deprives not just an individual, but an entire people, of their ability to assert their integrity, to express their dignity, and to resist the power that oppresses them.

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**„TAVO KALBA YRA UŽDRAUSTA“: KALBOS NEIGIMAS KAIP
POLITINĖS PRIESPAUDOS PRIEMONĖ PINTERIO *KALNŲ
KALBOJE***

Santrauka. Šiame straipsnyje nagrinėjama naujausia Haroldo Pinterio pjesė *Kalnų kalba* kaip politinės priepaudos, įsišaknijusios kalbos draudime, atvaizdas. Pjesėje vaizduojami „kalnų žmonės“, kuriems prievartos būdu valstybinės institucijos uždraudė vartoti savo „kalnų kalbą“. Kūrinyje pabrėžiamas kontrastas tarp pareigūnų ir sargų žiaurumo ir aukų, „kalnų žmonių“, žmoniškumo (matomo dviejose natiurmortinėse scenose). Vis dėlto galima pabrėžti netikėtą lingvistinį pjesės bruožą – tiek „kalnų kalba“, tiek „valstybinė kalba“ yra anglų kalba. Straipsnyje teigiama, kad šis sprendimas yra iš dalies motyvuotas Pinterio išreikštu noru paversti pjesę trikdančiai atpažįstama vakarietiškoms auditorijoms, tuo pačiu pašalinant žiūrovų ar skaitytojų nuomonę, kad šios priepaudos yra egzotinės, svetimos ar sutinkamos tik tolimese, nestabiliose šalyse. Straipsnyje tvirtinama, kad Pinterio kalbos draudimo, kalbinės diskriminacijos ir kalbinio šmeižto pabrėžimas yra universaliai perteikiamas dėl anglų kalbos vartojimo.

Pagrindinės sąvokos: Haroldas Pinteris; *Kalnų kalba*; kalbos draudimas; kalbos politika; priepauda.