

A Shot in the Dark: Delogocentrism in Harold Pinter’s *The Dwarfs* and Luigi Pirandello’s *Six Characters in Search of an Author*

Amrita S. Iyer, Independent Scholar, India

Abstract

The advent of postmodernism and poststructuralism has served to decentre the idea of *logos*: reason. The “decentred” universe has taken centre-stage in a fair share of postmodern fiction, especially absurdist theatre. Central to this paper is delogocentrism (as opposed to logocentrism), as articulated by Jacques Derrida. Associated issues are the problems of language, the metaphysics of presence, the locus of identity, and so on, leading to the contention that reality is constructed through language. This paper is an attempt to analyse delogocentrism in Harold Pinter’s *The Dwarfs* (1968), in which there is an attempt to articulate postmodern anguish; and Luigi Pirandello’s *Six Characters in Search of an Author* (1921), in which delogocentrism is theatrically represented.

Keywords: delogocentrism, absurd, theatre, metaphysics, identity, Derrida

Introduction

John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* (1956) was considered to be the point of departure from the modernist grand-narratives and arrival into the postmodern thought of disillusionment and alienation in the realm of modern British drama. However, an alternative perspective is that Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, first performed in 1953, could be the true initiation of British theatre into postmodernism. The former falls under the category of kitchen-sink realism, and so depicts situations as they are, while the latter is an absurdist play, and so provides a more scathing if exaggerated perspective that reveals the true absurdity of human existence. One characteristic feature of postmodern thought is delogocentrism (as opposed to logocentrism).

Logocentrism is the act of regarding words and language as a fundamental expression of an external reality. This idea was deconstructed by philosophers like Jacques Derrida, Ludwig Wittgenstein, Jean-Francois Lyotard, Michel Foucault, etc. in different ways on the premise that language does not communicate meaning, rather it creates misunderstanding. Compounding this, Nietzsche deconstructed the whole idea of reason being a fixture in his remark that there are only interpretations (as opposed to facts), showing that positivist ideals like "reason" and "the ultimate truth" are constructs built around *one* out of innumerable possibilities. This idea extended to reality as well. Reality was a construct that was interpreted and understood in terms of language. As Wittgenstein expresses in his book *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, the borders of language determine the borders of our world.

Post World War II

The Second World War is far worse than the first one for many reasons, the violence, death, and overall inhumanity notwithstanding. One of its aftermaths was that there was a collective loss of faith in the grand narrative of the individual, because the individual himself was denounced as fragmentary. However, it would be wrong to hold only the Second World War as causative agent. The postmodern mind was not the outcome of a single event. Rather, it was the result of the cumulative effect of large-scale events like the First World War, the Holocaust, amongst others that had shaken the belief that Europe was the decisive source of civilization. Second, the new scientific theories of relativity of time and space took away the stability that came with conceptualising time and space as absolute, as there was no point of reference in order to measure entropy. Instead, the situation was found to be that of increasing entropy, that is, change piled on change which cannot be measured without a point of reference. Hence, we now live in what post-structuralists have termed, a "decentred universe" (Barry, 2014, p. 60), because all that had previously defined the centre has been deconstructed.

Derrida's Delogocentric Discourse

Derrida's paper 'Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences', delivered at a symposium at Johns Hopkins University in 1966, called into question the fundamentals of the Western philosophical tradition, most famously the ideas of logocentrism and the metaphysics of presence. Reality and the metaphysics of presence are the two foundational pillars upon which the edifice of human existence and all its subsequent constructs rest. Apropos of his theory of deconstruction, Derrida argued that the notion of 'structure' has always presupposed a 'centre' of some sort, which governs the structure *but is itself not subject to structural analysis*. This is because finding the structure of the centre would be to find another centre, which would only lead to an inward spiral. The importance of the centre lies,

as mentioned earlier, in its ability to tether itself to reality and in its ability to guarantee *being* as presence. If the ‘centre’ itself is found to be faulty and is deconstructed on the same basis, then the very idea of the structure can be dismantled.

Derrida calls the belief in a higher purpose and the search for ultimate meaning or, alternatively, the desire for a “centre”, the logocentrism of Western thought. Central to logocentrism, suggests Derrida, is the belief that the origin of all things lies in God or, in Derridean terms, a ‘transcendental signified’. It is expressed in the New Testament in the statement: ‘In the beginning was the Word.’ This epitomises the consequential assumptions of logocentrism: that words, *spoken* by God, were the source of everything in the universe. However, Freud’s theory that the mind of man was split into the conscious and the unconscious, as well as Nietzsche’s idea of the ‘Death of God’, upturned everything that was believed to be true and unshakeable before. Subjective truths replaced the one Truth. In ‘Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences’, Derrida called this the “absence of the transcendental signified”, which “extends the play of signification infinitely” (p. 354). Second, philosophers began to hail language as “the medium of retrogressive arguments” (Kernan, 2008). All this contributed to and culminated in Derrida’s theory of delogocentrism. Thus, delogocentrism is the debunking of this logocentric theory which offered a recourse to those in search of meaning, purpose and stability. Continuing in this vein of thought in his paper ‘Structure, Sign, and Play in The Discourse of the Human Sciences’, Derrida made his famous statement: “in the absence of a center or origin, everything became discourse...” (p. 354).

With respect to language, philosophers as diverse (spatially and temporally) as Plato, Rousseau, Levi-Strauss and Saussure, to name a few, have all held the written word as subordinate to oral speech, reflecting the hierarchical nature of Western philosophical tradition. If Rousseau contends that “Languages are made to be spoken, writing serves only as a supplement to speech” (Rousseau), in his *The Confessions*, Saussure states (*Course on General Linguistics*) that “language and writing are two distinct systems of signs: the second exists for the sole purpose of representing the first” (Saussure, 2011, p. 23); both meaning essentially the same thing. Derrida deconstructs this idea with the argument that whatever is claimed of writing is true of speech too: that it is derivative and merely refers to other signs. Second, the concept of ‘the arbitrariness of the sign’ shows that the signifier does not have a relationship with the signified, hence denying any *natural* attachment between signifier and signified. The conclusion is that if the sign is arbitrary and “eschews any foundational reference to reality” (Reynolds), one type of sign (i.e. the spoken) cannot be more natural than another (i.e. the written). The clincher was his concept of *différance*. *Différance* was “an attempt to conjoin the differing and deferring aspects involved in arche-writing” (Reynolds). However, equally significant is the term itself that plays upon the distinction between the audible and the written. After all, what differentiates *différance* and *différence* is inaudible, and this means that distinguishing between them actually requires the written, thus neatly deconstructing the ideas of Plato, Rousseau, Saussure, and so on, among others.

Furthermore, Derrida analysed and brought out the concept of delogocentric discourse, with reference to the instability and undecidability of language, by combining and synthesizing the precepts put forth by Nietzsche and Freud. Freud stated that writing as an action was not completely conscious while Nietzsche, in his essay “On Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense” (1873), stated that “truth” is just “a mobile army of metaphors, metonymies, and anthropomorphisms” (as in Bennet & Royle, 2014). Both affirm the structural inconsistencies in language, identity, and truth, the concreteness of which had hitherto been considered as axiomatic. Thus, Freud’s critique of consciousness, Nietzsche’s critique of truth have

contributed in the “decentring” of the universe. These point to the fact that the stability of “truth” and of the human mind are merely constructs that have been legitimised over time. Therefore, carrying these precepts forward, Derrida concluded that meaning is perpetually deferred by supplementation or substitution and so the signified always remains elusive and illusionary. If the signified is elusive, then meaning can only be *inferred* from the signifier. Although context can control meaning to some extent, it is not stable enough to create a fixed meaning. This deconstructs Saussure’s theory of the sign being a particular combination of the signifier and the signified that is indicative of the meaning of the signified, referred to in Saussurean terms as the “sign”.

If the borders of language determine the borders of our world, as claimed by Wittgenstein, then the instability of language and its ability to create misunderstanding and miscommunication can mean that the universe at large is characterised by instability, in other words, by increasing entropy. In order to counteract this, Western philosophy since Plato has reverted to metaphysics of “presence” to reduce the possibility of misunderstanding and misinterpretation, so that absence is marginalised. The preference of speech over writing is rooted in the same idea that the presence of phonetic sounds and tone of the speaker can communicate the correct meaning. However, phonetic sounds can only hint at the meaning while tone can create misunderstanding. Jack Reynolds points out that Derrida's references to the metaphysics of presence borrows from Heideggerian principles. Heidegger insists that Western philosophy has consistently privileged that which *is*, and has forgotten to pay any attention to the *condition for that appearance*. For instance, it is evident that there is no good without evil, or light without darkness or happiness without sorrow. However, Western philosophy from Plato has privileged one above the other; the “pure before the impure”, the “good before evil”, etc., once again revealing the hierarchical structure of Western philosophy.

Thus, in terms of Derrida’s delogocentrism, the methodology adopted to analyse Pinter’s *The Dwarfs* and subsequently Pirandello’s *Six Characters in Search of an Author* will be to deal with issues of reality (metaphysics of presence), meaning (logocentrism) and their subsequent effect on identity as a construct.

Delogocentrism in *The Dwarfs*

In Pinter’s *The Dwarfs*, delogocentric discourse is most evident in Len’s statement:

It’s no use saying you know who you are just because you tell me you can fit your particular key into a particular slot, which will only receive your particular key *because that’s not foolproof and certainly not conclusive* (p. 111).

It shows Pinter deconstructing our day to day reasoning ability, which involves defining the self with reference to other(s).

The Dwarfs voices Len’s angst at being unable to find the answer to “the who”, an apparently easy enough question but one which has no definite answer. The inability to answer the truly significant question that Len finds in the system of language leads him to believe that “[We]’re the sum of so many reflections. Whose reflections? Is that what we consist of?” (p. 112). This metaphor of reflections refers to identities, thus effectively portraying the fragmented postmodern individual. Mark Silverstein points out that Len’s attempt to synthesize these “reflections” into a cohesive entity is doomed to fail because the “reflections” prove to be nothing more than the empty signifier of reality. Allan Thiher has stated that these linguistic

“reflections” underpin the metaphysics of presence and reinforce the illusion of being. *The Dwarfs*, therefore, captures the anguish felt at the failure of language to articulate anything of worth because language is nothing more than “periphrastic conjugation”¹ (as in Silverstein, 2011, p. 310). Thus, the attempt to enable understanding is, quite literally, a shot in the dark.

At one point, while arguing with Mark, Len says, “You think I’m a ventriloquist’s dummy” (p. 107). The idea of being a ventriloquist’s dummy reflects the situation of any individual with respect to the institution of language, and the “human linguistic condition of being born into a language always already stamped with significations and meanings” (Silverstein, 2011, p. 312). These pre-existing significations are indicative of the idea that language creates ambiguity and misunderstanding because our form of expression *is not our own*.

That language poses a serious threat to identity becomes evident in Len’s statement: “this is a journey and an ambush” (p. 96). That outright violence is ever-present in the linguistic arsenal is witnessed in Pinter’s *The Birthday Party*, wherein the character of Stanley is reduced to incoherence, with his psychology marred, possibly permanently. Secondly, Len’s denial of the presence of the “voices” and the statement that “they make no hole in my side” (p. 97) conveys the idea that they are very much present, simply because he mentions them. This brings to light the damaging effect language can have on one’s psyche. With respect to Len, however, the perpetrators of the defective linguistic system - here Pete and Mark - possess the power to bulldoze him into submission. This idea of eroding identity is reinforced when Len directly accuses Pete and Mark of “[making] a hole in my side” (p. 107). Marc Silverstein uses Baudrillard’s concept of the ‘ecstasy of communication’ from his eponymous essay to explain Len’s condition:

Len experiences what Baudrillard terms “the ecstasy of communication” marked by “the loss of private space... the sovereignty of a symbolic space which was also that of the subject”, but now “dissolves completely”. (Silverstein, 2011, p. 312)

However, *The Dwarfs* also depicts a more insidious characteristic of language: that it, like any other institution, has the potential to fail us. This becomes evident in the play in Len’s naming objects around him, showing that language operates upon a certain set of rules (which have been constructed using that language), while providing the frame of reference too, as pointed out by Wittgenstein. Therefore, the entire institution of language has been constructed using its own elements as building blocks, and so with the failure of one element, the entire structure can come crashing down. Wittgenstein reaffirms this fear that language and existence separating so far apart that not even the illusion of knowledge can be claimed. In *The Dwarfs*, Len is frightened of this idea of going beyond the highest of (human) “truths” and he repeatedly says that he “has been thinking thoughts [he has] never thought before” (p. 104). In terms of the metaphysics of presence, the unknown realm which lies beyond the range of human knowledge is characterised by a conspicuous “absence”, because there is no knowledge of that realm. Since there is no knowledge of it, language cannot describe it.

Metaphysics of Presence

Pinter’s philosophy and his simultaneous deconstruction of the Western philosophical ‘metaphysics of presence’ is best described in the exordium for his acceptance speech of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2005. Therein he stated that “There are no hard distinctions

¹ From the novel *The Dwarfs* (1990) by Harold Pinter.

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” (Art, Truth & Politics).

The metaphysics of presence in Pinter’s plays usually revolves around the paradigms of real and unreal. Other paradigms like good and evil, pure and impure, etc. are not applicable in his plays because Pinter does not portray good and evil as something divergent and present in diametrically opposite characters; they exist together as complements, thereby creating conflict within an individual. Continuing in the same vein, Pinter’s plays offer an “unwavering ambiguity” to the roles of victimizer and victimized, which, in the words of Penelope Prentice, “invalidates easy application of those terms to his work generally” (p. 23). The real/unreal paradigm, however, occupies a central role in his plays. With respect to *The Dwarfs*, this real/unreal syncretism is observed in the character of Len, who seems to belong to two different worlds: one which consists of his friends, Mark and Pete, and the other which consists of dwarfs.

The dwarfs could symbolically signify Len’s psychological frame of mind wherein he has reduced his overbearing friends to diminutive dwarfs or his utopian vision where the dwarfs are “real professionals” (p. 102). This is evidenced in a turning point in *The Dwarfs*, when Len exclaims, “There must be somewhere else” (p. 107), in the midst of conflict over divided loyalties between himself, Mark and Pete. These words articulate the appeal for another place, for another kind of space, which is less conflicted and perhaps more inclusive in nature. Len reiterates his unhappiness by plaintively asking Mark, “Why haven’t I got a home?” (p. 111). Also, the fact that the dwarfs remain in Len’s head and gain space on the stage only through his *words*, shows that the dwarfs are indeed “somewhere else”. In this context, the dwarfs symbolize Len’s utopian dream of what should be, but what does not exist in reality.

Pinter’s deconstruction and reinterpretation of reality is observed in *The Dwarfs* in the statement: “Occasionally I believe I perceive a little of what you are but that’s pure accident on both our parts, the perceived and the perceiver. It’s nothing like accident, it’s deliberate, it’s joint pretence” (p. 112). Pinter not only reveals in blunt terms that reality is a construct, an “accident”, but also denounces it in the subsequent statement, calling it a “joint pretence”. However, the realization that reality is nothing more than a “joint pretence” does not offer consolation to Len, who realises that he must partake in the methodical madness to validate his existence in society, even though “he can’t keep up”. He says,

We depend on these accidents, these contrived accidents to continue. It’s not important then that it’s conspiracy or hallucination. What you are, or appear to be to me, or appear to be to you, changes so quickly, so horrifyingly, I certainly can’t keep up with it and I’m damn sure you can’t either. (pp. 112, italics mine)

To affirm his stance on reality, Pinter describes at length the state of constant change in which our surroundings are immersed. In *The Dwarfs*, Len complains,

The rooms we live in... open and shut. Can’t you see? They change shape at their own will. I wouldn’t grumble if they would keep to some consistency. But they don’t. And I can’t tell the boundaries, the limits, which I’ve been led to believe are natural. (pp. 99, italics mine)

This partial monologue shows the inherent inconsistency of the truly real and the mutability of the presence of things, while the conclusion reveals that “boundaries” are nothing more than human constructs.

Locus of Identity

“The point is, who are you? Not why or how, not even what” (p. 111). This statement encapsulates the essence of the undefinable concept of identity in *The Dwarfs*. Pinter expresses the desire to find an identity with respect to the self, contained within the self; hence his emphasis on “who”. The whys, hows and whats question and construct an identity with reference to the outside, that is, society. However, the play does not present a positive picture when it comes to the search for identity, showing that such a search for something as intangible as identity is doomed from the beginning. Towards the end of the narrative, Len does come to some sort of conclusion about his identity (or lack thereof), but it comes at the cost of his friendship with Mark and Pete. What the play seems to suggest is that “the essence” of identity may be non-existent or, as Len states, indistinguishable from “the scum”. Echoing Pinter’s assertion, “A moment is sucked away and distorted, often even at the time of its birth” (Prentice, 2000, p. lxvii).

In Pete’s vision, everything is logical and has its own place. However, he too suffers a nightmare, which he describes:

When I looked around, everyone’s faces were peeling, blotched, blistered.... When I looked at the girl, I saw that her face was coming off in slabs too.... She wouldn’t budge. Stood there, with half a face, staring at me.... Then I thought, Christ, what’s my face look like? Is that what she’s staring at? Is that rotting too? (pp. 101-102).

Pete sees the melting physical form, notably faces, which reveals his fear of the dissolution of being. It shows that individuality and identity at the physical level are only skin deep. Beneath the features, we are all essentially the same. That the fear finds expression in someone as logical as Pete shows that one need not be overly imaginative to fear the idea of homogeneity. It also provides a relative form of evidence that the epiphanies Len has been having are not just an overly imaginative delirium of his mind.

In *The Dwarfs*, Len’s difficulties with reality are evident from the beginning when he is seen naming his surroundings methodically, using language as a medium to determine his world’s parameters. Unlike Sarah from Pinter’s play *The Lovers*, Len does not wish to live in an ‘imaginary world’ or an ‘alternative reality’. Penelope Prentice asserts that Len chooses to ground himself in the reality of everyday objects around him. He watches his friends Pete and Mark leave and simultaneously watches the dwarfs leave, after which he reverts back to naming his surroundings as he had in the beginning: “There is a lawn. There is a shrub. There is a flower” (p. 117), in order to ground himself in the accepted construct of reality (as it is generally perceived). He neither accepts this reality nor does he outright reject it. His ambivalent attitude is observed in his rhetorical question, “What have I seen, the scum or the essence?” (p. 112).

Six Characters in Search of an Author: Illustrating delogocentrism through theatricality

Theatre as a medium, since ancient times, has had a commonly contested space in a conceptual tug-of-war: does it portray reality or fantasy? The postmodern approach, especially delogocentrism, shows that there is no “truth” but only a range of subjectivities expressed

through the highly unstable system of language, one that governs and is governed by its own rules. Since reality itself is revealed to be a construct, what theatre represents is twice removed from reality, and hence, is illusory. This artificiality becomes the main basis for the postmodern theatre. Hence, theatre is a “where people play at being serious” (Pirandello, *Six Characters*, Act II)

Luigi Pirandello’s *Six Characters in Search of an Author* dramatizes the delogocentrism through the performative aspect of theatre itself, most overtly by portraying characters in physical forms on stage such that characters and actors are two different types of entities. The space provided in theatre becomes the scope of imaginary characters to “live” their “reality”. However, the illusory “presence” of the characters on stage contradicts the logocentric preference for presence and contributes to postmodern theatre.

Linguistic Solipsism

In *Six Characters in Search of an Author*, solipsistic angst is reflected in the Manager’s statement when the Father articulates a central theme of absurdist theatre.

The Father [mellifluously]. Oh sir, you know well that life is full of infinite absurdities, which, strangely enough, do not even need to appear plausible, since they are true.
The Manager. What the devil is he talking about? (Act I)

This statement implying a general lack of understanding is oft-repeated in the play, mostly by the Manager. However, there is more to the solipsism in the play. Pirandello’s usage of language possesses an ambiguity that has the effect of not only applying to the context of the play, but also to the condition of the postmodern theatre in general. One such example is in the Leading Man’s statement: “But it’s ridiculous!” (Pirandello). The Leading Man’s comment, in the context of the play, is addressed to the Manager, as he is denigrating the cap he is to wear, the “book” and the stage directions. On the other hand, in a general context, it could be intended for the entire body of readers/audience, critics and actors due to the ridiculousness of postmodern theatre, specifically the Theatre of the Absurd, so this might be regarded as a metafictional comment. This especially gains traction because the “book” is one of the things he deems ridiculous. The Manager’s retaliation is an emphasized rant against absurdist theatre as he complains:

The Manager. Ridiculous? Ridiculous? Is it my fault if France won't send us any more good comedies, and we are reduced to putting on Pirandello's works, where nobody understands anything, and where the author plays the fool with us all? (Act I)

With respect to historical context, it can be observed that this statement encapsulates the essence of the Theatre of the Absurd², which came into prominence in the 1950s; Pirandello wrote his play in 1921. Second, Pirandello also brings to light delogocentrism in his statements: “Phrases! Isn’t everyone consoled when faced with a trouble or fact he doesn’t understand, by a word, some simple word, *which tells us nothing* and yet calms us?” (Act I, italics mine), showing that language is periphrastic in nature. This is reinforced by the scene where the Mother holds God as her witness. God, or the Derridean transcendental signified, cannot affirm her story, so her argument is rendered redundant.

² a post-facto term coined by Martin Esslin in his essay ‘Theatre of the Absurd’ in 1960

On a related note, it is seen that a conversation between the Father and the Manager moves from a defence of art to a succinct expression of the postmodern condition and then towards an attempt to establish the metaphysics of presence and to legitimize being, born as a character in a play. The Father says, “nature uses the instrument of human fantasy in order to pursue her high creative purpose” (Pirandello), referencing the value of art. The Manager questions the purpose of it: “Very well, -- but where does all this take us?” (Act III), to which the answer is “Nowhere”. In the context of the play, it is the Manager’s way of bringing to an end a pointless discussion, while in conjunction with the postmodern condition, the question as well as its answer is the expression of the anguish that accompanies the absurdity of life.

Inversion of Reality

Pirandello also reverses the dynamics that exist between characters and actors. The characters perform the drama that is “in them” while the actors become the audience. Second, characters are meant to be concepts or ideas that have no metaphysics of presence while actors are the “truly real” people who “bring the characters to life”. Pirandello subverts this status quo by his directions that the characters should not be phantasmic, rather they should be created realities.

A tenuous light surrounds them, almost as if irradiated by them -- the faint breath of their fantastic reality. This light will disappear when they come forward towards the actors. They preserve, however, something of the dream lightness in which they seem almost suspended; but this does not detract from the *essential reality of their forms and expressions*. (Act I, italics mine)

When compared to the introduction of the actors, it is evident that the characters are more real by virtue of their detailed description. Additionally, the actors give “life” “to immortal works” (Act I), to which the Father adds “Exactly, perfectly, to living beings more alive than those who breathe and wear clothes: beings less real perhaps, but truer!” (Act I). This establishes that actors give life to characters who are less real metaphysically, but truer than humans actually living. This shakes the foundation of the metaphysics of presence, for Pirandello grants presence to Characters while labelling Actors as illusionary because the sole *raison d’être* of their existence is “to make seem true that which isn’t true...without any need...for a joke as it were” (Act I).

The Father’s continuous insistence that he and the rest of the characters are “alive” combines with the view that the Boy “dies” in the end according to some actors, while according to other actors “it’s only make believe, it’s only pretence!” (Act III). Thus, with respect to the metaphysics of presence, the reality of the characters is open to interpretation; there are no clear boundaries.

Multiple Truths, Multiple Perspectives

The subjectivity of truth, when it is ascertained from different perspectives, can be seen in the fact that the same series of events is told differently by the Father, the Mother and the Step-daughter. Where the Mother holds herself as a victim to the Father’s tyranny, the Father maintains that all his actions stemmed from altruism and selfless love for his wife, while the Step-daughter characterises the Father as an unfeeling villain. This situation is articulated by the Father:

The Father. But don't you see that the whole trouble lies here. In words, words. Each one of us has within him a whole world of things, each man of us his own special world. And how can we ever come to an understanding if I put in the words I utter the sense and value of things as I see them; while you who listen to me must inevitably translate them according to the conception of things each one of you has within himself. We think we understand each other, but we never really do. (Act I)

Pirandello also shows that the unitary nature of personality is false because we adopt different personas with different people. This goes in tandem with Pinter's assertion that identity is "the sum of so many reflections" (p. 112). Pirandello also brings to light the idea of trying to attach each one to a particular reality, something that we are all guilty of doing in order to contend with the anguish of being alienated from reality.

In the same vein, the Son brings forward the idea of the mirror's falseness, showing that what is reflected back is not true. He articulates this in his question, "haven't you yet perceived that it isn't possible to live in front of a mirror which not only freezes us with the image of ourselves, but throws our likeness back at us with a horrible grimace?" (Act III). The reflection, thus, possesses an element of unrecognizability. In conjunction with Pinter's idea that identity is "the sum of so many reflections" (p. 112), both plays give rise to the idea that identity as a construct is as intangible as reality and the metaphysics of presence. It can be summed up and articulated in Len's assertion that the "whats" and "whys" can be answered while the "who" remains unanswered.

The concept of reality is severely tested in the play, from the moment Characters walk on stage and announce that they are in search of an Author. Another aspect of reality as a construct is revealed when the Step-Daughter states that the set does not look like the real setting at all. In this context, the ending of the play points directly to the dichotomy of real/unreal, one of the dual paradigms by which Western philosophers had attempted to establish a metaphysics of presence.

Conclusion

The Dwarfs, therefore, shows that the closer we look at the many institutions that govern and *define* our lives, we will find that they are no more than hollow, unstable structures. This kind of analysis even removes the illusion of knowledge we may claim to possess, echoing Wittgenstein's fear of language and the world diverging so far apart that neither can define the other anymore, leaving us literally nowhere. This train of thought serves to take away a stable *weltbild* in addition to affecting our conceptions of identity and metaphysics of presence. Len's condition reflects Wittgenstein's fear, for at the end of his epiphany, he has seen something transcending human constructs. However, since language cannot articulate that experience – which has no metaphysics of presence – he is left to wonder, "What have I seen, the scum or the essence?" (p. 112).

Luigi Pirandello shows through his play-within-a-play *Six Characters in Search of an Author* that theatre and life in general share the commonality of having a performative aspect. An individual, as a member of a community or society as a whole, caters to the norms postulated by the group to which he belongs, and so acquires a performative aspect at the same time. This theatrical metaphor of our lives is best expressed by Jacques in William Shakespeare's *As You Like It*:

“All the world’s a stage,
And all the men and women merely players;
They have their exits and their entrances,
And one man in his time plays many parts,” (Act II, Scene VII)

Pirandello, therefore, destabilises the idea of reality by *theatrically representing it* on stage instead of finding recourse in theoretical expostulations.

With respect to delogocentric theory in general, if the aspects postulated are put into order, it can be observed that the origin of language led to the idea of the metaphysics of presence, which has contributed in the construction of reality as we know it. The questioning of these constructs has led to the issue of identity crisis in the postmodern mind, between the dualistic paradigms of good/bad, conscious/unconscious, real/unreal, and so on. Outright rejection of either would contribute in the formation of a new “centre”. According to Derrida, a viable course of action is to disallow either pole in a system to become the centre and guarantor of presence.

Thus, we see that while deconstruction attempts to unravel the complexity with which constructs have been woven (in order to provide legitimisation and authenticity), the solution cannot be as simple as suggested by Rousseau: that we go back to being a ‘noble savage’. Since history cannot be erased, one of the few solutions available is to hark back to the causes of the origin of such constructs and attempt to understand them, instead of getting lost in our own creation, our own spaces. Even if all these aspects were dismissed, all that is required to recognise delogocentric discourse in daily life is to ask ourselves a simple question: if even our expressions aren’t our own, where is the question of reasoning; furthermore, where is the question of having an identity individual to oneself?

In brief, postmodernists and poststructuralists (authors as well as critics) have attempted to bring forward the idea that instead of legitimising one possibility out of “a thousand and one possibilities” (to quote Salman Rushdie in *Midnight’s Children*), there is the option to broaden our horizons and enjoy the variety and the diversity that would accompany acceptance of all of feasible possibilities.

References

- Barry, P. (2014). *Beginning theory*. (3rd ed.). New Delhi: Viva Books Pvt. Ltd.
- Bennet, A., & Royle, N. (2014). *An introduction to literature, criticism and theory*. NY: Routledge.
- Derrida, J. (2016). *Of grammatology*. (G. C. Spivak, Trans.). Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press. (Originally published 1976)
- Derrida, J. (2005). Structure, sign, and play in the discourse of the human sciences. In *Writing and Difference* (pp. 351–370). (A. Bass, Trans.). London: Routledge. (Originally published 1967)
- Esslin, M. (2004). *Theatre of the absurd*. NY: Vintage Books.
- Kermany, F. V. (2008, October). *Towards Delogocentrism: A study of the dramatic works of Samuel Beckett, Tom Stoppard and Caryl Churchill*. Retrieved from GWDG: <http://webdoc.sub.gwdg.de/ebook/dissts/Frankfurt/VaziriNasabKermany2008.pdf>
- Pinter, H. (2005, December 7). *Art, truth & politics*. Retrieved from Nobel Prize Web Site: <https://www.nobelprize.org/uploads/2018/06/pinter-lecture-e.pdf>
- Pinter, H. (1986). *The Dwarfs* (1968). In *Harold Pinter plays: Two* (pp. 89–119). London: Methuen.
- Pirandello, L. (2006, November). *Six characters in search of an author* (E. Storer, Trans.). Retrieved from Project Gutenberg Australia: <http://gutenberg.net.au/ebooks06/0608521h.html>. (Originally published 1921)
- Prentice, P. (2000). *The Pinter ethic*. NY: Garland Publishing Inc.
- Reynolds, J. (n.d.). *Jacques Derrida*. Retrieved from Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy: <https://www.iep.utm.edu/derrida/>
- Rousseau, J. J. (2015, September 5). *The confessions of Jean Jacques Rousseau*. Retrieved from Project Gutenberg: <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/3913/3913-h/3913-h.htm>
- Saussure, F. (2011). *Course on general linguistics*. (W. Baskin, Trans.). (P. Meisel & H. Saussy, Ed.). NY: Columbia University Press. (Originally published 1916).
- Selden, R., Widdowson, P., & Brooker, P. (2005). *A reader's guide to contemporary literary theory*. (5th ed.). Harlow: Pearson Education .
- Silverstein, M. (2011). "CAN YOU PUT A WORD TO IT?": LANGUAGE AND EPISTEMOLOGY IN "THE DWARFS". *Studies in the Novel*, 43(3), 306–327. <https://doi.org/10.1353/sdn.2011.0046>
- Wittgenstein, L. (2014). *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. (D. F. Pears & B. F. McGuinness, Trans.). NY: Routledge. (Originally published 1921)

Corresponding author: Amrita S Iyer
Contact email: iyeramrita@gmail.com