

PINTER ENIGMATIST: A SELECTIVE STUDY OF THE
STAGE PLAYS OF HAROLD PINTER

CENTRE FOR NEWFOUNDLAND STUDIES

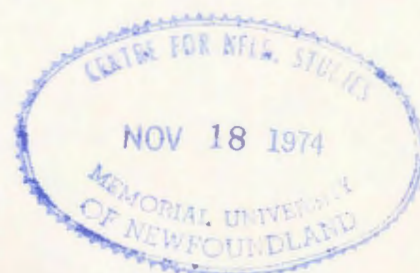
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SHANE O'DEA

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PINTER ENIGMATIST: A SELECTIVE STUDY OF THE STAGE

PLAYS OF HAROLD PINTER

by

Shane O'Dea, B.A.

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submitted in partial fulfillment
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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the achievement and innovation in Harold Pinter's stage plays as well as his use of enigma in them. In the introduction Pinter himself - as person and as writer - is considered as presenting an enigma. Both his own personality and the form of his work evade definition.

In the first section Pinter's achievement and innovation in the areas of structure and dialogue are examined. It is seen that Pinter has taken the theories of both the Naturalists and the Realists and brought them to a logical conclusion - he has used reality in what is probably its barest sense, a reality apparently little altered or adapted. In this use of reality lies both his achievement - in that he has used it successfully - and his innovation - in that it had not been used on the stage before.

Pinter's use of enigma is the subject of the second section of the thesis. The enigmas are an element of his innovation in that those he uses are the enigmas encountered in reality. Pinter, recognizing that reality has many faces, recognizes that it does not always provide clear answers or subscribe to fixed definitions. It is this reality that constitutes his enigmas. The enigmas considered are those of character - that a person does not always have to have an established background or personality to be dramatically effective; of sexuality - that people do not always fit easily into their expected sexual roles, a development of the enigma of character; of time - that time is unfixed and it, as well as what happens in it, depends on the mind of the character.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1

A refusal to be categorized, as a person or as a writer, is one of the more notable characteristics of Harold Pinter. In all the interviews and talks he has given he has offered only a limited amount of information about his works. He has dismissed suggestions of social intent or literary influence.¹ To an Observer critic who was questioning him about his political opinions, he remarked that he had once voted for Labour but now regarded it "as a sentimental gesture".² Until recently he refused to be associated with any social or political movement although he did once register as a conscientious objector.

This chapter will introduce Harold Pinter as a creator of enigmas and will show how both his life and work elude categorization. He told Harry Thompson, who interviewed him for New Theatre Magazine,

This category business is the most facile of things. My only categories are plays I like and plays that I don't. . . . The critic is afraid to either sink or swim when he sees a play: he must grasp the lifebelt of a category.³

Speaking to a student audience later, he was more definite:

A categorical statement, I find, will never stay where it is and be finite. It will immediately be subject to modification by the other twenty-three possibilities of it. No statement I make, therefore, should be interpreted as final and definitive.⁴

¹ Bensky, Lawrence, "The Art of the Theatre III", The Paris Review, XXXIX (Fall, 1966), p. 28.

² Bryden, Ronald, "Pinter", The Observer, February 19, 1967, p. 11.

³ Thompson, Harry, "Harold Pinter Replies", New Theatre Magazine, XI: 2 (January, 1961), p. 8.

⁴ Pinter, Harold, "Between The Lines", Sunday Times, March 4, 1962, p. 25.

This Epimenidean characteristic of Pinter's critical commentary can be found in his characters, who both find and put themselves in contradictory situations. And his forms cannot be treated as any more final than his statements. He is very careful to avoid working according to any formula; when he noticed a degree of repetition of words and ideas in one of his television plays, that was, as he put it, "the red light for me".⁵

These observations can be better substantiated if, before beginning a consideration of the plays, one has some idea of Pinter's attitudes as shown in his life. The only son of a Jewish ladies' tailor, he was born in Hackney, London, on October 10th, 1930. Although only a child during the war he was made aware of the forces that fed its violence when he had to evade or fight with the Fascists of East London. The war may have influenced his attitude toward conscription for, when he was called up to do his two years' National Service, he asked for status as a conscientious objector. Two tribunals rejected his plea and he was fined twice. Of the whole situation he told an interviewer, "I was aware of the suffering, and of the horror of war, and by no means was I going to subscribe to keeping it going."⁶

But, while a conscientious objector, Pinter is not necessarily a non-violent person. Alun Owen told Kathleen Halton of an occasion in which Pinter, having been drawn into an argument by a belligerent anti-Semite in a bar, gave the fellow a savage beating.⁷ At another time, having observed a

⁵ Thompson, op. cit., p. 9.

⁶ "Two People in a Room", New Yorker, XLIII (February 25, 1967), p. 36.

⁷ Halton, Kathleen, "Pinter, Funny, Moving and Frightening", Vogue, CL (October 1, 1967), p. 236.

group of politicians discussing Vietnam, he wanted "very much to burst through the screen with a flame-thrower and burn their eyes out and their balls off and then inquire from them how they would assess this action from a political point of view".⁸

His interest in the theatre and acting was initiated by one of his masters at Hackney Downs Grammar School. After leaving school he entered the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art but left after two terms, having found himself out of his element. In 1951 he began work with Aneurin McMaster's Shakespearean repertory company in Ireland, and stayed with McMaster a year. He joined Donald Wolfit in 1953 and then worked in several provincial repertory theatres. It was this traditional English theatre that gave Pinter his background and experience in the drama. Its product - his writing - while recognizably the work of someone aware of the stage and stagecraft, is quite different from the plays Pinter was used to performing in.

It was while he was working in provincial repertory that he was first struck by the potentialities of a room and its contents as a dramatic image. He described the actual experience in this way. "I went down into a room and saw one person standing up and one person sitting down, and a few weeks later I wrote The Room. I went into another room and saw two people sitting down, and a few years later I wrote The Birthday Party. I looked through a door into a third room and saw two people standing up and I wrote The Caretaker."⁹ He mentioned his initial experience to Henry Woolf and

⁸ Bensky, op. cit., p. 28.

⁹ Pinter, "Writing for Myself", Twentieth Century, CLXIX:1008, (February, 1961), p. 174.

his intention to write something around it. Sometime later Woolf, needing a play for production, rang Pinter who sat down and wrote The Room in four days.

And while a playwright by profession, Pinter maintains that his main interest was and is poetry. His first publications were poems "under the influence of Dylan Thomas"¹⁰ written for the little magazines from about 1950 onwards. They are seldom personal and, even when the first person is used, the person is merely observing. There is in these poems an awareness of material objects, a sense of a tangible reality that is an essential part of many of his plays and which can be seen in the following lines from his poem "The Table":¹¹

I dine the longest
All this time

My feet I hear
Fall on the fat

On cheese and eggs
On weekend bones

The influence of Dylan Thomas was so strong that it led to imitation as can be seen in "Book of Mirrors",¹² a poem Pinter wrote in 1951:

Fabulous in image I walked the Mayworlds,
Equal in favour the concubant winds,
Set by my triangle the sextant sounds,
Till crowded lips I kissed,

Even before he began writing plays he made an attempt at a novel but it

¹⁰ Halton, op. cit., p. 239.

¹¹ Pinter, Poems, (London: Enitharmon, 1968), p. 20.

¹² Ibid., p. 5.

proved unsatisfactory and he never finished it. This novel formed the basis of The Dwarfs, a play Pinter wrote in 1963 and which he described as "apparently the most intractable, impossible piece of work".¹³ However, even in this novel his emphasis on dialogue and his sense of language is apparent.

Pinter, a writer who professes that his main interest is poetry while he spends his energy and makes his name writing plays, a man who objects to the violence of war yet is himself capable of violence, is difficult to fix as a man or as a writer. He will not allow any categorical statement about him "to stay where it is and be finite". This is equally true when it comes to the categorization of his work.

It has not been easy for those critics who have tried to fit Pinter's writing into any specific school of "playwrighting". At first he was compared to Ionesco but denied the possibility of influence because he did not hear of the French author until after he had written his first few plays. The influences he has admitted as possible are Beckett and Kafka. But it is notable that it is their prose and not their drama that he considers of consequence to him. In fact, it is difficult to find any dramatic influences in his early reading as he told Lawrence Bensky that he never read any playwrights at all until after he started writing for the theatre himself.¹⁴

Martin Esslin has included him in his study of the Theatre of the Absurd

¹³ Bensky, op. cit., p. 23.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 19.

partly because of his literary kinship to Beckett.¹⁵ It is certainly true that both writers present the stage with characters who display little motivation for their actions, and with actions that seem to lead nowhere. The language of both playwrights appears to be the language of nonsense and this is true in the sense that it is not the highly controlled, pointed speech of writers like Ibsen and Shaw. Esslin, however, feels that Pinter, independently of Beckett, has a place among the absurdists. He feels that Pinter exemplifies Ionesco's definition of the absurd: "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."¹⁶ But unlike Beckett or Ionesco, Pinter does not deal with the absurd as absurd, rather he deals with a reality which is incidentally absurd. His concern is not with the dramatization of a philosophic situation but with the reaction of particular individuals to particular situations.

Important in the efforts of critics to categorize Pinter's playwrighting are discussions of the elements of Realism and Naturalism in his work, in an attempt to see how closely he conforms to these schools. F. J. Bernhard maintains that of the group of new British dramatists, which includes Osborne, Wesker and Pinter, Pinter is the least realistic. Pinter, according to Bernhard, is really a poet, and certainly no social realist, for the social problems that

¹⁵ Esslin, Martin, "Godot and his Children: The Theatre of Samuel Beckett and Harold Pinter", in Experimental Drama, ed. William A. Armstrong, (London: Bell, 1963), p. 143-146.

¹⁶ Cited in Esslin, The Theatre of the Absurd, (New York: Doubleday, 1961), p. xix.

are presented in his plays serve only the function of revealing his characters' impulses and are never solved.¹⁷ John Russell Taylor sees how Pinter might be regarded as a "purveyor of fantasy ... (or) ... the stage's most ruthless and uncompromising naturalist".¹⁸ Clifford Leech describes Pinter's plays as a journey to "strange and impossible settings".¹⁹ Martin Esslin, while admitting that Pinter writes with a "devastating naturalness",²⁰ sees a considerable symbolic undercurrent in all his works.

The settings of some of Pinter's early plays might lead one to include him in the category of Realism - in the popularly understood sense of the term - since the plays take place in impoverished surroundings; the characters are poor. This is certainly true of The Room and The Caretaker in which possession of a roof over one's head seems to be a major element of the plot, and characters like the Hudds and Davies are quite poor. Equally depressed are the settings for The Birthday Party (a seedy seaside boarding house) and The Dumb Waiter (a rundown Midlands boarding house). Later plays are set in more comfortable surroundings peopled by characters who are somewhat better off.

¹⁷ Bernhard, F.J., "Beyond Realism: The Plays of Harold Pinter", Modern Drama, VIII, (1966), p. 185-191.

¹⁸ Taylor, John Russell, Anger and After, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1963), p. 314.

¹⁹ Leech, Clifford, "Two Romantics: Arnold Wesker and Harold Pinter", in Contemporary Theatre, ed. John Russell Brown and Edwin Harris, (London: Arnold, 1962), p. 12.

²⁰ Esslin, "Godot and His Children", op. cit., p. 139.

But it is not only setting that characterizes Realism; it is also, and more importantly, subject matter. Plays which are considered to be Realist generally deal with topics which are of social concern. Wesker, for instance, deals with the pressures of military life in Chips With Everything; Osborne with the post-war generation's loss of purpose and direction in Look Back in Anger. Pinter's plays might well suggest such situations but he never concerns himself with them directly. It could be said that a chronic housing shortage is the problem of The Room but this is certainly not explicitly dealt with. In Night School the difficulties of rehabilitating criminals might be suggested by Walter's problems but Pinter is concerned only with Walter and Rose themselves and not with the more general problems that might have contributed to their situations. Plays like The Collection and The Lover could be said to deal with unsatisfactory marital relationships but such a generality is only incidental to the situations in which the characters find themselves. Pinter's concern then is with the characters and their reactions to their various situations and not with any social problems that might be involved in these situations. He is a Realist only in the sense that he uses a contemporary social setting, but because he is not concerned, in his plays, with the graver social and political implications of these settings he can hardly be considered a Realist in the way that Shaw, Ibsen, Osborne or Wesker can.

Critics have included Pinter in the category of Naturalism on the basis of his dialogue and characterization. His dialogue is a most accurate transcription of every-day speech with all the nuances, pauses, signs of

boredom and idle gestures that characterize actual speech. What for another playwright would only contribute to tedium or unnecessary obscurity, Pinter is able to make use of with considerable skill. His characters are capable of discussing the mundane in the most banal terms while remaining interesting. In addition he utilizes the dialect and speech mannerisms of ordinary people.

His characters, too, are naturalistic. His first plays dealt with Beckett-like derelicts with the exception that these people of Pinter's are much more concrete than Beckett's. Beckett has a tendency to abstract his characters from the general flux of humanity, to produce characters who are only the sum of their ailments or foibles - characters like Hamm and Clov, the last men, in Endgame; or Vladimir and Estragon, the metaphysical tramps, in Waiting For Godot. Indeed they might be seen as caricatures or latter-day allegories of the human condition as it is, or as it will be. Pinter's characters, on the other hand, are almost entirely naturalistic despite their games and lapses into apparent madness. They are acceptable doubles of certain types of English people in the late fifties and sixties - characters like Bert Hudd who is a truck driver partially fascinated by the machine he drives, or like James Horner and Harry Kane in The Collection who are in the clothing trade but who are quite different in personality and manner of living despite their common occupation. Pinter's characters are not being used as vehicles to present a social subject or theme; they exist because Pinter is interested in their characters and their situations.

Harold Pinter is an enigma then as a person and as a writer - both he and his work evade the limits of definition. He also makes use of enigma

in the creation of his work. It is, in fact, as characteristic of his work as the much commented-on use of menace.

In the next two chapters I want to consider Pinter's achievement in the areas of dialogue and structure and then, in subsequent chapters, the use of enigma in the plays.

CHAPTER II

DIALOGUE: ACHIEVEMENT AND INNOVATION

Harold Pinter is undoubtedly a success as a dramatist. His plays are produced all over Europe and North America; they have been translated into, analyzed and discussed in numerous languages. In the past seven years, six full-length studies of his work have appeared, as well as a number of pamphlets and over a hundred critical articles. While The Birthday Party was not found acceptable when it was first produced, it has since received great praise. The Caretaker, The Homecoming and his most recent play, Old Times, have all been successes from the start.

The problem with The Birthday Party is part of the reason for this success. The problem - that The Birthday Party was about a group of people with neither reason for nor conclusion to their conduct - was one of innovation. Pinter did not fit his play into the general mold and thus puzzled the critics who, with one exception - Harold Hobson in the Sunday Times - described it variously as "a masterpiece of meaningless significance" (Punch) or a play that "wallows in symbols and revels in obscurity" (Daily Telegraph).¹

When The Caretaker was produced and became an immediate success, The Birthday Party was re-examined and produced again. The Caretaker, being somewhat more immediately comprehensible, allowed the critics to fit Pinter into one or other of their categories. By this time they were beginning to recognize that Pinter was bringing something new to the stage.

¹ Cited in Herman T. Schroll, Harold Pinter: A Study of His Reputation (1958-1969) and a Checklist, (Metuchen: Scarecrow, 1971), p. 10.

although they were not always able to define the innovation. This recognition enabled them to analyze the puzzlement in Pinter's plays and see it as a dramatic device rather than a lapse into obscurity.

Pinter's success as a dramatist is partly due to innovation per se but also to the dramatic effectiveness of these innovations in addition to his other techniques. His innovations, once recognized, set him apart from many of his fellow writers - such as Osborne and Wesker - who tended to write plays in the more traditional forms. His innovations drew critical attention, allowed the development of critical ideas and created a fashion. He provided a change, a novelty; but were his fame to rest on this he would have disappeared some time ago.

ACHIEVEMENT IN DIALOGUE

Dialogue is Pinter's most important means of developing character and situation as well as creating that sense of tension which is a hallmark of his writing. His dialogue, while capable of reinforcing this sense of tension, is frequently quite humorous.

In the following sequence from The Birthday Party, breakfast is being eaten. This meal, generally conducted in a semi-torpid state, is frequently characterized by conversations devoid of logical and intellectual content. But it is a measure of Pinter's skill that from the most banal of conversations he is able to create a sense of character and situation.

Petey: Someone's just had a baby.
 Meg: Oh, they haven't! Who?
 Petey: Some girl.
 Meg: Who, Petey, who?
 Petey: I don't think you'd know her.

Meg. What's her name?
 Petey. Lady Mary Splatt.
 Meg. I don't know her.
 Petey. No.
 Meg. What is it?
 Petey (studying the paper). Er - a girl.
 Meg. Not a boy?
 Petey. No.
 Meg. Oh, what a shame. I'd be sorry. I'd much rather
 have a little boy.
 Petey. A little girl's all right.
 Meg. I'd much rather have a little boy.

(The Birthday Party, p. 11)

Up until this point Petey has been patiently giving Meg little bits of information from his paper, but this last piece seems to interest her more than the others. It is apparent, by this stage in the play, that they have no children and the conversation reveals that Meg would like to have a child, particularly a boy. Her first reaction is a negative one - "They haven't!" - and indicative of a degree of envy on her part. Petey appears to be reluctant to go on with the story, attempting to discourage Meg's interest by being unspecific - "Some girl" - and maintaining that Meg would not know the girl. His reluctance may stem from the possibility that he has been unable to give her any children² and the subject is painful to him.

This sequence not only reveals character here but provides a basis for assessing later situations. When Stanley appears, Meg's conduct in relation to him makes it clear that he is the little boy she wants and lends, to what might otherwise be characterized as a purely sexual situation, a maternal overtone.

² There is a line in Pinter's poem, "A View of the Party", which reads, "Petey impotent".

While the conversation above is amusing, the following conversation lacks any humour but is nonetheless effective in the revelation of situation. In this scene it is the very lack of communication between the two brothers that is most revealing.

Lenny. Staying the night then are you?

Teddy. Yes.

Lenny. Well, you can sleep in your old room.

Teddy. Yes, I've been up.

Lenny. Yes, you can sleep there.

Lenny yawns.

Oh well.

Teddy. I'm going to bed.

Lenny. Are you?

Teddy. Yes, I'll get some sleep.

Lenny. Yes, I'm going to bed too.

(The Homecoming, p. 26).

This absolutely desultory conversation is evidence of the absence of any real bond between the two brothers. They have nothing to talk about to each other. The whole conversation (which is a good deal longer than the one quoted before) contains no expression of interest in the experience of each of them since they last saw each other. Lenny makes no inquiry as to Teddy's life as a professor in America even though such a life is totally removed from his experience and that of the family. Nor does Teddy inquire about Lenny's career.

Familial interest is shown in only one remark of Teddy's, "How's the old man?" to which Lenny replies, "In the pink." Teddy's question is not a true question because it is not seeking information - it is merely a remark to fill a gap that both realize should not be in their conversation.

Lenny's response is in keeping with the question - a cliché.

In this sequence conversation has deteriorated. By repetitions of "yes" and of certain phrases the divergence of their relation becomes more marked. The numerous pauses in their conversation strengthen the sense of their difference, and as the play develops this gap becomes wider until Teddy decides to leave, having never really succeeded in communicating with his family.

It should be realized that dialogue is virtually Pinter's only means of developing character because he does not believe that he has to provide the audience with any explanation of the background of the character. In a Pinter play a person is apprehended, understood by the audience and others in the play only by what he says or does in their presence. Of course reported actions do affect analysis of character, but such reports are tested against the seen, the visible conduct of that character. An audience meets Pinter's characters almost as if would a total stranger - the characters appear and they grow before the audience. They are, in effect, what the audience makes of them as they have no previous nor predetermined existence.

In addition to utilizing dialogue in the development of character, Pinter makes use of dialogue to create the tensions of his plays - developing quite simple statements into expressions of far profounder import. In the following sequence from The Homecoming, Ruth has just met Lenny, brother of her husband Teddy, and is chatting with him after Teddy has gone to bed.

Lenny. ... and now perhaps I'll relieve you of your glass.
 Ruth. I haven't quite finished.
 Lenny. You've consumed quite enough, in my opinion.

Ruth. No, I haven't.
 Lenny. Quite sufficient, in my own opinion.
 Ruth. Not in mine, Leonard.
 Lenny. Don't call me that please.
 (....)
 Just give me the glass.
 Ruth. No.

Pause.

Lenny. I'll take it then.
 Ruth. If you take the glass ... I'll take you.

Pause.

Lenny. How about me taking the glass without you taking me?
 Ruth. Why don't I just take you?

(....)

Have a sip. Go on. Have a sip from my glass.

He is still.

Sit on my lap. Take a long cool sip.

(The Homecoming, p. 33-34)

Here a drink of water has become a metaphor for a sexual seduction. Lenny's attempts to dominate Ruth are converted by her into a battle with sexual overtones. His attempt to define the situation as one in which he maintains control is taken by Ruth and twisted so that she is the one who has control. At first she is merely firm with him, refusing him the right of control. Then she addresses him, using the name which his mother used to call him, and in doing so first distracts him and then arrests his attempt by using his technique (his attempt to assert himself by demanding her glass) to assume control. Having named him (calling him "Leonard", his mother's name for him) she leads him to identify her with his mother thus placing her (Ruth) in a position of authority. She then gives the drinking of a glass of water a sexual overtone and uses its suggestiveness as a means of taking control of him. This dialogue creates tension and also contributes to the development of Ruth's character in that it produces a sense

of uncertainty about her conduct for the rest of the play.

Pinter has also found that humour can co-operate with tension to amplify that tension. His humour does this because he reverses its general use - amusement, joy, release - and upsets the preconceived notions about the place and role of humour - that it is associated with laughter and thus should be linked with joy and not with fear. But when humour becomes violence, when it is linked with fear, then the degree of tension is only increased by further humour rather than relieved. What happens is that, the audience's preconceptions having been upset, they are left in a state of uncertainty, in a state where they feel that out of anything - no matter how simple - evil can come.

This co-operation of tension and humour can be seen in the following examples. The first, from The Dumb Waiter, indicates how both are developed unconsciously by the characters in the course of their dialogue.

Ben. Go and light it.

Gus. Light what?

Ben. The kettle.

Gus. You mean the gas.

Ben. Who does?

Gus. You do.

Ben (his eyes narrowing). What do you mean, I mean the gas?

Gus. Well, that's what you mean, don't you? The gas.

Ben (powerfully). If I say go and light the kettle I mean go and light the kettle.

Gus. How can you light a kettle?

Ben. It's a figure of speech! Light the kettle. It's a figure of speech!

Gus. I've never heard of it.

Ben. Light the kettle! It's common usage!

Gus. I think you've got it wrong.

Ben (menacing). What do you mean?

Gus. They say put on the kettle.

Ben (taut). Who says?

They stare at each other, breathing hard.

(Deliberately). I have never in all my life heard anyone say put on the kettle.

Gus. I bet my mother used to say it.
 Ben. Your mother? When did you last see your mother?
 Gus. I don't know, about -
 Ben. Well, what are you talking about your mother for?

(.....)
 Ben (vehemently). Nobody says light the gas! What does the gas light?

Gus. What does the gas-?

Ben (grabbing him with two hands by the throat, at arm's length).
 THE KETTLE, YOU FOOL!

(The Dumb Waiter, p. 47-48)

The humour in Pinter's dialogue is found in his quick recognition and accurate transmission of the banality of ordinary conversations, of the use of jargon, and of the idiosyncrasies of certain speech patterns. The sequence above is humorous because of the stubbornness of both characters on an issue which should not be of great importance. Pinter carefully builds the discussion from a series of stychomythia, in which Ben is puzzled and Gus is merely being contradictory and stubborn, to a potentially violent situation which does, eventually, resolve itself in violence. Thus this dialogue works on two levels: it is humorous but, because of the possibility of violence, it is also frightening.

In this sequence the tension grows out of the humour, that is, as the dialogue develops the sense of what is ridiculous is overwhelmed by what is tense. In the next three sequences the humour embodies the tension as the characters quite consciously use the humour to augment the tension. In The Collection Harry has become quite annoyed by someone who keeps calling to speak to Bill but who will not identify himself.

Harry. Yes, this chap, he was asking for you, he wanted you.
 Bill. What for?
 Harry. He wanted to know if you cleaned your shoes with furniture polish.

Bill. Really? How odd.
 Harry. Not odd. Some kind of national survey.
 Bill. What did he look like?
 Harry. Oh... Lemon hair, nigger brown teeth, wooden leg,
 bottlegreen eyes and a toupee. Know him?

(The Collection, p. 27-28)

The absurdity of the description both masks and reveals the tension that is present. Harry is annoyed that something is going on without his knowledge and Bill is not entirely sure how much Harry knows and how much he is annoyed. Bill's replies, as a consequence, are quite guarded though apparently casual, indicating a desire to avoid being intimidated, as well as to determine what his reaction should be.

In The Lover Richard is attempting to destroy the sexual game he plays with Sarah, and he deliberately makes use of comments that are ostensibly humorous to do this. (In all these sequences Richard and Max are the same person)

Max. You're not plump enough. You're nowhere near plump enough. You know what I like. I like enormous women. Like bullocks with udders. Vast great uddered bullocks.
 Sarah. You mean cows.
 Max. I don't mean cows. I mean voluminous great uddered feminine bullocks. Once, years ago, you vaguely resembled one.
 Sarah. Oh, thanks.
 Max. But now, quite honestly, compared to my ideal...
He stares at her.
 ...you're skin and bone.
They stare at each other.
He puts on his jacket.
 Sarah. You're having a lovely joke.
 Max. It's no joke.

(The Lover, p. 72-73)

She is alarmed because of the threat he poses to their game - which

appears to be an important element of their marriage.

While these games are essentially ludicrous, the audience is willing to accept them as serious if Richard and Sarah treat them as such. But when Richard begins to treat the games as ludicrous, to make it apparent that they are clichés, then those games become objects of laughter, and with Sarah's alarm, sources of tension. In this next sequence, Richard's use of cliché-filled descriptions of his mistress, ridiculous and ostensibly funny, are counterpointed by Sarah's attempts to soften the ridicule.

Previously Richard (Max) has just announced that he cannot deceive his wife any longer.

Sarah. But your wife ... knows. Doesn't she? You've told her ... all about us. She's known all the time.
 Max. No, she doesn't know. She thinks I know a whore, that's all. Some spare-time whore, that's all. That's what she thinks.
 Sarah. Yes, but be sensible ... my love ... she doesn't mind, does she?
 Max. She'd mind if she knew the truth, wouldn't she?
 Sarah. What truth? What are you talking about?
 Max. She'd mind if she knew that, in fact ... I've got a full-time mistress, two or three times a week, a woman of grace, elegance, wit, imagination.

(*The Lover*, p. 69-70)

Sarah is uncertain whether she is being told that Max/Richard has somebody else or whether this is just further game-playing. His effusiveness suggests that he does not consider his mistress (whether it be Sarah or anyone else) to be a "woman of grace, elegance, wit, imagination". The tension is developed by Sarah's uncertainty in combination with Max's descriptions which are simultaneously funny and brutal.

Another factor of Pinter's dialogue that is worthy of attention is his

diction. Being particularly aware of the nature of language, Pinter is equally aware of the nature of the words that comprise that language and of the fact that, as statements can express more or less than they appear to, so it is with words - they can be used to express ideas beyond their definitions.

In a number of his plays Pinter has created speeches entirely out of words or phrases which may or may not form coherent sentences - that is, he creates speeches which are recitations of terms, litanies of names. Mick in The Caretaker has four speeches like this, of which the following, about the renting of the flat, is an example:

Mick. ... You got no business wandering about in an unfurnished flat. I could charge seven quid a week for this if I wanted to. Get a taker tomorrow. Three hundred and fifty a year exclusive. No argument. I mean, if that sort of money's in your range don't be afraid to say so. Here you are. Furniture and fittings. I'll take four hundred or the nearest offer. Rateable value ninety quid for the annum. You can reckon water, heating and lighting at close on fifty. That'll cost you eight hundred and ninety if you're all that keen. Say the word and I'll have my solicitors draft you out a contract. Otherwise I've got the van outside, I can run you to the police station in five minutes, have you in for trespassing, loitering with intent, daylight robbery, filching, thieving and stinking the place out. What do you say? Unless you're really keen on a straightforward purchase. Of course, I'll get my brother to decorate it up for you first. I've got a brother who's a first-rate decorator. He'll decorate it up for you. If you want more space, there's four more rooms along the landing there ready to go. Bathroom, livingroom, bedroom and nursery. You can have this as your study. This brother I mentioned he's just about to start on the other rooms. Yes, just about to start. So, what do you say? Eight hundred odd for this room or three thousand down for the whole upper story. On the other hand, if you prefer to approach it in the long term way I know an insurance firm in West Ham'll be pleased to handle the deal for you. No strings attached, open and above board, untarnished record, twenty per cent interest.

fifty per cent deposit; down payments, back payments, family allowances, bonus schemes, remission of term for good behaviour, six months lease, yearly examination of the relevant archives, tea laid on, disposal of shares, benefit extension, compensation on cessation, comprehensive indemnity against Riot, Civil Commotion, Labour Disturbances, Storm, Tempest, Thunderbolt, Larceny or Cattle all subject to a daily check and double check. Of course we'd need a signed declaration from your personal medical attendant as assurance that you possess the requisite fitness to carry the can won't we? Who do you bank with?

Pause.

Who do you bank with?

(The Caretaker, p. 35-36)

This speech is delivered by Mick to Davies, a tramp whom his brother Aston has taken in. It is intended by Mick to baffle and terrify Davies but also allows Mick to dream out loud. Previously, Mick has come into the room, thrown Davies to the floor and battered him with questions. The two speeches which precede this one give Mick the appearance of being unbalanced, and this speech, the longest, suggests that he is building to a pitch which can only have issue in violence. Davies finds himself in a dilemma, uncertain whether he should answer the questions but afraid to because he does not know the desired answers. As it turns out, the speech does not lead to violence but ends with a question that is manifestly irrelevant to a person like Davies. The effect of this is that Davies is now even less certain of where he stands and, consequently, more terrified.

The whole effect of this speech is conveyed by the diction which bears little relation to Davies' situation. Davies is faced with the spectre of a man who is not only completely familiar with all the aspects of housing but seems to be obsessed with them. The flood of real estate phrases and legal

terms overwhelms Davies with a sense of his own ignorance of them and the law that reinforces them. Mick then, is almost like a wizard who by his incantations determines his control of any situation and strikes fear into the heart of the onlooker.

And these incantations which frighten Davies conjure up for Mick a sense of the reality of his dreams. In Mick's speeches his phrases are part of a plastic reality, a reality that is the product of advertising copy. Garbed as they are, advertisements have the power of dreams and their language has, in Mick's case, become the language of his dreams. This is visible in this speech but also, more vividly, in his speech about the decoration of the flat when he rhapsodizes about "... a table... in afromosia teak veneer, sideboard with matt black drawers, curved chairs with cushioned seats, armchairs in oatmeal tweed, a beech frame settee with a woven sea-grass seat, white-topped heat resistant coffee table, white tile surround". (The Caretaker, p. 60). Mick has read these descriptions in magazines and has taken them as they stand. He has not made any attempt to restructure them to a colloquial form but repeats them as he read them. This produces, if the speech is taken out of context, a stilted language. But in context - of Davies' fear and Mick's dream - these words have an almost ritual effect.

Pinter has demonstrated an ability to give particular words an additional dimension which assists in the development of tensions. In the two examples below the tension created is a sexual one with otherwise innocent words being invested with a sexual connotation. In A Slight Ache, the flowers are given a sexual import by Flora (possibly consciously) both by their

context and their sound.

Flora (off) . Barnabas?

Pause.

She enters.

Ah, Barnabas. Everything is ready.

Pause.

I want to show you my garden, your garden. You must see my japonica, my convolvulus . . . my honeysuckle, my clematis.

(A Slight Ache, p. 39) . .

Flora has previously shown that she is attracted by Barnabas and is about to reject her husband for him. The flowers thus become representative of her body with "garden" having its traditional sexual association with the pubis. The other words develop their secondary meaning by their sound: "Japonica" - knickers, "Convolvulus" - vulva, "clematis" - clitoris, and "honeysuckle" another possible reference to the vulva via the word "suck" in relation to cunnilingus.

A similar example of this use of words occurs in The Birthday Party when Stanley describes his fried bread as "succulent" and Meg reacts:

Meg. You shouldn't say that word.

Stanley. What word?

Meg. That word you said.

Stanley. What, succulent-?

Meg. Don't say it.

Stanley. What's the matter with it?

Meg. You shouldn't say that word to a married woman.

(The Birthday Party, p. 17) .

Meg obviously does not understand the meaning of the word and relates it to a sucking of the breast or, possibly, to fellatio. This little mistake creates simultaneously humour and tension. The audience is amused by the recognition of the words as having a value beyond their definitions and by

Meg's somewhat ludicrous mistake. They also react to the sexual tension that these words or the use of these words entails.

INNOVATION IN DIALOGUE

It is in the area of dialogue that Pinter has achieved greatest recognition for innovation in his work. While in both structure and dialogue he has introduced something new to the stage, this is the innovation that is the most characteristic and commented-on feature of his plays.

Virtually all the critics have noted Pinter's introduction of a dialogue that is far more naturalistic than anything that preceded it. John Russell Brown, writing in the Critical Quarterly,³ compares Pinter to Chekov in the use both make of detail and the mundane. Both are able to convey character or emotion by simple references to objects or situations that might escape normal attention. Brown, however, does make a distinction between the dialogue of the two dramatists in that the use of detail in Pinter is and remains part of the fabric of reality, while in Chekov the use of such detail is more self-conscious in that it is given an almost symbolic import. Pinter's detail is part of the situation he is creating while Chekov's is emphasized and partially abstracted from the situation he (Chekov) is creating.

Esslin comments that Pinter:

...has a remarkably sensitive ear for the real speech of real people. His dialogue is, superficially at least, of a

³ Brown, John Russell, "Dialogue in Pinter and Others", Critical Quarterly, VII, (Autumn, 1965), p. 223.

devastating naturalness. He not only captures the vocabulary of real conversation but also the quirks of repetition, malapropism, tautology, spurious logic, and verbal incantation which pervade ordinary speech and which, hitherto, had been largely missed in stage dialogue that attempted to combine naturalness with good grammar, correct vocabulary and logical progression of its reasoning.⁴

Esslin too compares Pinter with Chekov in that, though both deal with the unspoken reality that ordinary speech reveals, Pinter does not have to use a language as rhetorical as Chekov's to achieve the same effect.⁵

Pinter himself, in one of his few pieces of critical writing, has dealt in considerable detail with his use of dialogue. He states that he has refused to give characters a language which would not be theirs, which would be totally out of place in their mouths. As a consequence he, to a certain degree, allows the characters to determine their own development, to determine what they will say next. This should not be confused with a form of automatic writing, rather it should be seen as a strict adherence to nature.

Pinter observes and writes from his observations: "You arrange and you listen, following the clues you leave for yourself, through the characters."⁶

Apart from his observations of the various elements of real speech he has also noted what he calls two silences: "One when no word is being spoken. The other when perhaps a torrent of language is being employed."⁷

He maintains that it is not merely from what a person says that we determine

⁴ Esslin, "Godot and his Children", op. cit., p. 139.

⁵ Esslin, The Peopled Wound: The Plays of Harold Pinter, (London: Methuen, 1970), p. 196.

⁶ Pinter, "Between the Lines", op. cit.

⁷ Ibid.

who he is, but also from what he does not say and how he does not say it.

And even his speech, his "torrent of language", does not always convey

what the words themselves mean. Speech tends to be an indicator of

emotions and sensations that the actual words are attempting to hide.

Pinter sees speech as "a necessary avoidance, a violent, sly, anguished or

mocking smoke screen which keeps the other in its place . . . it is a constant

stratagem to cover nakedness".⁸

Pinter's facility with ordinary speech, his ability to use it for

dramatic effect, and his pauses are so characteristic that the word

"Pinteresque" has all but become a standard adjective to describe

dialogues such as those found in his plays. His reaction to this dubious

form of fame is what might be expected: "That word! These damn words

and that word Pinteresque particularly -- I don't know what they're bloody

well talking about!"⁹

Harold Pinter with his uncompromised transcription of ordinary

speech has dared what no one before him would. And he has given the lie

to a comment in George Gissing's New Grub Street (the speaker is an

aspiring novelist who wishes to write absolutely naturalistically and is

describing a lovers' conversation he has just overheard):

Now, such a love scene as that has never been written down; it was entirely decent, yet vulgar to the Nth power. Dickens would have made it ludicrous -- a gross injustice. Other men, men who deal with low-class life, would have preferred idealizing it -- an absurdity. For my own part I am going to reproduce

⁸ Pinter, "Between the Lines", op. cit.

⁹ Crist, Judith, "A Mystery: Pinter on Pinter", Look, December 24, 1968, p. 77.

it verbatim, without one single impertinent suggestion of any point of view save that of honest reporting. The result will be something unutterably tedious. Precisely. That is the stamp of the ignobly decent life. If it were anything but tedious it would be untrue.¹⁰

This comment, from 1891, is echoed in 1962 by Allardyce Nicoll:

"The world of drama ... is or should be, the world of emotions, and everyone knows that our common speech has no power to express our passions intimately."¹¹ Nicoll sees the problem of the modern dramatist is "to find a form of language which may have such a connexion with our debased common speech as the standard Elizabethan blank verse measure had with the richer, less stereotyped, and more expressive familiar utterance of that time."¹² Yeats, connected with Synge and the development of the use of naturalistic speech in the Irish theatre, still demanded a heightened language. He, like Synge, rejected the "joyless and pallid words"¹³ of Ibsen and Zola while recognizing their other dramatic achievements. His concept of a heightened language is contained in the following quotation from his program for the new theatre: "Language was still alive then (in Shakespeare's time), alive as it is in Gaelic today, as it is in English-speaking Ireland where the Schoolmaster or the newspaper has not corrupted it."¹⁴

¹⁰ Gissing, George, New Grub Street, (New York: Modern Library, 1926), p. 151.

¹¹ Nicoll, Allardyce, "Dramatic Dialogue" in Perspectives in Drama, ed. J. L. Calderwood and H. E. Toliver, (Toronto: Oxford, 1968), p. 31.

¹² Ibid., p. 362.

¹³ Synge, John Millington, Preface to The Playboy of the Western World, in Collected Works, ed. Ann Saddlemyer, (London: Oxford, 1968), p. 53.

¹⁴ Yeats, W.B., "Language, Character and Construction" in Playwrights on Playwriting, ed. Toby Cole, (New York: Hill and Wang, 1966), p. 39.

These gentlemen failed to see what Pinter was able to see - that it was not the mere novelty of speech (the use of dialect or speech mannerisms not common to the general audience) that could be effective but also the ordinary speech itself - "Real" speech in all its disordered and inarticulate barrenness"¹⁵ as it has been described. Pinter has shown that the disorder and inarticulateness of "Real" speech is merely superficial; that, in fact, this disorder is an oblique but quite articulate expression of the emotions of character.

The particular weakness of Ibsen's form of "Realism" can be seen by examining the following passage from A Doll's House:

Helmer. Do you remember last Christmas? For three whole weeks - you locked yourself up every evening until past midnight - making paper flowers for the Christmas tree - and a lot of other things you wanted to surprise us with. I was never so bored in my life!

Nora. I wasn't a bit bored.

Helmer (Smiling). But it all came to a rather sad end, didn't it, Nora?

Nora. Oh, do you have to tease me about that again! How could I help the cat coming in and tearing it all to pieces?¹⁶

In this passage the whole event has to be carefully explained to the audience or the effect of the recollection is lost. There is a degree of falsity about this conversation which is supposed to be superficially light and inconsequential while effecting a revelation of the two characters. Ibsen, because his sense of what is "real" is more restrictive than Pinter's, is unable to allow what would normally be unexplained to remain unexplained.

¹⁵ Calderwood, Perspectives in Drama, op. cit., p. 337.

¹⁶ Ibsen, Henrik, Six Plays by Henrik Ibsen, (New York: Modern Library, 1957), p. 7-8.

Pinter would not have concerned himself with the activities of the cat but would have let the substance (the fact that Nora's surprise came to grief) speak for itself. Equally unnatural is the fact that the passage is composed of orderly, grammatical speech - something that one is unlikely to encounter in a relaxed and intimate conversation between husband and wife.

The "heightened language" demanded by Yeats was a language which had to be beautiful and vivid and this, he maintained, eliminated the ordinary language of ordinary people which was a dead language. Yeats thought highly of Ibsen's "sincerity and logic" but felt only an "imperfect pleasure" because the language lacked strength.¹⁷ The poet's own concept of what constituted heightened language, as it could supposedly be found in the mouth of the Irish peasant, is seen in this passage from Cathleen Ni Houlihan:

Bridget. That's no wonder. Why should she look at it when she had yourself to look at, a fine strong young man? It is proud she must be to get you, a good steady boy that will make use of the money, and not be running through it or spending it on drink like another.

Peter. It's likely Michael himself was not thinking much of the fortune either, but of what sort the girl was to look at.

Michael (coming over to the table). Well, you would like a nice comely girl to be beside you, and to go walking with you. The fortune lasts only for a while, but the woman will be there always.¹⁸

This is a strong lilting speech, filled with constructions that are poetic.

This quality coupled with images and aphorisms gives it an effectiveness

17. Yeats, W. B., in Cole, op. cit., p. 38.

18. Yeats, W. B., in Collected Plays, (London: Macmillan, 1963), p. 78.

beyond what is described as "ordinary" speech.

The following sequence from The Birthday Party will demonstrate the differences between Pinter's dialogue, that of Ibsen's "realism" and Yeats' "heightened language". This sequence occurs towards the end of the play after Stanley has suffered his breakdown. It is the morning after the party and Goldberg has come down his normal effusive self.

Goldberg (sipping his tea). A good woman. A charming woman.

My mother was the same. My wife was identical.

Petey. How is he this morning?

Goldberg. Who?

Petey. Stanley. Is he any better?

Goldberg (a little uncertainly). Oh ... a little better, I think, a little better. Of course, I'm not really qualified to say, Mr. Boles. I mean, I haven't got the ... the qualifications. The best thing would be if someone with the proper ... mnn ... qualifications ... was to have a look at him. Someone with a few letters after his name. It makes all the difference.

Petey. Yes.

Goldberg. Anyway, Dermot's with him at the moment. He's keeping him company.

Petey. Dermot?

Goldberg. Yes.

Petey. It's a terrible thing.

Goldberg (sighs). Yes. The birthday celebration was too much for him.

Petey. What came over him?

Goldberg (sharply). What came over him? Breakdown, Mr. Boles. Pure and simple. Nervous breakdown.

(The Birthday Party, p. 71)

Goldberg's effusiveness is almost immediately destroyed by Petey's question, a question which indicates that Petey has some idea of what happened the night before even though he was out during the party. As a result Goldberg has to be extremely careful what information he gives Petey and his speech, consequently, loses its normal flow and ease. He is forced into

pauses, repetitions, clichés and inconsequentialities. These mannerisms are the mannerisms of normal conversation and mannerisms which one would find only in a very limited way in the works of either Ibsen or Yeats -- they might have found it difficult to sustain their dramatic situations under such circumstances. Pinter, however, suffers no such problem. In fact, the use of these mannerisms contributes to this particular dramatic situation adding, as it does, to the tension of the scene. Both Petey's questions and his replies indicate that he is not entirely satisfied with the situation. His brief "Yes" after Goldberg's disquisition on qualifications has a tone more of irony than of assent. And, as Goldberg begins to relax after Petey says, "It's a terrible thing," he is brought up sharply with, "What came over him?" This last question is not merely a matter of conversation but implies that Petey would like an explanation of the events.

Pinter is innovative in that he makes use of all the facets of ordinary conversation - that people do not always talk in a logical manner, that they are not entirely consistent, that they are not completely fluent or grammatical in their speech, that there are awkward gaps in conversation, or simple strugglings for the right word. Nor has he presumed that people always say what they mean. He has observed that people frequently talk trying, for example, to convey an impression of self-confidence while they are inwardly shaking. In his plays Pinter has been able to convey the reality of the attempt as well as the reality that lies behind that attempt.

Pinter has demonstrated in his plays an ability to use the language of the tenements, the suburban cottages and the city apartments.

In the following sequence from The Dumb Waiter Ben and Gus, two hired gunmen, are waiting in a basement room to receive their orders. Since the play began Gus has been attempting to flush the toilet without success and asks Ben what the problem might be:

Ben. Nothing.
 Gus. Nothing?
 Ben. It's got a deficient ballcock, that's all.
 Gus. A deficient what?
 Ben. Ballcock.
 Gus. No? Really?
 Ben. That's what I should say.
 Gus. Go on! That didn't occur to me.

Gus wanders over to his bed and presses the mattress.

I didn't have a very restful sleep, did you? It's not much of a bed. I could have done with another blanket too. (He catches sight of a picture on the wall). Hello, what's this? (Peering at it). "The First Eleven". Cricketeers. You seen this, Ben?

Ben. (reading). What?
 Gus. The first eleven.
 Ben. What?
 Gus. There's a photo here of the first eleven.
 Ben. What first eleven?
 Gus. (studying the photo). It doesn't say.
 Ben. What about that tea?
 Gus. They all look a bit old to me.

Gus wanders downstage, looks out front, then all about the room.

I wouldn't like to live in this dump. I wouldn't mind if you had a window, you could see what it looked like outside.

(The Dumb Waiter, p. 39).

The conversation here is hardly a logical one, in fact it appears to be simply a monologue by Gus with grudging responses from Ben. It begins with the toilet, moves to the bed, the first eleven, and the room itself. This conversation makes use of the tendency people have to repeat themselves and Pinter does not, as most playwrights would have, attempt to

excise the apparently irrelevant pieces. "Apparently irrelevant" because to Pinter all these pieces are relevant. He uses them as the different reactions of a character to a situation, all of which reveal in one way or another the emotional state of the character. In the sequence just given Gus's emotional state is revealed, but not in any explicit way (with the possible exception of his statement that he did not sleep well). His wanderings from topic to topic, his attempts to keep Ben talking to him are all evidence of his feelings of uneasiness, his restlessness. He is attempting to fill the time with words instead of thoughts - thoughts which could only be of his coming task, thoughts which make him uneasy.

In the next sequence there is a somewhat similar attempt to maintain conversation - but this time both characters are doing it. In this play James is attempting to find out if his wife Stella has had an affair with Bill in whose flat this conversation takes place:

James. I bet you're a wow at parties.

Bill. Well, it's nice of you to say so, but I wouldn't say I was all that much of a wow.

James. Go on, I bet you are. (Pause)

Bill. You think I'm a wow, do you?

James. At parties I should think you are.

Bill. No, I'm not that much of a wow really. The bloke I share this house with is, though.

James. Oh, I met him. Looked a jolly kind of chap.

Bill. Yes, he's very good at parties. Bit of a conjurer.

James. What, rabbits?

Bill. Well, not so much rabbits, no.

James. No rabbits?

Bill. No. He doesn't like rabbits, actually. They give him hay fever.

James. Poor chap.

Bill. Yes, it's a pity.

James. Seen a doctor about it?

Bill. Oh, he's had it since he was that high.

James. Brought up in the country, I suppose?
 Bill. In a manner of speaking, yes.

Pause.

Ah well, it's been nice meeting you, old chap, you must come again when the weather's better.

(The Collection, p. 22-23).

This conversation, on the surface, is totally irrelevant to what it conveys. James is not really interested if Bill is a wow at parties or not, nor is he interested in Harry's conjuring ability. In fact, it is very doubtful if Harry is a conjurer at all. James here is trying to disarm Bill so that he can get the truth out of him. Bill is not entirely sure whether or not James will attack him and is trying to play out the conversation so that James will get bored and go away. At the end of this sequence James does actually attack Bill.

These two sequences, one in the language of the lower class, the other in the language of the middle-class, both demonstrate Pinter's ear for speech nuance. Ben speaks with a degree of technical knowledge of the "deficient" (defective) ballcock almost as if he had spoken from a text book. Throughout The Dumb Waiter he recounts the stories he has found in the newspapers in the language of the newspapers. James and Bill talk in a falsely hearty manner ("wow", "jolly kind of chap", "old chap") almost burlesquing the speech mannerisms attributed to the upper class in an attempt to appear at ease with each other - an attempt which is quite obviously unsuccessful.

Pinter also shows an awareness here of the associative mode of perception. Gus, because he is distracted, because he is trying to occupy his mind, is moving from object to object as it strikes him. He could have

carried on a discussion about the quality of his bed but the picture of the first eleven captures his attention and he starts on it. But Ben is not interested so Gus returns to his previous thought - his living conditions. The conversation between Bill and James is almost entirely associative as conversations tend to be when there is no logical ground for their existence except the need to talk and keep talking. In this sequence the control of the substantial level of conversation lies with James who can revert to his own subject at any time. Control of the superficial level (the words spoken) lies with Bill and he moves it over a series of ideas with the intention of avoiding the substantial level and any conflict with James.

Equally innovative is Pinter's use of silence as a dramatic device. While the dramatic pause has always existed it has had a tendency to become a histrionic pause and is seldom an element of naturalistic conversation. Such pauses frequently followed a dramatic revelation and were used to intensify it. Pinter's pauses and silences are not always the products of a revelation and intended only to heighten that situation. Rather, they tend to be the pauses that occur when words run out, when there is nothing more to say or when a character is searching for something to say. Stage characters before Pinter's were generally fluent if not always grammatical. There was seldom a pause in conversation or, if there was, it was of the kind mentioned above or to allow some action to take place.

The following passage from The Homecoming (used previously) shows just how conversation can flag and how it need not be, in Gissing's words, "unutterably tedious".

Teddy. I've just come back for a few days.

Lenny. Oh yes? Have you?

Pause.

Teddy. How's the old man?

Lenny. He's in the pink.

Pause.

Teddy. I've been keeping well.

Lenny. Oh, have you?

Pause.

Staying the night then, are you?

Teddy. Yes.

Lenny. Well, you can sleep in your old room.

Teddy. Yes, I've been up.

Lenny. Yes. You can sleep there.

(The Homecoming, p. 26)

Teddy has just returned from America and entered his home unknown to his family whom he has not seen for a number of years. His conversation with his brother Lenny is almost embarrassingly empty. Yet, while empty it has a distinct dramatic effect in that this very emptiness, those constant pauses create a degree of tension and underscore the irony of the title of the play. This is no great homecoming - a quiet entry in the middle of the night, a desultory conversation with a brother.

In addition to the pause which produces an ironic echo of the words just spoken, Pinter also makes use of total silence in some of his dialogues. The Matchseller in A Slight Ache never says a word from beginning to end of the play despite the fact that both Edward and Flora carry on lengthy conversations with him. This play was written for radio and thus the audience could never be certain whether or not the Matchseller actually existed or was merely a figment of the characters' imaginations. The effect of the Matchseller's silence is to produce a loquaciousness in Edward and Flora which reveals a great deal of their characters. In The Room

Bert Hudd remains absolutely silent over his breakfast while his wife Rose rambles on about the weather, the room, the cold and in doing so, introduces the audience to her fear of the outside.

Pinter then, has made use of dialogue in an almost totally new way. He has seen that both sound (as normal conversation or as monologue) and silence (as pause or total silence) communicate and evade communication. Whereas on one level a character may be attempting to reveal one thing, on another level he is revealing another thing that he may not have wanted to reveal; or he may be attempting to conceal something on the superficial level which on the substantial level he is actually revealing. Pinter has seen that silence need not indicate a loss for words but an emptiness filled with a multitude of responses. Similarly conversation is an emptiness filled with words which, while superficially a logical expression of a particular situation, can mean in dramatic terms something quite other or more than the speaker intends. Thus for McCann to sit quietly tearing up strips of paper in The Birthday Party speaks as eloquently his fear as do Goldberg's great monologues on his dead relatives. What Pinter has realized is that dialogue need not be ordered to be dramatic. To be ordered is, sometimes, to be sterilized.

CHAPTER III

STRUCTURE: ACHIEVEMENT AND INNOVATION

ACHIEVEMENT IN STRUCTURE

Pinter's structure, as much as his dialogue, demonstrates his careful craftsmanship. While he speaks of not knowing "what kind of characters my plays will have until the ... well, until they are"¹ and of trying to avoid imposing an order on life², he is quite clear about his own role in the process - that his main concern is "to get the structure right".³ And of this concern he said at another time, "The only order I can impose is in the structure of the play. That's the joy, doing that."⁴

That Pinter takes pleasure in creating his structures can be seen by examining any of his works. - In this chapter The Room will be considered as a representative example. The way in which he presents information, the way in which he initiates, develops and maintains tensions, the way in which the whole structure is moved rhythmically to the end all point to a considerable skill and care in the creation of the structure of each play.

The Room, Pinter's first play, opens with a monologue by Rose Hudd which is almost the equivalent of an introductory address, with the notable difference that it is much closer to reality than a formal dramatic prologue. Rose's monologue, which is directed at her husband who is silently reading a magazine and eating the supper she is serving him,

¹ Bensky, op. cit., p. 24.

² Lewis, Peter, "Fascinated by Unsatisfactory People", Time & Tide, XLIII, (June 21, 1962), p. 17.

³ Bensky, op. cit., p. 26.

⁴ Lewis, op. cit., p. 17.

determines the setting, gives a limited amount of information about their characters and initiates the mood of the play. In her ramblings Rose indicates that the weather is quite cold and that the house they are living in is not in the best of conditions. Bert is apparently a driver and has to go out on some errand as soon as he has finished his meal. Throughout the whole of this monologue Rose gives a definite impression that she would prefer he stayed in and that she herself has not been out in some time. Her repeated references to the basement indicate that she is somewhat uneasy about it and its possible occupants.

This sequence, with its references to inside and outside, to the unknown occupants of the basement initiates the tension that will be the basis of the play. This tension, Rose's fear of anything outside the room, is not presented explicitly, but rather suggested by her movements and the rhythm of concerns in her speech. The food she is serving suggests to her the cold outside and thus, by comparison, the warmth inside. This brings up another comparison: the warmth of their room with that of the basement. With a slight digression to the food she reverts to thinking of who lives in the basement and the conditions they would have to live in. Then, again, she thinks of the food, of the comfort of the room, of the cold. She next mentions that she has not been out in some time and that Bert has not been well recently, and it is lucky that they did not have to live in the basement while he was ill. Again she thinks about the occupants of the basement, that perhaps they might be foreigners, of their comparative comfort, of the cold outside, of the ice on the roads, of someone outside, of the basement, of its occupants.

Throughout the sequence Rose is moving to and from the gas stove, the window, the table and her rocking-chair. Her constant movement and chatter suggest, at first, that she is pampering Bert and that she is naturally talkative; but it soon becomes apparent that she is tense - though for what reason is unclear. The appearance of Mr. Kidd breaks the monologue but allows its implications to sink in: the threefold comparison of inside - outside, warm - cold, room - basement. Rose's movements to the window suggest that she is looking for someone or, if not looking for, expecting to see someone.

Mr. Kidd who is deaf and who is, possibly, the landlord or caretaker contributes to the tension through the difficulty of eliciting any response from him. The motif of the basement is brought up again when he mentions that he has been examining the pipes which are probably in the basement, and again when Rose and he begin comparing the room with the basement. Thus Rose's preoccupation with the basement is developed.

Another matter, only briefly mentioned in the first sequence - the fact that Rose has not been out in a long time - is also developed here. In Rose's questioning of Mr. Kidd it comes out that apart from not having been outside the building she has not even been outside her room. She does not know how many floors there are in the building or if there are any other occupants. While her initial reasons for not being out - the cold and her health - are not cast into doubt, the impression that she is either extraordinarily reclusive or that she has a fear of what is outside is developed in this scene.

While the tension here is not so sustained as in the first sequence, it is nonetheless sharper, so the rhythm is different. In the first scene the various motifs were introduced in a somewhat fluid manner, each thought moving into another with a recognizable degree of association. In this scene the flow is broken for two reasons: first, that there are two characters speaking instead of one; second, that one of these characters is partially deaf and his responses often bear no resemblance to the question asked. This develops the sense of uncertainty about the situation. While Mr. Kidd's answers to Rose's questions are not evasions, by reason of his impaired hearing they appear to be so. His age, too, contributes to this in that his memory is failing. He says at one point that the house is "packed out" and a minute later that he can have his pick of bedrooms.

Mr. Kidd leaves and is soon followed by Bert who is off on his errand. Rose moves about the room, occasionally stopping to listen and then goes out to the landing with a bin where she meets the Sandses, a young couple looking for a room and trying to find the landlord. Almost immediately the uncertainty about the house that was initiated in the conversation with Mr. Kidd is developed. The Sandses are looking for the landlord but his name, to their knowledge, is not Kidd. After a few minutes of conversation, Mr. Sands, hearing Rose's surname is Hudd, says that that is the name of the man they are looking for.

The basement is brought into the conversation again when the Sandses mention that they have been down there looking for the landlord. While there they met a man whom they could not see because of the dark, but who was

very polite and told them that they would find the landlord upstairs. In addition, he told them that room number seven was vacant, a piece of information which alarms Rose as that is her room.

The Sandses, while a pleasant couple, contribute to the tension by their vagueness, as much as Mr. Kidd does by his deafness and forgetfulness. They talk with Rose for a couple of minutes and then seem to retreat into themselves to have a little discussion on some trivial subject such as whether he "perched" or "sat down", or whether she saw a star. These discussions do not involve Rose and she is left in the same position as a member of the audience, somewhat puzzled by this rather fey pair. This puzzlement is also bound up with a degree of alarm because of the information they impart about the basement and her room.

Thus the tension in this scene is built in conversations in which Rose has no part. Those in which she has a part provide a break in the tension because, while Rose is speaking, she has at least partial control over events. The tension then, is built here on irrelevancies - the trivial disputes of the Sandses which, in their substance, have no bearing on the action.

A major climax is reached when the Sandses announce that they have been told that number seven is vacant. While Rose does not make a scene about it - there is merely a pause and she says, "That's this room." - the significance of this piece of information is apparent to the audience who have been given the impression from the earlier scenes that this room is Rose's haven of refuge. This impression has not been given directly, rather it has been evoked by her comments and her reactions.

The Sandeses leave and the tension subsides with their departing words and Rose's slow, distracted movements after they have gone. The stage directions call for her to go to the rocking-chair, rock, stop, and sit still. In these movements both the audience and Rose reflect on the information that has been given in the last scene.

At this point Mr. Kidd re-enters and both he and Rose talk at cross-purposes for a minute until she decides to hear what he has to say. It becomes obvious that Mr. Kidd's previous visit was with the intention of finding out when Bert would be out and when he (Mr. Kidd) could speak to Rose. This sequence reveals that there is a man in the basement and that he has been waiting there for the whole week to speak to Rose. Rose contends that she cannot speak to him because she does not know him, until Mr. Kidd threatens that the man will come up when Bert is present unless she sees him now. It is not made clear why this man feels he has to avoid Bert unless there might be a degree of jealousy involved. Rose finally gives in and tells Mr. Kidd to fetch the man.

Up to this point the play has been developing from puzzlement to puzzlement - the contradictory statements of the Sandeses and Mr. Kidd have made it difficult to determine the facts of the situation. This, coupled with a lack of information about matters which are only hinted at in what becomes an increasingly ominous fashion (e.g. all references to the basement), creates a degree of tension as well as a degree of awareness in the audience, so that each word, each line is given a level of importance that might not normally be accorded ordinary conversation. At this point the tension is somewhat relaxed as there is an expectation of relief from puzzlement. Rose's insecurity has at least been given a focus - it is now a little less frightening

because it is a little more comprehensible or tangible.

The man from the basement (Riley) appears and, while his conduct and conversation might be somewhat comprehensible, his physical appearance (he is both black and blind) is not. The audience, by this point well trained to see the significant in the apparently insignificant, strains to determine the import of this figure who is a double outcast by reason of his colour and his affliction.

Rose's verbal abusing of him indicates that she knows who he is:

Riley. My name is Riley.

Rose. I don't care if it's - What? That's not your name.

(The Room, p. 28).

She attacks him for being blind, for coming and upsetting her life, for upsetting her landlord, for trying to beg from her. It is very notable that she says absolutely nothing about his colour, the significance of which can only be inferred. His message to her is that her father wants her to come home and a little later he says, "I want you to come home." It is possible to suggest that Riley is Rose's father and that this is the reason for her reticence on the subject of colour but this statement cannot be made with any degree of certainty.

While she is abusing him the audience is able to absorb the fact of Riley's appearance. Her initial tirade is repetitive, virtually uninterrupted and almost totally uncommunicative despite its great flow of words. Its pace is rushed, as if she wished to avoid having to hear anything he might say to her. This is completely in contrast to the conversation that follows which, initially stichomythic, diminishes to a point of silence and peace.

Riley. I have a message for you.

Rose. You've got what? How could you have a message for me, Mister Riley, when I don't know you and nobody knows I'm here and I don't know anybody anyway. You think I'm an easy touch, don't you? Well, why don't you give it up as a bad job? Get off out of it. I've had enough of this. You're not only a nut, you're a blind nut and you can get out the way you came.

Pause.

What message? Who have you got a message from? Who?

Riley. Your father wants you to come home.

Pause.

Rose. Home?

Riley. Yes.

Rose. Home? Go now. Come on. It's late. It's late.

Riley. To come home.

Rose. Stop it. I can't take it. What do you want? What do you want?

Riley. Come home, Sal.

Pause.

Rose. What did you call me?

Riley. Come home, Sal.

Rose. Don't call me that.

Riley. Come, now.

Rose. Don't call me that.

Riley. So now you're here.

Rose. Not Sal.

Riley. Now I touch you.

Rose. Don't touch me.

Riley. Sal.

Rose. I can't.

Riley. I want you to come home.

Rose. No.

Riley. With me.

Rose. I can't.

Riley. I waited to see you.

Rose. Yes.

Riley. Now I see you.

Rose. Yes.

Riley. Sal.

Rose. Not that.

Riley. So, now.

Pause.

So now.

Rose. I've been here.

Riley. Yes.

Rose. Long.

Riley. Yes.

Rose. The day is a hump. I never go out.
 Riley. No.
 Rose. I've been here.
 Riley. Come home now, Sal.

(The Room, p. 30-31)

This whole sequence has the effect both of a conjuration and of a seduction. By the gentle, almost monosyllabic nature of his speech he calms her and, in doing so, reduces the level of tension almost completely. The rhythm of this sequence is so skillfully done that the audience slips into its calmness and ceases to think of the questions that are still unanswered.

The re-appearance of Bert breaks this mood and immediately rebuilds the tension since his presence reminds the audience of Mr. Kidd's threat to produce Riley while Bert is present. Pinter does this by picking up the manner of speech from the previous sequence:

Bert. I got back all right.
 Rose (going towards him). Yes.
 Bert. I got back all right.

(The Room, p. 31)

and building through a diction which suggests an increasing pace:

Bert. But I drove her.

Pause

I sped her.

Pause

I caned her along

(The Room, p. 32)

From this point he goes into a speech which both by its content (his account of how he forced his way through the traffic) and its rhythm

(short, abrupt sentences) contributes to heightening the tension. At the end of the speech he tips over Riley's chair and beats his head against the stove and walks away leaving Riley apparently dead. There is a moment of silence and then Rose clutches her eyes screaming that she cannot see.

This second climax is unlike the first in that, while the first was informative (the Sandes tell Rose they have been told her room is vacant), this climax is mystifying. To the questions who is Riley, what is his relationship to Rose, why is she afraid of the outside, are added, why does Bert attack Riley, why does Rose go blind? Thus the puzzlement that is an element throughout the play is developed at the climax. And there is no denouement, there is no relaxation of tension or resolution of the action.

While The Room is Pinter's first work it does show the skill with which he is able "to get the structure right". The progress of scenes, the development of tensions within each scene and their extension through others, the rhythms of language and action create a piece which, while tightly organized, is dramatically effective.

INNOVATION IN STRUCTURE

Pinter is innovative in the structure of his plays in that he treats both exposition and resolution in a new and different manner. In exposition of both character and situation, he goes almost entirely against the traditional procedure and refuses to give all the information. In development of the action of the play he essentially disposes of its resolution. While, in effect, both these elements go together - the resolution of the action generally demands a revelation of all the facts - I will deal with each

separately in this section.

Pinter's refusal to provide information is by design and not by accident as he made clear when he had the following statement included in the programme for a production of The Dumb Waiter and The Room in 1960:⁵

The desire for verification is understandable but cannot always be satisfied. There can be no hard distinctions between what is real and what is unreal, nor between what is true and what is false. The thing is not necessarily either true or false; it can be both true and false. The assumption that to verify what has happened and what is happening presents few problems I take to be inaccurate. A character on the stage who can present no convincing argument as to his past experience, his present behaviour 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 of these things. The more acute the experience the less articulate its expression.

Pinter realizes that truth or reality is not a tangible entity: that one does not always know oneself or one's situation. He sees that the world offers not certainties but only possibilities, that there are no definitive statements or explanations of events, merely a series of interpretations each of which has its own claim to acceptability. Pinter's work embodies a conception of a fluxive world in which no statement, fact or event is fixed. While other authors may have recognized such a theoretical position, Pinter has actually made use of it in his plays. Reality then, is multifaceted, a vast matrix with the capability of giving out numerous responses to a single input. In the plays of Harold Pinter, a single question can produce a large number of answers, a single emotion can be manifested in many different reactions, a single situation can be explained in many different ways.

⁵ Cited in Esslin, The Peopled Wound, op. cit., p. 40.

In The Collection, reality is determined by four people: Bill and Stella who were there and "know", James and Harry who were not there but "find out". The question asked is whether or not Stella had an affair with Bill while away in Leeds showing off a dress collection. Stella on her return has confessed to James that she has had an affair. James being both doubtful and curious goes to get Bill's side of the tale and, encountering Harry, Bill's flatmate and possible lover, arouses Harry's curiosity. Harry now wishes to determine what happened and approaches Stella who tells him that the whole story was fabricated by James. Bill has previously told James that he and Stella merely kissed, at Stella's instigation. When Harry comes in on Bill and James he tells them that Stella has confessed to him that she made the whole story up. Here the audience is certain of at least one thing - they may not know what story, if any, Stella told James, but they do know what Stella told Harry. Nonetheless, Harry's version - that Stella made the whole thing up - is not so easily dismissable. It could be Harry's interpretation of what Stella told him - that James made it up. He may have determined that Stella was attempting to make James jealous and created this story to do so. Or else Harry might well have accepted her story, but decided to reverse it in order to finish the matter and be rid of James who, at this stage, was beginning to be a too-constant visitor of Bill's. The whole matter is further complicated by a final story from Bill that he and Stella merely sat in the lobby and talked about sleeping together but never did it.

Pinter does not satisfy the "desire for verification", he does not

reveal what actually happened - it could have been any one or a combination of the explanations offered. While in The Collection the answer is as single as the question, in other plays the questions multiply as do their possible answers. Here the question "what has happened?" is asked, but in other plays the questions "what is happening?" as well as "what has happened?" are asked.

Even more puzzling than The Collection is The Birthday Party where even fewer explanations are offered. Goldberg and McCann appear in the Boles' boarding house for the night. They harrass Stanley, one of the boarders, until he has what appears to be a nervous breakdown and the following morning take him away to a character called Monty. In this play it is only possible to suggest explanations as those presented are even less clear than those in The Collection. Stanley speaks of himself as a piano player, McCann treats him as a traitor to Ireland (to detail only one of the innumerable crimes he is accused of). The play suggests that Stanley might be a fugitive from a group of organized criminals, but his real background is never made clear.

In revealing character Pinter is as enigmatic as he is in dealing with situation. It is not that he makes any effort to hide anything, but he does not go to any lengths to reveal. Characters appear on stage with no more introduction than if they had just appeared through a door. What they say and do on that stage is what they are, and Pinter refuses to invest them with an a priori existence. And while he generally will not give out any additional information on his characters - information as to background - he

has occasionally relented and assisted producers with a limited amount of material. He prefers, however, that characters should have their own validity and not need explanations.

Therefore, characters like Davies in The Caretaker and Riley in The Room present problems. Riley has been waiting in the basement of the house where Rose Hudd lives until her husband goes out and he can give her a message. She maintains that she does not know him nor want to see him but eventually the message - that her father wants her to come home - is delivered. Neither his conduct nor the message he delivers make clear what relationship Riley has to Rose - whether in fact he is her father or possibly a previous lover. When Bert Hudd appears he attacks Riley and apparently kills him. Who is Riley? What is he to Rose? Why is he a blind negro? Why does Bert attack him? None of these questions is answered, the audience is merely left with an impression of Rose's paranoia at the end of the play.

Davies' character has an additional complication in that he has two identities: one as Bernard Jenkins, the other as Mac Davies. He has an insurance card in the name of Jenkins which is a name he assumed at one time. His real name is Mac Davies but he only has papers in the name of Jenkins and he wants to get down to Sidcup to collect those papers. "... it's got it all down there, I could prove everything". Davies has a problem in that he is really Davies but can only possibly prove he is Jenkins which he is not. But even with this information, or, perhaps, because of it, the audience is unsure of who or what Davies is. He has become the character Pinter spoke of when he said, "A character on the stage who can present no convincing

argument or information as to his past experience ... is as worthy of attention as one who, alarmingly, can do all of these things."⁶ Davies is, in effect, one who provides and does not provide information. His situation is paradoxical in that the more information he provides the less certain the audience becomes about his identity. In the end Davies goes as he came, like the tramps in Waiting for Godot, from nowhere going nowhere.

Pinter, then, allows reality its own unravelling. He does not intrude to explain or to reveal, feeling that the characters and the situations have their own dramatic force and are in no need of additional material to lend them power.

Similarly, in his refusal to impose a resolution on the action he is an innovator. This lack of resolution is not unreasonably a logical concomitant of a lack of revelation for, if all the questions cannot be answered then all the action cannot be resolved. In a Shakespearean play, as John Russell Brown has remarked in a consideration of Shakespeare in the light of Pinter, "journeys end in lovers' meetings; the king is killed and the king is crowned".⁷ Something definable does happen and an apprehensible conclusion is reached. Much modern drama, however, does not reach such a point. Like Pinter, Samuel Beckett, Eugene Ionesco, N. F. Simpson, not to mention Luigi Pirandello, do not see matters as reaching a final point. In the plays of these authors it is often difficult to determine whether there

⁶ Cited in Esslin, The Peopled Wound, op. cit. p. 40.

⁷ Brown, John Russell, "Mr. Pinter's Shakespeare", Critical Quarterly, V, (Autumn, 1963), p. 258.

ever could be a final point. In Beckett's Endgame nothing happens interminably, in his world there is neither beginning nor end, neither past nor future. Events that do happen, happen without purpose.

Pinter's dreams, on a more realistic level than Beckett's do progress through a series of events but, like Beckett's, do not have a sense of finality when the curtain comes down. There is still, for the audience, a sense that something is still going on behind that curtain. When The Dumb Waiter is over, the audience is still waiting for something more to happen - does Ben shoot Gus, has there been a mistake, is Gus the intended victim? The Collection ends on a similar note and the audience is left wondering what will happen to the relationships of James and Stella, Bill and Harry.

Such a situation in Pinter's work involves a recognition that nothing is ever conclusive, that nothing really reaches a tidy ending, that life is a continuous process of which his plays present one part. With the possible exception of The Caretaker, in which the expulsion of Davies could be treated as a conclusion, none of Pinter's plays reaches a definite ending. Pinter then has achieved what Zola sought a century ago - "une tranche de vie" - a slice of life.

The plays of Harold Pinter are innovative in that they are almost relentlessly realistic in their presentation of characters and situations. Pinter has taken the theories of the Naturalists and the Realists and brought them to their logical conclusion. And in doing so he has avoided what those theorists most feared - that an absolute reality would be "unutterably tedious".

CHAPTER IV

ENIGMA OF CHARACTER

Pinter's characters, like the form of his plays, are enigmatic - they evade definition. The audience is never entirely sure whether or not they have discovered who or what any character is. Being unable to know what the characters have done, unable to predict what they will do, creates for the audience a sense of tension which is a reflection of the tension onstage. But this is exactly what Pinter intends to do for he sees that between a "lack of biographical data about them (the characters) and the ambiguity of what they say there lies a territory which is not only worthy of exploration but which it is compulsory to explore".¹ Recognizing both the fascination as well as the reality of this situation Pinter uses it to full effect in his work.

Using The Birthday Party, the most enigmatic of his full-length plays with regard to character, I will examine how Pinter develops this enigma in relation to both the psychology and situation of the characters and show how this development affects the play. While the characters of Meg, Petey and Lulu are fairly straightforward, those of Stanley, Goldberg and McCann are probably the most enigmatic to be found in Pinter.

Stanley is the most difficult character to fix in the play. The difficulty arises primarily because he is the central character and to fix him would allow us to fix the others - notably Goldberg and McCann. It is the torture and persecution of Stanley that is the plot of the play and the audience never really knows why it is being done (situation) or who Stanley actually is (psychology).

¹ Pinter, "Between The Lines", op. cit.

Some background is provided by Stanley when he talks to Meg about his career as a concert pianist. But one is not entirely sure whether these tales are in any way credible. It does seem possible to presume that he did play the piano, for Meg says she used to like watching him play. But when he begins to rhapsodize about his coming tour one begins to suspect that he is either providing Meg with some form of romantic fantasy, or preparing himself an excuse to leave before the two visitors arrive.

These visitors are a pair Petey met on the beach the night before and who eventually turn out to be Goldberg and McCann. Of any visitors Stanley seems to be inordinately wary, which leads one to wonder what crime he may have committed or what he has done which seems to have forced him into hiding. That he is hiding is partially confirmed by Lulu when she remarks to him that he should get out for some air, implying that he is constantly buried in the house.

His relationship to Meg and Petey, who own the boarding house in which he is staying, is not immediately clear and it is possible, at first, to think that he might be their son. Then, it having become clear that he is not, one begins to wonder about his means of existence - what does he do, does he have a job? As Goldberg and McCann get closer one wonders why he is afraid, has he done anything to justify his fear? Thus from his first appearance Stanley presents an enigma - we are able to determine neither who he is, what he is nor what he is doing.

While Stanley is not related to Meg, it does appear that they have some form of relationship, the full nature of which is not entirely clear. There is a strong suggestion in the play that Stanley is actually having

some sort of affair with Meg - a suggestion which is borne out by the games they indulge in in the first act. These are initiated by Stanley's use of the word "succulent" to describe the fried bread. Meg gives the word some sexual connotation and tells Stanley, "You shouldn't say that word to a married woman." Stanley immediately begins to play with the word and ends up calling Meg a "succulent old washing bag". She obviously interprets this as a sexual compliment and, a little later, enquires (shyly, as the stage directions indicate) if she really is succulent.

The suggestion of a sexual relationship between the two is amplified when it is seen that Meg brings Stanley up a cup of tea in bed each morning. And she has strong, possibly sexual, memories of the room:

Meg (sensual, stroking his arm). Oh, Stan, that's a lovely room.
I've had some lovely afternoons in that room.

(The Birthday Party, p. 19).

But Stanley appears to be repelled by this sort of cloying attention and departs. From his reactions it would seem reasonable to assume that their relationship is limited to game-playing. Stanley is too concerned about other matters to be able to involve himself with Meg and she may be using him both as a substitute son and a substitute lover.

The maternal side of this relationship is best seen when Meg tells Stanley of the advent of the visitors. Stanley is not sure whether or not she is teasing him and tries to convince himself that she is. But he is obviously worried by the prospect and becomes somewhat vicious with her and then begins to intimidate her.

Stanley. Come over here.
Meg. No.

Stanley. I want to ask you something. (Meg fidgets nervously. She does not go to him). Come on. (Pause). All right, I can ask it from here just as well. (Deliberately). Tell me, Mrs. Boles, when you address yourself to me, do you ever ask yourself who exactly you are talking to? Eh?

Silence. He groans, his trunk falls forward, his head falls into his hands.

Meg (in a small voice). Didn't you enjoy your breakfast, Stan? (She approaches the table). Stan? When are you going to play the piano again? (Stanley grunts). Like you used to? (Stanley grunts). I used to like watching you play the piano. When are you going to play it again?

(The Birthday Party, p. 21).

Meg recognizes, without understanding why, that this viciousness on Stanley's part is motivated by something that is worrying him. Her reaction then, is an attempt to comfort him as she would a child, by drawing his attention on to something else.

Turning to the problem of Stanley's background one is confronted with a question that is without answer, or, characteristically enough of Pinter, a question that has a multitude of answers: "a categorical statement ... subject to modification by the other twenty-three possibilities of it".²

What is known of Stanley? He lives, and appears to have lived for some time, with Meg and Petey and may be presumed to be a boarder. But where he gets his money from is a mystery for he does not seem to have any job as he lounges around the house all day. He does play the piano but whether or not he was ever a professional cannot be determined with any degree of surety. Certainly, one is inclined to put little trust in his tales of round-the-world tours.

² Pinter, "Between The Lines", op. cit.

It might be presumed that the arrival of Goldberg and McCann would provide the answers to some of these questions but, in fact, their arrival only compounds the enigma. When Meg first mentions Goldberg's name it is not clear whether Stanley recognizes it - that is whether he has ever known Goldberg before. His only reaction is to sit dumbly at the table. It is possible to presume that this reaction indicates that he has accepted what is to come as inevitable. The manner in which he greets McCann and in which McCann greets him does not suggest recognition. Here it might be said that Stanley recognizes Goldberg's name but not McCann's, and has never met either of them.

Because of a number of allusions in discussions between Stanley and the visitors it appears that Stanley was involved in some form of criminal activity with either them or a greater organization for which they all worked. The organization might well be controlled by Monty, the man to whom Goldberg says he intends to take Stanley. Stanley appears to have worked for the organization and then either decided to do a little operating on his own or to get out of the organization entirely. In a conversation with McCann, Stanley is defending his leaving of Maidenhead (his station?) and promises to return there:

Stanley. . . . I like it here, but I'll be moving soon. Back home. I'll stay there too, this time. No place like home. (He laughs). I wouldn't have left, but business calls. Business called, and I had to leave for a bit. You know how it is.

(.....)

I used to live very quietly - played records, that's about all. Everything delivered to the door. Then I started a little private business, in a small way, and it compelled me to come

down here - kept me longer than I expected.

(.....)

But what I mean is ... you know how it is ... away from your own ... all wrong, of course ... I'll be all right when I get back ... but what I mean is, the way some people look at me you'd think I was a different person. I suppose I have changed, but I'm still the same man that I always was. I mean, you wouldn't think to look at me, really ... I mean, not really, that I was the sort of bloke to - to cause any trouble, would you?

(The Birthday Party, p. 40).

This series of protestations, which McCann has not asked for, is interesting, like much of Pinter's dialogue, for what it does not say as much as for what it says. The professional musician is no longer visible - no mention is made of Stanley's alleged career as a pianist which casts further doubt on his previous statements. What Stanley says above - small business, lived quietly, had to leave, (a point amplified by Meg when she says someone wanted to give Stanley a tip, "And so he took the tip. And then he got a fast train and he came down here."), afraid of being considered a cause of trouble - suggests that he was involved in some activity which he left without the permission of his bosses, or because he cheated them. This idea is partially confirmed by McCann's asking Stanley, during the interrogation, why he left the organization and if he betrayed them.

This information does little but augment the enigma of Stanley's background and situation. It also makes it more difficult to analyze his personality - to determine whether he is an idle, but nasty coward or an ordinary man who is terrified by the situation he has got himself into. The latter would appear to be the more reasonable interpretation for in his

conversation with McCann he demonstrates a limited degree of courage and self-reliance. When he enters the room where McCann sits tearing up the paper, Stanley is very cool and addresses McCann in a polite manner. When McCann brings up the subject of the impending party, Stanley appears to be unperturbed, he merely states that he is going out on his own. He maintains this calm even after Goldberg enters and only begins to break during the interrogations.

His treatment of Meg - presuming on her kindness and mocking her for it - could be interpreted as sheer nervousness brought on by the uncertainty he has to face every day. He is not entirely polite to Lulu but this could be because he has no interest in her and cannot afford, in his present position, to have any interest. One comment he makes to Goldberg could be said to indicate his affection for the Boleses, "To me, you're nothing but a dirty joke. But I have a responsibility towards the people in this house. They've been down here too long. They've lost their sense of smell. I haven't. And nobody's going to take advantage of them while I'm here." (The Birthday Party, p. 45). This could, of course, be sheer bravado in an attempt to bluff Goldberg and McCann into leaving, but it is as likely that Stanley feels some regard for those who have given him some kind of comfort and security. Meg has demonstrated her liking for Stanley and Petey will demonstrate his concern later. So it does appear that Stanley has created some kind of pleasant relationship with the Boleses and that they have responded to him in a way that has encouraged his loyalty to and concern for them.

Goldberg and McCann are equally difficult to determine. In many

ways they are like Ben and Gus in The Dumb Waiter although the positions of superiority as related to personality are reversed: Goldberg, boss in The Birthday Party, is ebullient, talkative, urbane, while Ben, boss in The Dumb Waiter, is quiet, irritable. Indeed, the similarity between the two plays goes further in that Ben and Gus are on a mission to get their man in much the same manner that Goldberg and McCann are.

The enigma of the background of Goldberg and McCann has been dealt with in the consideration of Stanley - it can only be presumed that they are criminals whose task it is to bring Stanley back to make reparation for his unspecified misdemeanours. But their personalities, too, are equally difficult to deal with; despite the fact that Goldberg does talk about himself for almost a third of the play.

McCann is an almost completely impassive character, the epitome of the hardened criminal. However, he does break towards the end of the play when he refuses to go back upstairs to collect Stanley. At this point he seems to have been unnerved by the events of the previous night. The whole business seems to have put him off, "Let's finish and go. Let's get it over and go. Get the thing done. Let's finish the bloody thing. Let's get the thing done and go." (The Birthday Party, p. 76). It could well be that McCann is used to straightforward killing and finds this psychological destruction alien to his character.

He is also completely dependent on Goldberg who does all the thinking and most of the talking. When Goldberg indicates that he does not feel his best, McCann panics and the outburst quoted above is the result. Most of

McCann's actions are in reaction to or with Goldberg. This is particularly visible during the interrogations where he acts as a chorus to Goldberg.

McCann's enigma is that one never knows what he is thinking or what he is about to do but it is generally expected that he will only follow orders and that he is, thus, under Goldberg's control. He appears to deviate from this control when he berates Lulu for her night with Goldberg. It is not clear whether this is an outburst from an enraged Irish Catholic (presuming he is both), a bitter reaction to Goldberg's mixing pleasure with business (which he dare not direct at Goldberg), or an attempt to drive her out of the house and keep her mouth shut.

Goldberg's character is in direct contrast to McCann's and, while he does talk a great deal about himself, the impression is still left that one knows as little of him as of McCann. His ebullience is contrasted with McCann's dourness. When he first appears he is trying to keep up McCann's confidence, to bolster McCann's doubts about this mission they have to carry out. All the audience learns of the mission is that it is somewhat different from the previous ones McCann has been involved in.

Goldberg is an enigma in that he creates a number of contradictory backgrounds for himself throughout the play. He, quite unlike McCann, provides the audience with a plethora of information, yet one is left with the feeling that he has succeeded in obscuring more than he reveals. But even this obscuring seems to be without purpose - he talks in one character with McCann and only changes it slightly, not even materially, for Lulu, so that there does not seem to be an attempt to hide anything. It seems, rather,

to be an attempt to maintain conversation to save himself from thinking and lapsing into the insecurity that McCann so visibly displays.

The most prominent feature in Goldberg's monologues is his reversion to the past. He is constantly expressing a regret for the loss of "the love, the bonhomie, the unashamed expression of affection of the day before yesterday that our mums taught us in the nursery". (The Birthday Party, p. 56). He reflects continually on the smaller joys of life: his childhood visits to the seaside, the meals his wife cooked, walks down the canal, "a little Austin, tea in Fullers, a library book from Boots". (The Birthday Party, p. 56). These recollections build to a pitch the morning after the party when Goldberg wakes up quite irritable and on edge. He enters the dining room in his normal, self-confident manner but begins to falter a bit when Petey enquires about Stanley, and his speech betrays this: his replies are short, to the point:

Petey. What came over him?

Goldberg (sharply). What came over him? Breakdown, Mr. Boles. Pure and simple. Nervous breakdown.

(The Birthday Party, p. 71)

or involved and vacuous!

Goldberg (rising, and moving upstage). Well, Mr. Boles, it can happen in all sorts of ways. A friend of mine was telling me about it only the other day. We'd both been concerned with another case - not entirely similar, of course, but ... quite alike, quite alike. (He pauses). Anyway, he was telling me, you see, this friend of mine, that sometimes it happens gradual - day by day it grows and grows and grows ... day by day. And then at other times it happens all at once. Poof! Like that! The nerves break. There's no guarantee how it's going to happen, but with certain people ... it's a foregone conclusion.

Petey. Really?

Goldberg. Yes. This friend of mine - he was telling me about it - only the other day. (He stands uneasily for a moment, then brings out a cigarette case and takes a cigarette). Have an Abdullah.

(The Birthday Party, p. 71-72)

It seems that Goldberg is no longer in full command of the situation at this stage - he is even unable to deal with Petey's somewhat belligerent questioning on behalf of Stanley. As McCann, too, appears to have been upset, it is likely that their work is the reason for their disturbance. Goldberg takes quite a time to rebuild his manner. He goes through a long and extraordinary ceremony with McCann in which he reviews the governing principles of his life. It would seem from this incident that Goldberg can only survive if he can talk away all aspects of reality. He seems to exorcise his demons by monologue and, in a long speech, builds to a point of madness:

Goldberg: ... Seamus - who came before your father? His father. And who came before him? Before him? ... (Vacant - triumphant). Who came before your father's father but your father's father's mother, Your great-gran-granny.

And then relaxes into normalcy:

And that's why I've reached my position, McCann. Because I've always been as fit as a fiddle. My motto. Work hard and play hard. Not a day's illness.

(The Birthday Party, p. 78)

Goldberg talks at length of his family life - of his father, his uncle, his wife and his mother - but it is never certain whether or not he has created these characters for the benefit of those listening to him, primarily Meg and Lulu, or whether they actually exist. One factor worthy of note with regard to these family figures is that Goldberg only talks of the males

(Uncle Barney and his father) in front of McCann. When talking to the others (including the first conversation with Petey and Stanley) he speaks of women - a girl he knew, his wife and his mother. The significance of this might be that he uses his father and uncle as authority figures, figures who command respect and on whom he has modelled his life. By use of these he may be hoping to impress McCann with his (Goldberg's) authority and thus make McCann feel more secure under his leadership. The references to the female members of his family would serve to reinforce the idea that he is a gentleman and allay any suspicions that the others might have.

His references to these figures, however, are neither consistent nor clear. It would seem that he is a widower for he mentions his wife and the fact that he has buried her well. Yet when he speaks of her it is in almost the same manner he spoke of his mother:

Goldberg: ... Up the street, into my gate, inside the door, home, "Simey!", my old mum used to shout, "quick before it gets cold." And there on the table what would I see? The nicest piece of gefilte fish you could wish to find on a plate.

McCann: I thought your name was Nat.

Goldberg: She used to call me Simey.

(The Birthday Party, p. 43).

Goldberg: ... and then back I'd go, back to my bungalow, with the flat roof. "Simey", my wife used to shout, "quick, before it gets cold!" And there on the table what would I see? The nicest piece of rollmop and pickled cucumber you could wish to find on a plate.

McCann: I thought your name was Nat.

Goldberg: She called me Simey.

(The Birthday Party, p. 59).

And then, later, when discussing Meg with Petey, he compares her with them, "A good woman. A charming woman. My mother was the same. My

wife was identical." (The Birthday Party, p. 71).

The audience in this play is in somewhat the same position as Petey - they do not know enough about Stanley to be able to determine what is to happen to him, even less what he has done. Thus they are unable to determine the justice or lack of it in the conduct of Goldberg and McCann. Being enigmas, Goldberg and McCann pose the threat of all puzzles - the unexpected. This creates a greater degree of tension than might be expected if their backgrounds and their characters were more fully known.

Pinter has, in this play, created some highly enigmatic characters and by doing so has built up a dramatic situation which is both comic and frightening. Thus the laughter of the audience is not entirely an expression of amusement. It is also an expression of nervous tension. Pinter's refusal to provide the characters with full biographies makes for a tension which is only increased when the character on stage is himself put in a situation of tension.

Thus Pinter has explored that "territory between the lack of biographical data" about the characters and "the ambiguity of what they say". The characters, he maintains, "possess a momentum of their own" and his job "is not to impose upon them, not to subject them to a false articulation".³ They are the characters he encountered in a room who develop themselves before him.

⁴ Pinter, "Between The Lines", op. cit.

CHAPTER V

ENIGMA OF SEXUALITY

This chapter is a development of the previous chapter (on the enigma of character). But, because Pinter makes such use of the enigma of sexuality and because it is such a characteristic motif in his work, it demands separate treatment.

Using A Night Out and The Homecoming as examples, this chapter will deal with the enigma of sexuality - the fact that characters in Pinter plays seldom fit properly into the sexual roles that might be expected of them: wives act like whores, husbands like lovers, fathers like mothers. Criticism of Pinter since The Homecoming - and it can be argued that The Homecoming is the play that deals most completely with this facet - has considered this enigma repeatedly, particularly in relation to the female characters. But there is also the male side of the enigma which has not been dealt with quite so fully. With the possible exception of Richard in The Lover, all males in the plays of Harold Pinter are subject to females, or, if not actually subject to them, are in a subordinate position. In Tea Party as in Old Times the central male character is the victim of the enigmatic conduct and personalities of two females.

Albert Stokes, in A Night Out, is a victim of an oppressive woman-kind - he is victimized by virtually every female he meets. The play is concerned with Albert's attempt to assert himself as an individual and as a man independent of female domination. The role of the mother here is not quite so clearly categorizable as those of other females in the plays into whore/wife, but there is a strong suggestion of incest in her relations with Albert. In this way their relationship is somewhat similar to that of Meg

and Stanley in The Birthday Party.

She exercises her control over Albert by an alternate use of power and appeal to pity which can be seen quite clearly in the following sequence:

Mother. You've got five minutes. Go down to the cellar, Albert, get a bulb and put it in Grandma's room, go on.

Albert (Irritably). I don't know why you keep calling that room Grandma's room, she's been dead ten years.

Mother. Albert!

Albert. I mean, it's just a junk room, that's all it is.

Mother. Albert, that's no way to speak about your Grandma, you know that as well as I do.

Albert. I'm not saying a word against Grandma -

Mother. You'll upset me in a minute, you go on like that.

Albert. I'm not going on about anything.

Mother. Yes, you are. Now why don't you go and put a bulb in Grandma's room and by the time you come down I'll have your dinner on the table.

(A Night Out, p. 44)

She begins by giving him a direct order. His irritated responses (his being positive about the situation) bring a response of feigned shock from her. He then tries to explain matters away but she seizes on his "lack of respect" (at least this is the interpretation she is putting on his words). In doing this she puts him entirely on the defensive, then rephrases her order so that it is a request with a reward at its conclusion. Mrs. Stokes is able to control Albert despite the fact that he is totally aware of his situation, that he is a "mother's boy" as Gidney says later. The possible reason for this is that Albert, being shy, is a dependent person and for this selfish reason does not want to effect a breach with his mother. But there is also a positive, unselfish side of this desire to avoid conflict, and that is that he recognizes that his mother depends on him as a husband substitute.

The previously quoted exchange is part of an attempt by Mrs. Stokes to prevent Albert going out to what appears to be his first party. Every other Friday night he has celebrated the end of the week by playing Rummy with his mother, but tonight Mr. King, manager of the accountancy firm Albert works with, is having a retirement party for the oldest member of the firm. Albert probably hopes that such a party, under such respectable circumstances, could not possibly upset his mother. She, however, sees it as a means of his gaining independence from her, possibly meeting some girl to whom he might become attracted and get married. She, therefore, attempts in every way possible to keep him from going. She attempts to delay him by getting him to put the bulb in Grandma's room, by saying his tie is not pressed when it is, by pressuring him to stay for his dinner, by reminding him of his customary game of Rummy with her. But her real concern only becomes evident when Albert is leaving and she demands to know whether he has been leading a clean life, whether he has been messing about with girls. He replies:

Albert. I don't know any girls.

Mother. If you're going to the firm's party, there'll be girls there, won't there? Girls from the office?

Albert. I don't like them, any of them.

Mother. You promise?

Albert. Promise what?

Mother. That ... you won't upset your father.

(A Night Out, p. 47).

But she has not the courage to reveal her purpose entirely as the pause following "That" indicates. She is unable to be so absolutely blatant about her possessiveness as to demand a promise from Albert that he does not like

"any of them".

When he returns after the party, dishevelled from a fight, his mother is asleep at the kitchen table. She wakes up and begins to reproach him for coming in drunk, for "mucking about with girls", for leaving her in the dark, for neglecting the dinner she specially prepared for him. And finally she specifies his greatest neglect: "Not for years, not for years, have you come up to me and said, Mum, I love you, like you did when you were a little boy. You've never said it without me having to ask you, not since before your father died." (*A Night Out*, p. 73). Having thus revealed herself, she returns to the patter of reproach until Albert finally seizes the clock from the table and the scene closes with the impression that he has smashed the clock on her head.

He leaves the house after this and has an encounter with a prostitute which will be examined later. When he finally comes home it is with a self-satisfied smile on his face and he seems to be in command of himself. But when he hears his mother call him, this complacency evaporates and the suggestion in the stage directions is that he returns to his former state: "His body freezes. His gaze comes down. His legs slowly come together. He looks in front of him." (*A Night Out*, p. 86). His mother is initially reproachful and self-pitying but then her tone changes to one of solicitude and she begins to worry about Albert. The play ends with the impression that Albert's night has come full circle and that the morning remains the same.

It is not only his mother who persecutes Albert, the girls in the

office do it as well. But in their case it is at the instigation of Gidney, the chief accountant, who is about Albert's age, captain of the firm's cricket and football teams and quite full of himself. Albert's manner, which is quietly insolent and independent, annoys Gidney, and he encourages the girls to flirt with Albert to see what his reaction will be. Gidney's dislike of Albert may stem from a fear that Albert despises him and is, as a consequence, a threat to Gidney's self-esteem. Albert does not allow Gidney the security of his self-importance - while he (Albert) makes no attempt to demolish Gidney in conversation he does make Gidney feel uncomfortable. Thus, as with no one else in the office, Gidney feels insecure in Albert's presence, and attempts to diminish this insecurity by diminishing Albert.

The girls do not necessarily want to upset Albert because they know he is quiet and prefers to be left alone, but at Gidney's insistence Joyce manages to get Eileen to join her in teasing Albert. Joyce's participation in this has actually been bought by Gidney. In return for teasing Albert she has demanded recompense so that, despite her apparent innocence, she has put herself in the position of the prostitute - allowing herself to be used for a man's amusement for a price.

The girls sit down by Albert and begin talking to him about the party and then start to crowd him off the seat. The crowding is in no way malevolent; rather it is a form of sexual contact as can be seen from the innuendo in the following conversation:

Joyce: ... Eh, move up, I'm on the edge.
 Albert: Sorry.

Eileen: Eh, mind out, you're squashing me.
 Albert: Oh
 Joyce: You squash her, she won't mind.
 Eileen (laughing): Oh, Joyce!

(A Night Out, p. 63-64)

Since Eileen and Joyce have almost stated that they are ready and willing for any games that Albert might want to play, Eileen's reaction when she is touched by an unknown hand later on is somewhat hypocritical. (In fact it was Mr. Ryan, for whom the party was being given, who touched her and not Albert). She blames Albert for doing it and he is quite horrified by the accusation. Joyce's summation of the situation is equally hypocritical, "I could tell he was that sort." (A Night Out, p. 67). They are, in fact, demanding that Albert live up to the image they have created for him.

The next female Albert encounters - the prostitute, or Girl, as she is ironically called - is the mirror image of Albert's mother. Her relationship to Albert is in contrast to that of Mrs. Stokes to Albert - the girl is a whore playing at being a mother, Mrs. Stokes is a mother playing at being a whore. And the girl treats Albert in exactly the same manner as does his mother, provoking a similarly violent reaction.

The girl, when he first meets her, is attractive. But once he enters her room she suddenly becomes another person. Indeed her manner is hardly that of a professional, rather its nervousness suggests an amateur. Like his mother, she orders Albert around and treats him as if he were a child. She warns him to close the door quietly, to take off his shoes, not to drop his ash on the carpet, not to swear.

And, like his mother, she is very concerned about respectability.

"I'm extremely particular, you see. I do like a certain amount of delicacy in men ... a certain amount ... a certain degree ... a certain amount of refinement. (.....) I'm quite well educated, you know. My father was a ... he was a military man." (A Night Out, p. 77 and 78). (In her pretensions she is not unlike Sally in Night School who hides her work as a night-club hostess by saying that she is attending night school). The girl says she is concerned about the opinion her neighbours have of her - this is why she does not want any noise or traces of ash on the carpet. She professes to be appalled at the conduct of other women: "I've heard that respectable married women, solicitors' wives, go out and pick men up when their husbands are out on business! Isn't that fantastic? I mean, they're supposed to be ... they're supposed to be respectable!" (A Night Out, p. 79). While her horror at the hypocrisy of these women is possibly justified, it is somewhat incongruous.

Her attempt to pass off a photograph of herself as a child as a photograph of her daughter (who does not exist) is another aspect of this pose of respectability. The way in which she speaks of her daughter is an aping of the language of sophisticated people in women's magazines: "Do you like this photo? It's of my little girl. She's staying with friends. Rather fine, isn't she? Very aristocratic features, don't you think? She's at a very select boarding school at the moment, actually." (A Night Out, p. 75). By this pose she hopes to achieve a number of things - to increase her respectability in the eyes of her customers, to increase her self-esteem and, possibly, to fill a mother-role for those who need it.

Although the inclination might be to regard a prostitute as hard and crude, the girl's attempts to be respectable and genteel evoke a degree of sympathy. She then, despite her trade, is fundamentally more innocent than either Eileen or Joyce and more gentle than Mrs. Stokes.

Mrs. Stokes, the secretaries and the girl all play two roles. Mrs. Stokes is both mother and wife to Albert, Eileen and Joyce both flirt and virgin, the girl both whore and mother. So there is a dichotomy between their ideas of themselves and their manifestations of themselves. Eileen and Joyce would probably like to think of themselves as free and easy but retreat into prudishness when faced with such a situation. The girl would like to be both respectable and a mother but is neither. Mrs. Stokes thinks of herself as a loving mother and does not see herself as one with incestuous tendencies. While the younger women may see the two sides of their personalities - that they are torn by both tendencies - Mrs. Stokes makes an effort to avoid seeing her other side.

Albert, by neglecting to assert himself in an individual and more particularly in a male role, leaves a vacuum which the women he comes into contact with fill. In one sense this is not a neglect on his part but rather a stifling on his mother's. She, in her need to keep possession of him, suppresses any social or emotional tendencies in him which might take him away from her. Consequently when Albert moves into a social situation he is unable to deal with people on their own level.

By his closeness, his "secretiveness" as Kedge puts it, Albert has tended to develop an unequivocal personality, to be fairly straight-

forward. This straightforwardness, plus his closeness, is what irritates people like Kedge and Gidney. And it is this tendency in Albert that makes it difficult for him to deal with people like his mother, the girl, Eileen and Joyce on their own level. His attack on the girl is actually an attack on the other three as well - an attack on a womankind which believes it can torment but, by virtue of its sex, not be held responsible for it.

When Albert attacks the girl it is with the same instrument that he attacked his mother - a clock. (Pinter plays a lot with shots of clocks in this play and it might be said that he is passing some comment on the interminable nagging that goes on). From his diatribe it is clear that he is talking not only to the girl but also to his mother and the secretaries.

Albert (seizing the clock from the mantelpiece). DON'T MUCK ME ABOUT! She freezes with terror.

See this? One crack with this ... just one crack ... (Viciously). Who do you think you are? You talk too much, you know that. You never stop talking. Just because you're a woman you think you can get away with it. (Bending over her). You've made a mistake, this time. You've picked the wrong man.

He begins to grow in stature and excitement, passing the clock from hand to hand.

You're all the same, you see, you're all the same, you're just a dead weight around my neck. What makes you think ... (He begins to move about the room, at one point half crouching, at another standing upright, as if exercising his body). What makes you think you can ... tell me ... yes ... It's the same as this business about the light in Grandma's room. Always something. Always something. (To her). My ash? I'll put it where I like!

(.....)

You haven't got any breeding. She hadn't either. And what about those girls tonight? Same kind. And that one... I didn't touch her!

(.....)

I've got as many qualifications as the next man. Let's get that quite ... straight. And I got the answer to her. I got the answer to her, you see, tonight. I finished the conversation ... I finished it ... I finished her ...

(A Night Out, p. 82-83)

What in fact has happened is that this whore has revealed factors of his mother's conduct to him which he had previously disliked but accepted because he had presumed them to be part of the fabric of respectability. It also enables him to see Joyce and Eileen in a new light - they are lumped in with his mother and the girl as creatures of no breeding (the very word Gidney has attacked him with).

He goes home feeling that this revelation has freed him only to find that he has merely achieved recognition; he still has to achieve liberty.

While in A Night Out the central female character combined the functions of whore and mother, the central female character in The Homecoming combines these roles with that of wife as well. The Homecoming is the play that most fully deals with the enigma of sexuality, particularly in the characters of Ruth and Max. The play deals with the return of Teddy, the eldest son, and his wife Ruth (whom the family have never met) to Teddy's family home in England. In the course of the visit Ruth decides she will stay with the family and allow them (notably Lenny who appears to be a pimp) to set her up as a high-class prostitute. Teddy is left to return to America, to his work and to his children, alone.

The personality of Ruth in this play is enigmatic in itself, but this enigma is compounded by the fact that she is virtually a re-incarnation of Jessie - the dead wife of Max and mother of the boys. It is, as Martin Esslin

says, "... not Teddy who has come home ... but the mother who has returned".¹ Into each of Jessie's roles Ruth seems to fit. She is a whore. At least if one is unwilling to accept her previous career as a nude photographic model as prostitution, then her ready acceptance of her coming career with Lenny would at least define her as one. And, while Jessie may not have been a whore by profession, her conduct with MacGregor (according to Sam, "MacGregor had Jessie in the back of my cab as I drove them along"), (*The Homecoming*, p. 78), allows the epithet to be applied to her. She is the mother of Teddy's three children, all boys, as Jessie was to Max's. She is wife to Teddy as Jessie was to Max. Ruth takes all these roles which parallel Jessie's and becomes as much Jessie to Teddy's family as she is Ruth to Teddy. She becomes wife/mother/whore to Max and his children as much as she is wife/mother/whore to Teddy and his children.

In relation to Teddy she is wife by virtue of their marriage, and mother by virtue of their children. She may be called whore, in relation to him, because of her previous career and her coming one. But also, her conduct with Lenny and Joey admits application of the title. When Teddy and Ruth are preparing to leave Lenny asks Ruth for one dance before she goes:

Lenny. Madam?

Ruth stands. They dance, slowly.

Teddy stands, with Ruth's coat.

Max and Joey come in the front door and into the room.

They stand.

Lenny kisses Ruth. They stand kissing.

¹ Esslin, *The Peopled Wound*, op. cit., p. 154.

Joey. Christ, she's wide open. Dad, look at that.

Pause.

She's a tart.

Pause.

Old Lenny's got a tart in here.

Joey goes to them. He takes Ruth's arm. He smiles at Lenny. He sits with Ruth on the sofa, embraces and kisses her.

He looks up at Lenny.

Just up my street.

He leans her back until she lies beneath him. He kisses her. He looks up at Teddy and Max.

(The Homecoming, p. 58-59)

A little later Joey takes her upstairs only to return two hours later not having succeeded in making love to her.

In relation to Teddy's family she plays all these roles by adopting the role of Jessie. She is wife to one of the sons, she is willing to become whore for the others. She is mother in that all recognize her as the re-incarnation of Jessie.

Max. Since poor Jessie died, eh, Sam? We haven't had a woman in the house. Not one. Inside this house. And I'll tell you why. Because their mother's image was so dear any other woman would have... tarnished it. But you Ruth... you're not only lovely and beautiful, but you're kin. You're kith. You belong here.

(The Homecoming, p. 75)

Max even refers to her in the inconsistent way that he refers to Jessie. When he first meets Ruth he describes her, among other things, as a "stinking pox-ridden slut". Later he describes Ruth as charming and beautiful. His view of Jessie is best expressed in the following lines.

Max. He was very fond of your mother, Mac was. Very fond.

He always had a good word for her.

Pause.

Mind you, she wasn't such a bad woman. Even though it made me sick to look at her rotten stinking face, she wasn't such a bad bitch.

(The Homecoming, p. 9)

It is fairly obvious at the end of the play that she has taken Jessie's controlling position in the household as, in the final scene, she is seen sitting in a chair with Max, Lenny and Joey around her in subordinate attitudes.

Ruth then, who had first appeared as the attractive and sophisticated wife of a college professor, in the end has become the whore-queen in a kingdom of essentially useless males. Both Lenny and Joey tried to dominate her sexually - Lenny psychologically, Joey physically - and both failed. By their failure they demonstrate their inability to play the expected male role. While Sam does not attempt to dominate Ruth his incapacity as a male is demonstrated by his meek acceptance of Max's abuse and, more particularly, by Max's suggestions that he might be a homosexual. Teddy, by allowing himself, in effect, to be cuckolded by his own family (he neglects to assert himself when the family encourage Ruth to abandon him and stay with them) demonstrates his weakness.

But of all the characters in the play Max is the most enigmatic in terms of his sexual role. The father, he acts as the mother, even his name suggests his role - Max/Ma. He rejects what would normally be accepted as his role in speaking to Lenny, "Stop calling me Dad. Just stop all that calling me Dad, do you understand?" (The Homecoming, p. 17). He does all the cooking in the house and, in fact, even in Jessie's time seems to

have done what would be considered her work. When he is reminiscing to Ruth it becomes apparent that he, and Jessie must have switched roles:

Max. That woman was the backbone to this family.

(.....)

I remember the night I came home, I kept quiet. First of all I gave Lenny a bath, then Teddy a bath, then Joey a bath. What fun we used to have in the bath, eh, boys? Then I came downstairs and I made Jessie put her feet up on the pouffe.

(The Homecoming, p. 46).

He takes the role of the mother in giving affection to his boys and speaks of tucking them into bed at night. One of the most surprising scenes in the play occurs when he asks Teddy, "Teddy, why don't we have a nice cuddle and kiss, eh? Like the old days? What about a nice cuddle and kiss, eh?" (The Homecoming, p. 43). And Teddy submits to it. Two other remarks Max makes show how deeply he feels he has taken on the role of motherhood: "I gave birth to three grown men... don't talk to me about the pains of childbirth - I suffered the pain, I've still got the pangs". (The Homecoming, p. 40).

These last comments may have been inspired by the possibility that the boys are not his - he refers to them as bastard sons, and Lenny's question about his begetting appears to upset Max. If Jessie was unfaithful with MacGregor it is possible that she may have been unfaithful with others - others who could have been fathers of the boys. Thus Max, never having been a father in the true sense, takes on the opposite role. His sense of gender is not particularly clear as he has a tendency to refer to males as

bitches - at different times he uses the term to describe or address Lenny, Teddy and Sam.

The Homecoming, then deals with the enigma of sexuality more explicitly than any of the other plays. While Ruth is the culmination of the female character Pinter had been developing in the earlier plays, Max is a development of but also a change in the male character - he is the only male who totally reverses his sexual role. With Max it is not, as with Ruth, a matter of a variant within a gender but a total change of gender.

The enigma of sexuality is a recognition that sexual roles are not as clearly followed as they are set - that characters are composites of both sexes as well as the variants played within these roles. While in the earlier plays the enigma of sexuality was an element of the enigma of the play, in The Homecoming it becomes the whole play.

CHAPTER VI

ENIGMA OF TIME

This chapter will deal, not only with the enigma of time, but also with the new direction that Pinter has taken in his four most recent plays. These plays, Landscape (1968), Silence (1969), Night (1969) and Old Times (1971), represent, in a fashion, his work reduced to its basic elements. Fundamentally static, they depend on Pinter's ability with language and the action of language for their vitality and their character dynamics. Having few characters, containing an intruder, being concerned with dominance and being enigmatic, they embody the characteristics of the earlier plays. What is here, though, which is greatly different, is the almost total lack of physical action and, in the case of Landscape and Silence, a lack of dialogue. Additionally, an important motif in these plays is the concern with the past, whereas in the earlier plays the concern was, in most cases, with the immediate, the present. It is by using this motif that he is dealing with an enigma of time - the different views characters have of the past, their varied remembrances of the same events and times.

While Old Times and Night tend to be more in the presentational mode of the earlier plays, Landscape and Silence make a distinct break. In these two plays there is virtually no communication between the characters although, in Silence there are odd snatches of dialogue. In Landscape the two characters, Beth and Duff, sit separately in the kitchen of the country house which they take care of for Mr. Sykes. Throughout the play they sit in their chairs and never move or glance toward one another. It is not

clear whether either hears what the other is saying. Both refer continually to events of the past, although they tend to differ in their recollection of it and their relationship to the present.

But despite this somewhat unreal material Pinter does not intend to create a surrealist, symbolic or dream setting for his play. He is quite deliberate about describing the type of setting he does want:

The kitchen of a country house.
A long kitchen table.
Beth sits in an armchair, which stands away from the table to its left.
Duff sits in a chair at the right corner of the table. The background, of a sink, stove, etc., and a window, is dim.

(.....)

Both characters are relaxed, in no sense rigid.

(Landscape, p. 8).

The most notable characteristic of Landscape is the lack of dialogue - the means by which Pinter built his reputation. In this play Pinter is almost parodying his own pronouncements about the failure of communication in that these two people, while not trying to communicate with each other, do actually achieve a form of communication. The communication is not always direct, explicit, but in the manner of which Pinter has spoken, "most of the time we're inexpressive, giving little away, unreliable, elusive, evasive, obstructive, unwilling. But it's out of these attributes that a language arises. A language ... under what is being said, another thing is being said ... I think that we communicate only too well, in our silence, in what is unsaid."¹ And it is this particular mode of communication

¹ Pinter, "Between The Lines", op. cit.

that this play demonstrates so clearly - that people do communicate with each other, as well as with outsiders - an audience - even when they are talking to themselves. Everyone is made aware that, in this play, "Under what is said, another thing is being said."

It is a parody because Beth and Duff who, unlike characters in the earlier plays, are not trying to communicate (at least on an apparent level) do in fact communicate with each other. This communication is achieved through an association of ideas. The monologues of Beth and Duff seem to mould and flow into one another although their sensibilities are markedly different. For instance when Beth is telling of her lover on the beach her ideas link with Duff's:

Beth. Snoozing how lovely I said to him. But I wasn't a fool, on that occasion. I lay quiet, by his side.

Silence

Duff. Anyway ...

Beth. My skin ...

Duff. I'm sleeping all right these days.

Beth. Was stinging.

Duff. Right through the night, every night.

Beth. I'd been in the sea.

Duff. Maybe it's something to do with fishing. Getting to learn more about fish.

Beth. Stinging in the sea by myself.

Duff. They're very shy creatures. You've got to woo them. You must never get excited with them. Or flurried. Never.

Beth. I knew there must be a hotel near, where we could get some tea.

Silence

Duff. Anyway ... luck was on my side for a change. By the time I got out of the park the pubs were open.

(Landscape, p. 14-15)

Her talking of snoozing is taken up by his mention of sleeping better

and her mention of the sea would appear to suggest the idea of fishing to him. The relationship between his luring the fish and she her lover is clear as is the association at the end of the sequence of her thought of the hotel and his of the pub.

Thus Pinter modifies what superficially appears to be monologue, and while not creating dialogue does allow for character interaction and does create a sense of action even if the players themselves do not move. This is more than an exercise in virtuosity, it is the culmination of Pinter's work in the value and effects of language. The speeches of Beth and Duff contain elements of dialogue - recalled conversations (Duff. This beer is piss, he said. Undrinkable. There's nothing wrong with the beer, I said. Yes there is, he said. I just told you what was wrong with it. Landscape, p. 15) but they are not there for dramatic dialogue, they are there to create a sense of the character of Duff or Beth, to bring out the elements of their personalities.

One of the most obvious distinctions between this play and the ones that preceded it is the fact that its primary concern is with the past rather than the present. Nothing happens onstage except the verbal revelations of these characters, their mood, their state of mind. There is no absolute present - a now. There is only a remembering - and it should be seen as a remembering, not a reliving - of other presents - the past. This creates a sense of the enigma of time in that the audience is seldom clear as to the distinction between past and present or where, in the scale of time, events mentioned fall. This enigma also renders enigmatic the nature of those events

making it difficult to determine their reality.

For Duff this past is not so distant, it is yesterday and earlier, but for Beth it is sometime ago. Yet Duff does go back into the past at points to talk of Sykes and of his (Duff's) infidelity to Beth. Characteristically enough there is another enigma here, a problem of verification, and it involves the man who was with Beth on the beach. It is quite unclear who this is, whether it was Sykes or Duff. Pinter himself came to the conclusion that it was Duff with certain attributes of Sykes.² Beth talks of his gentleness, his picking her up in the car, his presence on the beach, which suggest that the person spoken of is not Duff. Duff, to this point, has not been associated with the sea but with a pond; not with clear, bright days but overcast or rainy ones; not with gentleness, but a degree of vulgar brutality. Sykes is suggested as the lover by the way in which Duff speaks of him, what he says about him, while Beth describes the lovemaking on the beach. In these sequences Duff keeps mentioning Sykes while Beth refers to the unknown "he", the automatic antecedent of which is Sykes.

Beth. I buried my face in his side and shut the light out.

Silence

Duff. Mr. Sykes took us from the very first interview, didn't he?

(.....)

That nice blue dress he chose for you, for the house, that was very nice of him. Of course it was in his own interests for you to look good about the house, for guests.

² Cited in Esslin, The Peopled Wound, p. 192.

Beth. He moved in the sand and put his arm around me.

(Landscape, p. 20).

If Pinter's explanation is accepted and Duff is her actual lover on this and presumably all other occasions then this play becomes an examination of their relationship - an exercise in what all four of these plays are: sensibility remembered. Both characters treat the relationship quite differently; they treat it in the way it appears to have affected them. Beth's memory of the relationship is one of softness, gentleness and silence:

Beth. ...I'm going to water and arrange the flowers, I said.
He followed me and watched, standing at a distance from me.
When the arrangement was done I stayed still. I heard him moving. He didn't touch me. I listened. I looked at the flowers, blue and white, in the bowl.

Pause

Then he touched me.

Pause

He touched the back of my neck. His fingers, lightly, touching, lightly, touching, the back of my neck.

(Landscape, p. 13).

The effect of the punctuation in the last sentence is to produce an almost ritualistic recall of the contact and to suggest that Beth luxuriates in it now as she did then. Her last sequence in the play confirms this idea of the gentleness of her love and lover:

Beth. He lay above me and looked down at me. He supported my shoulder.

Pause

So tender his touch on my neck. So softly his kiss on my cheek.

Pause

My hand on his rib.

Pause

So sweetly the sand over me. Tiny the sand on my skin.

Pause

So silent the sky in my eyes. Gently the sound of tide.

Pause

Oh my true love I said.

(Landscape, p. 29-30)

Duff's memory, on the other hand, is dominated by a brutal incident which may not have actually happened. This is the "rape" scene at the end of the play. Duff remembers coming into the hall finding Beth banging the dinner gong when there was no one to serve lunch to and no lunch cooked. He takes off her chatelaine and kicks the gong down the hall. At this point the dog comes in and his narrative switches in tense from the past to the future conditional:

Duff. . . . I thought you would come to me, I thought you would come into my arms and kiss me, even . . . offer yourself to me. I would have had you in front of the dog, like a man, in the hall, on the stone, . . . you'll plead with me like a woman, I'll bang the gong on the floor, . . . I'll hang it back on its hook, bang you against it swinging, gonging, . . . bang your lovely head, . . . slam -

(Landscape, p. 29)

The change of tense makes it uncertain whether such an event ever took place. But the fact that Duff thinks of it, of doing this suggests a tension on his side of the relationship. When the play begins he is giving an account of being caught in a downpour under a tree by a pond where the paths are dangerous because "there was a lot of shit all over the place, all along the paths, by the pond. Dogshit, duckshit . . ."

(Landscape, p. 12) After he had left the park he went into a pub where

he had a disagreement with an outsider about the quality of the beer and then told him about the work of a cellarman. Throughout the mention of these events Duff displays irritation by the words he chooses. He speaks at one point of feeding the birds if he had some bread and follows this by a statement that the birds were "making a racket" - that they were not being the pleasant beasts that one feeds. The mention of "all kinds of shit" indicates an irritation with his surroundings as does the memory of the men in the pub whom he later describes as knowing "bugger all about beer".

All that Duff says is directed at Beth - he is telling her what happened yesterday whereas she is merely reminiscing to herself. And this is possibly the source of his irritation, his tension, that he cannot reach, that he cannot, in her words, "touch her". His questions to her ("Do you remember the weather yesterday? That downfall?") (Landscape p. 10), go unanswered and he talks of her as if she had become reclusive:

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

Pause

I sometimes run into one or two people I know. You might remember them.

(Landscape, p. 12)

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

Pause

I've put in some flowers. You'd find it pleasant. Looking at the flowers. You could cut a few if you liked. Bring them in. Nobody would see you. There's no-one there.

(Landscape, p. 12)

It would seem that she is not willing to see anybody, to go out, even into the garden. There is another enigma - why is she like this? She seems to have retreated even from Duff who, it is reasonable to assume, is her husband. Duff keeps her informed of the outside world, of what he does during the day, but she appears to do nothing. Certainly she is not doing her housework as he indicates, "I had a look over the house the other day. I meant to tell you. The dust is bad. We'll have to polish it up We could go up to the drawing room, open the windows. I could wash the old decanters ..." (Landscape, p. 23). Her withdrawn manner may be a reaction to Duff's infidelity, to the absence of Sykes, to age or to something that neither mentions.

While Duff attempts to touch her in his conversation she makes no attempt to do the same to him. She only dreams of that day on the beach with her lover. It is notable that the landscape of their memories differs greatly: his - dark, wet, dull, inland, cold; hers - bright, dry, clear, seashore, warm. Hers seems to be a happier, distant past; his a dull, recent past. In her first words, spoken to her lover on the beach, she asks if he would like a child and repeats the question later. It is possible to presume that this childlessness might have been a barrier between them as James Eigo suggests.³ Something does appear to have happened or, at least, such is implied by Duff's comment, "That's what matters, anyway. We're together. That's what matters." (Landscape, p. 24).

³ Eigo, James, "Pinter's Landscape", Modern Drama, XVI: 2, (September, 1973), p. 181.

Landscape then is concerned with presenting the views two people have of their past and the different way they have reacted to it, the different way it has affected them. There is also in Landscape a poetic quality which sets it apart from the earlier plays for here events are evoked rather than merely re-created.

Silence differs from Landscape in several ways but primarily in the fact that it contains a certain amount of dialogue and tends to be more repetitive. It is concerned with a girl, Ellen, her two loves, Rumsey and Bates, and her relationship with them. While Pinter, in the cast list, specifies that the characters are not old, the play itself suggests, as Martin Esslin points out, that they are.⁴ It would seem that the characters are looking back to a time when they were the age the author specifies for them (Ellen is supposed to be in her twenties, Rumsey in his forties, Bates in his thirties). Ellen has known Rumsey since she was small and at some stage in their relationship Rumsey had suggested that she find a younger man, with the implication that he is too old for her. She rejects this as she does not like the young men she knows. Bates she meets occasionally and he has possibly been her lover.

Rumsey's relationship with Ellen is a protective one, more protective than sexual, although one line - "She floats ... under me. Floating ... under me." (Silence, p. 40) - suggests that he also might have been her lover. She defers to him, dresses for him: "I walk with my girl who wears a grey blouse when she walks and grey shoes and walks with

⁴ Esslin, The Peopled Wound, op. cit., p. 178.

me readily wearing her clothes considered for me ... When it's chilly I stop her and slip her raincoat over her shoulders ... She looks up at me or listens looking down. She stops in midsentence, my sentence, to look up at me." (Silence, p. 33).

Bates is less confident, more bitter than Rumsey. His bitterness leads his landlady to ask if he ever had any pleasure in life. He is angered by noise of young people and their lovemaking in the next room, possibly bitter because they are enjoying what he no longer can.

All these characters merge past with present but none more so than Ellen who seems to be unable to distinguish between the two. "Yes, I remember. But I'm never sure that what I remember is of to-day or of yesterday or of a long time ago." (Silence, p. 46). Indeed she even seems to have trouble confirming the facts of immediate existence, a situation on which Rumsey remarks:

Rumsey. She walks from the door to the window to see the way she has come, to confirm that the house which grew nearer is the same one she stands in, that the path and the bushes are the same, that the gate is the same.

(Silence, p. 34).

Thus the play deals with the past and the present in a manner somewhat different from Landscape. In Silence the characters have never entirely separated from the past so that the enigma of time is much more marked. Bates has never separated from his frustrations, Rumsey from his self-reliance, Ellen from her vagueness, because events, as they appear to have occurred, have produced no break. In Landscape there is a sense that something has broken at one point - possibly the departure of Sykes - and

that memory relates to before and after the point of break. Ellen is somewhat similar to Beth in that she has never fully come into the present; Rumsey to the dream lover in his quietness, and Bates to Duff in his crudity and brutality of speech.

The sensibilities remembered are equally similar. Ellen, as does Beth, remembers herself as pretty and the memory is in the present:

Ellen. But I'm still quite pretty really, quite nice eyes, nice skin.

(Silence, p. 37).

Beth. I could stand now. I could be the same. I dress differently, but I am beautiful.

(Landscape, p. 12).

The contacts are similarly gentle but Ellen's are much more explicitly sexual than Beth's although there is less of a sense of sensuality created in Silence than in Landscape. Whereas Beth's man touches her, Ellen's kisses. There is a distinction too, in the memories of participation in love: Beth is the active party in her relationship, Ellen the passive party in hers. Ellen is conscious of two lovers and Beth seems to be aware only of one, although, as suggested before, the one is probably a merging of Sykes and Duff.

Night, written as a sketch for an entertainment on marriage called Mixed Doubles, covers the same themes as Landscape and Silence but uses dialogue rather than monologue. In Night a couple remember their first meeting and attempt to reconstruct it for their memories of it differ. The woman's sense of touch is reminiscent of Beth's: "You took my face in

your hands... You were very gentle, you were very caring." (Night, p. 56) . The man's memory is of a more sexual contact, of feeling her breasts while they were standing on the bridge. The play is a very simple variation on the themes of the two previous plays but lacks the pathos of these plays in that this couple have not drifted apart, in that the differences in their stories do not matter greatly to them. There is not then the flow from past to present, the lack of fixity of time that there is in the other two plays. The enigma of time is not really present in this piece except in the differences of their memory of it. This play is like the others, a reminiscence but only that, it does not go deeper to produce an awareness of the depth of their love.

Pinter's most recent play, Old Times, deals with the same themes but is unlike Landscape and Silence in dialogue and unlike Night in depth. The play is set in the house of Deeley and Kate who have been married for about twenty years. They are visited by Anna who once shared a flat with Kate and is now back from her present home in Sicily. The play resembles Night in that it focusses on the first time that Deeley, Anna and Kate met each other.

Deeley insists that he met Kate at a cinema where they were showing Odd Man Out, a film with which he was greatly impressed. When he is alone with Anna he states that he has met her before, that he picked her up in a bar and took her to a party where he spent part of the time looking up her skirt. She does not immediately remember this and appears, in fact, to deny it, but towards the end of the play confirms his story.

Throughout the course of the play Deeley becomes uncomfortable with what becomes the intrusion, past and potentially present, of Anna into his relationship with Kate.

Thus with the development of Anna's character, Pinter is returning to several of his earlier motifs: the intruder, the sense of menace, the move for possession. Anna, because she has lived with Kate and because Deeley has no knowledge of their previous friendship, is an unknown to him. To this unknown he reacts, like many other Pinter males (Edward in A Slight Ache, Lenny in The Homecoming, Bert in The Room) in a somewhat aggressive fashion. He attempts to discomfort her by his observation of her diction:

Anna. . . . 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.

(Old Times, p. 19)

and by his knowledge of where she lives, by being very open about his intimacies:

Deeley. And then at a slightly later stage our naked bodies met,
hers cool, warm, highly agreeable, and I wondered what
Robert Newton would think of this. What would he think of
this I wondered as I touched her profoundly all over.
(To Anna). What do you think he'd think?

(Old Times, p. 31)

Anna seems to be quite capable of handling such aggressiveness and appears to be unaffected by it. But then she has the advantage of being able to talk to Kate about things they had done in the past and to exclude

Deeley from the memories because he had never participated in them. He is concerned with observing both of them, particularly Kate. On two occasions the women drift back in memory almost as if they were re-living the days of their London youth. The play partially involves Deeley's attempt to maintain possession of Kate while he feels he could lose her to Anna. And it is possible to say that, at the end of the play, when he sits slumped in his chair, an apparently defeated figure, he has lost. Or it may simply be that he has been defeated by the equanimity of Kate and Anna.

The idea that is so prominent in the other plays - of sensibility remembered - is not so strong in Old Times. The characters rely more on places and events in their recollections rather than on sensations. But the moulding of the past and present is there and strongly enough to be encapsulated by Anna in these words, "There are things that I remember which may never have happened but as I recall them so they take place." (Old Times, p. 31-32). On this basis it is possible that Anna's confirmation of Deeley's story (about looking up her skirt) is something remembered which as a consequence - takes place. This indefiniteness of the past is all part of Landscape, Silence and Night. In Night the characters almost merge their stories so that they become facts. Ellen in Silence is unclear what is past or present, therefore only what she remembers can be real to her. This is in effect, the enigma of time.

And while Pinter makes use of dialogue in Old Times it is nonetheless somewhat similar to Landscape and Silence in that the dialogue at times excludes people. At points one character or another is ignored and treated

as non-existent. Kate occasionally brings this to the attention of the other two, commenting that they talk as if she were dead. Deeley attempts to avoid exclusion but cannot effectively bring himself into the reminiscent conversations of the two women.

These four plays do represent a new direction in Pinter's work. He has moved away from the sense of menace of his previous works and experimented successfully with a new form, for him, of stage speech. These plays represent a continuation, a development of his views on verification - that it is not always possible to satisfy the desire for verification. Here he has taken this idea and allowed it to dominate the plays. By using the enigma of time he has established a point (although it was explored earlier by Goldberg in The Birthday Party) that the past is not a collection of absolute truths but of sensations remembered, situations emphasized.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

Pinter's world is one in which there is no fixity, a world which is infinite in its possibility of being interpreted. Pinter is aware, as is the French novelist Alain Robbe-Grillet, that reality is not an objective thing, that it is presented by human beings who are far from being objective. As Robbe-Grillet comments, "Not only is it a man who ... describes everything but it is the least neutral, least impartial of men."¹ Robbe-Grillet recognizes, as does Pinter, that reality is dependent on the observer as well as on the participant: "Even if many objects are presented and described with great care, there is always, and especially, the eye which sees them, the thought which re-examines them, the passion which distorts them."²

In his plays Pinter has made use of this seeing eye and distorting passion and, in the process, made us aware of the multiplicity that is reality.

In this thesis I have considered Pinter as a person and as a writer who presents numerous possibilities of interpretation. In considering him as a writer I have shown that, in the way he writes, he eludes category and also that, in what he writes, he makes use of an elusiveness of category - of enigma. His work does not fit neatly into any of the standard critical patterns. In his use

¹ Robbe-Grillet, Alain, *For A New Novel*, (Pour un nouveau roman), trans. Richard Howard, (New York: Grove, 1965), p. 138.

² *Ibid.*, p. 137.

of an unobjectifiable reality he has developed Naturalistic and Realistic dramatic theory beyond a point its original theorists might have expected to achieve. And in doing this he has been both dramatically effective and critically successful.

He has also taken characteristics of this reality - its enigmas - and made them powerful motifs in his plays. Enigma of character and its attendant enigma of sexuality were important in his earlier plays. In his most recent work the enigma of time has been added to these and is, in fact, a development in his sense of the varied nature of reality.

In the sixteen years that Harold Pinter has been writing plays, his work has undergone considerable development and change. From The Room with its amusing and mystifying characters, its powerful sense of menace, its actual violence, to Landscape with its enigmatic mood, its poetic language, its lack of action, is a considerable distance. Yet through all these plays Pinter has continued many of his motifs, using them each time variously and successfully. But also the ideas with which he approached his first plays remain valid for his most recent. The ideas he presented in his speech to the National Student Drama Festival in 1962 still hold true. He is still exploring the subtleties of language, the varieties of meaning in response. In his theories as in his practice he has remained set in presenting a sense of reality. The enigmas one finds in his plays are not there because he has merely sought to present enigmas, rather enigmas are an integral part of the reality that he presents.

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