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Although, as Robert Gordon observes, many critics view Harold Pinter’s political plays as simply didactic (163), his radical drama *Mountain Language* resists this perceived didacticism. This political play offers a nuanced understanding of how fascist bureaucracies manipulate language to authorize and to authenticate violence against political subjects and how these subjects utilize language to resist governmental oppression. Employing Walter Benjamin’s theory that fascist states aestheticize politics, this essay argues that the fascist bureaucracy of *Mountain Language* aestheticizes language to justify and conceal its violence. In *Mountain Language*, anthropomorphism and offensive humor construct a dehumanizingly fascist aestheticization of language.

Raymond Williams’ concept of an effective dominant culture, one which organizes a “lived” set of “dominant… meanings and values” (38), illuminates the extreme extent to which the fascist government of the play dominates the lives of its citizens, both banning their native tongue and using names to regulate political agency. Homi K. Bhabha’s theory of a Third Space of negotiation between two subjects illuminates the play’s use of metatheatrical techniques, particularly voice-over, as a means of asserting the capacity for language to promote love and empathy as easily as the state uses language to justify its violence. Voice-over dialogue between family members imparts the liberating power of language. Negotiating the Third Space created by the play’s voice-overs, spectators witness the power of their political agency to create new social realities. Because individuals cannot escape language, they must find a way to transform this mechanism of their oppression into one of their liberation. While *Mountain Language* cannot simply teach audiences what political actions to take, the play provides useful suggestions for initiating effective political action. In a social reality presenting fascist tendencies, achieving political action founded on community is no easy task, but *Mountain Language* proposes that it constructs a powerful political mechanism. This essay challenges the assumption of many Pinter critics that Pinter’s political plays are less worthy of critical attention than his other plays, and advances the trend of the majority of discourse on his play *Mountain Language* in particular beyond mere plot summary and generalizations about violent totalitarian states.

Works Referenced


