Artikel

Listening to the Silences in Selected Early Prose and Dramatic Works of Samuel Beckett and Harold Pinter

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By Ian Butcher

Synopsis

In this article, I hope to demonstrate that – for Beckett and Pinter – silence is not simply a void, the binary opposite of language, an absence of speech, absence of meaning and intention, but that silence can have an eloquence, positivity and complexity that can express the inexpressible.   No pause or silence is identical, most are context-dependent. From an actor's viewpoint "each [pause] has no meaning unless it is filled with imagination, tension or thought" (Shaw 2007). Silence is both pregnant and empty, and both writers exploit this ambiguity in their works. One of Britain's greatest actors – Sir Ralph Richardson – claimed that "The most precious things in speech are pauses" (Mars 2013: 161).

I examine Beckett's obsession with silence in his early novels as a philosophical, ineffable, and somewhat solipsistic impossibility. Silence is lifted from the page and transformed into the almost visceral, unnerving experiences in the theatre. His characters experience the metaphysical silence of the inability to communicate through a language which has failed. I trace his flight from language through the increasingly pared down dramas, towards his final destination of the muteness of his mime pieces. The best silence his characters achieve appears to be a broken one of murmurings inside their heads which they attempt to silence by "fatuous clamour" (Molloy: 116).

Pinter acknowledged his great debt to Beckett, especially in his early plays. However, Pinter's silences are less metaphysical than Beckett's and more apparently rooted in the everyday life of English speech-rhythms, class and geographies. His rooms are filled with invisible tensions. Pinter's characters are either intruders – who use language and silence as a weapon to gain dominance – or victims, who use language as a mask to avoid revealing anything to the other. Pinter's focus is on this mask. Pinter writes of two silences: one where "no word is spoken" and the other "when a torrent of language is being employed" (Pinter 1989: xiii). I examine both types of silences and the "grammar" that directors and actors of Pinter's plays employ to bring out their full significance in performance.

I attempt to demonstrate that the pauses and silences are not trivial, empty theatrical devices, but that they have been elevated to a status of priority over verbal dialogue. Both use silence to explore what Rilke called "language where languages end", where silences and pauses are critical outer manifestations of inner turmoil (Horton 2018).

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I have taken as my title from Beckett who, when asked to explain the meaning of his plays, replied "Don't look for the meaning in the words. Listen to the silences" (Grumbach 1994: n.p.). Similarly, Pinter wrote "keep your sights on the place where the characters are silent and in hiding. It is in the silence that they are most evident to me" (Pinter 1989: xiii).

For both writers, silence is not simply a void, the binary opposite of language, an absence of speech, absence of meaning and intention, but that silence can have an eloquence, positivity and complexity, a "concrete reality" that "affirms the existence of a realm of experience that escapes language" (Chesney 2013: 26; Loevlie 2003: 11). Silence can express "the invisible, the inexpressible, the unintelligible" (Kane 1984: 19). Both writers purposefully take advantage of the ambiguous nature of silence which can be both plenum and void.

Both writers wrote early poetry, several novels, radio and television plays and film scripts. The writers knew each other, exchanged manuscripts and both were awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature. Pinter acted in a number of Beckett's plays and both were yoked together in Esslin's seminal book *The Theatre of the Absurd* (Esslin 2001). Sharing Beckett's distrust of words, Pinter confesses that he has a "strong feeling about words which amounts to nothing less than nausea" (Pinter 1989: xi). Both share a common focus: "Beckett is interested in analysing the human being at moments of intense self-awareness and anxiety", whereas Pinter claimed that he was interested in characters "at the extreme edge of their living" (Boulter 2013: 2; Esslin 2001: 267. Indeed, for both writers the silences and pauses are outer manifestations of inner turmoil.

Silence

Silence has been a fruitful area of study for philosophers and linguists. Cicero regarded silence as "one of the great arts of conversation" (Ephratt 2008). Wittgenstein advises "Whereof one cannot speak, therefore one must be silent" (Pattie 2000: 120). Heidegger proposed a science of 'sigetics', or 'schweigen' – "accomplishing something by keeping silent".[1]

Bindeman writes:

Silence is one of those mysterious intangibles that, the closer we look the more our understanding of them falls through our fingers like sand. Is silence an absence or a presence? An emptiness or a fullness? A negative space or a positive space? Something or nothing? Metaphysical or substantial? The prelude or the finale? […] the answer must be: all of the above. This is because silence transcends logic and acts independently of reason […] Silence in fact performs a myriad of functions in the world of language, both good and bad […] leaving in its wake words pregnant with meaning and demanding to be said. (Bindeman 2017: 2)

Silence is valued as an almost spiritual entity, a retreat from the world – as with the Trappists' vow of silence, or reverential public silences at the cenotaph. Loevlie states "Silence, precisely because it is not a definable, graspable thing, is subject to numerous different understandings and can be used […] to make it serve many purposes" (Loevlie 2003: 9). Indeed, dictionaries define silence by absence, by what it does *not* contain, by what it is *not* – "The state or condition where nothing is audible; absence of all sound or noise, complete quietness or stillness; noiselessness".[2]

Ephratt quotes Sobkowiak's not uncommon belief that "Silence is inferior to speech since it does not function referentially and metalinguistically" (Ephratt 2008: 1926). Steiner disagrees,

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1) From Greek verb *sigan,* ["to keep silent"] (Kockelmans 1980: 115).
2) Oxford English Dictionary (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

pointing to the usefulness of silence "language can only deal meaningfully with a special, restricted segment of reality. The rest, and presumably it is the much larger part, is silence" (Steiner 2010: 30). Both Beckett and Pinter have raised silence to a level of important eloquence in their work so that "there is meaningless speech and meaningful silence" (Ephratt 2008: 1918). Thought is a brooding, silent activity and it is when Beckett and Pinter's characters plunge into thought that they fall silent, hiding what is going on in their minds. No silence or pause is the same as the next, their timing and meanings are highly variable and context-dependent. As Barker puts it "There is silence and silence. Like the colour black, there are colours within the silence" (Brewer 2009: 49). There is an auditory silence when nothing can be heard, and a verbal silence when nothing is being said. The power of expression of silence is summarized by Strindberg in *The Ghost Sonata* (1907) "I prefer silence. Then you can hear your thoughts and see into the past. In silence you can't hide anything…as you can in words" (Strindberg 1983: 286) Thus, if language is obfuscation, silence is clarity. Obviously, silence cannot exist in a vacuum and needs surrounding words "Just as there can't be 'up' without 'down' or 'left' without 'right', so one must acknowledge a surrounding environment of sound or language in order to recognize silence" (Sontag 2002: 3-34).

Silence is not a modern phenomenon in theatre. Greek drama was populated with mute and non-speaking characters. Character silence was somewhat of a novel trademark with Aeschylus which he used with devastating effect. His famous silent figures include Niobe and Achilles in two lost tragedies; Prometheus being attached to the rock, and Cassandra as Clytemnestra tries to induce her to talk. Indeed, in *Agamemnon* Cassandra dismounts from the chariot after some 291 lines of silence, later bursting into speech. Her silence creates audience puzzlement, builds suspense and dramatic interest. Cassandra's refusal to speak or obey Clytemnestra is pivotal in that it signals the moment that Clytemnestra's power begins to wane (Aeschylus 2010). As Taplin notes "it is not the silence which is important, but the ending of it" (Taplin 1972: 57-97).

Pantomime was also popular in Greek ("pantomimos") theatre, both in tragedy and comedy. It was the art of employing facial expressions and movement rather than the spoken word to communicate. The "pantomimus" – or 'imitator of everything' – in Roman theatre would act and dance all the characters in a story using only masks and body movement. Possibly the pantomime's most famous subsequent manifestation was the *Commedia dell'Arte* whose companies toured internationally and were popular throughout the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries. The characters were silent, communicating beyond the barriers of language, often to a background of music.

Shakespeare also leverages silence in his plays. Coriolanus calls his wife, Virgilia, "my gracious silence"[3], as a counterpoint to the belligerent rhetoric of Volumnia and Menelius. Virgilia is the only one who remains strong and steadfast in her silence and convictions. It is not passivity that silences her, but words that fail her. In *Macbeth,* after witnessing Lady Macbeth's sleepwalking and ravings, the doctor realises that she is involved in Duncan's murder and can only utter "I think but dare not speak".[4] The realisation of the import of this new knowledge has made him fearful for himself, the enormity of which can only strike him dumb.

As Rosenmeyer, writing primarily about Aeschylus, but with great relevance to Beckett and Pinter, observes:

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3) *The Oxford Shakespeare: The Tragedy of Coriolanus, William Shakespeare,* ed.by R.B Parker (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), Act 2, Sc.1.

4) William Shakespeare, *The Oxford Shakespeare: The Tragedy of Macbeth*, ed. by Nicholas Brooke (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), Act 5, Sc.1.

A distinction needs to be made between… the silence that fills the interstices of speech, and a silence that replaces speech and appeals to the audience with the dramatic power of speechlessness. (Rosenmeyer 1982: 190)

It is this second, dramatic speech-replacement silence which is the fundamental focus in the works of Beckett and Pinter.

Beckett and Pinter

Both playwrights turned their backs on the "well-made" play[5], a key feature of the theatre well into the twentieth century – which usually comprised a formulaic, compelling plot or structure with little emphasis on intellectual ideas, and relying on the dialogic interaction of "standard" characters. Characters are often extremely fluent in their use of language, their speeches often unrealistically honed and polished. On-stage silence is an anathema to be avoided at all costs in these types of plays. Chekhov reminds us "a completely vacuous pause, a blank gap, an empty space in time, simply cannot and does not exist on stage" (Chekhov 1984: 97). Drama is "about the spaces between the spoken word as much as about the speech itself, about how people react as much as how they act" (Eyre and Wright 2001: 21). Beckett rejected what he called this "grotesque fallacy of realistic art" (Esslin 2001: 29). Beckett and Pinter both embrace and exploit silence and make it as charged and relevant as the words which surround it. Both turn the pleasant living-room of established drama into "sealed containers, virtual coffins" (Cohn 1962: 56).

The silences signify critically different undercurrents in Beckett and Pinter. In Beckett, as in Pinter, there are two silences, related but somewhat different in nature, from the novels to his dramatic works. In the first kind, mainly found in his novels, the silences are philosophical, theoretical, ineffable, outside the text. They are somewhat solipsistic in that they usually relate to his characters' attempts to find silence through writing and art, a recurring dilemma of seeking silence through using words. This silence appears to be something sought after and desirable, though impossible to attain.

The second type of silences, in his dramas, are textual, physical silences which demonstrate an existential, metaphysical <u>inability</u> of the characters to communicate through a language which has failed. These silences are terrifying and represent death and nothingness. Neither type of silence is ever achieved, as there is always the presence of an intermediate, broken silence, the "whisper […] rustle […] murmur" of "the leaves" and "all the dead voices" in *Godot,* and the "dripping" in Hamm's head (Beckett 1956: 58; Beckett 1986: 116). Beckett's whole literary corpus explores the paradox of attempting to express longed-for silence through the medium of words. Finally, he moves away from words and retreats into mime and wordless plays, towards what Beckett himself called a "literature of self-erasure" (Pattie 2000: 168). Beckett's characters are more abstract and universal than Pinter's. Beckett's stage is "A country road. A tree. Evening", using the indefinite article.[6] Vladimir claims "at this place, at this moment of time, all mankind is us" and Estragon remarks that Pozzo is "all humanity".[7]

Pinter names two silences: "when no word is spoken" and "when a torrent of language is being

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5) Well-made play (*la pièce bien faite)*, developed around 1825 by Eugène Scribe, is one *"written in a formulaic manner which aims at neatness of plot and foregrounding of dramatic incident rather than naturalism, depth of character, intellectual substance etc".* (Oxford English Dictionary (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

6) *Godot*, 11.

7) *Godot,* 74, 78.

employed" (Pinter 1989: xiii). In Pinter the silences signal not so much the failure of language, rather the characters' fear and <u>unwillingness</u> to communicate, to interact socially, or even their failure to avoid communication. His characters are "inexpressive, giving little away, unreliable, elusive, evasive, obstructive and unwilling" (Esslin 1970: 44). Their "continual evasion, desperate rearguard attempts to keep ourselves to ourselves" as "to disclose to others the poverty within us is too fearsome a possibility" (Pinter 1989: xiii). Their falling into silence is more interactional than metaphysical, representing "the shackles and misery that are man's inevitable lot when he enters the company of other men" (Gordon 1969: 9). His characters are not dehumanized as Beckett's ones frequently are, but are more realistically grounded in a specific class and geography. Copeland posits that Pinter's plays "retain a deeper connection to 'life as lived' than do Beckett's" (Copeland 2001: 130). His plays abound with the realia of English life, for example the London geography of *The Caretaker,* the "McVitie and Price […] Lyons Red Label! […] Smiths crisps! […] Eccles cake!" of *The Dumb Waiter* (Pinter 1991: 136). Billington called *The Dumb Waiter* – where two men <u>wait</u> for instructions from an off-stage boss – "a kind of *Godot* in Birmingham" (Brewer 2009: 3). Irving Wardle affectionately described Pinter as "the poet of London Transport" (Raby (ed.): 33).

The measurement of these silence is complex but rewards analysis. Both authors took meticulous care over how long these hiatuses should last. They qualify them into specific measurement units, such as "long silence", "pause", "slight pause", "long pause", ellipses, three dots (…) and unfinished sentences. Pinter even has a hybrid "silent pause".[8] Stage directions indicate gaps in the flow of words, such as "he reflects", "he meditates", and there are episodes of wordless – sometimes vaudevillian – stage business. Beckett frequently attempted to further notate the nuances of silence, for example, "full value to silence", "longer", "embarrassed" and "more anguished". He advised that utterances should come "out of silence" or be situated "between long silences" (Morin 2017: 36). Pinter's directors also developed a methodology to portray his various shades of silence. The English language adopted a description of his silences as "Pinteresque".

Beckett

Throughout his work, Beckett explored silence extensively. He was said to be "obsessed by silence", "addicted to silences", "preoccupied with silence" (Biddle 2006; Esslin 2001 (1970) 33; Gould 2018: 62) . He even claimed that his own writing was "an unnecessary stain on silence" and "a desecration of silence" (Bryden 1997: 279-288; Rabaté 2016: 139). Beckett promised to "state silences more completely than ever a better man spangled the butterflies of vertigo", to fulfil "the old dream of giving a form to speechlessness".[9] Knowlson called Beckett "the great poet of silence" (Knowlson 2010: 19).

It is false to conclude that Beckett's silences are merely enigmatic devices or interruptions of a character's speech, a halt, an absence of words, a nothing. If silence is a nothing, then for Beckett "Nothing is more real than nothing", therefore "the only way to speak about nothing is to speak of it as though it were something".[10] Indeed, silence is almost a character in his plays as the audience and the players are acutely conscious of it, often listening intently to it as one would a spoken

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8) Harold Pinter, *A Slight Ache – Plays One,* 167.

9) Samuel Beckett – *Disjecta: Miscellaneous Writings and a Dramatic Fragment* ed. by Ruby Cohn (New York: Riverrun, 1983), n.p.; Dirk van Hulle and Mark Nixon, *Samuel Beckett's Library* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 222.

10) Samuel Beckett, *Malone Dies,* (New York: Grove Press, 1959), 186*; Samuel Beckett, *Watt* (New York: Grove Press, 1959), 77.

dialogue. Bryden notes "there is a peculiarly rich role allocated to silence in Beckett's writing" (Bryden 1998: 24). His silences are not empty binary opposites of speech but are dense and have a physicality that audiences can experience, often uncomfortably, sitting in the theatre. His characters frequently lapse into silence as language fails them. Beckett has reversed the traditional theatrical practice of privileging language over silence, and placed silence over language as, for Beckett, sound violates silence. Brinzeu posits that Beckett's silences are "endowed with a structural complexity that makes them gain a positive value", that they "reinforce the meaning of the words, allowing them to reverberate within the blank space of the pause" (Brinzeu 1993: 229). Kane affirms that "blank space functions as the background, the white canvas against which Beckett may project the words" (Kane 1984: 115).

For Beckett, silence contains both positive and negative associations – the void and the plenum – in his wish to grasp at "a whisper of that final music, or that silence that underlies All". [11] Beckett seems to realise the futility of the writer bravely working towards a predictable failure – the *aporia* of describing and attaining silence through the use of words – and who, even after that failure, continues to keep working "I have no voice and must speak, that is all I know". [12] Finney refers to this dilemma as:

In a world deprived of meaning, how can the linguistic artist express this meaninglessness with words that necessarily convey meaning? […] how to express silence through sound? Beckett is preoccupied with this dilemma from the beginning of his career. (Finney 1994)

Even as he wrote *Godot,* he acknowledged "silence is pouring into this play like water into a sinking ship" (de la Durantage 2016: n.p.). Silence is the *leitmotif* that drives *Godot*, in that silence is seen as the void, absence, negation, stasis, damnation and death, and is to be avoided at all costs. Vladimir and Estragon talk desperately in a "fatuous clamour" to avoid silence. [13] When they have nothing to say, they keep silent; when they cannot bear silence any more, they speak again. Speaking seems a way of proving to themselves that they are not alone; Vladimir admits "I felt lonely" when Estragon falls silently asleep and is unable to talk. [14] Estragon admits that "we are incapable of keeping silent". [15] They talk "so we won't think" and "so we won't hear […] all the dead voices" or see "all these corpses […] these skeletons". [16] Condemned to the repetitive, Sisyphean task of being obliged to wait for Godot – "nothing happens, nobody comes, nobody goes, it's awful!" – they have to fill the time and ward off the terrifying existential silence with games and activities. [17]

It should be remembered that, after a certain period, Beckett decided to write largely in his adopted French, a language not his own, to make expression more effortful and language more distant, weakened, attenuated and impoverished (Slote 2015: 119). He claimed that "in French it is easier to write without style" (Finney 1994: n.p.). Beckett first wrote in French and then later 'translated' his works (mostly) himself. There are many significant differences between the French and English texts. This is complicated by the fact that Beckett directed his own plays in multiple languages and frequently modified the plays in rehearsal. This involves an 'anglicization' of some of

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11) *Letters,* n.p.

12) Samuel Beckett, *Three Novels: Molloy, Malone Dies, The Unnamable* (New York: Grove Press, 2009), 309.

13) *Three Novels,* 116.

14) *Godot,* 17.

15) *Godot,* 58.

16) *Godot,* 58, 60.

17) Godot, 41.

the French references, for example "Normandie" to "Connemara", "Seine Seine-et-Oise Seine-et-Marne Marne-et-Oise" becomes "Feckham Peckham Fulham Clapham", to whole dialogues being cut out of the English version. [18] For example, Vladimir's:

Ce soir on couchera peut-être chez lui, au chaud, au sec, le ventre plein, sur la paille, ça vaut la peine qu'on attende. Non? [19]

is only to be found in the French version. Estragon replies to Pozzo that his name is "Adam" in the English version, but "Catulle" in the French version. Catullus was known for his "purposeful evocations of silence" and his "poetics of silence" so the French response is not as trivial as it first appears. [20] The way Beckett defines his silences and pauses in French and English is also of interest. 'Pause' becomes "repos" – as in a musical score - or "un temps", then "silence", "long silence" and "grand silence". [21] We can conclude that Beckett's 'translations' were largely 'versions' and care should be exercised when examining a particular linguistic rendition.

Silence in Performance

Actors and directors struggle to deal with the silences and pauses. Roger Blin – the original actor/director of Beckett's plays – opines "You can't just determine the length of a pause. One silence has to be relative to others. The pauses, the silences, related to each other. You can't just say in advance how long they should be" (Branigan 2018: 247). Actors would frequently ask Beckett for guidance on how to deal with the silences. Beckett responded:

Act as if you are in a boat with a hole in it and the water is coming in and the boat is slowly sinking. You must think of things to do; then there is a pause; then you get the feeling you have to do something else and you work at it once more and the boat goes up again (Knowlson (eds.): 181).

Taking this water image, Goldman confirms:

The little pauses, the breaks and the failure of utterances […] become the silences that threaten to drown [his characters]. Beckett's silences seem to come from beyond the scene. They are a kind of universal silence at the root of being, which threatens to crush the little voices of the dialogue. (Besbes 2007: 147)

Billie Whitelaw, his fetish actress, learned that "gradations in the timing of pauses could be infinitesimal", Beckett even asking "will you make those three dots, two dots?" (Kalb 1991: 77).

Much has been made of the musicality of Beckett's texts. Beckett referred to the "unfathomable abyss of silence" conjured up by Beethoven's Seventh Symphony, and how his compositions were "eaten away with terrible silences" and "enormous pauses", indicating that he strove to find similar music and silence in his own work (van Hulle) 2005: 52). Whitelaw claimed, when tackling a Beckett play, "my first task is to find the music of it" (Kalb 1991: 17).

The frequency of the silences is an indication of the emotional state of the characters. In the last scene of Act I after the arrival of the Boy in *Godot,* there are some eight silences. In Act II, in the 'mirror' last scene, there are some sixteen silences. The characters' reflections on their destinies appear to have become more alarming than before, the silences accelerate in frequency and their

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18) *Godot,* p.61; *Godot,* p.43.

19) *En Attendant Godot,* p.25. ["Tonight we will perhaps sleep at his place, warm, dry, our bellies full, on the straw, that's worth our waiting for. Isn't it?']

20) *En Attendant Godot,* p.51; Benjamin Eldon Stevens, *Silence in Catullus* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2013), p.ix.

21) *En Attendant Godot*, pp. 37, 41, 57, 62.

language becomes more dislocated and frantic.

In contrast, when Didi and Gogo are fully occupied with an activity, there are fewer pauses or silences. Similarly, when their familiar stichomythic, comic, vaudevillian banter is flowing, the very activity makes them less immediately aware of the void beneath and the pauses come less frequently. This pattern is repeated a number of times as sound-silence-sound.

Indeed, the silences seem to be at the intersection between the external action of the play, the outer self, and the internal psychic thought and unrest into which characters lapse momentarily for the duration of the silence – a junction or threshold between the subtext and the recesses of the character's minds. During the silences, the characters peer into the void, before emerging to talk more. They struggle in the silence reluctantly facing the challenge of the obligation to speak. Kenny writes about Beckett's silences "When it is quiet, with the silence screaming in your ears, you see the bleakness, the pointless vacuum of nothingness before you, and you go on anyway" (Kenny 2018: n. p.). The silences signify a breakdown in the trains of thought and fragment the flow of the action. The silences are an absence but the audience feels them like an uncomfortable, haunting presence. Silence is occasionally held like a frozen instant, the characters in a still-life tableau, as at the end of *Endgame.*

Lucky, who "used to think very prettily once" emerges violently from his silent – and later dumb – state into his famous stream of consciousness, logorrheic outburst, a parody of half-forgotten scholarship. [22] It is one of the few places in the play where there are no pauses, silences or hesitations.

Throughout his work, we are reminded of the thoughtful, loaded nature of Beckett's silences and that to understand them "it is with your head you hear, not your ears". [23]

Pinter

The influence of Beckett on Pinter was considerable. He considered Beckett "the greatest writer of our time". For him:

He's the boy alright. He can write anyone else under the table […] Beckett was an absolute knockout for me […] It was the most terrible chord struck in me at the time. I was about nineteen I think…I went on to read Beckett a great deal (Prentice 2000: xxxviii).

In 1954 Pinter wrote about Beckett:

The farther he goes the more good it does me […] He is the most courageous, remorseless writer going and the more he grinds my nose in the shit the more I am grateful to him […] Well, I'll buy his goods, hook, line and sinker, because he leaves no stone unturned and no maggot lonely. He brings forth a body of beauty. His work is beautiful. (Pinter 2013: 58)

Pinter and Beckett were friends and exchanged drafts of plays and letters frequently. Pinter has always been considered the disciple of Beckett, but Roof claims that these exchanges also had an effect on Beckett (Roof 2009). Michael Billington wrote that "Samuel Beckett is his only serious rival in terms of theatrical influence" (Billington 2008).

Roche claims that there is "a shared poetics of silence in the drama of Pinter and Beckett" (Roche 2009: 200). Kennedy posits that Pinter and Beckett are "the two masters of the speaking silence and the pregnant pause". [24]

However, Hammond quotes Kennedy that "Pinter has little of Beckett's intense 'metaphysical'

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22) *Godot,* 39.

23) *Molloy*, 36.

24) Maer Kennedy, quoted in *International Herald Tribune,* 20 October 2006.

anguish and, again, little of the sheer intensity of feeling – that to speak is to suffer and that all language is exhausted" (Hammond 1977: 42). Sartre famously claimed that "if God does not exist […] existence precedes essence" in that "man first of all exists, encounters himself […] and defines himself afterwards" (Sartre 1970: 2-28). In Beckett's plays, much of the agony is of the characters trying to work out their essence – why they are on earth in their "puke of a life".[25] Simard claims "While Beckett attempts to define man's essence, Pinter concentrates on his existence" (Simard 1984: n.p.).

Pinter's plays explore the more basic problems "the potential constraints imposed upon the individual when he comes into contact with another individual" (Hammond 1077: 46). Both writers feature inarticulacy, but whereas Beckett's characters demonstrate the inability and failure of language to express the despair behind the mask, in Pinter the characters use language as a "smoke screen", a "necessary avoidance" to hide what they do not wish to reveal to others or "to keep the other in its place" (Pinter 1989: xiii). In fact, Pinter's focus could be said to be the exploration of this mask.

Pinter's characters in his "comedies of menace" engage in social combat of what Pinter called "dominance and subservience" (Wardle 1960: 33; Bensky 1967). His characters can be roughly divided into "intruders/interlopers" and "victims", sometimes a blend of the two. Intruders generally manipulate language and silence better, and their own lapsing into baffled silence is less frequent. Greater control of language and the eschewing of silences denote dominance. Language and silence are used as menacing weapons to assert superiority, stake out territory, coerce the opponent into silence. The "victims" struggle not to reveal themselves, their language frequently fragmenting into silences in the process. Pinter frequently counterpoints loquacious characters with taciturn ones to deepen the atmosphere of non-communication, alienation and silence.

Pinter remarked that "So often, below the word spoken is the thing unknown and unspoken" (Pinter 1989: xii). Pinter is interested in exploring "what happens between the words, what happens when no words are spoken at all" (Kane 1984: 132). Horace Engdahl of the Swedish Academy when announcing Pinter's Nobel Prize for Literature in 2005 argued that Pinter "uncovers the precipice under everyday prattle" (Taylor-Batty 2014: 1). Hollis claims that "Silence is more than an absence and Pinter's gift has been to create dramatic representations of silence as a presence" (Hollis 1970: 17).

Defining his silences, Pinter wrote:

There are two silences. One when no word is spoken. The other when perhaps a torrent of language is being employed. This speech is speaking of a language locked beneath it […] The speech we hear is an indication of the speech we don't hear […] When true silence falls we are left with echo but are nearer nakedness. One way of looking at speech is to say that it is a constant stratagem to cover nakedness. (Pinter 1989: xiii)

As for communicating through silence, "I think that we communicate only too well, in our silence, in what is unsaid" (Pinter 1989: xiii). He advises "keep your sights on the place where the characters are silent and in hiding. It is in the silence that they are most evident to me" (Pinter 1989: xiii).

Pinter's plays – like those of Beckett - have been compared to music: we must "listen to his rhythms" (Hall 2009: 162). Pinter himself wrote of his sensitivity to "the balance, the timing, and the rhythm […] the silent music, as it were" (Hollis 1970: 92). A line may be "rather like the notes

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25) *Godot,* 57.

of a musical phrase" (Hall 2009: 162. For Salem, "A silence in Pinter's language is indeed comparable to a musical pause" (Salem 1986: 79).. Harry Burton, an actor and director of Pinter, recalls:

I had to learn the pauses and the silences, so that I could play them. And, you know, just as a piece of music requires diminuendos and silences and pauses and so on, every silence, every pause has a value musically, and if you don't play them, you've not heard the piece. (Smith 2005: 211)

The effect of the silences is best experienced in performance. Peter Hall, who directed many of Pinter's plays (and the first English production of Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* in 1957) has been instrumental in determining how Pinter's plays – and silences – have been presented in theatres. Hall writes that "The unsaid becomes almost more terrifying than the said. Pinter actually *writes* silence, and he appropriates it as a part of his dialogue […] the pause is as eloquent as speech" (Hall 2009: 163). Hall even developed a working grammar to deal with Pinter's various "meticulously considered" pauses:

There are three very different pauses in Pinter: Three dots is a sign of a pressure point, a search for a word, a momentary incoherence. A pause is a longer interruption to the action, where the lack of speech becomes a form of speech itself. The pause is a threat, a moment of non-verbal tension. A silence – the third category – is longer still. It is an extreme crisis point. Often the character emerges from the silence with his attitude completely changed. As members of the audience, we should *feel* what happens in a Pause (Hall 2009: 163).

Hall advises "unless the audience can follow the hidden emotions through the pause and under the verbal choices, they cannot understand the journey that the character is making" (Hall 2009: 164). Hall takes the image of the actor's journey a step further when he describes:

A pause is really a bridge where the audience think that you're this side of the river, then when you speak again, you're on the other side. That's a pause. And it's alarming, often. It's a gap which retrospectively gets filled up. It's not a dead-stop – that's a silence, where the confrontation has become too extreme, there's nothing to be said until either the temperature has gone down, or the temperature has gone up, then something extreme happens. Three dots is a very tiny hesitation, but it's there. (Hall 1974-1975: 10)

Pauses are not to be seen indiscriminately as identical, as Pinter underlines "One pause is quite unlike another pause". The pauses and ellipses, then, to some extent are simply reflections and imitations of the rhythms and hesitations of everyday speech and may not be necessarily charged in a significant way. The critical effort is to distinguish between meaningful and meaningless silence. As with Beckett, Pinter actively promotes ambiguity in his plays and does not help audiences to the definitive statement or interpretation of his silences. Knowles quotes Pinter "if I am being explicit, I'm failing" (Raby (ed.): 75).

Somewhat amused by the debate about his system for signifying pauses and silences, Pinter recounts this self-deprecating story:

In *The Caretaker* I cut out the dashes and used dots instead. So that instead of, say, "Look, dash, who, dash, I, dash, dash, dash," the text would read, "Look, dot, dot, dot, who, dot, dot, dot, I, dot, dot, dot, dot." So, it's possible to deduce from this that dots are more popular than dashes, and that's why *The Caretaker* had a longer run than *The Birthday Party*. The fact that in neither case could you hear the dots and dashes in performance is beside the point. You can't fool the critics for long. They can tell a dot from a dash a mile off, even if they can hear neither. (Pinter 2013: 58)

Puncturing any attempt at hidden meaning, and with tongue firmly in cheek, Pinter explains that frequently "I write the pause because people are going to stop talking at this point" (Herman 1998: 112).

Conclusion

Silence is frequently associated with passiveness, negativity and absence of speech. Silence – the so-called opposite of speech – is generally marginalized and considered useless and meaningless. However, "Pinter's pauses and silences are often the climaxes of his plays, the still centre of the storm, the nuclei of tension around which the whole action is structured" (Esslin 1970: 238). Hollis admires Pinter's ability to "rediscover the wordless quality of our language", his "endeavour to forge a poetic out of the silence that surrounds us" and "to produce the sundry sounds of silence that we often do not consciously hear" (Hollis 1970: 17, 30).

Whereas Beckett's characters largely fall into silence due to their inability to communicate through language which has failed, Pinter's characters use silence as an elusive smoke screen to hide their unwillingness to communicate and reveal what lies within.

Silences of both writers make us see "something submerged […] silence becomes the most terrifying moment for spectators who are made to face what they have repressed in their unconscious" (Tanaka 2008: 256). Both use silence as a written form of communication" (Hall 2009: 163). For both, as Sontag argues "silence remains, inescapably, a form of speech […] and an element in a dialogue" (Sontag 2002: 3-34).

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