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INTRODUCTION

There is no progress in human creation but there is a logical succession to the formulas, to methods of thought and expression. Thus, art takes the same strides as humanity, is its very language, goes where it goes, moves with it towards light and truth ...

-- Zola, Naturalism in the Theatre

Written by Emile Zola in the mid-nineteenth century, the above statement stresses the idea that drama, like all art forms, cannot remain static; it must change with the times. Determined by the laws of cultural change, the theatre should respond to the transient nature of man's condition in a changing society. Zola's purpose, to convince his contemporaries that the romantic formula practised in the theatre at that time was outmoded, enabled him to issue in a new naturalistic drama related to the scientific and cultural trends of the nineteenth century. Just as romantic drama had defied the old formula of classical tragedy, so, too, did Zola attempt to expose the falseness of romantic expression, replacing it with a drama more vital to his society and more expressive of the culture of his time:

Naturalism alone corresponds to our social needs; it alone has deep roots in the spirit of our times; and it alone can provide a living, durable formula for our art, because this formula will express the nature of our contemporary intelligence.¹

But Zola understood that "every period has its formula";² that drama

¹Emile Zola, "Naturalism in the Theatre," trans. Albert Bermel, The Theory of the Modern Stage, ed. Eric Bentley (Great Britain: Penguin Books Ltd., 1968), p. 359.

²Ibid., p. 360.

would continue to change when the values, beliefs and philosophies no longer corresponded to the drama presented. Naturalism's "durability" would suffice only until a new wave of artists, at some point, found the naturalistic expression outmoded:

We are friends of Naturalism and we want to go a good stretch of the way with it -- but we should not be surprised if, in the course of the journey, at some point which we cannot today ascertain, the road should suddenly turn and astonishing new vistas in art and life should emerge. For human culture is bound by no formula, not even the most recent; and in this conviction, with faith in the Eternally Becoming, we have launched a Free Stage for Modern Life ...³

The "Eternally Becoming" became the principle of change, and indeed, "new vistas in art and life" did emerge. The "Free Stage for Modern Life" was host to such modes of dramatic expression as Symbolism, Expressionism, Epic Theatre, "Angry" Theatre and the Theatre of the Absurd. As Zola had rebelled against romantic drama, each of the above-mentioned movements⁴ reacted against its predecessors, often extending the dramatic form in order to accommodate its own vision of reality.

Ionesco is in agreement with Zola as he explains:

Every movement, every new generation of artists brings a new style, or tries to bring one because it realizes, obscurely

³Otto Brahm, "To Begin," trans. Lee Baxandall, Theory, p. 375.

⁴I must clarify the term "movement" in relation to the "Theatre of the Absurd." In the preface to the Second Edition of his book, The Theatre of the Absurd (New York: Doubleday & Co. Inc., 1961; rpt. 1969), Esslin emphasizes that there is no such thing as a movement of absurd dramatists; the term is merely "a working hypothesis, a device to make certain fundamental traits which seem to be present in the works of a number of dramatists accessible to discussion by tracing features they have in common" (p. x). Although the artists may have "certain traits in common ... they are not necessarily conscious of them" (p. x). Since "Theatre of the Absurd" is a useful term, I shall continue to refer to it as such.

or clearly, that a certain way of saying things is worn out, and that a new way of saying them should be found, or that the old worn-out language, the old form should disappear, because it has become incapable of containing the new things which have to be said.⁵

Martin Esslin explains that the Theatre of the Absurd discards both the "old worn-out language" and the "old form," creating a new and vital dramatic expression that corresponds to man's condition in his present society. Since the early works of Harold Pinter are often allied to the category "Theatre of the Absurd," it is necessary to consider the distinguishing characteristics of this theatre in contrast to previous dramatic movements.

The fundamental belief of the Realists, that art should be a mimetic, objective representation of outer reality (in contrast to the imaginative, subjective transfiguration practised by the Romantics)⁶ was extended by the Naturalists to include both the adoption of the scientific method (the concern for precise analysis) and (as influenced by Darwin's Origin of the Species, 1860) the belief that man's fate was predetermined by heredity, environment and history. The scientific approach demanded absolute objectivity on the writer's part, assigning to him the role of "photo-phonographic recorder of reality".⁷

Believing it possible to explain all human behavior, the Naturalists

⁵Eugene Ionesco, "Notes on My Theatre," trans. Leonard C. Pronko, Tulane Drama Review, VII (Spring, 1963), p. 157.

⁶Lillian R. Furst and Peter N. Skrine, The Critical Idiom: Naturalism, ed. John D. Jump (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1971), p. 8.

⁷Ibid., p. 70.

thought themselves to be objectively reproducing a "piece of reality."

"This was the Naturalistic fallacy; the pursuit of the 'illusion of reality',"⁸ for without realizing it, their biological and philosophical assumptions already anticipated a certain pattern.⁹

But as Naturalism responded to the stimuli of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, so too, is the Theatre of the Absurd an expression of its age. In an essay on Kafka, Ionesco defines "absurd" as "that which is devoid of purpose Cut off from his religious, metaphysical and transcendental roots, man is lost; all his actions become senseless, absurd, useless."¹⁰ The Theatre of the Absurd is a reflection of the attitude representative of our time: that the certitudes and unshakable basic beliefs and assumptions of former ages have been swept away,¹¹ and modern man is left in a world of shattered concepts. Unlike the Naturalists who believed it possible to explain all human behavior, the Absurdists, like the Symbolists, see the world as essentially mysterious and unintelligible, devoid of rational purpose and clearly deducible rules of conduct,¹²

⁸Furst, p. 60.

⁹Ibid., p. 9.

¹⁰Eugene Ionesco, "Dans les armes de la ville," Cahiers de la Compagnie Madeleine Renaud-Jean-Louis Barrault, Paris, No. 20 (Oct. 1957). As quoted by Esslin, Theatre, p. 5.

¹¹Esslin, Theatre, p. 4.

¹²Martin Esslin, Reflections: Essays on Modern Theatre (New York: Doubleday & Co. Inc., 1961; rpt. 1971), p. 6.

As Pinter says:

I do so hate the because of drama. Who are we to say that this happens because that happened, that one thing is the consequence of another? How do we know? What reason have we to suppose that life is so neat and tidy? The most we know for sure is that the things which have happened have happened in a certain order: any connections we think we see, or choose to make, are pure guesswork. Life is much more mysterious than plays make it out to be.¹³

Because the human personality, as Pirandello demonstrates, is not a stable organism but remains in constant flux, truth and reality are equally impossible to fix. Hence, the difficulty of verification in the works of Pinter, the meaningless, repetitive actions of Beckett's characters, the endless illusions in Genet and the impossibility of communication in Ionesco.

Absurd drama is not a naturalistic, photographic recreation of outer reality, nor is it a depiction of a social external reality as was Brecht's Epic Theatre. Its aim is closer to that of Expressionism and Surrealism in the projection of an inner, psychological reality -- "the fantasies, dreams, hallucinations, secret longings and fears of mankind."¹⁴ The dramas are neither a symbolic flight towards the creation of artificial beauty, nor are they what Brecht called, "Epic Theatre," presenting political ideas to urge change. The dramatist is neither an objective, scientific observer, nor is he concerned with an "angry" emotional protest against social conditions. An Absurd drama instead "communicates one poet's most intimate and personal intuition of the human situation; his own sense of being, his individual vision of the

¹³Pinter, in an interview with John Russell Taylor, "Accident," Sight and Sound, XXXV, No. 4 (Autumn, 1966), p. 184.

¹⁴Esslin, Reflections, p. 183.

world"¹⁵ and "presents the audience with a picture of a disintegrating world that has lost its unifying principle, its meaning and its purpose -- an absurd world."¹⁶

As the Theatre of the Absurd is not concerned with conveying information or presenting the problems or destinies of characters that exist outside the author's inner world, as it does not expound a thesis or debate ideological propositions, it is not concerned with the representations of events, the narration of the fate or the adventures of characters, but instead with the presentation of one individual's basic situation. It is a theatre of situation as against a theatre of events in sequence, and therefore it uses a language based on patterns of concrete images rather than argument and discursive speech. And since it is trying to present a sense of being, it can neither investigate nor solve problems of conduct or morals.¹⁷

The main stress of an Absurd drama is on communicating a "poetic image" or a "pattern of poetic images" in which the image "is not just an illustration but the centre of the dramatic expression."¹⁸ In addition, this central image determines the play's form. Thus, the formal pattern, or structural elements of each play must arise from and express the basic conception of that play.¹⁹

The intention of this thesis is to focus on Pinter's later works, Landscape (first presented as a radio play, 1968 and produced on the stage, 1969), Silence (1969), Old Times (1971) and No Man's Land

¹⁵Esslin, Theatre, p. 353.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 361.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 353.

¹⁸Esslin, Reflections, p. 182.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 185.

(1975), in order to explore the "poetic image" of no man's land as "the centre of the dramatic expression." Although Landscape and the succeeding plays demonstrate a change of emphasis in tone and technique from the earlier plays, they do not reveal a fundamental change in Pinter's vision. They are, instead, extensions of the artist's main concerns, present in his work since the beginning: the problem of the self and the sense of isolation of the human condition. However, the plays following The Homecoming, concentrate more intensely on what appears, to Pinter, to be the nature of modern man's existence. He believes that each man inhabits a "no man's land" located somewhere between the known and the unknown, the past and the present, memory and actuality, life and death. Man is trapped between these polarities and ultimately accepts the isolation, immobility and death-in-life which are properties of this spiritual wasteland.

Essentially, the major body of Pinter's works can be seen in terms of a thematic progression, so that Landscape and the succeeding plays have developed as the logical extensions of their predecessors. The first stage of Pinter's works include The Room (1957), The Birthday Party (1958) and The Dumb Waiter (1960) which comprise the "Comedies of Menace" and present the idea of an individual's fear without exploring the origin of menace. The second stage offers A Slight Ache (originally performed as a radio play, 1959 and produced on the stage, 1961), The Dwarfs (first performed on the B.B.C. 1960 and as a stage play, 1963) and The Caretaker (1960) as a period of transition in which Pinter begins to explore the cause of menace that develops from emotional needs. The Collection (presented on television, 1961 and as

a theatrical production, 1962), The Lover (1963) and The Homecoming (1965) comprise the third stage of Pinter's development and continues to study different psychological aspects of need with an emphasis on movement and change. The final stage, thus far, includes Landscape, Silence, Old Times and No Man's Land which are basically "memory plays" presenting the aftermath of these changes; where memory impinges on the present, resulting in isolation, incompatibility and immobility; where psychological and emotional needs can never be met.

From Landscape onward, Pinter has become increasingly concerned with the question of time and its effects on states of mind. As Bergson says, "Wherever anything lives, there is, open somewhere, a register in which time is being inscribed."²⁰ It is precisely this "register" that Pinter uncovers in Landscape, Silence, Old Times and No Man's Land, exposing time's inscription on memory. The immediate present, explosive in The Room, The Birthday Party and The Dumb Waiter is now replaced by a sterile and stagnant present where a character's preoccupation with past shadows creates, for him, a death-in-life existence in the present. Pinter starkly dramatizes the loneliness of human experience and the emptiness of existence, whereby characters presented in Landscape and its successors are now merely "audible emblems of lost, failed humanity."²¹

In the four later works, Pinter presents the image of the

²⁰Henri Bergson, Creative Evolution, trans. Arthur Mitchell (New York: Random House, 1944), p. 20.

²¹Benedict Nightingale, "To the Mouth of the Cave," New Statesman (July 11, 1969), p. 57.

isolation and stasis of no man's land by dramatizing a conflict of unbalanced tensions between past and present. For Beth in Landscape, as for Ellen, Rumsey and Bates in Silence, the past serves as a convenient escape from present conflicts while their retreat into the landscape of memory is a response to that present. By juxtaposing the contrasting temperaments, attitudes and experiences of Duff and Beth and of Ellen, Bates and Rumsey, Pinter suggests that no balance can ever be achieved. The characters are consequently trapped in the no man's land, or still point, between their various dualities.

In Old Times, the past becomes a competitive battlefield explored through conflicting memories.²² Deeley and Anna manipulate their memories in order to establish the other as "odd man out." The "odd man out" is thus a vulnerable captive in no man's land. Although the play dramatizes shifting attitudes and changing memories, the basic relationship of Deeley and Kate is the same at the end as it was in the beginning. The couple are set in static isolation as were Beth and Duff, Ellen, Bates and Rumsey.

In No Man's Land, Pinter's characters become conscious of "time and its erosions on human substance,"²² when man begins to fear the past which reveals the being that he is no longer. He is, as well, contemptuous of the present which seems powerless to establish him and remains terrified of a future which will either change him again or

²²Richard Gilman, "For the Moment, A Film of the Mind," The New York Times Book Review (Dec. 11, 1977), p. 9.

terminate his existence.²³ Thus, no man's land, or absolute stasis, is the only desirable condition.

The early Pinter characters, attempting to escape the pressures of the hostile external world, often seek refuge in "the room." But as Len claims in The Dwarfs:

The rooms we live in ... open and shut Can't you see? They change shape at their own will. I wouldn't grumble if only they would keep to some consistency. But they don't. And I can't tell the limits, the boundaries, which I've been led to believe are natural. I'm all for the natural behaviour of rooms, doors, staircases, the lot. But I can't rely on them.²⁴

The rooms, therefore, often fail to offer the security Pinter's characters seek, becoming instead, "sealed containers, virtual coffins."²⁵

In his later works, Pinter moves from the external shelter and battleground of the room to the internal "no man's land" of the mind, that shadowy, illusory wilderness which is indeed open to no man. Once inside the mind, Pinter attempts to explore this mysterious territory with its multitude of hidden secrets. But as the earlier Pinter had rejected the didacticism of thesis plays, the playwright still resists commenting on or explaining the human condition. He simply presents it:

... the explicit form which is so often taken in twentieth century drama is ... cheating. The playwright assumes that we have a great deal of information about all his characters,

²³George Poulet, "Proust and Human Time," Proust: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. Rene Girard (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1962), p. 155.

²⁴Harold Pinter, "The Dwarfs," A Slight Ache and Other Plays (London: Eyre Methuen, 1961; rpt. 1973), p. 99. All further references to this work will appear in this edition.

²⁵Ruby Cohn, "The World of Harold Pinter," Tulane Drama Review VI (March, 1962), p. 56.

who explain themselves to the audience. In fact, what they are doing most of the time is conforming to the author's own ideology. They don't create themselves as they go along, they are being fixed on the stage for one purpose, to speak for the author who has a point of view to put over.²⁶

From the beginning, Pinter has felt justified in refusing to provide information concerning his characters' backgrounds and motives, since the real reasons behind the actions of complex people remain invariably obscure. Instead, Pinter believes that

A character on the stage who can present no convincing argument or information as to his present behavior or his aspirations, nor give a comprehensive analysis of his motives is as legitimate and as worthy of attention as one who, alarmingly, can do all these things.²⁷

It should not matter, then, that we can never verify Riley's connection to Rose in The Room, who the unseen power is in The Dumb Waiter, what Stanley did and who Goldberg and McCann are in The Birthday Party, or whether Stella did or did not sleep with Bill in The Collection. What Pinter feels to be more important is the immediate reality of the moment and the characters' reactions to the pressure of the situation.

The later plays are no exception. Although at times we are permitted to enter the minds of the characters, we are no closer to defining their behavior than we were in the earlier plays. For once inside the mind, Pinter encounters new dimensions of time which in Landscape, Silence and Old Times, defy any normal development of chronological events. From Landscape onward, the immediate present of the earlier plays is replaced by the characters' preoccupation with the

²⁶Pinter, as quoted by Martin Esslin, Pinter: A Study of His Plays (New York: W. W. Norton & Co. Inc., 1970; rpt. 1976), p. 38.

²⁷Ibid., p. 40.

past. Since memory is subjective, the difficulty remains in distinguishing fact from fantasy. In addition, Pinter presents the transience of identity which changes with time, or the fluctuating personality, whereby the individual is "the sum of so many reflections."²⁸ Finally, Pinter explores the dismal and sterile landscape of the aging individual, where life terminates while living continues. The end results are Landscape, Silence, Old Times and No Man's Land which express more profoundly and more directly than the earlier plays, the tragic plight of man's situation in that bleak and barren region of no man's land. Before approaching these works individually, it is first necessary to provide a brief overview of the earlier works which will indicate Pinter's direction to the icy, silent, unmoving and unchanging "no man's land" of the later plays.

Historically, the term "no man's land" referred to the strip of land between opposing first line trenches in World War I, in which any man attempting to cross left himself a vulnerable target for attack. Although Pinter's dramas are not war plays as such, they are, nevertheless, battles whereby language, ("under what is said, another thing is being said")²⁹ and in the later plays, memory ("a tractable tool, deceiving with seductive clarity")³⁰ serve as the main weapons. Pinter's

²⁸ The Dwarfs, p. 112.

²⁹ Harold Pinter, "Writing For the Theatre," Evergreen Review, No. 37 (Aug.-Sept. 1964), p. 82.

³⁰ John Lehr, "Pinter and Chekhov: The Bond of Naturalism," Pinter: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. Arthur Ganz (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1972), p. 70.

early plays often depict a character "actually fighting a battle for his life,"³¹ in which he must desperately attempt to avoid being caught in no man's land where he would be open to enemy attack. Instead, he tries to cover his tracks with hesitations, contradictions and denials in order to conceal his inner secrets.

Critical studies by Esslin, Hollis, Brown and Quigley³² agree that language is the most valuable and powerful tool used by a Pinter character both as an element of warfare and as a means of defense: "Language is a weapon that is used for exciting tactics in a series of human encounters."³³ Pinter, interested in speech as a weapon of warfare in a social combat, demonstrates the power of words to manoeuvre and control. In The Birthday Party, the exact meanings of the accusations made by Goldberg and McCann are less significant than what the words themselves are doing to their victim, Stanley. As Esslin says:

People interact not so much logically as emotionally through language; and the tone of voice, the emotional colour of the words is often far more significant than their exact meanings, by their dictionary definition; we all know that an outburst of name-calling by one person against another is basically an act of aggression, an assault by verbal blows in which the violence of the emotion behind the words is far more important than their content.³⁴

³¹Lawrence M. Bensky, "The Art of the Theatre III: Harold Pinter, An Interview," The Paris Review, No. 39 (Fall, 1966), p. 34.

³²See Martin Esslin, "Language and Silence," Pinter; James R. Hollis, Harold Pinter: The Poetics of Silence (Chicago: Southern Illinois University Press, 1970); John Russell Brown, "Words and Silence: The Birthday Party and Other Plays," Theatre Language (London: The Penguin Press, 1972); Austen E. Quigley, The Pinter Problem (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975).

³³Brown, p. 18.

³⁴Esslin, Pinter, p. 215.

The following excerpt from The Birthday Party makes use of the staccato line, terse and denotative, at a fast clipped pace for effectual verbal torture:

GOLDBERG: Where is your lechery leading you?
McCANN: You'll pay for this.
GOLDBERG: You stuff yourself with dry toast.
McCANN: You contaminate womankind...
GOLDBERG: Why don't you pay the rent?
McCANN: Mother defiler!
GOLDBERG: Why do you pick your nose?
McCANN: I demand justice!
GOLDBERG: What's your trade?
McCANN: What about Ireland?
GOLDBERG: What's your trade?³⁵

Stanley's eventual loss of speech indicates his loss of and dominance by linguistic control:

GOLDBERG: What's your opinion of such a proposal? Eh, Stanley?

Stanley concentrates, his mouth opens, he attempts to speak, fails and emits sounds from his throat.

STANLEY: Uh-gug ... uh-gug ... eeehhh-gag ...
(on the breath) Caahh ... caahh ... (p. 84)

Again, the image of a "ventriloquist's dummy" in The Dwarfs "crystallizes Len's fear of the controlling power of other people's language."³⁶

Quigley, in The Pinter Problem, discusses what he terms "the interrelational function" of language:

This battle, in the Pinter world, is grounded in the power available in language to promote ... the relationship that is desired. ... The kinds of topics discussed and the kinds of explicitness with which they are discussed are derived not from the need to establish some kind of objective truth

³⁵Harold Pinter, The Birthday Party (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1959; rpt. 1971), p. 51. All further references to this work will appear in this edition.

³⁶Quigley, p. 56.

but from the shifting demands of individual characters attempting to give a desired shape and coherence to a relationship.³⁷

Coupled with this, as Quigley suggests, is the refusal to meet the "reasonable expectations determined by someone's remark," so that verbal expectations are consistently not met.³⁸ The example he offers from The

Dwarfs expresses this predicament:

LEN: Do you believe in God?
MARK: What?
LEN: Do you believe in God?
MARK: Who?
LEN: God.
MARK: God?
LEN: Do you believe in God?
MARK: Do I believe in God?
LEN: Yes.
MARK: Would you say that again? (p. 111)

Quigley points out that the issue is not the existence of God or Mark's belief in God, but "whether or not Mark accepts the relationship with Len on terms that would allow such topics to be discussed."³⁹

Pinter's preoccupation with relationships further explores the question of dominance and subservience. His short story, The Examination, dealt

very explicitly with two people in one room having a battle of an unspecified nature, in which the question was one of who was dominant at what point and how they were going to be dominant and what tools they would use to achieve dominance and how they would try to undermine the other person's dominance. A threat is constantly there: it's got to do with this question of being in the uppermost position, or attempting to be.⁴⁰

³⁷Quigley, p. 52.

³⁸Ibid., p. 51.

³⁹Ibid., p. 52.

⁴⁰Pinter, as quoted by Bensky, p. 30.

In a Pinter play, with any two people who relate to each other, there must be a dominant and dominated personality and in all relationships, the lines are constantly shifting. Thus, Goldberg and McCann, although they dominate Stanley in The Birthday Party, are throughout, redefining their relationship to each other. In The Dumb Waiter, the quarrel over the grammatical propriety of "light the gas" or "light the kettle" becomes, essentially, a struggle for linguistic dominance.

Besides using language as an element in social combat, Pinter promotes the idea of language as an effective defense mechanism. Faced with his own incompleteness, a Pinter character is reluctant to open his mind to others for fear of exposing his own weaknesses. To "keep away from the danger of knowing and of being known"⁴¹ is to remain invulnerable and protected; closed to any opportunity to jeopardize one's position, security and one's life. To avoid disclosing any information that might be "irrevocable, and can never be taken back,"⁴² Pinter characters often use language not for communication, but rather as a "smoke screen";⁴³ a "constant stratagem to cover nakedness."⁴⁴ Therefore, Ben and Gus in The Dumb Waiter, like Vladimir and Estragon in Waiting For Godot, use language as a diversion. As long as they talk, they can keep from facing their fears and anxieties hidden beneath their words.

⁴¹Pinter, as quoted by Bensky, p. 27.

⁴²Pinter, "Writing," p. 82.

⁴³Ibid., p. 82.

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 82.

In the "linguistic battle," silences are an active source of articulation:

I think that we communicate only too well, in our silence, in what is unsaid and that what takes place is a continual evasion, desperate rear-guard attempts to keep ourselves to ourselves.⁴⁵

Silences also serve as effective ammunition:

Quite often ... a quarrel is a fundamental clash of animal feeling of personal or tribal interests and we quarrel with words instead of with our fists. It is a good thing that most civilized men accept the ordeal by words and both parties in most of our duels name either silence or words as the weapons.⁴⁶

The silence of Bert in The Room is a form of response indicating his unwillingness to enter into trivial conversation with Rose, suggesting (while trying to conceal) the emptiness at the core of their marriage. However, Stella's final silence in The Collection, like that of the silent matchseller in A Slight Ache, characterizes the ability of a non-literal response "to keep ourselves to ourselves." At the same time, Stella's silence demonstrates its power as a weapon to cast the victim, James, into the depths of the threatening unknown.

Thus, Pinter's thematic development in the later plays concerning man's resignation to a "no man's land" existence, seems a logical extension from the earlier image of life as a perpetual battle, where "speech is warfare, fought on behalf of thoughts, feelings and

⁴⁵Pinter, "Writing," p. 82.

⁴⁶J. R. Firth, "The Tongues of Men" and "Speech" (London: 1966), p. 95. As quoted by Quigley, p. 277.

instincts",⁴⁷ and where the territorial imperative necessitates both the need for isolation to insure privacy and safety and the desire for immobility to eliminate any threat of change.

In 1970, accepting the Shakespeare Prize in Hamburg for Landscape and Silence, Pinter said:

... I find it ironic that I have come here to receive this distinguished award as a writer, and that at the moment I am writing nothing and can write nothing. I don't know why. It's a very bad feeling ... When you can't write you feel you've been banished from yourself.⁴⁸

Old Times made its debut in 1971, but once again, until 1975, Pinter remained in limbo as a writer. The fear "that he'll never write again"⁴⁹ continually plagues Pinter, as it does other writers, exiling him to a vacant wilderness that freezes creativity and sensibility. His banishment to an artistic "no man's land" can perhaps account for the disturbing atmosphere in his latest play, No Man's Land, in which the haunting recognition that Pinter might remain "forever, icy and silent" becomes a threatening possibility.

⁴⁷Brown, p. 18.

⁴⁸Harold Pinter, "Speech: Hamburg, 1970," Theatre Quarterly, Vol. 1, No. 3 (1971), p. 4.

⁴⁹Quoted by friend and colleague, Peter Hall in Jack Kroll's, "The Puzzle of Pinter," Newsweek (Nov. 1976), p. 77.

CHAPTER I

SHADOW PLAY: LANDSCAPE AND SILENCE

Who knows what true loneliness is -- not the conventional word but the naked terror? To the lonely themselves it wears a mask. The most miserable outcast hugs some memory or some illusion.

-- Joseph Conrad, Under Western Eyes

While the earlier Pinter concentrated on characters at "the point of confrontation with drastic change" and ended his plays "at the point of impasse,"¹ Landscape and Silence indicate Pinter's concern for a new form that would dramatize what happens after the irrevocable is spoken:²

I started something last year in Boston, but that was no bloody good. I'd done it before. Now I've started a couple of pages of something quite different. A new form and I'm diving. It's simply, as it stands, about a woman around fifty. And she's talking. That's all I bloody well know. I don't know where she is. Certainly it's not a room. So the characters can't open a door and come in, but I think they're there.³

In its completion, the ensuing dramatic situation of Landscape invariably occurs in a room, but the room is ineffective to the outcome of the drama presented. Unlike the earlier plays, the room neither serves as a refuge from the hostile external world, nor is it a battleground

¹Quigley, p. 228.

²Ibid., p. 229.

³Pinter, in an interview with K. Halton, "'Funny and Moving and Frightening': Pinter," Vogue, CL (Oct. 1, 1967), p. 245. As quoted by Quigley, p. 229.

for protecting one's territory against intruders. Instead, it serves as a visual image depicting man's isolation. Although it is the only common ground shared by Beth and Duff, it paradoxically houses the idea of man's separation from his environment, indicated by the dim background. In addition, the characters' seating arrangement in the foreground suggests man's separation from each other.⁴ The couple live together, but remain isolated from each other.

The stage directions set the tone for what is to follow when Pinter, for the first time since The Dwarfs, enters the minds of his characters:

DUFF refers normally to BETH, but does not appear to hear her voice.

BETH never looks at DUFF, and does not appear to hear his voice.⁵

In the no man's land of the mind, man may seek refuge from his present situation and remain impenetrable to external stimuli. The mind now offers the desired sanctuary that the room was unable to provide.

Duff and Beth, seated on either side of a table that separates them, demonstrate what lies beyond the silence⁶ when all communication ceases. That "both characters are relaxed" and "in no sense rigid" (p. 8) indicates that the couple's immobility, lack of communication and isolation is not a rare occurrence in the present lives of Duff

⁴Quigley, p. 230.

⁵Harold Pinter, Landscape; "Landscape" and "Silence" (London: Eyre Methuen Ltd., 1969; rpt. 1970), p. 8. All further references to these plays will appear in this edition.

⁶Quigley, p. 230.

and Beth. As in Waiting For Godot and Endgame, Landscape seems to carry on something that has been happening for some time.

When Eric Salmon refers to Landscape as having "no movement, no overt confrontation of characters or clash of ideas; no ideas at all in fact; only the keen-edged and gently probing language beautifully spoken,"⁷ he overlooks the credo, "form is content, content is form,"⁸ which is essential to the understanding of a Pinter play. In this case, then, the lack of physical movement is precisely what the play is about; it is the idea. Again, Salmon is unjustly equating "action" with "idea" while neglecting to acknowledge language as an effective vehicle for both action and ideas. As I discussed in the Introduction, a Pinter play successfully demonstrates that language is "ultimately a form of 'action'; it is the element of action, the inter-action between characters, their reactions to each other, which constitute the truly 'dramatic' element in stage dialogue."⁹ While it is true that the play is seemingly static, as the characters do not move, no new characters are introduced and there is no overt confrontation; as we know it, between the characters, there is, nevertheless, a great deal of activity taking place within the structure of the piece. Landscape is alive with meanings, undercurrents, drifts and movements of language as Pinter

⁷Eric Salmon, "Harold Pinter's Ear," Modern Drama, Vol. XVII, No. 4 (Dec. 1974), p. 372.

⁸Samuel Beckett et al, "Dante ... Bruno. Vico ... Joyce," Our Examination, Round His Factification For Incarnation of Work in Progress (London: Faber & Faber, 1961), p. 14.

⁹Esslin, Pinter, p. 204.

successfully proves that dramatic dialogue is simultaneously an effective vehicle for ideas and a form of action.

Relying solely on the interplay of words, Pinter exposes a conflict of unbalanced tensions between the past (Beth) and the present (Duff). Within a structure based on the "principles of shadow and light," the juxtaposed monologues emphasize the antithetical temperaments and attitudes of husband and wife, suggesting that their personal needs can never be met, and each one is left alone in his landscape of stillness.

Exploring the no man's land of the mind, Pinter discovers new dimensions of time in the landscape of memory indicating the presence of the past in the present and the ability of that past to shape the present. Beth's speech concerning "the basic principles of shadow and light" becomes a significant thematic and structural element of the play:

... Objects intercepting the light cast shadows. Shadow is the deprivation of light. The shape of the shadow is determined by that of the object. But not always. Not always directly. Sometimes it is only indirectly affected by it ..
(p. 27)

If "objects intercepting the light cast shadows," then, in effect, the events recalled from the past intercept and cast shadows over the couple's current relationship. Time, in this case, need not be a static, chronological, objective phenomenon. It can be accentuated, halted or reversed in our inner minds when measured subjectively. With memory, "that is, the survival of past images, these images must constantly mingle with our perception of the present, and may even take

its place."¹⁰ Thus, if "shadow is the deprivation of light," then the remembrance or recreation of the past deprives the existence of the present.

Because the landscape of memory is "shrouded in the mists of eternal uncertainty,"¹¹ the "shadow," which is both the shape and problem of their lives, is not finally explained:¹² "... Sometimes the cause of the shadow cannot be found" (p. 27). If it is, as Pirandello would have it, that life is a fluid, everchanging force in which the reality of one moment is never that of the next, and given, as Proust believes, that a past event cannot be perfectly recaptured because it is so integral a part of a time and space that exist no longer, then "the tangle of memory and event remains difficult to unravel."¹³

Pinter believes that:

we are faced with the immense difficulty, if not the impossibility of verifying the past. I don't mean merely years ago, but yesterday, this morning. What took place, what was the nature of what took place, what happened? If one can speak of the difficulty of knowing what in fact took place yesterday, one can I think treat the present in the same way. What's happening now? We won't know until tomorrow or in six months time, and we won't know then, we'll have forgotten, or our imagination will have attributed quite false characteristics to today. A moment is sucked away and distorted, often even at the time of its birth ...¹⁴

¹⁰ Henri Bergson, "Matter and Memory," trans. Nancy Margaret Paul and W. Scott Palmer, Selections From Bergson, ed. Harold A. Larrabee (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., 1949), p. 47.

¹¹ Esslin, Pinter, p. 175.

¹² Quigley, p. 268.

¹³ Arthur Ganz, "Mixing Memory and Desire: Pinter's Vision in Landscape, Silence and Old Times," Pinter: A Collection, p. 162.

¹⁴ Pinter, "Writing," p. 81.

The landscape of memory, then, "is fraught with infinite possibilities which can become subjective truths, truths more true than those of objective reality."¹⁵ But however ambiguous and vague the past may be, it nevertheless casts its illusory shadow and determines the character of the present.

The present is in itself a no man's land. For Duff, it is the failed attempt at communication and the final resignation to his own personal landscape, while for Beth, it is an area to escape from in order to go on living. She remembers with what Proust terms, "voluntary memory"; a process of selecting comforting memories to protect her from a knowledge of things as they are -- as Beckett explains, "a screen to spare its victims the spectacle of reality."¹⁶ That Beth's past can never be verified is of little significance to the understanding of the play. What is important here, is the acceptance of the past as real only as it is remembered in the present, and that the past is not only an escape from present conflicts,¹⁷ it is as well a response to that present.

Unlike Pinter's earlier works, in which the unwillingness to communicate often emerged from dialogue between people who talked at length without any actual communication, Landscape moves from dialogue

¹⁵Thomas P. Adler, "Pinter's Night: A Stroll Down Memory Lane," Modern Drama, Vol. XVII, No. 4 (Dec. 1974), p. 462.

¹⁶Samuel Beckett, Proust (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1931), p. 10.

¹⁷Alan Hughes, "'They Can't Take That Away From Me': Myth and Memory in Pinter's Old Times," Modern Drama, Vol. XVII, No. 4 (Dec. 1974), p. 468.

to separate monologues conducted at different levels of expression.¹⁸

Quigley's comments on the nature of the couple's verbal relationship suggest that the two characters are not independent of one another; that there is an element of interaction:

If due attention is given to the sequence in which the statements occur, it becomes possible to perceive not only contrasts but development in terms of an oblique cause and effect that substantiates their attention to, and interaction with each other.¹⁹

The "oblique cause and effect" to which Quigley refers, pertains to those speeches that intersect at various points, so that what one speaker says affects the development of the next speaker's words. For example: Duff's statement, "There wasn't a soul in the park" initiates Beth's statement, "There wasn't a soul on the beach" (p. 13). Beth's talk of the sea is, at one point, followed by Duff's talk of fish (p. 14). Duff's visit to the pub precedes Beth's visit to the hotel bar (p. 15) and Beth's request for a child is followed by Duff's mention of the "youngsters" in the park (p. 17). While it is true that various speeches intersect, linking cause to effect, it is preferable to see them in terms of Pinter's structural design incorporating the "principles of shadow and light" -- that is, what one speaker says intercepts the previous speech and casts a shadow over what will follow. Thus, the connections in the monologues are more accurately "the streams-of-consciousness brush[ing] as gently as shadows

¹⁸ Esslin, Pinter, p. 169.

¹⁹ Quigley, p. 235.

intercepting,"²⁰ for although these "shadows" intercept, they never merge.

James Eigo suggests that the intersecting speeches, rather than substantiating the couple's "attention to, and interaction with each other," instead define the separation and isolation of Duff and Beth by demonstrating their differences in temperament and attitude.²¹ Duff's statement, "There wasn't a soul in the park," is directed towards his own despairing state of solitude and alienation, evidenced by his attempts to join the "youngsters":

... they were larking about and laughing. I tried to listen, to find out what they were laughing about, but I couldn't work it out. They were whispering. I tried to listen, to find out what the joke was. (p. 17)

Beth's statement, "There wasn't a soul on the beach" recalls the romance of a "desolate place" (p. 18) shared by herself and her "man." Duff's description of the pub is coarse; Beth's hotel bar is elegant. Beth's request for a child is personal, resulting from a shared and mutual love; Duff's "youngsters" are strangers.

Again, Quigley's conclusion seems to miss the point:

... instead of this aspect of language being the manifestation of a barrier between people struggling to impose common verbal ground ... it has now become the only safe means of contact between people largely committed to their own individual worlds We have in this play almost the converse of the linguistic usage in Pinter's previous work. Instead of extended verbal reverie directed solely toward a desired relationship with another person (as in Mick's and Davies'

²⁰Simon Trussler, The Plays of Harold Pinter: An Assessment (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd., 1973; rpt. 1974), p. 164.

²¹James Eigo, "Pinter's Landscape," Modern Drama, Vol. XVI (1973), p. 179.

longer speeches), we now have minimal verbal connections seized upon as starting points for, or elaborations of, a purely personal vision of life.²²

Language in Landscape is still "the manifestation of a barrier" between Beth and Duff. While the above passage may well explain Beth's situation, it cannot apply to Duff who, through all linguistic means open to him, vainly attempts to make contact with his wife and thus create the desired relationship. Contrary to both Quigley's remarks and to Arlene Sykes' claim that "the two speakers do not have sufficient communication to 'battle',"²³ the dramatic counterpoint does indeed consist of a "battle" for dominance over a particular chosen landscape. It is artistically demonstrated as a verbal duel in the structure of interweaving and contrasting monologues.

While Beth is lost in the reverie of her past, her rejected husband attempts to find, what Pinter terms, "a shared common ground."²⁴ But their only common ground, as Pinter suggests, is "more like a quicksand";²⁵ the no man's land or still point between their various dualities. The play is built around an explicit set of contrasts which remain in conflict throughout: past/present, memory/actuality, substance/shadow, male/female, active/passive, coarseness/gentleness. The tension of the play is created by the central conflict between Beth's vision of a peaceful and sensuous past and Duff's rough and

²²Quigley, p. 237.

²³Arlene Sykes, Harold Pinter (St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1970), p. 102.

²⁴Pinter, "Writing," p. 81.

²⁵Ibid., p. 81.

violent sense of the present. While Beth is withdrawn and reconstructs her memories of gentle love-making on the beach, hers is a landscape of lyrical images:

I'll stand on the beach. On the beach. Well ... it was very fresh. But it was hot, in the dunes. But it was so fresh, on the shore. I loved it very much. (p. 9)

Suddenly I stood. I walked to the shore and into the water. I didn't swim. I don't swim. I let the water billow me. I rested in the water. The waves were light, delicate. They touched the back of my neck. (p. 16)

In contrast, Duff's landscape is cruder and more forceful:

Mind you, there was a lot of shit all over the place, all along the paths, by the pond. Dogshit, duckshit ... all kinds of shit ... all over the paths. The rain didn't clean it up. It made it even more treacherous. (p. 12)

Beth's world is one of beautiful sights, graceful movements, gentle contact and intimate conversation; Duff sees more of the mundane and ugly things, in a more violent, more noisy world of blunt speaking and blunt action.²⁶ Beth's low-toned and broken phrases flow melodiously; Duff's monosyllables and hard consonants create a staccato rhythm.²⁷ Beth is concerned with an intimate love relationship; Duff reveals his infidelity. Beth's love-making was sensuous and gentle: "He touched the back of my neck. His fingers, lightly, touching, lightly, touching, the back, of my neck" (p. 13); Duff's sexual activity is animal-like and violent:

... I would have had you in front of the dog, like a man, in the hall, on the stone, banging the gong, mind you don't get scissors up your arse, or the thimble ... you'll plead with

²⁶Quigley, p. 241.

²⁷Andrew Kennedy, Six Dramatists in Search of a Language (London: Cambridge University Press, 1975), p. 180.

me like a woman, I'll bang the gong on the floor, if the sound is too flat, lacks resonance, I'll hang it back on its hook, bang you against it swinging, gonging, waking the place up, calling them for dinner, lunch is up, bring out the bacon, bang your lovely head, mind the dog doesn't swallow the thimble, slam -- (p. 29)

Beth's memory is, for her, complete and fulfilling with the poetry of past love, while Duff's aggressive chatter suggests a disturbing and violent sense of experience:

The bung is on the vertical, in the bunghole. Spile the bung. Hammer the spile through the centre of the bung. That lets the air through the bung, down the bunghole, lets the beer breathe. (p. 25)

If Beth's retreat into the world of memory is a response to the "cold intractable human experience"²⁸ evoked by Duff's present landscape, then Duff's anger and violence is, in part, his reaction to Beth's present impenetrability. Unable to face being shut out from Beth's world, his constant chatter serves as a smoke screen to keep from facing the actual chasm that separates them.

Beginning by speaking casually of mundane events, Duff unsuccessfully attempts to engage his wife in conversation:

The dog's gone. I didn't tell you.

Pause.

I had to shelter under a tree for twenty minutes yesterday. Because of the rain. I meant to tell you. With some youngsters. I didn't know them.

Pause.

Then it eased. A downfall. I walked up as far as the pond. Then I felt a couple of big drops. Luckily I was only a few yards from the shelter. I sat down in there. I meant to tell you. (p. 10)

²⁸ John Lehr, "The Language of Silence," Up Against the Fourth Wall: Essays on Modern Drama (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1968), p. 71.

The repetition of "I meant to tell you" suggests not only that Duff is ignoring Beth's world, but he is trying desperately to communicate with her. Failing to make contact, Duff continues to reject her world while inviting her to join him in his:

You should have a walk with me one day down to the pond, bring some bread. There's nothing to stop you. (p. 12)

One day when the weather's good you could go out into the garden and sit down. You'd like that. The open air. I'm often out there. The dog liked it. (p. 16)

Still refusing to acknowledge Beth's rejection of him, Duff again attempts to establish contact:

Do you like me to talk to you?

Pause

Do you like me to tell you about all the things I've been doing?

Pause

About all the things I've been thinking?

Pause

Mmmnn?

Pause

I think you do. (p. 21)

Having tried in vain to ignore Beth's world and having been unsuccessful at communication, the pressure of violence and anger increases in the description of the pub argument-- "the beer is piss ..." (p. 15)--reaching "its crescendo in a rage of violence and sexuality"²⁹

²⁹Francis Gillen, "'All These Bits and Pieces': Fragmentation and Choice in Pinter's Plays," Modern Drama, Vol. XVII, No. 4 (Dec. 1974), p. 482.

in the willful destruction of Beth's private world: "I booted the gong ..." (p. 29). Masculine force is all Duff has left and violent possession is his only remaining chance to reclaim Beth.

Thus, the movement in Duff's language from simple chatter to violent verbal assault is, as in the rest of the Pinter corpus, an ongoing battle to destroy whatever it is that menaces him. In this case, menace is manifested in Beth's memory. That Duff's attempt to destroy her world fails is evident in Beth's concluding lines: "Oh my true love I said" (p. 30). For Duff, it is his final defeat by the victory of Beth's memory, while for Beth it represents her inability to escape her landscape, for "that of yesterday is grafted on to the present and projected into the future."³⁰

Through the structure of contrasting monologues, Pinter dramatizes the incompatibility and separation of Duff and Beth, but as always in Pinter, ambiguity remains at the centre of Landscape. Unwilling to offer any clear-cut explanation concerning the characters, Pinter leaves us in doubt as to the cause of the couple's disjunction, preferring instead, to provide various open-ended possibilities. Thus, it is never verified whether Duff's infidelity or violent sexuality was responsible for Beth's withdrawn state, nor is it clear whether Beth's lover was Duff, Mr. Sykes or a mysterious identity from her past.

Pinter says:

... the man on the beach is Duff. I think there are elements of Mr. Sykes in her memory of this Duff which she might be attributing to Duff, but the man remains Duff. I think that

³⁰Eigo, p. 182.

Duff detests and is jealous of Mr. Sykes, although I do not believe that Mr. Sykes and Beth were lovers.³¹

If we believe Pinter's statement, then what we are witnessing is the mutation of personality by the flow of time (an idea which Pinter further develops in No Man's Land). Duff of the past is the antithesis of what he has become; they are two extremes of the human personality. For Beth, he is merely a shadow of his past self. But it is also possible that the Duff of the past is only a fabrication of Beth's imagination, in which case, ambiguity is all that we are left with.

Silence presents another poetic image of human beings trapped in the "soundscape"³² of memory, but whereas Landscape provided a definite location -- "the kitchen in a country house" -- Silence relinquishes any distinguishable stage properties: "Three areas. A chair in each area" (p. 32). Again, Pinter impresses upon us the visual image of the inevitable separation of men and the pitiful loneliness of human experience. Once more Pinter creates characters rooted in "the calamity of yesterday,"³³ each echoing their deep inner losses and desires.

Recalling Beckett's later works, particularly Play, the past in Silence is presented from three different perspectives, and, as in Play, the speech patterns are fragmented and repetitive as a result of the individual's inability to remember anything but parts of his experience: "But I'm never sure that what I remember is of to-day or of

³¹Pinter, as quoted by Esslin, Pinter, p. 175.

³²Kennedy, p. 190.

³³Beckett, p. 3.

yesterday or of a long time ago" (p. 46). "Existence, it seems, consists of little more than the accumulation of private sensations, sharply perceived at the time but dimly remembered."³⁴

The repetition of certain memories, such as Rumsey's "I walk with my girl" (pp. 33, 46, 54) and Bates' "Caught a bus to the town. Crowds. Lights ..." (pp. 34, 46, 54), suggest that time, for Ellen, Rumsey and Bates, has become cyclical and seemingly immobile. Since the shadows cast by their past are all that remain, Ellen, Rumsey and Bates are forever restricted to the shaping and reshaping of their limited memories. When the memory tapes are exhausted, they begin again.

As the trio recite fragments of past experiences, the shape of the play unfolds in a chainlike fashion, only to reveal that the three characters are, more appropriately, disconnected links of a chain. Whereas Bates needs Ellen, Ellen desires Rumsey, while the latter remains content in his delusion of self-sufficiency. Ellen's vacillation between the two opposing personalities conveys her inability to choose between them:

There are two. I turn to them and speak. I look them in their eyes. I kiss them there and say, I look away to smile, and touch them as I turn. (p. 35)

It becomes evident that both men embody qualities which have attracted Ellen and her inability to make a choice leaves her motionless between them.³⁵

As in Landscape, the three characters of Silence suffer from

³⁴Nightingale, p. 57.

³⁵Ganz, p. 168.

being different. Boxed in by their own insecurities and "life thoughts" (p. 33), each remains impenetrable for the other and the vital contact they desire is unattainable. Rudiger Imhof suggests that:

Ellen's, Rumsey's, and Bates' loneliness and inability to communicate are ... stressed by the fact that Pinter makes a love affair the background of the play. Even people in love are unable to establish any mutual understanding.³⁶

Instead, Pinter juxtaposes three opposing experiences, emphasizing, as in Landscape, the contrasts in temperament and attitude.

Like Duff, Bates is coarse and egotistical, and one senses the "cold intractable human experience" beneath his words. His speech is characterized by a sharp staccato rhythm. Incomplete sentences and numerous ellipses indicate that he is "hard-pressed, discontented and irritated."³⁷ The language he uses displays activity, violence and vulgarity:³⁸ "rain and stinking," "bumping lights," "cars barking," "standing clenched in the pissing dark" (p. 43).

Because Bates regards his neighbours as enemies, his life becomes a constant battle and he perceives everything around him, including love, as hostile and violent.³⁹ Tormented by the "unendurable racket" (p. 35) of his sordid environment and irritated by the "tittering

³⁶ Rudiger Imhof, "Pinter's Silence: The Impossibility of Communication," Modern Drama, Vol. XVII, No. 4 (Dec. 1974), p. 457.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 450.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 450.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 451.

bitches, and their music and their love" (p. 36), Bates is walled in by a series of frustrations and conflicts that comprise his life.

Acknowledging the need for solace as a solution to the struggle of his existence, Bates longs to "get out of the walls, into a wind" (p. 39) which, for him, represents freedom. He envies the unrestrained movements of the birds and their ability to rest after a long journey (p. 36). As for himself,

It's a question of sleep. I need something of it, or how can I remain alive, without any true rest, having no solace, no constant solace, not even any damn inconstant solace. (p. 36)

The memory of "that calm moment" (p. 41) is all he has.

Bates feels that Ellen could provide the freedom and solace he desires, but Ellen will not oblige him: "I didn't. I didn't hear you, she said. I didn't hear what you said" (p. 44).

Ellen's alienation stems from her inability to establish her own position in and relationship to the world around her. She shrinks from confronting the light that would give her meaning and determine her identity: "The horizon moves from the sun. I am crushed by the light" (p. 40). Instead, she prefers to be securely encapsulated by the darkness that negates the self: "Around me sits the night. Such a silence" (p. 43). Accustomed as she is to listening to others, Ellen has nothing to assert. There is no centre to her personality. She is lost, useless. Because she lacks any sense of self-definition, her very existence must be confirmed by others:

I can hear myself. Cup my ear. My heart beats in my ear. Such a silence. Is it me? Am I silent or speaking? How can I know? Can I know such things? No-one ever told me. I need to be told things. I seem to be old. Am I old now? No-one will tell me. I must find a person to tell me these things. (p. 43)

That Ellen dresses for Rumsey, suggests, that she does not determine her own existence. She is merely an extension of Rumsey as she conforms to his dull, withdrawn lifestyle: "I walk with my girl who wears a grey blouse when she walks and grey shoes and walks readily with me wearing clothes considered for me. Her grey clothes" (p. 33). In addition, Ellen's association with the colour "grey" emphasizes the "nothingness" of her being, the drabness of her existence and the neutrality of her position between the two men. Just as the colour grey is not a primary colour, but a mixture of black and white, Ellen is not a whole person, but a mixture of other people's opinions. Until she is able to find her own meaning, she will never find meaning in others necessary for contact:

After my work each day I walk back through people but I don't notice them There must be something in them to notice, to pay attention to, something of interest in them. In fact I know there is. I'm certain of it. But I pass through them noticing nothing (p. 46)

That Ellen passes "through" people reveals her transparency. There is no essence to her being; no core to her existence. She is bound to "turn ... turn ... wheel ... glide" (p. 40) aimlessly, as if in orbit, outside of time and space.

Thus, Ellen is unable to fulfill Bates' needs, looking as she does to Rumsey in order for him to authenticate her experience. But as Ellen was incapable or unwilling to listen to Bates, Rumsey is unattentive to her problems: ⁴⁰ "... I couldn't hear what she said" (p. 43).

⁴⁰ Inhof, p. 454.

Rumsey is the antithesis of Bates. Whereas Bates is associated with images of violent urban life, Rumsey is associated with rural images of nature. While Bates is aggressive and hostile, Rumsey is the embodiment of quiescence, passivity and grace.⁴¹ While Bates is surrounded by "crowds" (p. 34), Rumsey is secluded. While Bates' life is devoid of calm, Rumsey's calm is devoid of life: "My heart never bangs" (p. 35).

Unlike Bates, who acknowledges his needs, Rumsey willingly accepts this condition of death-in-life, creating for himself a deceptive illusion of happiness and purpose in his self-sufficiency.

Appearing to be content in his isolation, Rumsey convinces himself that he has "lost nothing" (p. 35): "There is no-one to tell me what is expected or not expected of me. Nothing is required of me" (p. 35). "But Rumsey's delusion of a self-sufficient, pleasant existence prevents him from perceiving his state of being in its full extent."⁴² Although his animals provide him with a sense of purpose, he will not admit that they are merely compensation for the lack of human contact. His refusal to believe that his horse does not need him (p. 39), confirms his desperation for communication. Feeling that people deliberately evade him, Rumsey resigns himself to a quiet, withdrawn life:

Sometimes I see people. They walk towards me, no, not so, walk in my direction, but never reaching me, turning left, or disappearing, and then reappearing, to disappear into the wood. (p. 40)

⁴¹Ganz, p. 166.

⁴²Imhof, p. 457.

Like Ellen, he has lost the potential for contact and is thus unable to respond to her in the way she requires. He will continue deluding himself that he needs no one, because "the essence of his reality is the appearance he attaches to it."⁴³

Although Hollis suggests that there are "a few abortive movements out of isolation,"⁴⁴ these encounters are, by and large, merely recreations of past experiences necessary for the reshaping of the characters' memories. They concern the present only in so far as they provide visual images of the shadows cast by Ellen's, Rumsey's and Bates' past. The only way in which the trio might escape from no man's land, is if each concedes to the failings of his existence: "You cross the field out of darkness. You arrive" (p. 35). By effacing their present weaknesses, they are all bound to "turn ... turn ... wheel [and] glide" in their insulated areas until the blur of shadows fades into darkness⁴⁵ and the dimming of memory dissolves into silence.

As I stated in the Introduction, Pinter is not concerned with verifying or explaining the human condition. He merely presents it. Landscape and Silence present the image of the eternal gulf between conflicting passions in people, in which no balance can ever be achieved. Human beings are consequently trapped in the virtual inaction and isolation of no man's land, somewhere between past and present, memory and actuality, life and death.

⁴³Inhof, p. 456.

⁴⁴Hollis, p. 115.

⁴⁵Nightingale, p. 57.

CHAPTER II

"ODD MAN OUT" IN OLD TIMES

... the rending pain of re-enactment
Of all that you have done and been.

-- T. S. Eliot, Little Gidding

Old Times¹ attempts to merge the new Pinter world with the old. On the one hand, the play continues the thematic development of Land-
scape and Silence concerning the pressure of the past upon the present, the relationship of memory to the present, and the dramatic clash of opposing personalities. At the same time, Old Times contains certain traits characteristic of Pinter's earlier works, such as the struggle for dominance resulting from the territorial imperative, the use of language as a weapon of warfare, and Anna, the menacing intruder who establishes her place among Riley, the dumb waiter, Goldberg, McGann, the silent matchseller and Ruth.

Although the similarities to past themes are apparent, the differences provide evidence of Pinter's growth, of his new explorations into the dark region of no man's land. Language, which once served as the most powerful weapon available to Pinter characters, is coupled, in Old Times, with memory: a deceiving and effective tool in social combat. In addition, the room is no longer the territory to be

¹Harold Pinter, Old Times (London: Eyre Methuen Ltd., 1971; rpt. 1976). All further references to this play will appear in this edition.

fought for and protected. Instead, Deeley and Anna fight for possession of Kate, a situation similar to that of The Basement. But where Jane begins as the imagined property of Stott and ends as the property of Law, Kate begins as the imagined property of both Deeley and Anna and ends as the property of neither.² Finally, the intruder, who had once carried threats of violence, is now destroyed in the end.

Although there exists, in this play, a conflict of contrasting passions between past and present similar to that of Landscape, the dramatic tension is greater and more complex in Old Times. As Duff attempts to destroy Beth's past in order to control the present, Anna attempts to destroy Deeley's present by manipulating the past. Deeley is forced to fight back and the past becomes a competitive battlefield explored through conflicting memories.

In Old Times, Pinter is again concerned with the Proustian concept of recapturing time past:

In primitive childhood Time is a friend: it stands peaceful and motionless at our side, and the world is ours to have and to enjoy. Presently, however, Time will break this harmony of living: in the wake of our first sorrow, we start on our slow journey towards death and assume the painful task of "comprehending" what we no longer immediately "possess." Intelligence, therefore, is a fruit of exile grown in a climate of oblivion. The memory of the brain is a faculty most conspicuous by what it forgets, and its very recollections are no recollections at all, rather a system of reference powerless in itself to resuscitate the past.³

²Michael Anderson, Anger and Detachment: A Study of Arden, Osborne and Pinter (London: Pitman Publishing Ltd., 1976), p. 109.

³Jean-Albert Bede, "Proust, Marcel," Columbia Dictionary of Modern European Literature, ed. H. Smith (New York: Columbia U. P., 1947), p. 649. As quoted by William Baker and Ely Tabachnick, Harold Pinter (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1973), p. 142.

Deeley's and Anna's futile attempts to recreate the past are demonstrated by a series of partially remembered "old times" which, rather than resuscitating the past, emphasize instead, the "mutability of love, time and memory."⁴ Beckett's statement that "we are other, no longer what we were before the calamity of yesterday,"⁵ expresses the transience of human desires when man is changed by the action of time. Like Krapp, of Krapp's Last Tape, who listens to his tapes in order that he may "be again,"⁶ Deeley and Anna attempt to recapture themselves as they were in the glorified past. But they are too different at this moment in time; their former identities are lost with the past -- "We were young then of course" (p. 17) -- and now exist in their minds only. Gone forever is the blissful world of childhood that happens only once, as suggested by Deeley's memory of his first and only tricycle (p. 29). Gone, as well, is the London of the thirties and forties that harbours their lost youth: "We rarely get to London" (p. 18), and gone are the songs and films, landmarks of the past which can neither be recreated exactly nor equalled in the present: "They don't make them like that anymore" (p. 29).

The dim lighting in the background suggests the dimming of memory and in Old Times, fact and fantasy remain indistinguishable. The present is merely the outcome of the past as we remember it⁷ and

⁴Baker and Tabachnick, p. 140.

⁵Beckett, p. 3.

⁶Samuel Beckett, Krapp's Last Tape (New York: Grove Press Inc., 1957; rpt. 1960), p. 26.

⁷Hughes, p. 470.

the past is "a landscape over which the mind can roam, selecting, discarding, distorting data and so creating a reality shaped to its own purposes."⁸ Thus, an invented memory is as true as a "real" one because the past itself has no objective existence.⁹

It remains impossible to ascertain any objective truth in what Deeley and Anna say, for,

There are some things one remembers even though they may never have happened. There are things I remember which may never have happened but as I recall them so they take place. (p. 32)

Memory, then, is not a confirmation of truth in Old Times; it is a source of power.

The triangle of characters in Old Times presents three conflicts resulting from the clash of opposing personalities: one between Deeley and Kate, another between Deeley and Anna and a third between Anna and Kate. The first distinguishes the differences in temperament and attitude between husband and wife, similar to that of Duff and Beth. Deeley and Kate, operating on different planes, dramatize the male/female conflict endemic to Landscape and Silence. Deeley, like Duff and Bates, exists on the physical level: "I touched her profoundly all over" (p. 31); Kate, like Beth, Ellen and Runsey, is withdrawn from any human contact, preferring to live in the no man's land of the mind:

When people leaned to speak to her she would fold away from them, so that though she was still standing within their reach she was no longer accessible to them. She folded herself from them, they were no longer able to speak or go through with their touch. (p. 64)

⁸Gillen, p. 483.

⁹Hughes, p. 467.

Deeley demonstrates masculine power and directness: "I had a thigh-kissing view, nobody but you had the thighs which kissed" (p. 51); Kate is a "classic female figure" (p. 36), enigmatic and passive, while others pursue her. Deeley displays coarse humour and blunt vulgarity: "Wearing your underwear she was too, at the time. Amiably allowed me a gander. Trueblue generosity. Admirable in a woman" (p. 69); Kate, instead, prefers men who are poetic, "gentle" and "sensitive" with "a lovely sense of humour" (p. 63). Deeley's memories of the past, whether true or false, are precise and detailed¹⁰; Kate is vague about the past, present and future, preferring instead "to live in a dreamy world of blurred indeterminate perceptions"¹¹

That's one reason I like living in the country. Everything's softer. The water, the light, the shapes, the sounds. There aren't such edges here. And living close to the sea too. You can't say where it begins or ends. That appeals to me. I don't care for harsh lines ... (p. 59)

Just as Beth's withdrawn state is a response to Duff's coarse and brutal present, Kate's isolation may be a safe retreat from Deeley's present. Old Times, like Landscape and Silence, present characters who suffer from being different and as it was with Duff, Beth, Ellen, Bates and Rumsey, the varying needs of Deeley and Kate cannot be satisfied within their relationship.

The second conflict, which comprises the main action of Old Times and gives the play its dramatic strength, charts the power-struggle between Deeley and Anna for the dominance of Kate. Anna,

¹⁰ Anderson, p. 112.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 112.

Kate's best friend from the past, returns to reclaim Kate and subtly menaces the marriage by trying to renew or recreate their intimate friendship, "a friendship into which Deeley intruded by marrying Kate."¹² Unlike the earlier plays in which the characters try to avoid confrontation with their personal nemesis (Rose attempts to avoid Riley in The Room and Stanley tries to ward off Goldberg and McCann in The Birthday Party), Deeley attempts to repel the threatening intruder in order to protect and solidify the bond between himself and Kate. Old Times, like The Caretaker, The Collection and The Homecoming demonstrates the desperate lengths to which people will go to acquire or preserve their relationships.

Deeley's speech concerning his first meeting with Kate at the film "Odd Man Out" (p. 29) introduces Deeley's and Anna's main objective throughout the play: simply, to establish the other as "odd man out." At the same time, both try desperately to avoid being caught in no man's land which would expose their vulnerability resulting in the loss of all rights to Kate. Thus, the play proceeds in a pattern of attack and defence.¹³ Deeley and Anna arm themselves with a variety of weapons, such as language, singing, re-enactments of the past and the most perilous of all weapons -- the power of memory:

Yesterday is not a milestone that has been passed, but a day-stone on the beaten track of the years, and irremediably part of us, within us, heavy and dangerous.¹⁴

¹²Baker and Tabachnick, p. 137.

¹³Ibid., p. 137.

¹⁴Beckett, Proust, p. 3.

The battle commences the moment Anna appears in the foreground and immediately begins a monologue about the past, when she and Kate were young "innocent girls, innocent secretaries" in the "hustle and bustle" of London (pp. 17-18). Deeley, beginning to feel threatened by his exclusion from the past, attempts to ensure Anna that that part of her life with Kate is over: "We rarely get to London" (p. 18). Kate belongs to him now as he warns Anna that his wife has willingly relinquished the excitement, "the sheer expectation ... the looking forwardness" of her youth in London for the permanent silence of middle age and the domesticity of their present lifestyle. In retaliation, Anna selects language as a convenient and suitable weapon to undermine the lifeless existence that Deeley presently provides for Kate: "You have a wonderful casserole ... I mean wife. So sorry. A wonderful wife" (p. 20). In this way, she is able to contrast Kate's drab existence in the present with the carefree, intellectual life of the past:

We weren't terribly elaborate in cooking, didn't have the time, but every so often dished up an incredibly enormous stew, guzzled the lot, and then more often than not sat up half the night reading Yeats. (p. 22)

Words are an effective and characteristic Pinter weapon. In addition, every pause is an attempt to control and every answer, a swift evasion.¹⁵ Deeley, aware of the potency of language, successfully turns Anna's speech against her:

¹⁵Baker and Tabachnick, p. 140.

ANNA

No one who lived here would want to go far. I would not want to go far, I would be afraid of going far, lest when I returned the house would be gone.

DEELEY

Lest?

ANNA

What?

DEELEY

The word lest. Haven't heard it for a long time.

Pause (p. 19)

And again:

ANNA

... Sometimes I'd look at her face, but she was unaware of my gaze.

DEELEY

Gaze?

ANNA

What?

DEELEY

The word gaze. Don't hear it very often. (p. 26)

Deeley is trying to trip Anna up with her own words. The "pause" following the first example above, indicates that he is assuredly gaining control, while the absence of a pause in the second example is Anna's attempt to evade the issue. As Simon Trussler explains, Deeley is implying that Anna is "affected and snobbish" in her speech, while his own language is controlled and decisive:¹⁶

My work took me to Sicily. My work concerns itself with life all over, you see, in every part of the globe. With people all over the globe. I use the word globe because the word world possesses emotional political sociological and

¹⁶Trussler, p. 171.

psychological pretensions and resonances which I prefer as a matter of choice to do without, or shall I say to steer clear of, or if you like to reject. (p. 40)

Although Deeley "exalts his own speech and criticizes Anna's ... [he finally] asserts power by stealing her language."¹⁷ At a later point in the play, he conveniently attacks Anna with her own word, "gaze": "I simply sat sipping my light ale and gazed ... gazed up your skirt. You didn't object, you found my gaze perfectly acceptable" (p. 51). Again, when discussing the issue of Kate's passion, Deeley seizes Anna's language, using it as a warning of his ruling power, as an outlet for his anger and frustration and as a "smoke screen" to hide the personal implications of his relationship with Kate:

ANNA

I feel that is your province.

DEELEY

You feel it's my province? Well, you're damn right. It is my province. I'm glad someone's showing a bit of taste at last. Of course it's my bloody province. I'm her husband. (p. 66)

The conflict between Deeley and Anna becomes more prominent as it extends beyond mere chatter and manifests itself in their singing. Anna's and Deeley's mutual affection for Kate brings to mind the old popular love-song, "Lovely To Look At, Delightful To Know" (p. 26), an association that sparks their remembrance of other tunes. Their singing is not only a sad reminder that the past is irrecoverable, it becomes a unique weapon used against each other in battle for Kate's affections. While the snatches of songs are sung romantically to Kate, the lyrics comment on one another, resembling a sparring match. Anna's infatuation

¹⁷Trussler, p. 171.

with Kate, revealed in the lines, "The way you comb your hair . . .," "Oh but you're lovely, with your smile so warm . . ." and "You are the promised kiss of springtime" (p. 27) is counterattacked by Deeley as he warns Anna that Kate is his property: "I've got a woman crazy for me. She's funny that way." He will not allow Anna to take his wife from him: "Oh no they can't take that away from me . . ." Anna's insistence that she and Kate share a mutual intimacy is threatening to Deeley:

(Singing.) They asked me how I knew
My true love was true,
I of course replied,
Something here inside
Cannot be denied. (p. 28)

But Deeley assures Anna that the "lovely flame" (p. 28) has died; that her past with Kate exists no longer. Anna will not admit defeat and accepts, instead, a slight victory with her foreboding reply, "Smoke gets in your eyes." She insinuates that Deeley refuses to see what is actually there; that the power of the past is greater than that of the present.

There are three principle reminiscences in Old Times, each one declaring sole ownership of the past and of Kate. The conflict, then, assumes a new dimension, simply because past events cannot be verified. Anna and Deeley must choose either to accept the other's version at face value or challenge it. The first to assert control is Deeley by means of his memory of the film "Odd Man Out," when his meeting with Kate seems to be overshadowed with details of his first tricycle, the two usherettes and his personal idolatry of Robert Newton. Perhaps, as Stephen Martineau claims, "the relish for detail is not for its own

sake but functions as a protective mask to cover the more personal implications of the meeting."¹⁸ For, Deeley's admission, "I was off centre and have remained so" (p. 30), suggests that he has always been the "odd man out" and the image of the two usherettes presents the Anna/Kate relationship that he fears will exclude him once and for all. Nevertheless, the purpose of this particular reminiscence is twofold: Firstly, it warrants that he, too, was a part of the past that laid claim to Kate and secondly, it is an attempt to convince Anna that she cannot separate Kate from him, since "it was Robert Newton who brought us together and it is only Robert Newton who can tear us apart" (p. 30).

Although Deeley makes a point of insisting that "there was only one other person in the cinema, one other person in the whole of the whole cinema, and there she is ..." (p. 29) Anna chooses to challenge Deeley's claim as she offers an alternate version of the story:

... I remember one Sunday she said to me, looking up from the paper, come quick, quick, come with me quickly, and we seized our handbags and went, on a bus, to some totally obscure, some totally unfamiliar district and almost alone, saw a wonderful film called Odd Man Out.

Silence (p. 38)

Thus, the event becomes kaleidoscopic as it shifts from Deeley to Anna and it remains impossible to distinguish if either account is correct. The only existing certainty is the threat that Anna's version poses, indicated by the "silence." In order to avoid no man's land, Deeley strategically withdraws by changing the subject: "Yes, I do quite a bit of travelling in my job" (p. 38).

¹⁸ Stephen Martineau, "Pinter's Old Times: The Memory Game," Modern Drama, Vol. XVI (1973), p. 289.

By emphasizing his masculine sexuality in his intimacy with Kate, Deeley tries to force Anna to accept his status as Kate's possessor: "And then at a slightly later stage our naked bodies met, hers cool, warm, highly agreeable ..." (p. 31). Again, Anna provides another version in the second principle reminiscence, which debases his masculinity and questions his sexuality:

The man crying in our room: One night late I returned and found him sobbing, his hand over his face, sitting in the armchair, all crumpled in the armchair and Katey sitting on the bed with a mug of coffee ... I undressed and switched out the light and got into my bed ... there was nothing but sobbing, suddenly it stopped. The man came over to me, quickly looked down at me, but I would have absolutely nothing to do with him, nothing.

Pause

No, no, I'm quite wrong ... he didn't move quickly ... that's quite wrong ... he moved ... very slowly, the light was bad, and stopped. He stood in the centre of the room. He looked at us both, at our beds. Then he turned towards me. He approached my bed. He bent down over me. But I would have nothing to do with him, absolutely nothing. (p. 32)

This story has two purposes: It foreshadows the final scene in which this event is silently re-enacted and it reveals Anna's successful attack on Deeley's self-confidence and masculine power. Contrary to Deeley's memory which finds Kate's body "highly agreeable," Anna's version connotes sexual failure, portraying Deeley as helpless and humiliated in a state of total submission: "He was lying across her lap on the bed" (p. 33). Although he is not "off centre" as he perceives himself to be, but rather "in the centre of the room," Deeley is, more than ever, the odd man out after being rejected by both Anna and Kate. Anna's insistence on relating the proper sequence of events contributes to Deeley's suffering, while her repetition that she "would have nothing to do with him" exemplifies his utter humiliation.

Throughout the battle, thus far, Kate has remained enigmatically silent and withdrawn, occasionally surfacing "to make a feeble protest";¹⁹ "You talk of me as if I were dead" (p. 34). Yet, when she finally becomes somewhat communicative, she devotes her attention to Anna, cutting Deeley out of the conversation completely:

KATE

(To ANNA.) Do you have marble floors?

ANNA

Yes.

KATE

Do you walk in bare feet on them?

ANNA

Yes. But I wear sandals on the terrace, because it can be rather severe on the soles.

KATE

The sun, you mean? The heat.

ANNA

Yes.

DEELEY

I had a great crew in Sicily. A marvellous cameraman. Irving Shultz. Best in the business. We took a pretty austere look at the women in black. The little old women in black. I wrote the film and directed it. My name is Orson Welles.

KATE

(To ANNA.) Do you drink orange juice on your terrace in the morning, and bullshots at sunset, and look down at the sea?

ANNA

Sometimes, yes.

DEELEY

As a matter of fact I am at the top of my profession, as a matter of fact, and I have indeed been associated with substantial numbers of articulate and sensitive people, mainly prostitutes of all kinds.

¹⁹Trussler, p. 176.

KATE

(To ANNA.) And do you like the Sicilian people?

DEELEY

I've been there. There's nothing more to see, there's nothing more to investigate, nothing. There's nothing more in Sicily to investigate.

KATE

(To ANNA.) Do you like the Sicilian people?

ANNA stares at her.

Silence (pp. 41-43)

Ignored by his conspirators, Deeley uses the shock effect to turn the conversation back to him. By referring to himself as "Orson Welles" and by declaring his association with "articulate and sensitive people, mainly prostitutes," he urgently tries to call attention to himself. That his strategy fails is indicated by the repetition in his speech, "There's nothing more to see ...," which clearly reveals the anger and frustration seething beneath his words. Although he desperately tries to be included, the final "silence" positively identifies him as odd man out and serves as a prelude to the re-enactment scene that follows which will reinforce his state of isolation.

Anna has one superlative manoeuver. She possesses the power to "abstract Kate from the present and make her live in the past,"²⁰ thus excluding Deeley entirely. Act I ends with the establishment of Deeley as the true odd man out after he tries in vain to intercept the shadow from the past in order to shift it back to the present.

In Act II, the scene moves to the bedroom, "a visual symbol of

²⁰Hughes, p. 472.

the depth of Anna's intrusion."²¹ But almost immediately, Deeley begins to seize control of the situation by affirming his property rights:

We sleep here. These are beds. The great thing about these beds is that they are susceptible to any amount of permutation. They can be separated as they are now. Or placed at right angles, or one can bisect the other, or you can sleep feet to feet, or head to head, or side by side. It's the castors that make all this possible. (p. 48)

Still in command, Deeley relates the third principle reminiscence. His attack takes the sexual form as he enlightens Anna of his previous meeting with her at the "Wayfarers." Like Lenny of The Homecoming, "he asserts his power and masculinity by telling stories in which women appear as degraded or subservient creatures":²²

You sat on a very low sofa, I sat opposite and looked up your skirt. Your black stockings were very black because your thighs were so white ... I simply sat sipping my light ale and gazed ... gazed up your skirt. You didn't object, you found my gaze perfectly acceptable. (p. 51)

Whereas Anna, in her own reminiscence, recollects having "nothing to do with him," Deeley's memory presents Anna as obliging: "You didn't object ..." With his blunt vulgarity, Deeley uses Anna's word "gaze" to "force a passive feminine role upon her,"²³ while at the same time implies that she is presently no longer desirable: "That's something that's all over now, of course, isn't it, nothing like the same palpable profit in it now, it's all over" (p. 51). To ward off Anna's advances towards Kate, Deeley strives to diminish her sexual powers by insinuating that she has changed with age; there is no longer the same

²¹Hughes, p. 473.

²²Ganz, p. 171.

²³Ibid., p. 174.

attraction to lure either Kate or Deeley in the present:

You must be about forty, I should think, by now.

Pause

If I walked into the Wayfarers Tavern now, and saw you sitting in the corner, I wouldn't recognize you. (p. 57)

Although Deeley does not seem to know Anna in the first act, he claims²⁴ an intimate knowledge of her in the second act. Thus, Deeley's story of the "Wayfarers Tavern" is either "an attempt to devalue Anna's memories of the past"²⁴ or it could have actually occurred. This is one of the ambiguities that Pinter chooses to leave open, suggesting the possibility that both these explanations can be true.

Their conflict is further illustrated in the argument over who should dry Kate after her bath (p. 54); in their singing, which is accelerated, emphasizing the underlying tension between them (p. 58); and in Kate's and Anna's re-enactments which once again deny Deeley's participation (pp. 59, 62). Deeley begins "to find all this distasteful" (p. 66) when he realizes that Anna has usurped the upperhand in the competition and his anger is revealed in the coarseness of his language:

... Waiting for all that, a kind of elegance we know nothing about, a slim-bellied Cote d'Azur thing we know absolutely nothing about, a lobster and lobster sauce ideology we know fuck all about ... I have my eye on a number of pulses, pulses all round the globe, deprivations and insults, why should I waste valuable space listening to two -- (p. 67)

Anna, acknowledging Deeley's present vulnerability, now claims Kate as her own:

²⁴Anderson, p. 110.

ANNA

(To DEELEY quietly.) I would like you to understand that I came here not to disrupt but to celebrate.

Pause

To celebrate a very old and treasured friendship, something that was forged between us long before you knew of our existence.

Pause

I found her ... (p. 68)

When the battle between Deeley and Anna reaches its climax, Kate asserts herself and takes command with the memory of Anna's "death." Before discussing the implications of this final scene, it is first necessary to introduce the third major conflict in Old Times.

This conflict concerns the Anna/Kate dichotomy in which Pinter, in Pirandellian fashion, explores the splits in people and between people. There is much evidence in the play to support the claim that Anna exists in the landscape of the mind as the vital force of Kate's inner life. Prior to Anna's entrance, Deeley and Kate speak of her while her "figure remains still in dim light at the window" (p. 7). Like memories, figures are barely discernable.²⁵ When she is to participate in the conversation, she simply walks downstage, calling attention to the fact that, "like the past to which she belongs, Anna has no objective existence."²⁶ As Alan Hughes suggests, Anna has been

²⁵Robert Skloot, "Putting Out the Light: Staging the Theme of Pinter's Old Times," The Quarterly Journal of Speech, Vol. 61, No. 3 (Oct. 1975), p. 266.

²⁶Hughes, p. 468.

"invented to combat conjugal boredom,"²⁷ a situation first explored by Pinter in The Lover. The Lover demonstrates the extent to which people will go in order to satisfy their needs in a relationship. By assuming alternate roles -- Richard as husband/lover and Sarah as wife/mistress -- they are able to portray different aspects of the same personality, thus enlivening what might be a dull, uniform marriage. Similarly, the Anna/Kate dichotomy becomes evidence of Deeley's dissatisfaction with the present state of his marriage. The women represent two extremes of the human personality and their contrasts reveal Deeley's preference for a woman like Anna. It is only when Anna "begins to take on an independent existence that she rapidly emerges as a menacing intruder who seriously threatens the marriage instead of enlivening it."²⁸

Deeley states that Kate was a girl whose

... only claim to virtue was silence but who lacked any sense of fixedness, any sense of decisiveness, but was compliant only to the shifting winds, with which she went, but not the winds, and certainly not my winds, such as they are, but I suppose winds that only she understood ... (p. 35)

That Kate lacks "fixedness" suggests her vacillation between roles. There does not seem to be any fixed point to her sliding personality; the "winds" inside her cause her to slip back and forth, from one personality to another. The "Kate" side of her character is dull: "She lacks curiosity" (p. 23); apathetic: "She hasn't made many friends, although there's been every opportunity for her to do so" (p. 23); a disintegrating personality: "I was interested once in the arts, but I

²⁷Hughes, p. 470.

²⁸Ganz, p. 173.

can't remember which ones they were" (p. 37) and most importantly; not "sexually forthcoming" (p. 37). On the other hand, the Anna side is vigorous, crafty, had "hundreds" of friends (p. 15) and in contrast to the quiet country house, she lives on a "volcanic island" (p. 22) suggestive of her role as the active, sexual principle.

Kate's lack of "decisiveness" is in keeping with her preference to maintain a hazy, dream-like existence:

I don't care for harsh lines ... The only nice thing about a big city is that when it rains it blurs everything, and it blurs the lights from the cars, doesn't it, and blurs your eyes ... (p. 59)

This blurred effect extends into Deeley's courtship of his wife, as the two sides of Kate become confused. Their identities are mingled when Anna and Kate went to the film "almost alone" (p. 38), again, at the party: "Looking up your skirt in her underwear" (p. 65) and once more, with Anna in the cafe:

She thought she was you, said little, so little. Maybe she was you. Maybe it was you, having coffee with me, saying little, so little. (p. 69)

"Compliant ... to the shifting winds," the two personalities often separate and interchange. When Anna will have "nothing to do" with Deeley, "she embodies Kate's refusal to grant him the passionate arousal he desires from her."²⁹ However, that Anna wears Kate's underwear reveals that there is a strong sexual force in Kate and suggests that Anna is its embodiment.³⁰ Thus, Deeley chose Anna's bed over Kate's since he "thought he was different in it because he was a

²⁹Ganz, p. 173.

³⁰Ibid., p. 174.

man" (p. 72). Again, it was the Anna part of Kate that fell in love with Deeley, since Kate "would always wait not just for the emergence of ripple" before jumping, but rather "for the ripples to pervade and pervade the surface ..." (p. 36). Kate verifies this as she tells Deeley:

KATE

She was prepared to extend herself to you.

DEELEY

I beg your pardon?

KATE

She fell in love with you. (p. 70)

It is the passionate, sexual side of Kate that Deeley is anxious to recover; the Anna aspect of herself that Kate has repressed: "I hardly remember her. I've almost totally forgotten her" (p. 12). A "parson's daughter" (p. 64), Kate is denying the sexual aspect of her character and her obsessive need to bathe suggests her fear of sexuality as something "dirty." Thus, Kate had once killed the "dirty" part of herself, cleansed herself from what she felt needed cleansing and assumed her present role as the enigmatic, blank lady.

I felt the time and season appropriate and that by dying alone and dirty you had acted with proper decorum. It was time for my bath. (p. 72)

When Anna surfaces again, Kate must "kill" her once more.

It must be acknowledged that Anna can be both a part of Kate which Kate kills and a separate person. As Esslin explains, "The different levels of possible interpretation do not exclude each other; they must co-exist to create the atmosphere of poetic ambivalence on which the image of the play rests."³¹ Regardless whether Anna's

³¹Esslin, Pinter, p. 188.

"existence is metaphorical, real, or a combination of both, the ending of the play is clear. Refusing to become a slave to Anna's past and unwilling to succumb to the passionate, sexual life that Anna embodies, Kate possesses the power to deny Anna's existence in the present. Kate's remembrance of Anna "dead" (p. 71) implies that Anna, as Kate's best friend, is now as meaningless as the past to which she belongs; while Anna, as that part of Kate that Kate kills, lies dead, yet "eternally latent within."³² In the same way, Kate's attempt to plaster Deeley's face with dirt affirms that he, too, is dead for her.³³ He cannot participate in her present world, nor can he penetrate the shell of her existence, living as she does "in a psychic blur where nothing has shape or form."³⁴

The play concludes in silence. While Anna lies on the divan, Kate and Deeley re-enact the weeping scene which underlines, once again, Deeley's humiliation and isolation. As with Edward in A Slight Ache, Disson in Tea Party, Max in The Homecoming and Duff in Landscape, Deeley ends in a state of numb despair,³⁵ helpless "before a woman upon whom he remains utterly dependent."³⁶

"Although the play ends in blazing light, it is not charting the

³²Ganz, p. 176.

³³Ibid., p. 176.

³⁴Ibid., p. 176.

³⁵Anderson, p. 107.

³⁶Baker and Tabachnick, p. 138.

path of characters who progress toward symbolic understanding or truth."³⁷
On the contrary, it discloses a picture of the death-in-life in no man's
land, "fixing it in our memories in the same way the flashbulb of a
camera makes possible the reality of the photograph."³⁸ Kate, like
Ellen, remains detached and motionless between her two alternatives.
Deeley, with his sterile present and Anna, with her energetic but
terminated past, are banished to no man's land, "where between desire
and death falls the shadow that could be called life."³⁹

³⁷Skloot, p. 266.

³⁸Ibid., p. 266.

³⁹Jack Kroll, "Past, Present and Pinter," Newsweek (June 14, 1971), p. 70.

CHAPTER III

NO MAN'S LAND: THE UNCHARTED TERRITORY

Except for the point, the still point,
There would be no dance, and there is only
the dance.

-- T. S. Eliot, Burnt Norton.

The present is only a strange interlude between
the past and the future.

-- Eugene O'Neill, Strange Interlude

As I stated in the Introduction, four years had intervened from the time Old Times appeared in 1971 to the production of No Man's Land in 1975. Aware of his banishment to an artistic no man's land, Pinter explains:

I've never been able to sit down and say, "Now I'm going to write a play." I just have no alternative but to wait for the thing to be released within me.¹

This prompted critics such as Harold Clurman, T. E. Kalem and Jack Kroll, to perceive No Man's Land in terms of auto-criticism; the two writers, Pinter and Hirst, being one man "before and after."² The play can be seen as "a remarkably complex orchestration of Pinter's anxieties and his vision, perhaps unconscious, of his entire persona as a man and an artist."³ As a man, the middle-aged Pinter "senses that his possibilities for change have been narrowed or foreclosed and that an icily

¹Quoted by Kroll, "Puzzle," p. 77.

²Harold Clurman, "Theatre," The Nation (Aug. 16, 1975), p. 124.

³Kroll, "Puzzle," p. 77.

unalterable route lies ahead"⁴; as an artist, he fears the void of no man's land and the freezing of creativity.

No Man's Land is an "echo chamber of the Pinter canon"⁵; a reverberation of situations, themes and techniques familiar to earlier Pinter plays: The basic situation of No Man's Land echoes that of The Caretaker in which Spooner, like Davies, is met in a pub and invited to the house of a potential benefactor. In an attempt to establish a position for himself in the household, Spooner, like Davies, becomes a menacing intruder and his hopes for new-found security are defeated; the room as shelter -- "What a remarkably pleasant room. I feel at peace here. Safe from all danger"⁶ -- is at once "home and hell, womb and battleground,"⁷ reminiscent of The Room, The Birthday Party and The Homecoming; Foster and Briggs, a pair of sinister and mysterious thugs, are clearly derived from Ben and Gus of The Dumb Waiter, Goldberg and McCann of The Birthday Party and Lenny and Joey of The Homecoming; the unreliability of memory⁸ and the "duel of wits ... conducted in terms

⁴T. E. Kalem, "Gamesmanship Galore: No Man's Land," Time (Nov. 22, 1976), p. 58.

⁵Bernard R. Dukore, Where Laughter Stops: Pinter's Tragicomedy (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1976), p. 62.

⁶Harold Pinter, No Man's Land (London: Eyre Methuen, 1975), p. 17. All further references to this play will appear in this edition.

⁷John Weightman, "Another Play For Pinterites," Encounter (July, 1975), p. 24.

⁸Dukore, p. 62.

of one spurious reminiscence topping another"⁹ was first dramatized in Old Times; Spooner's "I have known this before. The voice unheard. A listener. The command from an upper floor" (p. 68) is a direct echo of The Dumb Waiter; and the ominous blackout at the end of Act I immediately recalls that of The Birthday Party. Perhaps Pinter, like the characters of Landscape, Silence and Old Times, is seeking refuge in the nostalgia of the past in an attempt to recover his previous security and success. Thus, Spooner's reiteration of "I have known this before" is, in part, Pinter's quest for "la recherche du temps perdu." For, in No Man's Land, states of being are growing old and former men of "action" are now caught, like Eliot's "hollow men," "Between the idea/And the reality/Between the motion/And the act." Spooner's belief that he will execute his painting and Hirst's presumption that he will write his essay, echo Davies' intended trip to Sidcup in The Caretaker -- each one is an illusion that offers a purpose in life. But when frozen illusions are ultimately shattered, exposing the emptiness at the core of their beings, Hirst and Spooner slide willingly into no man's land. As an artist, this is Pinter's fear -- that he will end, as Eliot writes in "The Hollow Men," "Not with a bang but a whimper."

On the surface, No Man's Land dramatizes the familiar intrusion plot, whereby Spooner, a social-climbing guest, menaces the stability of "family life" (p. 50), the Hirst domain. Spooner, sensing the security and safety of the Hirst drawing room, attempts to insinuate

⁹Esslin, Pinter, p. 198.

himself into the life of his host. Offering to play the honest "boatman" (p. 33), Spooner wishes to accompany Hirst on "the last lap" (p. 32) with the hopes of ultimately attaining a permanent position for himself. But Hirst, existing in a continual state of alcoholic stupor, is under the supervision of two sinister caretakers who keep their employer in vague contact with reality and protect him from outside encroachment. Thus, Foster and Briggs treat Spooner as a menacing intruder while they, in turn, act as a menacing bulwark against Spooner's potential achievement.

But No Man's Land is not merely a variation of The Room, The Birthday Party, The Caretaker and The Homecoming, where the intruder is either in control or destroyed in the end. As I stated in the Introduction, Pinter has become increasingly concerned with the question of time and its effects on states of mind. For Pinter characters, the past can serve as a convenient escape from present conflicts (as in Landscape and Silence) or as a battleground for discerning territorial rights (as in Old Times). But more importantly, the past is able to comply with man's need for order, security and fixity. To live in the landscape of memory is comfortable as it eliminates the threatening unpredictability of the present. The remembrance of a past which has already happened and is now fixed, is incapable of producing shocks or surprises.¹⁰ Thus, to linger in the past is safer than living in the present which may, at any moment, expose man's nakedness. However, when man becomes aware that he is no longer the same being he

¹⁰John Bush Jones, "Stasis as Structure in Pinter's No Man's Land," Modern Drama, Vol. XIX, No. 3 (Sept. 1976), p. 294.

was in the past, he begins to fear the present which seems powerless to establish him and remains terrified of a future which will change him again.¹¹ This is the situation that Pinter develops in No Man's Land, in which the only escape is the emancipation from time. Since the only emancipation from time is death, the characters must consequently locate their still point, or no man's land, somewhere between life and death.

In No Man's Land, Pinter explores the subjects that have come to be associated with the works of Proust and Pirandello: simply, the agonizing flux of life, where the human personality is not single and fixed but multiform and changing; man's fear of impermanence and his need for order and fixity; and the idea of permanence in art, which for the artist, is a reconciliation of life and form. Pinter weaves these ideas into an intricate design which is essentially a dualism of movement and stasis, time and timelessness. For within a structure that conveys a general impression of stasis,¹² Pinter dramatizes the ideas of flux, change and impermanence, and although Pinter's characters are "victims and prisoners"¹³ of time, they nevertheless achieve timelessness in the work of art.

From The Room onward, Pinter has demonstrated his awareness that reality is not absolute, but forever changing and elusive, never certain from one moment to the next. As Pinter says:

¹¹Poulet, p. 155.

¹²See Jones' article.

¹³Beckett, Proust, p. 2.

Because "reality" is quite a strong firm word we tend to think, or to hope, that the state to which it refers is equally firm, settled and unequivocal. It doesn't seem to be ...¹⁴

Thus, Pinter's works present the ever-present difficulty, if not impossibility of verification. Like the cubist painter, Pinter depicts the multiple personality of man, pliable and shifting, which results in man's endless odyssey for a fixed standard by which he can establish his own identity. As an artist, Pinter understands that in a fluctuating reality, such a quest is futile.

Pinter believes that

... To arrive at a lucid appreciation of what is taking place is impossible. Perhaps it can only be achieved through art. In life, I don't think it can be achieved.¹⁵

Thus, art becomes the artist's hold on reality, for an artistic form is timeless and hence, fixed. As Pirandello says:

All that lives, by the fact of living, has a form, and by the same token must die -- except for the work of art which lives forever in so far that it is form.¹⁶

Pirandello's views of art

... are an extension of his concept of the face and the mask. When a man becomes a "costruzione," placing a mask over his changing features, he stands in the same relationship to his new identity as the artist does to his art -- for art is the artist's "costruzione," the form he imposes on chaotic life. The construction, in each case, is built up by the human demand for order.¹⁷

¹⁴Pinter, "Writing," p. 81.

¹⁵Pinter, as quoted by Kroll, "Puzzle," p. 77.

¹⁶Luigi Pirandello, "Preface to Six Characters in Search of an Author," (1925), Naked Masks, ed. Eric Bentley (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co. Inc., 1952), p. 372.

¹⁷Robert Brustein, "Pirandello's Drama of Revolt," Pirandello: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. Glauco Cambon (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1967), p. 121.

No Man's Land, then, is Pinter's "costruzione"; a dramatic form which dramatizes both the conflict between life and form and the artist's relationship to his art. The condition of stasis and permanence that the artist, Hirst, achieves at the end of the play, mirrors Pinter's own attainment of order and fixity in the work of art. For art is the only form that will remain eternally, "as it is." As Spooner says,

What quarrel can be found with what is, au fond, a gesture towards the sustenance and preservation of art, and through art to virtue?

HIRST

Through art to virtue. (Raises glass.) To your continued health. (p. 28)

John Bush Jones, in his essay, "Stasis as Structure in Pinter's No Man's Land," develops the thesis that the shape of the play is what No Man's Land is about.¹⁸ The tone of immobility is set with the opening words, "As it is?" and signals the outcome when Hirst's "I'll drink to that" suggests the acceptance of an unchanging condition which will remain "absolutely as it is" (p. 15). Since the physical movement of the characters is minimal, which visually anticipates the frozen ending of ultimate stasis, the principle structural element is language.

Jones observes that there are two elements of the formalized speech which give the play its noticeable shape: "a coherent, unified fabric of imagery emanating from or related to a controlling metaphor of stasis" and verbal repetition.¹⁹

¹⁸Jones, p. 291.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 291.

The play is loaded with verbal imagery and direct statements suggestive of the condition of stasis:²⁰ Spooner's "It assures me ... that I am fixed, concrete" (p. 17) indicates man's need for permanence and fixity in a changing world. Spooner's "... I first appreciated how quiet life can be" (p. 24) suggests the desire for quietude over an existence in a fluctuating, ephemeral reality. Hirst's story of the church garlands (p. 29) is a memorial to death as well as an abstention from, or the denial of a basic activity in life.²¹ The two recitations of the characteristics of no man's land (pp. 34, 95) are direct thematic statements describing the ultimate stasis obtained at the end. Both Spooner's painting (p. 39) and Hirst's photograph album (p. 45) render the active static. Hirst's "It's gone. Did it exist? It's gone. It never existed. It remains. I am sitting here forever" (p. 46) fuses past, present and future into an eternal state of immobility. "Bolsover Street" or "Life At A Dead End" (p. 62) serves as a metaphor for the Hirst household. The impossibility of ever changing the subject (p. 91), results in a total, final immobility or stasis,²² for "nothing else will happen forever" (p. 94).

Repetition contributes to the general impression of stasis in that it retards progress or development while keeping the situation "as it is": Foster's repeated questions on his first meeting with Spooner serve not to advance either the relationship or the situation.

²⁰Jones, p. 299.

²¹Ibid., p. 299.

²²Ibid., p. 294.

but to keep things precisely where they are.²³

What are you drinking? Christ I'm thirsty. How are you? I'm parched ... What are you drinking? It's bloody late. I'm worn to a frazzle. This is what I want ... How are you? What are you drinking? Who are you? ... (p. 35)

By not letting Spooner answer, Foster has frozen their encounter at a particular point, not allowing it to progress.²⁴ Spooner's repetition of "I have known this before," suggests that each action or thought is repeating itself, thus denying a progression from one activity to another.²⁵ Hirst's three alcoholic collapses emphasize visually the failed attempts for action and his constant demands for refills keep him immobile and in vague contact with reality. Hirst's repetition of his dream exposes the conflict between the dynamism of the waterfall and the calm of the lake.²⁶ The conflict is resolved in the last example when the energetic waterfall is overpowered by the static lake.

One of the most important keys to the understanding of the play can be found in Briggs' monologue pertaining to the difficulties of getting into and out of Bolsover Street. This passage is not, as John Weightman unjustly claims, "pure verbal excrescence, intended to fill in time with local amusement."²⁷ It is more accurately a metaphor for the Hirst domain and reveals "the nature and cause of the stasis which

²³Jones, p. 297.

²⁴Ibid., p. 297.

²⁵Ibid., p. 297.

²⁶Ibid., p. 298.

²⁷Weightman, p. 25.

is both the form and theme of No Man's Land.²⁸

Bolsover Street, as Briggs explains,

was in the middle of an intricate one-way system. It was a one-way system easy enough to get into. The only trouble was that, once in, you couldn't get out. (p. 62)

The Hirst household is engulfed in the same no man's land from which it cannot emerge. It is an inescapable "one-way system" for both its inhabitants and guests: Hirst's remark, "It's a long time since we had a free man in this house" (p. 21), suggests that Hirst, himself, is less than free. Spooner is imprisoned in the darkness of the drawing room at the end of Act I. In addition, Foster and Briggs accompany their employer to no man's land in the end. "Life At A Dead End" is indeed the condition of the Hirst household. As Hirst says: "And so I say to you, tender the dead, as you would yourself be tendered, now, in what you would describe as your life" (p. 79).

However, as Jones points out, the stasis of the Hirst domain, like that of Bolsover Street, is a voluntary condition:

There is no suggestion, either in the shape of No Man's Land or in the more explicit statements that it makes, that anything external to a man -- whether societal, cosmic, or meta-physical -- is responsible for thrusting him into a state of suspended animation ... Quite to the contrary, most of the play's evidence points squarely to the person himself for creating -- or, if not creating, at least allowing his own condition of stasis. Not only Hirst's "I'll drink to that" acceptance, but the very fact of his lying in an alcoholic stupor, or such a minor detail as his refusal to take his morning walk (p. 81), show Hirst as chiefly responsible for sinking himself into the apparently irreversible stasis that obtains at the play's end.

The reason for this volitional entrapment or stagnation may be the same as the reason for characters desiring the

²⁸Jones, p. 301.

security of a room in other of Pinter's plays: fear. Here it is a fear of flux, of change, of encountering and perhaps being rebuffed by the unknown. By comparison, a life of quietude, even to the point of total immobility, is relatively safe and hence, comfortable -- though one may occasionally be disturbed by memories of what he was.²⁹

Because existence is chaotic, irrational and fluid, man is not the stable organism he may believe himself to be. "An individual," writes Beckett in his essay on Froust, "is a succession of individuals,"³⁰ since the self undergoes a perpetual metamorphosis. As one of Pirandello's characters explains:

But what am I really? I'm sure I don't know. I assure you I don't know -- even myself! All this way and that, fickle, changing, my feet off the ground! First I'm here and then I'm there. I laugh. I go off into a corner to have a good cry all by myself. Oh, how terrible it is! Sometimes I just have to hide my face to keep from seeing myself. I am so ashamed at realizing how different, how incoherent, how unreliable I am from time to time.³¹

In a protean reality, man is constantly undergoing change, so that identity is difficult to establish and harder to maintain. In No Man's Land, Spooner is at one point addressed as "Charles Weatherby" (p. 78), Foster is called "Jack" (p. 61) and Briggs is referred to as "Denson" (p. 68). The fact that these characters go by more than one name suggests that there is nothing constant or certain about their identity. However, the question of identity is not new in Pinter. It began with Rose's "Who are you?" in The Room and was continued in The Birthday Party, when Stanley's identity is crushed and a new one is born. A Slight Ache presents the idea of the loss of identity, whereby

²⁹Jones, p. 302.

³⁰Beckett, Froust, p. 8.

³¹Luigi Pirandello, "Each in His Own Way," Naked Masks, p. 281.

characters become interchangeable. In The Caretaker, Davies' papers symbolize man's search for identity and the impossibility of discovering it. The Basement dramatizes people changing drastically from one moment to the next. The Lover and Old Times demonstrate that the individual contains not one fixed personality, but diverse personalities and The Dwarfs denies the possibility of ever knowing anyone for certain:

The point is, who are you? Not why or how, not even what. I can see what, perhaps, clearly enough. But who are you? ... You're the sum of so many reflections. How many reflections? Whose reflections? Is that what you consist of? (p. 111)

Since the human personality is in constant flux, the roles a man assumes must fluctuate as well. Therefore, Spooner is both poet and tramp, guest and intruder, stranger and acquaintance. Hirst is a successful writer and an alcoholic failure, host and prisoner. Foster, as the name suggests, is a foster son -- "Have you met your host? He's my father" (p. 35) -- and foster father³² -- "We make life possible for him" (p. 50). Briggs is both guardian and jailer.³³

On the question of fluctuating identities, John Weightman writes:

Even if we willingly grant the principle that all personal identity is uncertain, why should Hirst, who seems to figure at the centre of the pattern, be at least three completely different people in the course of the action? In the first part, he is an almost speechless drunk who exits

³²Lucina Paquet Gabbard, The Dream Structure of Pinter's Plays: A Psychoanalytic Approach (New Jersey: Associated University Press, 1976), p. 261.

³³Gabbard acknowledges that in the American military, the "brig" is a prison, p. 260.

through the door on his hands and knees. At the start of the second act, he is a comic old buffer of a club-man, who claims to recognize Spooner as a former acquaintance, Charles Weatherby, whom he once cuckolded ... Towards the end, he becomes a pseudo-poetic figure in a chair intoning a sort of chorus about time having to have a stop ... And at no point does he correspond to his frequently stated character, which is that of an eminent and successful writer. ... What a pity it is not set in a firmer context.³⁴

Weightman seems to have missed the point, for the fact that the play is "not set in a firmer context" is precisely Pinter's success in conveying meaning through form. Pinter is dramatizing the idea that neither reality nor identity are fixed and permanent. Instead, they fluctuate gratuitously, as demonstrated by Hirst's changing character. The reason why Hirst does not "correspond to his frequently stated character" is primarily because he no longer is that character. He has been changed by the action of time, so that Hirst, in the present, is neither successful nor is he a writer.

In Proust's view, man is condemned to a life that is a constant substitution of self for self so that the human being is never sure whether he will come to life again or in whom he will come to life.³⁵ Thus, man is haunted by the anguish of death, not only the death that awaits him at the end of total existence, but the fragmentary and successive deaths that close the existence of each "self."³⁶ In this respect, man is trapped in a no man's land between "this side" of a death to come and "that side" of a death "already come," a death

³⁴Weightman, p. 25.

³⁵Poulet, p. 154.

³⁶Ibid., p. 154.

beyond which lies his past life.³⁷

Hirst and Spooner are "survivors from a discarded history."³⁸ In the past, they "knew remarkable people" (p. 44), were allowed a taste of the "bucolic life" (p. 29) and were sexually active, Hirst being accused of "insane and corrosive sexual absolutism" (p. 76). In addition, Hirst was an eminent "man of letters" (p. 67) and Spooner was "one of the golden of his generation" (p. 89). Because each individual recreates his past according to his own needs and his own sense of order, it remains impossible to verify the past events of Spooner and Hirst. Nevertheless, whatever it is they recall, exists no longer, since time's irrevocable forces have changed all that they were and all that they possessed. The "remarkable people" are now merely nameless faces haunting the pages of a photograph album. The "bucolic life" has inexplicably vanished and exists in memory only: "What happened to them? What happened to our cottages? What happened to our lawns?" (p. 29). Sexually, they are impotent. Spooner admits, "I don't peep on sex. That's gone forever ..." (p. 19), and later pays homage to Hirst's state of affairs: "... you won't I hope, object if I take out my prayer beads and my prayer mat and salute what I take to be your impotence?" (p. 33). Although they are "too old for it to matter" (p. 69), they nevertheless linger in the effects of their losses as they attempt, in schoolboyish fashion, to top each other's memories of

³⁷Poulet, p. 154.

³⁸William Abrahams, "Now and in England," The Atlantic Monthly (Feb., 1976), p. 103.

sexual experience. Creatively, they are both in a no man's land. Hirst, once an acclaimed writer is now "an alcoholic literate of fading reputation"³⁹ and fading mind:

I have an essay to write. A critical essay. We'll have to check the files, find out what it is I'm supposed to be appraising. At the moment it's slipped my mind. (p. 83)

Spooner is no longer one of the "golden," but is instead a failed poet working as a "pintpot" and "pisspot" attendant in a local pub (p. 48). Thus, the play explores the no man's land of the aging mind, where life seems to be terminated while living continues; when the intensification of loss signals the death-in-life of old age. Spooner and Hirst are now "of an age" (p. 47) when they can "speak with the weight of experience behind [them]" (p. 20), since words are all that are left when the experience is gone. As Spooner says, "All we have left is the English language" (p. 18). For the two men, the present is merely a "strange interlude" between a death "already come," beyond which lies the ambiguous past of blurred shapes and "blank" faces (p. 79) and a death to come: the inevitable future in no man's land.

In Burnt Norton, Eliot writes that "humankind cannot bear very much reality," and for man, the confrontation with a changing reality is too alarming to bear. Humanity demands order and a sense of fixity.

As George Poulet writes:

The anguish of solitude is not only that of being detached from things and beings, it is being detached from fixity, from the permanence one would like to have beings and things possess and give them in return ...⁴⁰

³⁹Michael Coveney, "No Man's Land: Old Vic," Plays and Players (July, 1975), p. 22.

⁴⁰Poulet, p. 153.

Man is unable to accept an existence which constantly changes, for anything formless fills him with dread and uncertainty,⁴¹ Thus, Spooner takes refuge in the belief that he is "fixed, concrete" (p. 17). He assures himself that "I am I" (p. 89) and expects others to respond to him in accordance with his own self-definition:

But please don't be alarmed. I shan't stay long. I never stay long, with others. They do not wish it. And that, for me, is a happy state of affairs. My only security, you see, my true comfort and solace, rests in the confirmation that I elicit from people of all kinds a common and constant level of indifference. It assures me that I am as I think myself to be, that I am fixed, concrete. To show interest in me or, good gracious, anything tending towards a positive liking of me, would cause in me a condition of the acutest alarm. Fortunately the danger is remote. (p. 17)

When Spooner thinks that he is beginning to interest Hirst, he becomes alarmed at the prospect that he is other than what he believes himself to be:

SPOONER

I have gone too far, you think?

HIRST

I'm expecting you to go very much farther.

SPOONER

Really? That doesn't mean I interest you, I hope?

HIRST

Not in the least.

SPOONER

Thank goodness for that. For a moment my heart sank. (p. 20)

Against the subject of change in time, Spooner poses the idea of a stable eternity: "In fact, you're kindness itself, probably always

⁴¹Brustein, p. 107.

are kindness itself, now and in England and in Hampstead and for all eternity" (p. 17). And again, "I am a poet. I am interested in where I am eternally present and active" (p. 20). Although Spooner is "present," he has abstained from any activity. "Too old for any kind of expectation" (p. 18), he has become a voyeur; a spectator on life: "But of course I observe a good deal, on my peeps through twigs" (p. 18). In this way, he can "keep the proper distance between himself and others" (p. 19) and insure himself a static, predictable existence:

When you can no longer maintain an objective relation to matter, the game's not worth the candle, so forget it and remember that what is obligatory to keep in your vision is space, space in moonlight particularly, and lots of it. (p. 19)

Although Spooner is aware that "something happened" (p. 89) which changed the man he was, he nevertheless admits: "I don't know what it was" (p. 89). In his need for certainty, he is unable to attribute the cause of his losses to something as formless and as undefinable as time and is even more unwilling to accept the condition of man's life as unknowable and in constant flux.

Hirst continues the idea of the "eternally present" in discussing the life embodied in his photograph album:

I had my world. I have it. Don't think now that it's gone I'll choose to sneer at it, to cast doubt on it, to wonder if it properly existed. No. We're talking of my youth, which can never leave me. No. It existed. It was solid, the people in it were solid, while ... transformed by light, while being sensitive ... to all the changing light. (p. 45)

But Hirst is aware that men are still "transformed by light" which is why he prematurely closes the curtains in Act II:

The light ... out there ... is gloomy ... hardly daylight at all. It's falling, rapidly. Distasteful. Let us close the curtains. Put the lamps on.

BRIGGS closes the curtains, lights lamps.

HIRST

Ah. What relief! (p. 86)

While Spooner chooses to believe that his existence is fixed and permanent, Hirst chooses to live in a constant alcoholic haze between awareness and oblivion, remembering and forgetting.⁴² Tormented by a past frozen in pain and a future which holds the uncharted void, Hirst can tolerate only the anesthetized present.⁴³ Like Edmund, in O'Neill's Long Day's Journey Into Night, Hirst drinks to be outside of time, which recalls Edmund's recitation of Beaudelaire's prose poem:

"Be always drunken. Nothing else matters: that is the question. If you would not feel the horrible burden of Time weighing on your shoulders and crushing you to earth, be drunken continually.

Drunken with what? With wine, with poetry or with virtue, as you will. But be drunken.

And if sometimes, on the stairs of a palace, or on the green side of a ditch, or in the dreary solitude of your own room, you should awaken and the drunkenness be half or wholly slipped away from you, ask of the wind, or of the wave, or of the star, or of the bird, or of the clock, of whatever flies, or sighs, or rocks, or sings, or speaks, ask what hour it is; and the wind, wave, star, bird, clock, will answer you: 'It is the hour to be drunken! Be drunken, if you would not be martyred slaves of Time; be drunken continually! With wine, with poetry, or with virtue, as you will!'⁴⁴

⁴²Gabbard, p. 255.

⁴³Ibid., p. 255.

⁴⁴Eugene O'Neill, Long Day's Journey Into Night (London: Yale University Press, 1955; rpt. 1973), p. 132.

Thus, Hirst's aim is to "drink with dignity" (p. 45) and his drinking is both a means of escape from an ephemeral reality and an excuse for the chaos which would exist without alcohol. But alcohol, like Spooner's sense of fixity, merely offers the illusion that he exists outside of time, and on occasion, his clouded vision catches a glimpse of reality:

I do not understand ... I do not understand ... and I see it all about me ... continually ... how the most sensitive and cultivated of men can so easily change, almost overnight, into the bully, the cutpurse, the brigand. In my day nobody changed. A man was ... (p. 78)

And as he tells Spooner:

I might even show you my photograph album. You might even see a face in it which might remind you of your own, of what you once were. (p. 79)

In life, the only escape for the four characters is the total and final condition of stasis which they attain at the end. That the subject will never be changed and that Hirst will remain seated forever insures a death-in-life existence comparable to the life embodied in his photographs. Like the photographs, Hirst, Spooner, Foster and Briggs will "possess all that emotion ... trapped" when they are "fixed, imprisoned" (p. 79) in the icy stillness of no man's land, "which never moves, which never changes, which never grows older, but which remains forever, icy and silent" (p. 95).

No Man's Land is Pinter's reconciliation of life and form. By the living nature of the drama, Pinter is ensured that his characters will come to life at each performance. But at the same time, they are fixed and can never be other than what they are: characters in a play. No Man's Land is, as well, evidence of Pinter's success in conveying meaning

through form: Pinter's meaning is his desire to attain fixity and permanence in a work of art, and the form is the work of art in which the characters do attain fixity and permanence.

CONCLUSION

Without believing that art progresses, we can still say that it is continually in motion, among all civilizations, and that this motion reflects different phases of the human mind.

— Zola, Naturalism in the Theatre

The evidence of the above statement can be found in the various dramatic movements that have emerged since the middle of the nineteenth century. Following Zola, Naturalist dramatists, like Ibsen, Chekhov and Strindberg, by and large emphasized the portrayal of observable fact. Symbolism rejected the "objective world" portrayed by the Naturalists and Realists believing that truth could not be logically understood and therefore, could not be expressed directly. Instead, the Symbolists felt that truth could only be communicated through symbols which evoke feelings and states of mind. The Surrealists believed that the dream-like state is the only road to truth, since the principle source of truth lies in the subconscious mind. The Expressionists sought fixed truths within man's nature rather than in any mysterious external force. Brecht chose the name "Epic," to distinguish his theatre from "dramatic" theatre, against which he was in revolt. Epic plays are comments upon life, directed toward social reform. The "Angry Young Men" capture the discontent of their generation in their protest against false values and their attack upon class distinctions. The Theatre of the Absurd concerns itself with "the ultimate realities of the human

condition, the relatively few problems of life and death, isolation and communication."¹ Each of the above movements reflects a different phase of the human mind that very often reflects contemporary preoccupations.

Pinter's drama, then, is an expression of its age. The playwright fixes his attention on contemporary existence and presents plays that are poetic evocations of the human condition. But Pinter is not merely an observer and objective recorder. As I stated in the Introduction, an Absurd drama "communicates one poet's most intimate and personal intuition of the human situation; his own sense of being, his individual vision of the world."² Therefore, Pinter's plays are his own personal response to the world around him, a world which Pinter sees submerged in no man's land.

Landscape, Silence, Old Times and No Man's Land are poetic images of the isolation and stasis of no man's land. Characters are immobilized and trapped between the known and the unknown, the past and the present, memory and actuality, life and death. These works move deeper than the earlier plays into "the terror of the loneliness of the human situation."³

Landscape and Silence present the eternal gulf between human beings by dramatizing the characters' differences within a structure of

¹Esslin, Theatre, p. 353.

²Esslin, Theatre, p. 353.

³I. A. Richards, Principles of Literary Criticism (1926), p. 33. As quoted by James T. Boulton, "Harold Pinter: The Caretaker and Other Plays," Modern Drama, Vol. VI (1963-64), p. 131.

interweaving monologues. Communication is no longer possible since the characters are boxed in by their own private memories, and each one is isolated in his landscape of silence. Old Times presents Pinter's familiar image of life as a battle where the duel between Deeley and Anna proceeds in terms of attack and defence. Since Deeley and Anna are unwilling to accept their status as "odd man out," the ending exposes a general stalemate. Like Kate, both characters are exiled to a static existence in no man's land, that blasted territory between opposing forces in battle. Within a structure that conveys the impression of stasis, Pinter's No Man's Land presents the ideas of the flux of life and man's impermanence. Since death is the only emancipation from time, no man's land, or the ultimate stasis between life and death is the only alternative for characters threatened by the unpredictability of the present and the future. For Pinter, the artist, the work of art is his only means of imposing form on chaotic life. Therefore, No Man's Land is, as well, a poetic image of the artistic no man's land that Pinter and other writers continually fear. Afraid that he will lose the creative impulse, Pinter has shown that he is haunted by the possibility that he will remain, like Hirst, "forever, icy and silent."

Pinter's recent explorations into no man's land suggest a reply to the inquiry raised by Lenny in The Homecoming: "Apart from the known and the unknown, what else is there?"⁴ The answer to this question is no man's land, the uncharted territory that lies between the known and

⁴Harold Pinter, The Homecoming (London: Eyre Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1965; rpt. 1966), p. 52.

the unknown; where characters remain forever isolated and stagnant,
suspended between life and death.

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