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THE POLITICS OF MEMORY IN Harold Pinter's *Ashes to Ashes*[*]

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To my mother

and those who came before

and those who are still to come

Because you don't know where [the pen] had been. You don't know how many other hands have held it, how many other hands have written with it, what other people have been doing with it. You know nothing of its history. You know nothing of its parents' history.

- DEVLIN

TODESFUGE

Schwarze Milch der Frühe wir trinken sie abends
Wir trinken sie mittags und morgens wir trinken sie nachts
Wir trinken und trinken
Wir schaufeln ein Grab in den Lüften da liegt man nicht eng
Ein Mann wohnt im Haus der spielt mit den Schlangen der schreibt
Der schreibt wenn es dunkelt nach Deutschland dein goldenes Haar Margarete
Er schreibt es und tritt vor das Haus und es blitzen die Sterne er pfeift seine Rüden herbei

Er pfeift seine Juden hervor läßt schaufeln ein Grab in der Erde
Er befiehlt uns spielt auf nun zum Tanz

Schwarze Milch der Frühe wir trinken dich nachts
Wir trinken sie morgens und mittags und wir trinken dich abends
Wir trinken und trinken
Ein Mann wohnt im Haus der spielt mit den Schlangen der schreibt
Der schreibt wenn es dunkelt nach Deutschland dein goldenes Haar Margarete
Dein aschenes Haar Sulamith wir schaufeln ein Grab in den Lüften da liegt man nicht eng

Er ruft stecht tiefer ins Erdreich ihr einen ihr andern singet und spielt
Er greift nach dem Eisen im Gurt er schwingts seine Augen sind blau
Stecht tiefer die Spaten ihr einen ihr andern spielt weiter zum Tanz auf

Schwarze Milch der Frühe wir trinken dich nachts
Wir trinken dich mittags und morgens wir trinken dich abends
Wir trinken und trinken
Ein Mann wohnt im Haus dein goldenes Haar Margarete
Dein aschenes Haar Sulamith er spielt mit den Schlangen

Er ruft spielt süßer den Tod der Tod ist ein Meister aus Deutschland
Er ruft streicht dunkler die geigen dann steigt ihr als Rauch in die Luft
Dann habt ihr ein Grab in den Wolken da liegt man nicht eng

Schwarze Milch der Frühe wir trinken dich nachts
Wir trinken dich mittags der Tod ist ein Meister aus Deutschland
Wir trinken dich abends und morgens wir trinken und trinken
Der Tod ist ein Meister aus Deutschland sein Auge ist blau
Er trifft dich mit bleierner Kugel er trifft dich genau
Ein Mann wohnt im Haus dein goldenes Haar Margarete
Er hetzt seine Rüden auf uns er schenkt uns ein Grab in der Luft
Er spielt mit den Schlangen und träumet der Tod ist ein Meister aus Deutschland
Dein goldenes Haar Margarete
Dein aschenes Haar Sulamith

Paul Celan, 1952

DEATHFUGUE

Black milk of daybreak we drink it at evening
we drink it at midday and morning we drink it at night
we drink and we drink
we shovel a grave in the air there you won't lie too cramped
A man lives in the house he plays with his vipers he writes
he writes when it grows dark to Deutschland your golden hair Margareta
he writes it and steps out of doors and the stars are all sparkling he whistles his hounds to come close
he whistles his Jews into rows has them shovel a grave in the ground
he commands us play up for the dance

Black milk of daybreak we drink you at night
we drink you at morning and midday we drink you at evening
we drink and we drink
A man lives in the house he plays with his vipers he writes
he writes when it grows dark to Deutschland your golden hair Margareta
Your ashen hair Sulamith we shovel a grave in the air there you won't lie too cramped

He shouts jab this earth deeper you lot there you others sing up and play
he grabs for the rod in his belt he swings it his eyes are so blue
jab your spades deeper you lot there you others play on for the dancing

Black milk of daybreak we drink you at night
we drink you at midday and morning we drink you at evening
we drink and we drink
a man lives in the house your goldenes Haar Margareta
your aschenes Haar Sulamith he plays with his vipers

He shouts play death more sweetly this Death is a master from Deutschland
he shouts scrape your strings darker you'll rise then as smoke to the sky
you'll have a grave then in the clouds there you won't lie too cramped

Black milk of daybreak we drink you at night
we drink you at midday Death is a master aus Deutschland
we drink you at evening and morning we drink and we drink
this Death is ein Meister aus Deutschland his eye it is blue
he shoots you with shot made of lead shoots you level and true
a man lives in the house your goldenes Haar Margarete
he looses his hounds on us grants us a grave in the air
he plays with his vipers and daydreams der Tod ist ein Meister aus Deutschland

dein goldenes Haar Margarete
dein aschenes Haar Sulamith

English translation: John Felstiner

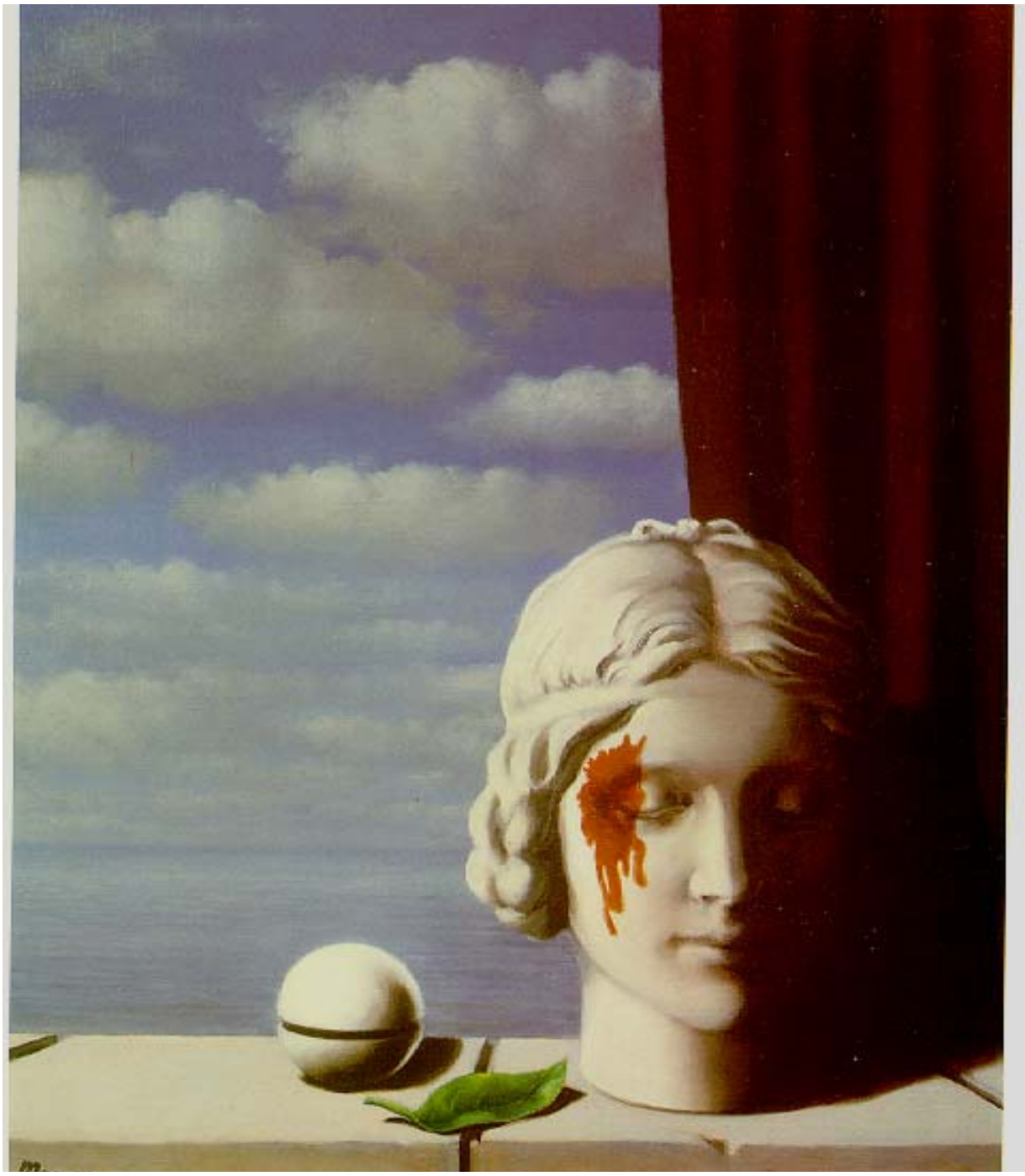

Figure 1- La Mémoire, 1948 – Magritte

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ABSTRACT

The present work proposes an investigation of the treatment given to memory in Pinter's latest play, *Ashes to Ashes*, and of its function in the development of Pinter's work. In order to do that, different aspects of the construction of meaning in the theatre are analysed, so that the specificity of its reception is determined. A survey of techniques used to present information, time and space in the theatre is made. The analytical drama, the history drama, and the theatre of the absurd are defined. After that, the evolution of the author's work is analysed to determine what characterises Pinter's work, while at the same time determining how his treatment of themes like menace, memory, and political oppression of the individual has evolved. Finally, a detailed survey of the apparently disconnected elements that are mentioned in *Ashes to Ashes* is made. The intertextual analysis allied to a study of the analytical form as used in this play enables the discovery of several layers of meaning. Through the connection established between the Holocaust and man's fall followed by expulsion from Eden, Pinter examines the use of memory as a way of dealing with personal and collective responsibility and guilt. It is through the recovery of memory (also through writing) that the present can establish a critical and responsible relation with the past.

RESUMO

O presente trabalho propõe uma investigação do tratamento dado à questão da memória na mais recente peça teatral de Harold Pinter, *Ashes to Ashes*, e de sua função no desenvolvimento da obra pinteriana. Para tanto, é feita uma análise dos diferentes aspectos da produção de significado no teatro, determinando-se a sua especificidade relativa aos modos de recepção. Faz-se um levantamento de técnicas usadas para a apresentação de informação no teatro, bem como de tratamento de espaço e tempo. Define-se o drama analítico, histórico e o teatro do absurdo. Em seguida, o desenvolvimento da obra do autor é avaliado a fim de se determinar não apenas aquilo que torna a obra de Pinter característica, mas também para que se possa traçar uma evolução da abordagem dos temas desenvolvidos pelo autor: ameaça, memória e opressão política do indivíduo. Por fim, é feito um detalhamento dos elementos aparentemente desconexos que são abordados em *Ashes to Ashes*. A análise intertextual aliada a um estudo da forma analítica, conforme usada nesta peça, permite descobrir diversos níveis de significado. Através da relação estabelecida entre o Holocausto judeu na Segunda Guerra Mundial com a queda do homem e sua subsequente expulsão do paraíso, Pinter questiona o uso da memória como forma de lidar com a responsabilidade e a culpa, tanto no nível individual quanto no coletivo. É através da recuperação da memória (também através da escrita) que o presente pode estabelecer uma relação crítica e responsável com o passado.

Introduction

Histoires de Mémoire, Mémoire de Histoire

Michel Verret

Harold Pinter's latest play, *Ashes to Ashes*, resumes some of the themes that have already appeared in the playwright's previous works while, at the same time, by resorting to an innovative shape, proposing a new approach to the way collective memory should be handled. In this one-hour play Pinter explores the relationship of a couple in their forties in the midst of a relationship crisis and inserts them in history, more precisely at the centre of a (self) questioning concerning the holocaust. This is a rich play, even more so because it appears at the summit of Pinter's career as a playwright, comprising, in that way, a further development of his treatment of themes such as: the uses of power, memory, desire, and politics in the interpersonal relationship. Although it might at first seem strange to talk of politics in the interpersonal relationship, it still bears a meaning in the case of Harold Pinter's work, since his characters are in all aspects of their lives in constant confrontation with one another. This confrontation assumes various forms, from the intrusive interrogatory that is intended to make the opponent lose his/her bearings through the lies that hinder any true understanding between people, since they never know where truth lies, up to the total impossibility of getting to know each other's identity. Such is the universe created by Pinter, where truth more often than not cannot be verified. Words are intended to delude, to mystify, and to withhold instead of revealing. At the same time, this elusive world is

charged with powerful images and silences that serve as reinforcement, negation, hindrance, or the ultimate assertion about what remains unsaid. Pinter is the master playwright for suggesting what is never explicitly said, for whatever his characters do not reveal or are incapable of understanding. The world of Pinter's plays is one in which there are no guarantees, where the figures constantly negotiate their positions in relation to one another, where identity is built in the confrontation with the other. Such quest for identity is not limited to the present situation but is based on a reconstruction of the past, which will lay the basis for a new configuration of the future.

The play *Ashes to Ashes* was first presented on 12 September 1996 at the Royal Court Upstairs (Ambassadors), in London's West End. Since then it has been performed, among other places, in Canada, Italy, France, Argentina, Germany, Ireland, Brazil, Sweden, Spain and Switzerland. The play has aroused conflicting responses from the critics and audience alike. A man standing alone in front of the Gate Theatre, Dublin, where the Pinter Festival 97 was taking place, probably represents the most negative response. His picket sign read, "Pinter is a liar and a cheat" (Younger). This lonely protest is probably best balanced by critical readings that have successfully demonstrated the complexity of the play. Between these two extreme positions, there is a continuous line with different ratings. Pinter remains relatively obscure to the uninformed audience (Dalglish), and *Ashes to Ashes* has not encountered critical acclaim by some of those more acquainted with his previous work. It has been dismissed as a poorer play among Pinter's oeuvre for its "single-mindedness." Nevertheless, other reviewers and critics have called attention to its complexity, by identifying several layers of meaning. Among these can be found the relationship between the couple, the implications of the Nazi holocaust, and archetypal human situations as connected to the theme of the fall of man.

The present work aims at analysing the ways individual and collective memory is constructed and used as a political tool to gain possession of the past and, consequently, to secure a safe position in the present situation. In order to do that, the first chapter concentrates on how meaning is constructed in the theatre. In addition, a specific metalanguage is discussed for further application in the analysis. This contemplates

aspects such as the way information is conveyed, structures of time and space, and the way reception is guided. After dealing with the terminological aspects of dramatic analysis, it is necessary to insert Harold Pinter's work as a whole, and specifically *Ashes to Ashes*, historically. In that sense, it is useful to contemplate the elements that define the history play, the analytical play, and the theatre of the absurd.

The second chapter surveys the theatrical work of Harold Pinter through its different phases. Accordingly, the development investigates, after a general introduction to the treatment of the past and memory in Pinter's work, the three phases generally agreed upon by the critics: comedies of menace, memory plays, and the political plays. To these three phases another one is added, namely: comedy of mannerism. These stages are grouped more or less thematically, but also differences in the treatment of plot, and dialogue structure are identified.

The third chapter concentrates on the analysis of the play itself. The elements discussed so far are brought into play to show ruptures and continuities both in the realm of Pinter's oeuvre and in the theatrical tradition of the 20th century. In order to do that, the analysis traces how meaning is constructed in several layers in the play. First, a survey of the apparently disconnected motives as they appear in the play is made, so as to make its connection with the themes so far explored by the playwright clear. Then the intertextual relations that *Ashes to Ashes* establishes with the literary tradition are discussed, together with their implication for the general meaning of the play. Finally, it is discussed how the playwright's innovative use of literary forms helps give shape to the main concern of the play: memory. Although the theme of memory pervades all of the author's work, it acquires a new dimension in *Ashes to Ashes*, where it becomes associated with taking collective responsibility over the past.

Chapter 1

The Construction of Meaning in the Theatre

It is with the spectator, in brief,
that theatrical communication begins and ends.
Keir Elam

The Semiotics of Theatre

The experience of going to the theatre to see a performance is quite different from, say, reading a book at home. To start with, it is a collective activity, since it involves not just a larger audience but also the complex interaction of the work of many people devoted to the production of a written text that, only then, finds its full scenic realisation. Consequently, the construction of meaning in the theatre follows a different pattern than that involved in the reading of a narrative. Although the categories of plot, figure[1], time, and space can follow the models from narrative theory, there are

[1] The term "figure" is taken from Manfred Pfister, who adopts it in opposition to the more common term "character" to emphasise the ontological difference between the dramatic construct and a character in real life. In this way, the connotation of the word "figure" points out to an intentional artificiality as opposed to the idea of autonomy attached to a real character. Although it is true that context can influence both, a real character can be shown to exist independently of it as an "analytically isolated, real category," whereas a figure is constituted by the sum of its relation to the context. In other words, if the real context has a formative or determining influence on a real character, the fictive context has a defining function on the fictive figure (160).

crucial differences between these two genres. Following Manfred Pfister, Peter Wenzel lists three areas in which theatre and narrative communication differ, creating thus the need for a specific drama theory. The first refers to the existence of an internal and an external communication system in drama. The internal communication system points to the interaction between the figures. The external communication system encompasses the relation between the actors and the public. These two levels of communication result from the absence of a narrative instance in drama, since showing is the basic mode. Nevertheless, throughout the times playwrights have been creating alternative ways to overcome this absence, such as: the chorus in ancient Greek drama, the asides of Elizabethan drama, the epic narrator of Brechtian epic theatre, or the extended secondary text of modern times, to mention just a few. The two systems of communication have also other means of interaction. They can remain totally separate or the distance can be bridged "either by bringing actors into the public space or bringing the public into the iconic space of the performance" (Carlson 81). An example of this decrease in distance is Peter Brook's production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, when the "company left the stage to clasp hands with the public" (Carlson 80).

The second difference between narrative and theatrical communication was briefly mentioned above, namely: the collective character of production and reception. In fact, a performance of a dramatic text involves, on the part of the sender, the joint efforts of an author, a director, a set designer, a composer, technicians, actors, etc. Instead of an individual receiver, on the other part, there is a collective audience, whose number may vary greatly. Moreover, this simultaneous presence of performers and audience in one place allows for a two-way communication in form of applause, laughs, whistles, boos, and other sounds. Even though many experiments have been made to alter the distance between the iconic stage and the audience, some distance will always be preserved, thus assuring that the play is always "seen as" theatre. The distinction between "seeing as" and "seeing" was used by Roger Crouton, based on Wittgenstein, to refer to what is perceived imaginatively as opposed to what is seen involuntarily. Anyway, it is a modern reformulation of Coleridge's "willing suspension of disbelief" (Carlson 89).

A third way through which theatre communication differs from narrative communication is the multimediality of the performance. Not only does the performance involve other aspects absent from the range of narrative, like the physical ambience of the theatre, the intermissions, or the programme, but it also employs a whole set of codes that are specific to the performance. These codes form a system that should be included in the analysis of a play. Nevertheless, it is sometimes problematic in terms of theory to distinguish between what is part of this system of codes and what is contingent. Keir Elam retells a very illustrative example of the problems that can arise when the audience reads a sign that was not intended as one. When Groucho Marx attended a performance of *I am a Camera*, the actress had scratches on her legs. According to his account, they all waited to discover the reason for those scratches and were disappointed to find out that they were never mentioned in the play. They finally concluded "that either she had been shaving too close or she'd been kicked around in the dressing room by her boyfriend" (qtd. in Elam 9). Other common problems can arise from a black actor or an actor with long hair in the role of Hamlet when those aspects are not intended as thematic instances of the play (Wenzel 193 – 200).

In addition to these differences, there is the question of the relation between performance and text. Keir Elam's distinction between the terms 'theatre' and 'drama' is valuable here. According to him, 'theatre' refers to "the production and communication of meaning in the performance itself and with the systems underlying it," whereas 'drama' means "that mode of fiction designed for stage presentation and constructed according to particular ('dramatic') conventions" (2). To describe the interrelationship involving text and performance, Marvin Carlson used the term supplement. It implies a double dynamics, since it refers both to the performance as something added to a text complete in itself and to the "performance as supplement in the sense of filling in a void, perhaps a void not apparent until the performance was created" (Krieger 78).

In that way, the performance is obviously not restricted to the text but is made up of "a complex polysystem of signs and codes," as Issacharoff has pointed out. Tadeusz Kowzan, a Pole semiotician, created a typology of this theatre code, which is generally

accepted. This system consists of thirteen categories divided into two main groups, those associated with the actor and those outside the actor. The first group is subdivided into three subgroups: spoken text (word and tone), expression of the body (mime, gesture and movement), and actor's external appearance (makeup, hairstyle and costume). The second main group is formed by two subdivisions: appearance of the stage (properties, settings and lighting) and inarticulate sounds (music and sound effects) - (Krieger 79-80).

It is clear that these categories may prove useful in the analysis of the performed play. Although a semiotic analysis is not the aim here, it is important to emphasise that the non-verbal categories can be used to focus the audience's attention on certain figures, elements of the set, or even the relationship between the figures. This process of foregrounding can involve lighting control, music, sounds, construction of the set, or the proxemic/deictic relation of the figures (Krieger 86). Pfister likewise identifies several other techniques that can be used to help the audience reconstruct the "authorially intended reception-perspective" (60). As these channels try to influence the receiver's perspective from inside the verbal system, they will be discussed later (see Elements of Dramatic Analysis in this Chapter). For now it suffices to say that, concerning the performance as opposed to the written text, some problems in the generation of meaning might interfere with the reception.

Gottfried Krieger states three reasons for this impaired reception. First, there is the irreversible tempo of the performance that cannot be controlled by the audience. In reading, it is possible to go back a few pages to check some detail or the reader can go at a slower pace in the introductory parts. These possibilities, however, are not available in a performance. Second, the production and the reception of a play occur simultaneously in the theatre. Because of its multimediality, a variety of information is transmitted at the same time, making it difficult for any recipient to assimilate all of it. Lastly, the performance is not selective in the way a narrator or a camera in a film can be. Everything is present before the audience and there can only be but an attempt at focusing to minimise this problem (Krieger 86; Elam 99).

According to Carlson, the recipient's freedom of response is fundamentally determined by a characteristic that is proper of the theatre: presence. A performance does not only consist of words, but it also "[emits] what Barthes called a 'thickness of signs'" (96). The spectator's attention can move freely from the central focus to secondary areas of focus, thus providing "an (sic) unique and individual synchronic 'reading' as the play moves forward diachronically" (99). Although the strongly authorial guidance is undeniable in the theatre, its pervasiveness is lessened by a multitude of simultaneous signs offering themselves to the spectator's attention. This is especially powerful in the case of actors. As long as they are physically present on stage, they may always be the focus of attention of a member of the audience. Carlson calls this phenomenon "psychic polyphony," since there is always more than one possible focus (97 – 101).

Another aspect of this pervasive presence is the idea proclaimed by Jiři Veltruský that everything on stage is a sign (Elam 7). Indeed, as Carlson points out, more than any other art, theatre relies heavily on iconicity, something that is similar to something else, for which it stands as a sign. A chair is not a chair, but is a sign for another chair. Likewise, an actor on stage represents another human being.

The degree of iconicity in theatre will vary according to the historical period. Realism, in particular, makes a great effort to resemble as much as possible the outside world. More stylised conventions prefer the use of symbolism. In any of those cases, the mere presence on stage is likely to have a strong emotional power. To illustrate this emotional power, Carlson cites two examples: one related to the presence of the actor, and the other, to the presence of a prop. The first refers to the muted presence of Cassandra in the *Oresteia* during Agamemnon and Clythemnestra's reunion after the war. Her presence could be forgotten in a reading of the text, but her physical presence before the audience during this tense dialogue builds up a high expectation in the audience, until it is finally released in her cry to Apollo (101). The second example emphasises the whole set of associations that are attributed to a prop. In Ingmar Bergman's production of *King Lear*, at the beginning of the play, the king takes off his crown, which is left

downstage until the end of the play, suggesting the leaderless state of the reign (98). Therefore, theatre contrasts with both narrative and film through its immediate presence.

Finally, meaning in theatre can be further explained through Marvin Minski's concept of frame. According to this theory, whenever someone confronts a new situation the mind calls upon a structure called frame. This forms a framework that can be partly modified, as incoming data require. Therefore, the process of constructing meaning in literature is best described as an interaction between two types of stored knowledge: "(a) knowledge of the world, knowledge of situations (everyday knowledge), universals of co-operation and understanding […]; (b) literary, aesthetic knowledge on various levels, knowledge of genre" (qtd. in Krieger 87). Thus, the spectator is able to compare what is presented on stage with what he knows about the world and form a judgement on how adequate the figure's response to the situation is. Dramatic worlds are constructed to be under the same logic and physical laws of the audience's real world. Even semantic and cultural aspects tend to overlap in the two worlds. Attempts to violate this principle of identity are recognised as such and interpreted as invitations to reflect upon the state of the world of reference (Elam 104).

In conclusion, the construction of meaning in the theatre differs from narrative texts in three basic ways. It possesses an internal and an external communication system that are not as a rule mediated by a narrating figure, its production and reception are collective, and it is made of a polysystem of signs and codes. Further differences can be accounted for the emotional power derived from the co-presence of actors, scenery, props, sounds, lights, etc., and audience in the same place. This leads to the question of the ontological status of the performance in relation to the text, which was defined above as that of a supplement. Because of the predetermined tempo of the performance, its multimediality, and the spectator's freedom of focusing, the reception during the performance can be impaired. Naturally, this is not to diminish the importance of the scenic presentation of the text. Its importance lies precisely in the emotional power derived from the presence of all elements pertaining to such a presentation. Nevertheless, the scenic realisation of a text always has an ephemeral character, making its analysis

problematic. Attempts made at filming the theatrical performance have resulted inefficient (Krieger 79; Carlson 103).

Therefore, it is important to keep in mind that *Ashes to Ashes* is a play written to be performed on stage. Not only is its presentation on stage relevant to its analysis, but also the audience's reaction to it is an important indicative of its reception. These elements shall be taken into account here, even though this work will concentrate on the text. It is never too much to remind ourselves that a profitable understanding of a play lies in the dialogue involving text, performance, and criticism. Alternatively, to use M. C. Bradbrook's definition, "the history of drama is the history of interaction between the author's imagination, the actor's skill and the spectators' imagination" (qtd. in Harben 18).

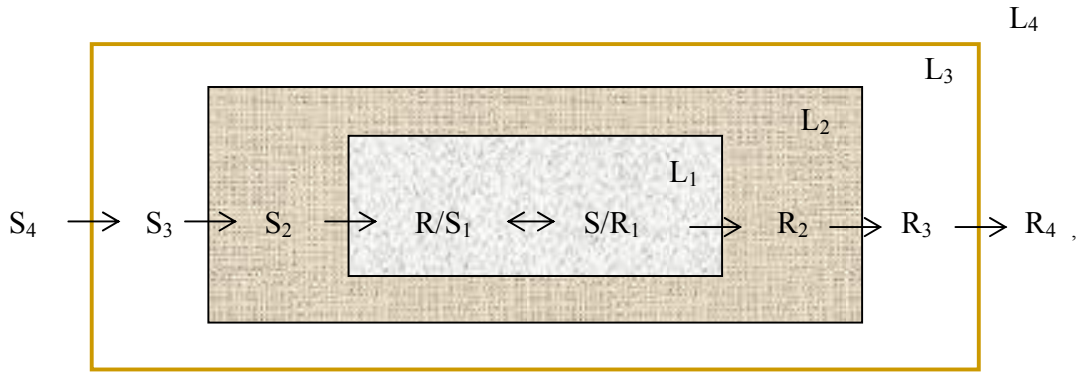
The Internal and External Communication Systems

Until recent times, theories of drama tended to be normative. Although Aristotle did not aim at prescribing norms, his concepts of catharsis and hamartia, and "his description of drama as 'the imitation of an action' in speech, involving closed structures of time and space and a particular set of characters" have become norm since the Renaissance at least (Pfister 1). The dramatic theories of the Renaissance and French and German classicism identify conflict as the essence of the dramatic. Modern plays and different traditions, however, invalidate such conclusions (Pfister 1).

According to Manfred Pfister, structuralism and communication theories have exerted considerable influence on drama theory. Structuralist theory tends to privilege either the written text or the performance, though. Russian formalism and the New Criticism, on the other hand, disregard drama for its mixture of verbal and non-verbal elements. Drama theory, however, has gained a new impulse from historical poetics, whose approach is descriptive, and also from semiotic analysis, "which interprets the dramatic text as a complex verbal, visual and acoustic supersign activating various

sociocultural codes" (2). Supersign here means not the single theatrical message, but the multiple messages sent through the various channels simultaneously, so that the spectator interprets the complex of messages as an integrated text (Elam 38). The communicative model for narrative texts proves useful when applied to dramatic texts.

This model attributes different superimposed semiotic levels to the sender and the receiver. It can be graphically displayed thus:



where S_4 stands for the empirical author, S_3 for the "ideal" author, S_2 for the fictional narrator, and R/S_1 and S/R_1 are the fictional figures communicating to each other. The empirical author (S_4) is the person who lies entirely outside the fictive world, who has produced the work. The "ideal" author (S_3) is the voice which manifests itself "as a narrative strategy, a set of instructions" given to the audience step-by-step (Eco 21). The fictional narrator (S_2) is the voice telling the story inside the fictive world. On the receiver's side, R_2 is the fictional addressee of S_2, R_3 is the implied "ideal" reader, who is able to follow the instructions given by S_3, and R_4 is the empirical reader, who can act as the "ideal" reader following the hints given by the text or not. The inner rectangle represents the internal communication system of the text (L_1 = level 1), which lies entirely in the fictional level. The beige filled rectangle shows the mediating communication system (L_2), while the area outside this rectangle (L_3 and L_4) indicates the external communication system.

Dramatic texts, as opposed to narrative texts, leave positions S_2 and R_2 vacant. The absence of a mediating communication system is compensated by the plurimedial

system of codes and signs. The function of the narrator, if there is any, is taken up by one of the figures (S/R_1). In fact, Pfister recognises a tendency in modern drama towards epic structures, whereas narrative shows a counter movement in terms of diminishing the importance of the narrator. Different dramatic periods have fulfilled the narrative function differently, such as the chorus in classical Greek drama, the allegorical figures in medieval morality plays directly interpreting their roles to the audience, asides in Elizabethan drama, prologues and epilogues presented by a commentator in modern "epic dramas", or the extended secondary text of modern drama. Still, positions S_2 and R_2 remain as deviations in dramatic representation (4), since the essence of the dramatic lies in the fact that the performer-audience communication is not direct, but is mediated through the dramatic context, in which the figures' interaction is ostended (to use Umberto Eco's term) to the audience (Elam 38).

It is exactly this indirect communication, whose most consequential form is the realistic convention of the "fourth wall," that Peter Szondi calls the "absolute nature" of drama (Pfister 4). This absolute nature can also be expressed differently. According to Szondi, drama is primary, that is, it is not a citation of something else, but it is its own representation. The playwright is not visible; the "action" is placed before the audience. Therefore, time in drama is always the present tense. The passage of time in drama is a succession of presents that carry the seed of the future in them. Time shifts are a rupture of this principle, since the passage of time is not implicit in the scenes themselves. In that way, any time gap (implicit or explicit) implies an epic structure. Similarly, changes in space are motivated from other sources outside the scene itself, and must therefore be accounted as epic. Another consequence of the absolute nature of drama is the absence of accident. Whatever happens in the play has to be motivated. As carrier of drama, Szondi identifies the dialogue as opposed to the prologue, chorus, or epilogue (14-19).

This absolute drama, where the absence of the mediating communication system is complete, emerged in the Renaissance and was in agreement with the normative poetics of the period, which has dominated until the end of the nineteenth century. After that period, it emerges what Szondi denominates the crisis of drama. Deviations from this

model appear and new forms have to account for the confrontation of ideas that begin to arise. Although Szondi has been criticised for his too Hegelian perspective, in which dialogue is of vital importance in detriment of other scenic aspects of theatre (Kennedy 3-4; Pillau 379), his thesis is valuable in that it provides a scale by means of which any deviation from this "pure" model can be measured.

In short, this embedding of the internal communication system in the external system is what provides the specific link between reality and fictionality. In particular, through the implementation of special rules and conventions, it enables the suspension of the temporal and spatial relations of ordinary life, and, therefore, a relative autonomy in relation to it.

Elements of Dramatic Analysis

As a genre in itself, drama has its own rules and conventions. Therefore, the elements used in the analysis of drama, though similar to those of the novel, are manifested in specific ways. Following Pfister, this section will review some elements concerning the way information is conveyed, and structures of time and space. Before going into these elements of dramatic analysis, however, it is important to consider the relation between the written text and the performance.

Dramatic texts are written for stage enactment. They are basically built upon dialogue. Yet, there are verbal segments that are not intended to be reproduced on stage in speaking. Roman Ingarden has called them the secondary text. They are: title of the play, inscriptions, dedications and prefaces, the *dramatis personae*, announcements of act and scene, stage-directions (scenery or action), and the identification of the speakers (Pfister 13). The appearance of the secondary text is a recent development, since in Elizabethan times, for instance, the written form of the play was intended only as a reminder of the performance.

Here two tendencies are identifiable. On the one hand, stage directions serve the theatrical purpose of indicating elements of the performance, from the actors' timing, entrances and exits, through gestures, to paralinguistic elements of speech. Contextual stage directions refer to set, lighting, properties, music and sound effects, or even changes of scene or act. On the other hand, the secondary text indicates a distrust of the stage, offering itself to a pure literary reception of the text. Consequently, the difference between narrative and dramatic texts becomes blurred, and a mediating communication system in its own right is established. The text becomes autonomous (14).

The relation between the performance and the text may also present other varieties, since the degree of freedom in the secondary text offers a range of possibilities. Although actions and events are variants of the spoken text and do not possess much autonomy, in theatre there is always the possibility of translating information from one code into another. To illustrate this, suppose the spoken text says: "It is going to rain soon." This utterance can be accompanied by the sound of thunder or a lightning or both or neither of them. These paralinguistic codes are usually not indicated in the secondary text and the production has to decide on whether to use them or not. They can also help in the characterisation of the figures, since "in realist drama the non-verbal elements function as an unconscious manifestation of a psychic condition or reflect a need for silence in the face of verbal impotence" (18). Another possibility is that stage directions are omitted because they are already incorporated in the dialogue or the relation word–action will have to be worked out by the production. In any case, it is not always clear whether word has precedence over action in the enacted text or not. Sometimes action without text, or mime, serves the purpose of providing a key to the general meaning of the play. Even the frozen tableau, where all movement ceases to give room to a pictorial moment, may serve this same purpose of offering a general comment on the play. Actually, because it is difficult to explain the tableau in the internal communication system, this artifice exposes the artificiality and arbitrariness of such pose. Questions as to the figure's motivation to "stand still" begin to arise immediately, provoking "an inevitable tension, either pleasurable or disturbing," in the audience (Carlson 105-6).

The question concerning what kind of information is given in the secondary text and what may be added in the performance is part of a more general problem, namely, how information is imparted to the audience. This has to be considered taking into account the embedding of the internal communication system in the external. As Pfister notes, "the informational value of a single verbal or non-verbal signal changes according to whether it is evaluated within the framework of the internal or the external communication systems" (40). In other words, is the new piece of information new to the audience or is it new for the figures within the internal communication system? In the first case, the information is part of the experience of the dramatic world and thus would not need to be overtly stated again in the internal communication system. This poses a problem in the representation of the past, since the audience does not know how the present situation came into being. Traditionally, the playwright might recur to a brief prologue exposing the information that the audience will need to understand the following scenes, or the new information may be imparted in a disguised manner through a psychologically plausible conversation within the internal communication system. In the second case, a piece of information might already be known in the external communication system, but is new for one or more of the figures. Here the audience's attention is set free to pay attention to the reaction of the figure or figures and to the specific perspective adopted by the informant.

Therefore, there are different levels of awareness between audience and figures in the dramatic world and among the figures in the internal communication system. Besides, these different levels of awareness, or 'discrepant awareness' (50), are not constant throughout the play but are modified by dialogue and the information conveyed through the non-verbal codes and channels.

To start with, the audience has information already given in the title of the play, which may include the name of the main figure, the genre, some moral judgement, or indications as to the action in the play. These indicators create an expectation in the audience, which can be fulfilled or not. If it is not, an ironic effect is created. Further, the audience may already have thematic knowledge of the background to the events of the

play or even of the plot either through myth or through history. Though redundant at first, this piece of information can be used either to provide a new variant or interpretation of the myth or historical event or to create dramatic irony, which is manifested through the discrepancy between what the figures and what the audience know.

As to the different levels of awareness of the various dramatic figures, they refer to the different background each figure has prior to the beginning of the play and to the information they gain during the course of action through dialogue and their own analysis of their environment. The result is that in the same situation each figure is able to assess it differently according to what background information it has. Pfister emphasises that it would be misleading to speculate the amount of information each figure has that was not articulated by them, because "to speculate on a greater degree of prescience is to misunderstand the status of fictional figures" (50).

Consequently, it is possible to calculate at each moment the total amount of information that each figure and the audience have. This configuration, however, changes as the play progresses and more information is constantly added. In this way, the audience is able to join and collate the partial awareness of each figure. Yet, it can never be sure until the end whether a figure has articulated his or her advance information in full or whether there is still more to come. From this relative position of the audience, it is possible to identify three relationships of awareness. Either the audience has superior or inferior awareness in relation to the fictional figures, or – in an extreme case – it has congruent awareness. When the audience has superior awareness, it can recognise the discrepancies between the levels of awareness in the individual dramatic figures. This can be a very pleasurable position. The opposite case of inferior audience awareness is far less common than the opposite, even in dramas where an analytical technique predominates. In this kind of text, the communicative possibilities are greatly reduced and there is a loss of ambiguity, which can only be gained retrospectively. Pfister cites the classical American and British "whodunits" and "thrillers" as typical examples of this genre. Naturally, these texts are meant to be seen only once, since knowing the answer undermines the intended effect. When there is congruent awareness the element of

discrepancy between what the figures know and what the audience knows is zero. Although not many texts manifest this situation throughout the play, this can form the pattern of a particular phase of the text. Finally, as mentioned before, dramatic irony is created when there is an overlap and some kind of interference of the internal and external communication systems with each other. This happens when the audience has superior awareness and is, thus, able to add another layer of meaning to either a verbal or non-verbal behaviour of a figure, so that the effect is different from that intended by the figure.

These different levels of awareness are part of the overall context of perspective structure. In that way, figure perspective is determined by three factors: level of advance information, psychological disposition, and ideological orientation. On the other hand, the reception-perspective is determined by the text. In an ideal "absolute" model, all figure-perspectives are equally important in the construction of the reception-perspective intended by the author. Historically, however, many forms of epic structures have been created to mediate the relation between the internal and external communication systems. Therefore, a hierarchy between the different figure-perspectives emerges.

Independently of the various figure-perspectives, the author can use several techniques to guide the reception. Although some have been mentioned above in a different context, they will be briefly repeated here in a more systematic way. The first technique used to control and coordinate the perspectives is that provided by the use of non-verbal information, such as "stature, physiognomy and costume, gesture and mime, the set and props, voice-quality, noises off and music" (61). Indeed, a whole set of semiotic signs and channels are available here.

The second technique is the use of telling names. Of course, the use of "chance" names without any selection process linking them to the created figure is always possible, but one that is rarely employed by dramatists. According to Carlson, telling names are usually the quickest and most powerful device the dramatist has of orienting the audience. It can provide

> information not only about the character who bears a particular name, but also about his actantial role in a total dramatic structure, about his place in a pattern of relationships, and about intertextual relations between the drama in which he appears and other dramas of the same or contrasting genres. (26)

Different historical periods rely on different codes when attributing names to figures. Accordingly, a realistic dramatist considers the naming codes operating in the society his/her drama seeks to mirror. These codes refer to sexual differentiation, national, regional, and ethnic differentiation, social position, character qualities, and the changing fashion in names. Historical names, when used, are inserted in a constellation of other names, which bring a whole series of associations from outside the play with them. Certain historical periods in drama have given prominence to "stock" names, which were accompanied by certain characters' behaviour. This is the case, for example, of the names used in the *commedia dell'arte*, such as Harlequin, Pantalone, or Pulcinella. "Speaking" names indicate a "consistent type filling a predictable actantial role in the dramatic structure" (Carlson 33). In spite of its great variation, "speaking" names fall into four main categories, namely, animal names, objects, trade's actions, and character description such as Volpone, Otter, Scale, Syringe, Errand, Haircut, Jolly, and Sneerwell. It is worth noting that, despite being generic indicators of their role in the play, these names keep a pretence of individuality, such as the abstract nouns of the medieval religious plays and the abstract categories of the expressionism have not striven to create. In these plays, the figures are what their names say without any extra "residue" extending beyond them. (Carlson 26 – 38)

A third technique of guiding reception is associated with the behaviour of the figure, which may discredit his or her own words. Therefore, this figure's perspective may be presented as a distortion of the ideas he or she proclaims. Another technique used to steer the reception-perspective is associated not with the figures, but with the plot itself. The convention of "poetic justice" determines that a happy ending for a figure amounts to a confirmation of his or her perspective, whereas a tragic ending negates it.

An additional control technique is associated with the combination of figure-perspectives. On the paradigmatic level, it is related to the degree of emphasis, or focus,

given to each figure-perspective, both quantitatively and qualitatively. In practical terms, this means that the audience tends to identify itself more promptly with the figure-perspective that is quantitatively predominant, that is, the one that is most often presented. In addition, the poetic quality of the speech of a particular figure is powerful in influencing the audience's attitude. The syntagmatic level refers to the constellation of figure-perspectives. There are various possibilities here, such as the symmetric arrangement of opposed figure-perspectives around a central one or the contrasting of two opposite figure-perspectives, leaving the audience free to choose between them.

The multiple perspectives can combine in three kinds of structure: a-perspectival, closed, and open. The a-perspectival structure is an extreme form of drama, in which the figure's utterances serve to express the author's conviction. Every speech in this kind of drama reinforces the authorially intended audience-perspective and is, therefore, close in function to an expository text. In the closed perspective structure, the receiver has to reconstruct the converging line connecting all the perspectives to discover the intended authorial perspective. Therefore, even this kind of drama has to contain a number of implicit or explicit guidelines for the audience. The open perspective structure offers no such guidelines leading to a single converging line uniting all the perspectives. According to Pfister,

> [this] absence of one clearly implied reception-perspective has the effect of challenging the sensibilities and critical faculties of the audience and leaving it to choose between accepting the perspectival ambiguity of the text or creating its own 'unofficial' reception-perspective that has not been sanctioned by the author. (68)

To conclude this exposition on how information is transmitted in drama, it is important to consider that a play is a process that develops in time. In addition to the simultaneous information being transmitted through the various channels, drama realises its informational potential in a pattern of successive elements. Two prominent elements in the chronological dramatic process are the exposition and the dénouement. The first can be defined as the transmission of all information that helps understand the dramatic present. It serves an informative and referential function. The expository information can come as a block at the beginning of the play or it can be gradually intermingled in the

plot. It tends to concentrate on the initial phases of the text. Nevertheless, in plays with an analytical structure, the plot is constructed so that this process of providing the expository information is distributed throughout the play. The more it uses the present, the more contextually motivated it is in the internal dramatic level.

A term introduced by the dramaturgists of the French classicism, the dénouement serves to describe a situation in which a figure or group of figures find themselves in a distressing situation caused by intrigue, self-deception, or lack of information. The resolution of this situation motivated by some new piece of information leads to either a happy or a tragic ending. A closed form of dramatic ending is one in which all the situations find a solution at the end of the play. In recent times, dramas with open endings have become common. This can either reflect the idea that the crisis or conflict is a lasting condition for which a resolution "would be unthinkable" (96) or it could indicate that the playwright is delegating the responsibility of supplying a resolution to the audience. This open-endedness refers to a thematic aspect of a conflict of norms. Modern plays, however, tend to leave even simpler questions of the play unresolved, as an attempt to approach the open-endedness of reality itself.

In addition to the different ways used to impart information in the play, it is important to analyse the categories of time and space in drama. Also here the superimposition of the internal and external communication systems occurs. Therefore, the space of the performance corresponds in the internal communication system to the fictional space of the dramatic world, whereas the time of the performance corresponds to the time elapsed in the fictional time. Should the fictionality of time and space be exposed or even undermined, then the "absolute autonomy" of drama is broken and an epic mediating system is established. The two deictic systems do not remain entirely separate.

Normative theories of drama used to emphasise the need to keep the "three unities" of time, space, and plot. Although Aristotle's *Poetics* was considered the source of this general principle, it "really only calls for the unity of plot" (Pfister 249). However, if closed space is defined as an omission of all changes of space and closed time as a total

absence of ruptures, then each scene is a closed space-time continuum in the play. Classicist theories insisted that these rules apply to the play as a whole and admitted, in varying degrees, switches of space between rooms or within the same city and a time-span of a whole day or even a day and a night. In the eighteenth century, these rules were questioned and eventually were abandoned as a norm. There are still plays being written which are based on a closed structure of time and space. This is especially the case of "naturalistic theatre and, more surprisingly, perhaps, in the theatre of the absurd as developed by Beckett, Ionesco and Pinter" (252).

Because closed structures are expected in certain kinds of text, such as in French classical drama, it is considered unmarked. This happens because there is a general tendency to consider closed structures of time and space as being similar to the way we perceive the world around us. However, if these same structures have a thematic function, as it is the case of many naturalistic plays, then it is marked. Ruptures in the structures of time and space undermine the absolute autonomy of drama because the gaps must be identified. Although it is possible to mark such changes implicitly, dramas with an open time-space structure have a tendency to create epic structures, that is, to insert mediating instances indicating the changes in time and space.

Space has a threefold function in drama. First, it defines the setting of the story, where the figures interact with each other. Closely connected to this function, it fulfils its subordinate secondary function of providing an environment for the story. The environment then influences the figures' actions and, at the same time, helps with their characterisation. More importantly, however, is what Pfister, citing J. M. Lotman, calls its "model-forming role." This third function refers not to the environment that surrounds the figures but to the spatial relations formed among the figures and their function as a "language employed to express a number of other non-spatial relations in the text" (qtd. in Pfister 257). This third function reflects the semantic relations spatially, whether they follow the naturalistic principle or recur to extreme stylisation.

Pfister distinguishes three types of spatial relations: first, there are the binary opposites of left and right, top and bottom, back and front within a single scenically

presented locale. Second, there is the differentiation between the scenically presented locale and off-stage. Third, there is the relationship between the various scenically presented locales (257).

The first type of spatial relation, which refers to the relationship of the figures within a single locale, is already inherent in the dialogue structure of the play. It is important to emphasise, though, that the relationship existent in verbal imageries find an expression in the gestural movements and relative positions of the figures in relation to one another. The second type of spatial relation becomes significant when the opposition stage and off-stage is marked, which is the case in some modern plays. In this case, the closed space of the stage assumes the connotation of a labyrinth, a uterus, a "room," or a "no man's land," as the titles of some plays already suggest. The third type of spatial relation is usually defined by simple spatial antithesis, such as the city and the countryside, the realm of dreams and reality, or the sheltering room and the dangerous public park. Here, there are multiple possibilities of creating an orchestration of contrasting locales that are measured against each other. Finally, there is a relationship of a different order from the three above. It refers to the proximity of the fictional locale to the audience. The further it is from the audience's real environment, the more likely it is to accept fictionality and give up its claims on realism.

A historical study of the conception of the scenic space shows a variety of notions, ranging from abstract neutrality through stylisation to realisation. This development, however, is by no means linear in Western drama and does not imply a progression towards more realistic representation of space. Modern drama, through various movements, such as expressionism, epic theatre and theatre of the absurd, has shown a tendency opposite to the naturalistic use of realistic space. This range from less to more realistic detail corresponds to different functions. The concept of space that comprises a largely amount of realistic detail strives at recreating the contingencies of reality. In naturalistic drama, it even acquires a symbolic meaning, since the environment exerts a strong influence on the individual. On the other side of the scale, the locale remains largely neutral or unspecified, moving in the direction of the representation of

the figures' inner consciousness. In general, because of this lack of individualisation, the spatial context tends towards public spaces, towards the representation not so much of individuals but of a representative of a particular class. The characteristic feature of a more stylised conception of space, however, is not any symbolic quality it might posses. Naturalistic spaces can also have a symbolic function. Its distinctive feature is that the locale has a reflective rather than a determining function.

An equally important structure governing the construction of a play and contributing to its overall meaning is the structure of time. Absolute autonomy means that, as opposed to narrative texts, the predominant tense is the present. This means that action is brought before the audience without the need of any mediating instance. As it occurs with the structure of space, the relationship between the fictional time and the real time is relevant to the intentions underlying the text. Part of the desired effect is generated by the relationship between the audience's own time and the period portrayed on stage. The playwright can benefit from more or less distance from his own time to invite the audience to generalise from the play.

The chronological relationships in a play vary along two axes: the axis of the succession of events and the axis of simultaneous events. "This simultaneity applies both to actions and events that are presented scenically and those that occur off-stage and which are related verbally, either as they occur or retrospectively" (276). Therefore, the axis of simultaneity also has a spatial component.

The axis of succession – or the horizontal axis – refers to two different levels, that of the story and of the presentation of the story. Should the story be presented out of chronological order, then the two levels are displaced against each other. Yet, even reports of past events are presented scenically and are, therefore, a future-oriented movement on both levels of the axis. According to Pfister, even modern and highly experimental drama tends towards a linear representation of time. Any overlapping of acts or scenes represents a strong deviation and must be signalled accordingly. He lists four types of possible disruptions of the successive presentation of time. First, simultaneous events may be presented in successive acts or scenes. Second, a situation

that occurs later in the fictional world may be presented before scenes taking place earlier. Third, the successive time structure can be disrupted by the introduction of an epic element, such as a narrator who is able to comment on the events from a future perspective. Finally, soliloquy can also suspend time in a similar way, since the thought processes it represents cannot be measured in any time-scale, although they take some time to be articulated.

Simultaneity in drama is characterised by the use of several codes and channels at the same time. As signalled before, they can refer to events being presented both on stage and off-stage. Off-stage actions and events may be brought to the audience's knowledge by acoustic means or through a teichoscopic report, when a figure on stage reports what another figure is supposedly doing off-stage. Another possibility of presenting simultaneous events or actions is to divide the stage into several areas.

There are several possibilities of transmitting chronological information. This may be conveyed epically, or a figure may refer explicitly or implicitly to the time. Costumes and set, along with lighting and the activities performed by the figures can also indicate time. Other means are visual signs, as for instance, a clock, complemented by acoustic signs. Furthermore, scenes and acts must be arranged in some chronological order in relation to one another, so that a sense of past and future emerges. There are different degrees of precision in how the passage of time is marked. This difference can occur not only among different texts but even within the same text.

The specific time when an action or event takes place serves not only the realistic purpose of providing a link with reality, but it can also refer to another semantic layer. In that way, placing a text in a particular historical period ensures a set of socio-cultural stereotypes associated with that period. Likewise, the season of the year and the time of the day imply archetypal associations with specific moods and genres. These associations can be violated to create ironic effect, though. In closed time structures, the measurement of the passage of time implies a movement forward, since any new piece of information brings with it an expectation in relation to the future. That is how suspense is created.

Open structures of time, on the other hand, can give "the impression of a slow and rather aimless process of development," suggesting a cyclic time structure (283).

Actually, the distinction between closed and open time structures is given by the relationship between the actual performance time and the fictional time. The time structure is always closed if the total length of time covered by the action presented directly on stage (primary fictional time) coincides with the fictional period presented on stage, including the periods of chronologically hidden action (secondary fictional time). Open time structures, however, are characterised by a greater or smaller divergence between the secondary fictional time, that is, the time beginning with the "point of attack" until the end, and the fictional duration of the story, from the beginning of the purely verbally narrated background to the events to the furthest point in the future (tertiary fictional time). As a consequence, the latter the "point of attack," the greater will be the divergence of secondary and tertiary fictional times. If they coincide, the story is presented chronologically from beginning to end with no degree of retrospective or anticipatory narrative.

The presentation of time can be compressed or extended. The compression of events is a useful technique, because not all phases of the story can be presented at the actual performance time. Therefore, scenes happening off-stage can be related with a greater or lesser degree of explicitness. In addition, scenes can be compressed. In films, the speeding up effect is based on the idea that all events take place in a quicker pace than they would do in reality. In theatre, this process occurs by means of exclusion and abbreviation of certain sequences, so that the time they take up in performances is shorter. The opposite effect of stretched time, which produces an effect of slowing down the tempo, though of minor importance in the context of drama in general, is very important when we consider Pinter's work because of the author's abundant use of pauses. Pauses together with scenes reduced to a series of irrelevant or insignificant activities create the impression that time is drawn out. This does not happen because activities take up longer time than they would do in real life or in the fictional performance time, but mainly because of the absence of compression techniques.

Performance tends in general to concentrate on the logically most important causal events. Technically, it is not correct to refer to this slow motion technique if the fictional time is not mentioned – verbally or non-verbally – in the internal communication system, and, therefore, cannot be compared with the actual performance time. Because dreams and soliloquies cannot be chronologically measured in the fictional time, but rather take up time in the performance, time is considered suspended.

Although the techniques of representation of time based on the communicative system model can be presented as a relatively closed repertoire, this is not true to the conceptions of time underlying them, since they vary historically. Three significant polar opposites in the conception of time concern: objective versus subjective perception of time, progression versus stasis, and linear versus cyclical movement. First, the subjective perception of time can be created through compression or extension of the fictional time, of which the fictional figures can be aware or not. This is an increasingly important feature in modern drama. Second, time can be conceived as chronological progression, where there is constant change, and as duration, where there is chronological prolongation of a static condition. In such case, the situation presented at the end of the text does not differ considerably from that of the beginning. What changes is the figures' insight, which has changed as a consequence of new information provided by the development of the story. Third, time can be interpreted as cyclical. Even though some progression takes place, the cyclical movement involves a passage from a position passing through several others and returning to a position corresponding to the initial one. Finally, on account of new insights gained from recent developments in the conception of time in science and philosophy and the concurrence of other media, such as the film and the novel, which are more flexible in their presentations of time, modern drama has shown a preference for more subjective, static, and cyclical conceptions of time.

To conclude, this section has focused on the technical possibilities related to the ways information, space and time can be conveyed in drama. These, however, have to be seen in relation to the historical frame that underlies any given texts. Only then, it is possible to analyse the authorial intentions and audience expectations, and the social

conditions and ideological frames of a dramatic text. Consequently, the next section deals with three genres, as they seem relevant to a better understanding of *Ashes to Ashes*.

Some Dramatic Genres

Genre can be a controversial issue, if we consider its normative use in the history of literature, which sharply prescribes what falls into one genre category or another, or even if we confront the fact that sharp boundaries defining genres are a theoretical impossibility. Here, however, the categorisation into genre is intended to provide clarity over the principles, language, ideas, and forms that belong to a certain kind of text. This is helpful in examining continuities and ruptures that each new text brings in relation to its contemporaries and to the literary tradition. Therefore, there is no attempt here to place the text into any single category, but to see how the techniques and functions associated with these are used in the construction of the play. Furthermore, it is worth repeating again, genre also plays an important role in determining the expectations of both the dramatist and the audience (Suerbaum 83).

The communicative model that was discussed above explains certain principles that define the dramatic genre. Within this development, three historical genres are especially useful in the analysis of *Ashes to Ashes*, namely: the twentieth century history play, the theatre of the absurd, and the analytical play.

The decision to deal with a subject taken from history implies that the dramatist "[comes] to terms with his subject and [shows] a deep and serious interest in the past, free as he is to think critically and independently about it" (Harben 2). Therefore, the question on how much flexibility the playwright has when using history imaginatively is crucial to define the genre. According to Niloufer Harben, the use of history cannot be limited to a mere indication of theme or subject. This would be a travesty of history, as it was often the case in nineteenth century drama. The playwright is not free to interpret history without any consideration of historical fact. This would be anything but a history play. On the other hand, the use of the writer's power of intuition can help him/her go beyond

what is documented "to explore the possibilities of human character and situation within the context of actual experience" (2). In order to do that, we should remind ourselves of the much-debated question of what constitutes historical fact.

If the positivist idea of an "objective truth" based on facts seems suspicious nowadays, its counterpart that stresses that all historical judgement is subjective is hardly more illuminating. Harben cites different positions held by historians in defence of a more flexible understanding of what constitutes a fact. Even being aware of the dangers of total relativism, E. H. Carr defends the idea that a fact becomes a historical fact only when the historian has focused on it. In contrast, G. R. Elton defends the independence of historical facts. If, he says, an event of the past can be known, it is a "fact of history." A historian who places himself above the facts is apt to do anything with them. A more balanced position is that founded on the relationship between the past, or what can be traced of it, and the historian's skill to reconstruct and interpret it. The constant measuring of fact against interpretation and vice-versa is the closest the historian can get to knowing a past reality. Therefore, Harben concludes, although unattainable in an absolute form, there is a historical truth and it is the historian's ambition to get as close to it as possible (3).

The playwright, however, has different aims from those of the historian. When analysing documents, investigating the sources and applying disciplined assessment of the facts, the historian is bound to the methods of historical investigation. The dramatist, on the other hand, approaches the facts with a different purpose in mind. Although facing the same limits as the historian, the dramatist is bound to use these same facts imaginatively and sympathetically. There is a large body of facts over which there is considerable agreement and which should be considered in any new interpretation of the past. Consequently, major distortions, which grossly disregard the nature of figure and events, are unjustified. The playwright proceeds then to create new possibilities within these boundaries. Transposition of time and space, condensation of events, imposition of the dramatic form are legitimate procedures taken by playwrights. Even the insertion of scenes that have never happened is justified, provided the historical context supports this

imaginative treatment of the theme. Actually, what the playwright seeks is to achieve a deeper truth, which incorporates the significance these facts have come to bear upon humankind. The dramatist's strength lies precisely in his/her ability to establish connections between the past and the present.

The danger of transforming history into myth is, of course, always present. The boundaries between history and myth are, in such case, not easily definable, since the reworking of the past through another age's perspective involves the symbolic dimension which that past has for our age. The past can only be known through the minds of the present day historians, who use their own experience to interpret his/her sources. Therefore, it is vital that this process be done as consciously as possible, in order to avoid attributing to the past the same environment of the observer. According to the English historian C. Webster, "it is just the analysis of our own experience which enables us to understand more completely that which is so different from it" (qtd. in Harben 10). This is what justifies the playwright's reading of the present into the past.

Another aspect emphasised by Harben is the fact that the interest in historical issues is not limited to political structures. The contemporary view over history tends to include practically all cultural aspects of human life. Therefore, it is not surprising that in our post-Freudian era "modern playwrights tend to emphasise the universe that lies within, the private man behind the mask, the complexity and precariousness of personality" (256). If the dramatist chooses to focus on the influence of the individual on his historical period or to project the figure as a representative of the influences of the historical period is an entirely open matter. The playwright, having carefully researched into his sources, is extremely free to use history. His/her limits being a sound basis that supports his vision in history. Even the use of anachronisms does not undermine the seriousness of his/her project, since these are usually introduced to highlight the connections between past and present. What interests the dramatist is to read history so as to convey "the totality of an experience and he gains something by this greater imaginative appropriation of the past" (14). The history play aims at shedding new light on the past and the complexity of the human condition.

Finally, in attempting to define a genre, even briefly as it has been done here, two important aspects should be mentioned. First, the categorisation within any given category demands a close individual analysis of a play on its own terms. This is especially important in the case of the modern English history drama, which cuts across many schools and phases in the development of the twentieth century English drama. The second aspect is related to the historicity of a genre. Although the history play can be found since Elizabethan times, it has been diversely conceived in different phases of its development. The approach adopted here is concerned with the treatment given to history in twentieth century drama. Examples of these are Osborne's *Luther*, Shaw's *Saint Joan*, or Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral*.

A very different approach to the past is that offered by the analytical play. Although at first only a technique for the presentation of actions prior to the point of attack, the analytical play as a genre was fully developed by Ibsen, whose position in the history of theatre "marks the transition from the traditional to the modern theatre" (Esslin, *Ibsen* 71). This genre presupposes that form and content are closely associated. Indeed, the analytical play looks backwards to find the causes of the present situation. The assumption underlying such procedure is that "the past holds the answer" (Hallett qtd. in Wächter 3). The plot is said to unfold retrospectively, that is, the events leading to the conflict are not presented on stage, but having started just before the final consequences, the play proceeds to uncover what exactly the past conceals.

The question is how to bring the past into the present, since the theatre presents the actions as they take place. Martina Wächter summarises three dramatic consequences that follow from this divergence between the fictional period, including its purely narrated forms and the fictional period presented on stage. The first consists of the use of retrospective dialogue, which serves to bring into the present what has determined the situation of the figures. This kind of dialogue can only generate conflict as long as the figures interpret and value the past differently. The second dramatic consequence lies in the use of stage props that serve to motivate the discussion of the past. The third consequence is the unity of time and space, since time change can distract from the

analysis of the past. Again, the beginning of the action on stage is presented shortly before the final catastrophe. Along with the concentration of the action in time and space, the reduced number of figures provides an intensification of the psychological constitution of the analytical play. Although this reduction in the number of figures is not a constitutive trait of the genre, it presents advantages in the reconstitution of the past (13).

This reconstitution of past events represents a dislocation of the action to the inner side of the figures, who speak about their past. This conversation implies an encounter that determines the structure of the play. The play is not centred on what the figures do, but on bringing a past action into the figure's consciousness by means of dialogue. According to Andrew K. Kennedy, this kind of dialogue has undergone changes since Ibsen's time. If in Ibsen the language is "naïve" and the figures simply say things in a transparent language, later European drama has reached further complexities of self and style. Dramatic language has become more self-conscious of itself and of the inner processes of the mind (169).

More important, however, are the changes that happen in the figure's mind resulting from his/her new gained consciousness about past acts. In the analytical play, the revision of the past is generated by a third person, by someone who is aware of what happened in the past. The time distance is condition for the figure to re-evaluate what he/she has done. As Werner Keller puts it in his discussion of Ibsen's plays: "The person literally builds a consciousness about what he/she has done blindly" (184 – my translation). In that sense, the play portrays the evolution of a figure that does something and gradually acquires conscience of his/her guilt. Ibsen called this false consciousness of oneself a life-lie, or "the lure of the ideal" (Esslin, *Ibsen* 78). The person cannot face a truth and, therefore, blocks his/her moral judgement of it.

Anyway, the overall implication of the analytical play seems to be that there is a past that can be apprehended and explained. The figures' motivation, though unclear at first, can be known. This is not possible in later kinds of drama, which reflect the idea that there are unconscious motivations and feelings and even when these are known, it is

not always possible to express them. Thus, the self-revealing dialogue gives way to interstices that give only a glimpse at the true motivations of the figures.

If the twentieth century English history play is defined by its thematic use of history as the playwright's attempt to offer a new and more truthful interpretation of the past, the theatre of the absurd is conceived as an expression of a new worldview. Martin Esslin – in his seminal work *The Theatre of the Absurd* – identified a new mode of writing based on the existentialist idea of a universe deprived of an ultimate meaning. According to him, after the end of the Second World War, many of the certainties that had guided humanity seemed to have vanished. Among these certainties was the religious idea of a God watching over humanity. For many, the aftermath of the war brought the sensation of the absurdity of life. The theatre that came to be identified with this human state of purposelessness about the world began to appear around mid-century. Representatives of this kind of theatre are Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, Ionesco's *The Bald Soprano*, Genet's *The Maids*, and Pinter's *The Birthday Party*.

In this kind of theatre, absurd is the human condition. In naturalism, people have become alienated from their environment, which determined the fate of the individual. Existentialism radicalises this strangeness between environment and individual. "The environment becomes the situation; not tied to the environment anymore, the individual is from now on free in the strange but his/her own situation" (Szondi 100 – my translation). The individual's freedom consists of recognising his/her situation and in engaging him/herself in it. The individual's situation, however, does not correspond to the usual environment of the naturalists. According to Szondi, to show the metaphysical sensation of being thrown in the universe, the dramatist has to create an exceptional situation, in which the figure feels out of place, alienated, estranged (101).

Above all, the theatre of the absurd created a new language by breaking down the realist causality of language, where word and action do not necessarily reflect each other. The absurd acquires an additional meaning, for it means not only unreasonable, meaningless, senseless, but also ludicrous, foolish, laughable. The language is highly symbolic, while at a surface level, it can be hilarious because of the unusual associations,

puns, gags, parodies, mannerisms, and other devices of which it makes use. Language is not restricted to the logic of verbal interaction, but it is usually defamiliarised. This distance from naturalistic dialogue violates the maxims of co-operation, which "asks us to be, respectively: informative, truthful, relevant and unambiguous" (Kennedy 9). Esslin points out that the theatre of the absurd exposes the gap between language and reality. According to him, three important currents of contemporary thought have exposed this gap. First, Marxism showed how much social relations are determined by economic conditions. Because these are founded on the objective exploitation of one class by another, any discourse ignoring this remains subjective. Then, Freudianism states that human beings also have an unconscious mind, so that desires, for instance, can have a deeper reality than a conscious statement. Finally, Wittgenstein's philosophy of language exposes the conventional character of language, making it clear how much language shapes our vision of the world, which we mistake for reality. As a fourth power acting to increase humanity's suspicion of language, Esslin cites the mass media, which distort reality in order to sell, obtain political power, etc (*Absurd* 407).

The comic effect is also achieved through the way figures are constructed. By refusing to expose the figure's motivation, the theatre of the absurd denies any possibility of identification of the audience with the figures on stage. Thus, even if the "subject-matter is sombre, violent, and bitter" (Esslin, *Absurd* 411), the audience can still laugh at the figure's predicament. The figure's actions seem senseless, because the audience never learns the reason underlying them. The absurd figure appears to exist without a past. In opposition to the realist play, where questions concerning the cause and, consequently, the moral behind actions are meaningful, in the theatre of the absurd there is no indication of how much the figures' past has shaped their personality or how much they influence their environment. They seem to exist independently of their past. Yet, these apparently disparate and senseless actions, which do not lend themselves to moral questioning, because they "[tell] us nothing about the [figures] or their world" (Peter 6), form a statement about the world outside the play. John Peter explains this idea of a statement saying that the theatre of the absurd can be seen as a picture of the world. This happens because the audience has no means of further questioning the figures' motivations or

even what will happen next. These questions would be meaningless in a play that refuses to follow an argument. The absurd play leaves an image in the audience that is a statement about the world and about the human condition.

Therefore, the theatre of the absurd is concerned with offering an image of the world through a succession of images and actions whose motivations remain mostly unclear. According to Esslin, any evaluation of this kind of theatre, which mixes "poetry and grotesque, tragicomic horror," must be based on the suggestive power, originality of invention and the psychological truth of these images allied with the skill necessary to translate them into stage terms (*Absurd* 419). Consequently, the theatre of the absurd communicates an experience whose character of truth has to be measured by the audience.

Chapter 2

Pinter's World

Such a cold winter with scenes as slow as Pinter.

Pet Shop Boys

Pinter's plays are highly dramatic in the sense that they are very effective on stage. His superb command of the many inflections of the English language and his control of stage techniques make him one of the best English playwrights alive. Yet, the plays are elusive, defying the audience's understanding. Once asked what was the subject of his plays, Harold Pinter answered that they were about "the weasel under the cocktail cabinet" (Pinter, *Interview*). Intended just as a dismissive answer by someone who "[is] not interested in helping people understand [his plays]" (Gussow 42), the statement has been taken seriously by many critics. Although Pinter disapproves of the excessive importance given to this remark[1], it is not difficult to understand why it gained

[1] Pinter is constantly reminded of this statement in interviews. In a speech made in 1970 in Hamburg (*Four*, xiii), he made it explicit that to ascribe a hidden meaning to his plays would mean to dissolve their complexity into a few generalizations of no interest to anyone.

such a privileged status[2]. Despite the apparent naturalism of his plays, Pinter seems to be grasping at something much deeper than what is actually being said on stage. Even though they are not always immediately perceived, disturbances in the figures' utterances indicate that words should not be taken at face value. In the highly dangerous world inhabited by the figures, words are used as a means of negotiating a position where the figures can cater for their social, physical, psychological, or emotional needs.

Because of this deviation from naturalism and the impending atmosphere of menace coming from an unclear source, Pinter's early plays have been identified with the Theatre of the Absurd, as practiced by some Continental playwrights. In common with these plays, there is the individual facing a world that has become strange and is beyond the figure's total understanding. Despite the inner isolation experienced by the figures, these plays tend to be comic since they show a new vitality in the unexpectedness of the situation and dialogue construction. Critic Ben Brantley's comment on Pinter's play *The Hothouse* that "[it] applies the rhythms of old music hall and vaudeville routines to the darker complexities of the modern world" can certainly be extended to most of Pinter's early plays, where the affinity with the theatre of the absurd is most evident (*No Refuge for Terror*)[3]. Nevertheless, Pinter presents an entirely new diction of his own. Whereas it is evidently true that Pinter's figures live in isolation from each other in a world that is not seen as friendly, they are not at the world's mercy, as is the case in naturalistic drama.

[2] Peacock offers the best explanation for the success of this expression as representative of Pinter's early work. According to him, the expression juxtaposes "two incongruous images in a surrealistic manner" (54). The first image is of a wild animal, whereas the second refers to a piece of furniture, "that could be seen as representing middle-class decorousness and even complacent conviviality." The intrusion of the animal under the cabinet, he continues, is "the very action that drives the action in most of Pinter's early plays" (55).

[3] This affinity with Beckett's work, however, exists more in terms of linguistic texture than in terms of theme. Pinter is not an existentialist, whose figures are placed in a metaphysically meaningless world. Rather, his figures strive for concrete goals, such as territory, sex, affection, physical integrity, language, and political ideals. "The existential dilemma of Pinter's characters is the threat to their autonomy. They do not confront *themselves*, but *other human beings* whose demands, with the arguable exception of the anomalous Riley, are social, not metaphysical" (Peacock 56). It is therefore misleading to account for his early work as belonging to the Theatre of Absurd as it has been done initially. This affiliation to a group happened because both the public and the critics had to rely on comparison to other plays in order to try to understand Pinter's innovative language.

Nor do the figures in Pinter's plays revolt against a hostile abstract world. Instead, they look for shelter, be it physically defined, as a room, for example, or in the negotiation for a psychological safe place. For Pinter's figures are always striving for the fulfilment of their emotional needs.

This search for an emotionally acceptable position takes place in a very singular manner in Pinter's world. The concepts of love, friendship, family, loyalty, and self are all mediated by the power relationship they establish with each other. The negotiation for a secure position, momentary as it may be, can take up all the figures' assets, be it their intellectual abilities, sexuality, authority granted by an institution, religious disposition, even their own identity and, together with it, their control over the past. For in Pinter's plays, very little is concretely verifiable. Most of the times, all that is available are the figures' words, which more often than not are unreliable. As Andrew K. Kennedy emphasises, "Pinter writes […] within his own 'principle of unverifiability'" (224), which means that there are no clear-cut distinctions between what is true and what is false. Therefore, the past is not an objectively verifiable instance, but it possesses an "ever-present quality" (Gussow 38). Consequently, the past only exists insofar as the figures bring it to life in their speech.

Precisely because this past lacks a concrete quality, it can be put to use in the most surprising ways. Indeed, Pinter's figures do not seek the past as a key to deciphering their own present situation, as many of Henrik Ibsen's figures do. Nor are they interested in reviving involuntarily the past in order to create significance where there was none before, as Marcel Proust's Marcel does. In Pinter's world, the past becomes part of the present to the extent that the figures alter and distort it to fit their immediate purpose. In fact, the past is used as an irrefutable argument whose main purpose is to win control over the present situation. Indeed, "for Pinter, the present is more likely to be a battleground in which the prize is the past" (Regal 111). That is, the direct dispute between figures can only be won by the one whose ultimate version of the past cannot be contradicted. It does not mean, however, that the figures deliberately decide to lie or tell the truth. Most of the times, the ambiguity or unverifiability of the past is a comment on

the world inhabited by the figures, which is a place where motives are not transparent to the observer.

These allusions to the past occur in the figures' speech. Because of the problem of verification, it is often not possible to say how much information they are distorting, creating, or withholding. Even their own identities remain uncertain in some cases. The audience is presented with contradictory hints that are never disentangled into any reliable piece of information. In Pinter's theatre, there is no objective instance beyond the figure's own presentation. Their speech is ambiguous, contradictory, self-effacing. As Pinter once said, speech can also be a way to say what remains throughout unsaid, "it is a constant strategem (sic) to cover nakedness" (*One, Writing for the Theatre* 15). In their struggle to survive emotionally and psychologically, the figures cannot be trusted for their sincerity. They are simply too aware of the dangers of being unguarded.

Another aspect of this "principle of unverifiability" is that the versions presented do not form a coherent whole. Rather, there are inconsistencies that cannot be accounted for from an outside perspective. Therefore, it is often impossible to say whether the contradictions and indeterminacies in the figures' speech are a creation of their own intended to manipulate the course of events, or whether the figures are themselves lost in relation to their own identities, as well as the time and space that they occupy. Indeed, in his study of the aspect of time in Pinter's work, Martin Regal consistently shows that the figures' sense of timing presents inner disturbances that prevent them from locating events in time. Many of the figures in Pinter's plays seem entrapped in a time universe of their own, where the experience of the past is so engulfing that they cannot look at it from a different time perspective. Many times, it is as if they are talking not *about* the past but *from* the past. There is no guarantee that what they remember has in fact existed or not. The guest visitor in *Old Times*, Anna, expresses this uncertainty about the past thus: "There are some things one remembers even though they may never have happened. There are things I remember which may never have happened but as I recall them so they take place" (*Four* 27). From this it is clear that whatever is recalled as having happened somewhere in the past becomes real in the present so long as the present situation

provides, if not the meaning, at least the justification for it. Consequently, this mutability of past facts ends up affecting the present, which becomes as liable to the interferences of the subjective mind as the past. As Regal puts it: "If the past is flexible and mutable, then so is the present" (79). Later on in his work, Regal traces Pinter's expression of the subjective nature of time back to Beckett. He cites Colin Duckworth, according to whom, "the definition of Self [in Beckett's work] depends on memory, [which] is imprecise" (qtd. in Regal 133). The difference between the two playwrights lies in the fact that while Beckett's figures seem to get lost in the void created by this uncertainty, "Pinter dramatises the loss and reconstitution of memory as a strategy for control or power" (Regal 133). Still according to Regal, the consequence of this relativistic view of temporality is that the self becomes likewise a "temporally contingent phenomenon," which demands a constant renewal of the strategies it uses to protect its fragility (133). Therefore, the figures try, as much as they can, not to reveal their inner selves, since this leaves them in a vulnerable position. Pinter, however, denies the conclusion that figures can never say what they really mean. According to him, "there invariably comes a moment when [the character says what he in fact means], when he says something, perhaps, which he has never said before" (*One, Writing for the Theatre* 15). Even though they are rare, these moments do happen and offer a profound insight into the figures' character, since they reveal the emotions that motivate them.

In short, despite the apparent naturalism of the plays, the absence of a coherent past that can explain the present situation undermines the assumptions of realism. As long as the figures are able to transform their present moment by producing a convincing "memory," they are still in the battleground for the fulfilment of their needs. If, however, they fail, even for a moment, to convince others of their authority over the past, they become helpless in the present. An expression of this is provided by the many pauses and silences, which are present throughout the secondary text in Pinter's work.

The profusion of pauses and silences in Pinter's plays has been object of inquiry ever since the beginning of his career as a playwright. This becomes more evident in the production of a play, when actors want to know what is the difference in length between

them. Duration, however, is not the main point to be considered, but the different psychological functions that they have in the dialogue. In an interview to Mel Gussow, Pinter explains their differences by saying that:

> A pause is a pause because of what has just happened in the minds and guts of the characters. They spring out of the text. They're not formal conveniences or stresses but part of the body of the action. I'm simply suggesting that if [the actors] play it properly they will find that a pause – or whatever the hell it is – is inevitable. And a silence equally means that something has happened to create the impossibility of anyone speaking for a certain amount of time – until they can recover from whatever happened before the silence. (36)

Therefore, the difference is accounted for in terms of intensity. In addition to this aspect of intensity, the study on the semantics of silence carried out by Christian Mair is elucidative of the semantic difference between a silence and a pause. This linguist suggests that silence expresses "a state or condition the opposite to or negation of speech/noise," and the pause refers to "a measurable interruption in the flow of speech/noise that is nevertheless considered part of it" (*Semantics* 19-20). Furthermore, linguistic research shows that the word *silence* is often found in collocation with negatively connoted words, such as "awful," "awkward," "sepulchral," "cold," "deep," and "deadly", among others. Finally, Mair concludes that "the absence of sound is experienced as deafening, and a refusal to say anything turns out to be the clearest way of making a statement" (24), and that "silence is rarely experienced as quiet and calm" (25). The conclusion, therefore, must inevitably be that silence not only emerges out of the incapacity to carry the dialogue on but also carries with it an underlying atmosphere of menace.

Indeed, Regal notes a progression in the function of the pauses and silences in Pinter's plays. He cites the playwright saying that because *Old Times* and *The Homecoming* deal thematically with the subject of sex, "'the pauses […reverberate] with half-meanings and suggested meanings,' while 'the pauses in *No Man's Land* are much more clearly a matter of threat and tension, as in *The Caretaker*'" (98). Later on in his book, Regal summarises their different functions. He asserts that, in the earlier plays, the insertion of pauses and silences has the effect of distorting the perception of time in an

otherwise realistic environment. This structural feature has its effect strengthened by other melodramatic effects in the text. As Pinter's work progressed, however, the need for such disjunctive element became much more reduced, since he laid more emphasis on the different perceptions of time, therefore dispensing with the need for violent disruptions in causation (131).

Finally, a few words must be said about the perception of space in Pinter's plays. Although the spatial dimension does not play a role as important as that of temporality, it cannot be ignored. Its importance in Pinter's work is already indicated by some of the titles, such as *The Room*, *The Basement,* or *No Man's Land*. These titles suggest the restricted space wherein the figures move. Not only are they the environment where the events take place but they also represent the territory where the figures take shelter, therefore assuming a psychological connotation. Moreover, just as it happens with the perception of time, figures also sometimes feel incapable of defining their surroundings. In that way, the figures in *The Room* are not able to say how many storeys the house has. Likewise, in *The Dwarfs* Len complains about rooms not keeping to a certain shape, because they tend to vary according to their relative position to the observer, which makes them very unreliable. In *The Basement* the decoration also changes completely and unpredictably according to which figure has the dominant position in the house. From these few examples, it is clear that the figures also imprint their subjective perception on space, thus undermining further assumptions of naturalism. Consequently, space represents not only the setting where the events take place, but it also has an important function as territory. Indeed, D. Keith Peacock argues convincingly that human beings, just like other animals, are territorial beings, who feel threatened if their territory is invaded physically or psychologically (53).

Harold Pinter's work shows a consistency of themes and motifs, which have incorporated an increasing complexity in the treatment of the processes of memory and time. "That is, each play grows out of what he has written before" (Gale 5). Therefore, any attempt to analyse one of his plays must consider the intertextual context of his work. This is especially true for a writer who has received two awards for a lifetime's

achievement – the David Cohen British Literature Prize of 1995 and the Laurence Olivier Award of 1996 (Reiter 174).[4]

Pinter's plays have generally been classified into three groups: comedies of menace, memory plays, and political plays. Based on the structure and function of dialogue, Kennedy proposes a new group, which would include some of the plays. He calls them comedies of mannerism. This further division is useful because it distinguishes the memory plays, where the focus is entirely on the past, from other plays, where the figures try to appropriate themselves of the past to use it as a weapon in the present.

In the subsequent sections, the four groupings are discussed in detail as far as they concern the development of the theme of memory and its function in Pinter's work. Before that, however, it should be made clear that it is not always possible to trace a clear-cut classification of Pinter's work. The groupings are arbitrary to some extent. The main aim in dealing with these headings is to identify major trends both in the themes pursued by Pinter as well as the structures underlying their treatment. Themes such as menace, memory, power, and politics pervade all of his work with different emphasis in different plays. The purpose of classifying the plays according to these four categories is simply to gain some insight into how subject and form have progressed throughout Pinter's work.

Comedies of Menace

The term "Comedy of Menace" was first applied in relation to *The Birthday Party* in 1958, because of the presence of two different moods in the play: the comic and the

[4] Pinter refused a knighthood from John Major's government. In many occasions, Pinter has manifested his discontent with his country for repeated violation of human rights (Review: "'Ashes to Ashes' is Pinter-to-Pinter"). He is also an active PEN member (the political organisation of Poets, Playwrights, Editors, Essayists, and Novelists) and a co-founder of a group called 20th June Group, which first met on that date in 1988 and which until 1992 has occasionally met to discuss about subjects like censorship and civil liberties. Other participants were the Mortimers, David Hare, Margaret Drabble, Michael Holroyd, Germaine Greer, Ian McEwan, Angela Carter, and Salman Rushdie.

threatening. Coined by David Compton, who had used the term to refer to his collection of one-act plays, the expression became associated to Pinter's early plays since Irving Warble applied it in reference to *The Birthday Party* in a critical article in the magazine *Encore* (Peacock 64).

In 1957, while acting in rep and a year after having married Vivien Merchant, who was going to give memorable interpretations of his female figures, Pinter was asked by his friend Henry Woolf to write a play in 6 days. Pinter refused, but wrote the play in 4 days. *The Room* attracted much attention and received a favourable review from critic Harold Hobson, who was very impressed by the work. This one-act play already contains some of the themes that Pinter has later developed in his subsequent works. The title indicates the physical environment that is central to the action of the play.

As the play opens, Bert and Rose – he a man of fifty and she a woman of sixty – are in the room. He keeps silent, while Rose serves him tea. The initial talk is done solely by Rose while she performs simple domestic actions. Her speech, which is interwoven with pauses, concentrates on the subject of the room. She emphasises repeatedly how cosy the room is and how cold and dangerous it must be outside. Therefore, the spatial distinction between in and out is charged with meaning. Even references to the other parts of the house, whose definition of size and shape is constantly denied, describe it as a dark and damp place. The room serves as a shelter to the outside world, which is seen as a threatening place. The weather is very cold outside. Both Rose and Mrs. Sands, who appears later in the play, refer to the weather in the same way: "It's murder" (101 and 111). The contrast between inside and outside includes even the other parts of the house, which remain part of the outside space. This sheltering function of the room is further specified as a place where nobody can disturb them:

> ROSE: (…) If they ever ask you, Bert, I'm quite happy here where I am. We're quiet, we're all right. You're happy up here. It's not far up either, when you come in from outside. And we're not bothered. And nobody bothers us.
>
> *Pause.* (103)

Then Bert goes out of the room, leaving Rose alone. Soon thereafter Rose meets a young couple on the landing. They are looking for a room and they have heard from someone in the basement, whom they could not see, that Rose's room was vacant. Realising the disturbing effect this piece of news has on Rose, they go away. Then, Mr. Kidd, the landlord, announces that there is a man in the basement who insists on talking with Rose. After some insistence on his part, she agrees to receive the strange visitor before Bert comes back, only to find a blind Negro with an Irish name ushered into her room. Apparently, she does not know him and is even aggressive towards his presence. But it does not take long before she quietly accepts his presence. At this moment, Bert comes back and, after a few unremarkable comments about the weather outside, he shouts "Lice," and kicks the other man's head against the gas-stove. Rose clutches her eyes and says she cannot see.

Thus, the "off-stage area [harbours] all sorts of vague and anonymous threats heralded by every knock at the door, telephone call and the appearance of each new figure" (Pfister 259). This, however, does not explain the outcome of the play. Many questions remain unanswered to the audience. Who is that black man? Why has he told the young couple that Rose's room was vacant? Why does he call her "Sal"? Why does Bert first ignore the blind man's presence only to attack him afterwards? Did he feel that the intruder was stealing Rose from him? Why does he shout "lice"? Why is Rose not able to see at the end of the play? Is she simply refusing to see, or has the black man's blindness transferred to her? These and other questions concerning the plot remain for the most part, if not completely, unexplained. The plot provides no clarification. Rather, it presents many gaps in the structure of dialogue – enhanced by the interposition of pauses and silences, which disturb the logical sequence. If Pinter denies using symbols in his plays, as he did in an essay entitled "Writing for Myself" (*Two* 10), then we must assume that these gaps have their genesis elsewhere. Pinter answers this question by declaring that he "went into a room and saw one person standing up and one person sitting down, and a few weeks later I wrote *The Room*" (*Two* 10). Regal suggests that this primacy of the image can in fact explain the final scene as an image opposed to the first scene, when the room still could protect its inhabitants from the outside world (15).

Although the resource to this use of image can explain much in terms of theatrical devices, from the perspective of the internal communication system the situation is not clearly motivated. If, despite Pinter's denial of the use of symbolism in his plays, we were to look for some symbolic explanation beyond the play, we would find no corroboration for that in the text. The fact is that the text does not provide all the necessary clues and the figure's motivations remain unknown to the audience. This does not result from a failure in the plot to provide the needed information. As opposed to traditional forms in which the plot creates situations where the background information is supplied to the audience, Pinter does not intend to solve all the ambiguities created by the plot. As the playwright summarises appropriately: "Between my lack of biographical data about [the characters] and the ambiguity of what they say lies a territory which is not only worthy of exploration but which it is compulsory to explore" (*One, Writing for the Theatre* 13). This means that motivations must be searched behind the spoken words, exactly in the interplay between what is known and unspoken; and the key to understand them lies in the powerfulness of the image. James T. Boulton attributes this resource to images to Pinter's mistrust of final explanations. The final purpose of using "suggestion, hints, variation in intensity of mood, and the like" is, according to him, "[to involve] the audience in an imaginative comprehension of the dramatic situation, the seeming triviality of which masks its deeper significance" (131). As Harold Hobson summarises: "The play makes one stir uneasily in one's shoes and doubt for a moment the comforting solidity of the earth" (qtd. in Peacock 38).

Pinter's first full-length play, *The Birthday Party*, was written in that same year and staged on 28 April 1958 at the Arts Theatre, Cambridge. After a little tour of Oxford and Cambridge, it was transferred on 19 May to the Lyric Theatre, Hammersmith, in London, where it was a flop. While the play was granted an enthusiastic reception on the pre-London run, the London performance was taken off after only one week. It was severely attacked by the critics, who accused it of obscurity. Even those critics who grasped that the play was not intended to be realistic did not have a positive appreciation of it, for any symbolist interpretation of the play seemed unsatisfactory. Unfortunately, Harold Hobson's claim that Pinter "possesses the most original, disturbing, and arresting

talent in theatrical London" only appeared one day after the play had closed (qtd. in Peacock 62). Two years later, the play received a very different reception in a slightly modified version for the television.

A careful look at this play indicates some of the major themes to be found in Pinter's subsequent work and his treatment of them. The innovative form, which was so shocking for the audience at first, relies heavily on a traditional form – the well-made play – and the original elements that came to characterise the "comedy of menace." Therefore, it is useful to explore the play in terms of its textural, structural, and thematic concerns, and connect it to *The Room* in order to establish concerns and techniques that are common to the early plays.

The three-act play is set in a boarding house at a seaside town. The action of the play takes place over two days in the summer. Meg and Petey, a couple in their sixties run the house, which has only one guest, Stanley, who is in his late thirties. Pinter summarised the plot briefly in a letter to the director of the first production:

> The first image of this play that … was put on paper was a kitchen, Meg, Stanley, corn flakes and sour milk. There they were, they sat, they stood, they bent, they turned … Not long before Goldberg and McCann turned up. They had come with a purpose, a job in hand – to take Stanley away. This they did, Meg unknowing, Peter (sic) helpless, Stanley sucked in. Play over. (qtd. in Regal 21)

This summary is especially clear not so much for what it says, but for the questions that it raises. From reading it, it is impossible to say who Goldberg and McCann are, why they have come to fetch Stanley, and where they are taking him. Actually, these same questions cannot be answered by the whole play either. All that the audience gets to know is that they belong to an organisation, and that Goldberg is McCann's senior. Besides, it is clear that Goldberg has come from a Jewish family that has imprinted on him the respect for morals and the norms of society. Furthermore, by repeating the same story twice, but alternating his wife and his mother, Goldberg shows a certain confusion of their roles. McCann, on the other hand, is more of a thug type, who is carefully kept in check by the more urbane Goldberg. His speech often refers to his native Ireland, especially in reference to its Catholic martyrs. McCann shows a certain stubbornness of

character, be it in the way he methodologically stripes pieces of paper, or in the forceful tone with which he enforces that Goldberg's orders should be obeyed.

They come and secretively accuse Stanley, a frustrated musician, of something that is never clear to the audience. By using an absurd non sequitur interrogatory, they manage to make Stanley speechless and to force him to go with them to Monty (probably the head of their organisation). Neatly dressed, as opposed to his former appearance, deprived of speech and without his glasses, Stanley goes with them. Unfortunately, Petey's exhortation to Stanley not to let them tell him what to do comes too late.

Consequently, questions relating to the nature of what is happening remain for the most part unanswered. What organisation do McCann and Goldberg represent? What is Stanley being accused of? Why do they take him away? What do they want from him? What will they do with him? What is the meaning of their nonsensical questions? These and other questions are not answered by the play and what remains is a series of conjectures about the motivation behind the figures' words and actions.

The most striking thematic similarity between *The Room* and *The Birthday Party* concerns the need that the figures have of securing a safe territory. Rose repeatedly mentions in her initial talk how happy she is for having that room. It is evident that she feels psychologically safe in that place and her fears of losing it are triggered by the presence of each new visitor. Peacock suggests that this desire for territorial security also has a sociopolitical component besides the psychological aspect. After the war, when many homes were destroyed by bombing, housing became scarce and the fear of not having lodgings was a real threat to many people. The situation was aggravated by the great influx of Commonwealth citizens who were attracted to Britain to supplement labour demands (57). Stanley, on the other hand, has his position threatened by mysterious people who from one moment to another come knocking at his door to take him away. This situation has its realistic base in European society. Pinter alludes to the not too distant persecutions carried up by the Gestapo and extends this to other social instabilities over the last two hundred years. Therefore, whereas in the first play the

conflict is interpersonal, in *The Birthday Party* it becomes a conflict between individual/institution (Peacock 57).

John Russell Taylor's assertion that *The Birthday Party* is in a way "a well-made drawing-room drama complete in every detail, even down to the meticulously realistic dialogue, except that the exposition is left out altogether" can be likewise extended to *The Room* and other plays of this period (qtd. in Quigley 222). Indeed, he refers here to the above-mentioned obscurity of motives that inform the figures' reactions. It is clear, however, that these plays are not simply well-made plays. It does take the form as its point of departure; other unconventional elements are added, though. Quigley cites Taylor again to explain this latter point:

> It would be easy to write in the necessary explanations: how Stanley came to be living in this seaside boarding house, what his secret is and why McCann and Goldberg came to get him. But of course this is not what the play is about: it is the process that interests Pinter, the series of happenings, and not the precise whys and wherefores. These are totally incoherent, as necessarily they have to be in so much of life, where no explanations are offered and we must make the best we can of it. (223)

The well-made play deals ultimately with causes and effects because of its emphasis on a plot that involves a secret known to the audience but which remains unknown to some of the figures until the end of the play, generating a series of misunderstandings and conflicts, which are solved in the end. The resource to this traditional formula implies a vision of the world in which causes can ultimately be known. Pinter, however, subverts the form, frustrating the audience's expectations and, therefore, challenging the assumption of the well-made play that there is a consistent set of explanatory truths. Instead, Pinter creates situations that generate more confusion the closer we examine it, "as our guesses and assumptions fail to stand up to further scrutiny" (Quigley 224). Thus, this circular search for explanations lies between the audience's desire for conclusive explanations (reinforced by the identification of the well-made play format) and the realisation that there is a variety of possible truths and explanations (created by the subversion of the form).

Another important aspect in terms of structure is related to the construction of the figures. As pointed out in chapter one, the figure is defined in its relation to the fictive context[5]. In the opening scene of *The Room* Rose and Bert are in a realistic set. The situation seems quite familiar, with Rose and Bert resembling stock theatrical types: Rose as "the garrulous, dominant wife and Bert the subservient 'stooge,' the henpecked and smothered husband of radio or television's domestic situation comedy" (Peacock 44). However, Rose becomes less of a type and ends up gaining the sympathy of the audience, as the hints of menace begin to accumulate. First, while she is still talking to Bert, who has not said a word yet, she thinks she sees someone outside, just to realise at a second look that there is nobody there. Second, Mr. Kidd knocks at the door but does not answer when she asks who it is. His presence further undermines her (and the audience's) sense of security by his denial to answer her questions properly. He either ignores her questions or contradicts information that he has just given a few moments before. Then, there is the unexpected presence of Mr. and Mrs. Sands on the landing followed by the comic cross-talk between the couple and the final revelation that someone in the basement said that her room was vacant. Mr. Kidd's return with the announcement of a stranger insisting on talking to Rose enhances the impending air of menace. The entrance of a blind Negro with an Irish name would be strange in itself, were it not for the additional fact that he calls her by another name and summons her to come home. Finally, the last element of menace comes unexpectedly from Bert. The almost inarticulate husband, who comes home to find his wife touching a stranger, hits the intruder until he lies motionless on the floor. Therefore, Peacock concludes that in his construction of the figures in *The Room*

[5] This concept can be further extended by the addition of the idea of "status," which refers not to what one *is* but to what one *does* (Keith Johnstone qtd. in Peacock 52). Peacock explains the concept by saying that in a dramatic situation the figure assumes a certain status only insofar as he or she relates first to the environment and the props and then to other figures. Traditionally, the first actor endows the environment and whatever properties he or she selects with a status in relation to him- or herself. When the second actor comes into action, his position is defined in binary terms in relation to the other actor. The introduction of a third character disturbs the initial relation and "normally initiates betrayal." Peacock concludes by adding that this structure of binary opposition dates back to the Greek theatre and still shapes most of western drama. Therefore, even when there are more than two figures participating in the scene, their interaction can be analysed in binary oppositions, which represent either loyalty or betrayal (Peacock 52).

"Pinter introduced theatrical allusion followed by transformation" (45). This becomes characteristic of Pinter's plays, where, he continues, "the ordinary and familiar is subverted and with it the rational and predictable, leaving the audience in a state of disorientation." Consequently, even if final explanations are absent, the audience can still experience the "unpredictability and precariousness of existence." The final images or the climatic tableau at the end are an enduring part of that experience.

The development of a figure from a stock type into a figure with psychological depth is typical of Pinter's early plays, where the allusion to the thriller helps capture the audience's desire to know what is going to happen next. The subversion of that superficial type serves not only to generate confusion among the audience as to the real motivation behind the figure's behaviour but leads also to a greater sympathy towards them as they gain substance. Even if a figure like Goldberg, for instance, is first identified with the brain of a pair of comic villains, he still possesses a personal history, which makes him unique. He is a senior member of a mysterious organisation, which sent him to take Stanley to Monty. The conformist Goldberg, whose life guidelines are based on a series of clichés on propriety, still displays an undeniable charm that makes it possible for the audience to see him as more than a type, despite the many doubts concerning his true identity and the nature of his job.

Dialogue represents verbal interaction between the figures. Although in Pinter's plays dialogue was considered at first to be very mimetic because of its proximity to the inflexions of spoken language, it is in fact much stylised. As John Peter observes, "the characters in Harold Pinter's plays spend a lot of their time sizing each other up" (*Vladimir's Carrot* 316), which is equivalent to say that a central feature of mimetic dialogue of the naturalistic post-Ibsen drama is missing, namely, the cooperative principle[6]. Instead, what they invariably try to do is to establish some kind of dominance

[6] According to Andrew Kennedy, "the maxims of co-operation (useful post Kantian categories covering the Quantity, Quality, Relation and Manner of what is being said) ask us to be, respectively: informative, truthful, relevant and unambiguous" (9). Although he admits that this definition makes almost all dramatic

over the other. Each statement reveals a desire to gain territory. Much of the dialogue in Pinter's play is defamiliarised, figures revel in ambiguities, word-games, evasion, or non sequitur statements. Dialogue serves not to discover truth but to disguise it by blurring the boundaries between truth and fiction. This effect is also partly achieved by disturbances in the natural sequence of dialogue. The many pauses and silences throughout the play indicate a rhythm that is guided by the figures' psychological moment. They extend the present moment in a way that calls attention to the visual image on stage and suggests more than what is actually being said. At other moments, dialogue is shortcut before it can fully develop, leaving the audience wondering what would come of it. Therefore, both extension and interruption represent a suspension in the natural flow. Many sequences find their meaning not in the immediate context of their utterance but already indicate what is to come. In that way, for example, Rose's and Mrs. Sands's reference to the weather outside as being murder already points out to the apparent murder at the end of the play. In short, Pinter uses stylisation, changes in rhythm, disturbances in the sequence and word-games as devices to create mood and to distance himself from the straightjacket of the well-made play.

The Caretaker, written in 1959, presents the process of loyalty and betrayal. Aston invites Davies, a tramp that he has met at a bar, to stay in his room. Davies, however, soon realises that Aston's brother, Mick, is the person who runs the place, as it were, and tries to ingratiate himself with him. The hardly articulate Davies does not shy away from intriguing his protector with his younger brother in order to gain a more permanent position in the house. He transforms himself from guest into intruder. In the end, however, Mick ridicules the tramp by using a set of interior decorator's jargon. His verbal revenge is fully discharged when, in a last attempt to retain Mick's favour, the tramp tries to take his words back and put them in Aston's mouth.

DAVIES: I didn't tell you nothing! Won't you listen to what I am saying?

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dialogue sound non-cooperative, it is still very useful in that it allows us to measure the "angle of deviation" from the norm.

Pause.

It was him who told you. It was your brother who must have told you. He's nutty! He'd tell you anything, out of spite, he's nutty, he's half way gone, it was him who told you.

MICK *walks slowly to him.*

MICK: What did you call my brother?

DAVIES: When?

MICK: He's what?

DAVIES: I ... now get this straight...

MICK: Nutty? Who's nutty?

Pause.

Did you call my brother nutty? My brother. That's a bit of … that's a bit of an impertinent thing to say, isn't it?

DAVIES: But he says so himself!

MICK *walks slowly round* DAVIES' *figure, regarding him, once. He circles him, once.*

MICK: What a strange man you are. Aren't you? You're really strange. Ever since you come into this house there's been nothing but trouble. Honest. I can take nothing you say at face value. Every word you speak is open to any number of different interpretations. Most of what you say is lies. You're violent, you're erratic, you're just completely unpredictable. You're nothing else but a wild animal, when you come down to it. You're a barbarian. And to put the old tin lid on it, you stink from arse-hole to breakfast time. Look at it. You come here recommending yourself as an interior decorator, whereupon I take you on, and what happens? You make a long speck about all your references you've got down at Sidcup, and what happens? I haven't noticed you go down to Sidcup to obtain them. It's all the most regrettable but it looks as though I'm compelled to pay you off for your caretaking work. Here's half a dollar. (82-83)

Realising the fragile position he finds himself, he still tries to win back Aston's sympathy when the latter comes back. Nevertheless, it is too late and Aston turns his back on him. The play ends again in a tableau.

As opposed to the previous plays, the intruder is not an outsider who has come uninvited into Aston's room, but he was brought inside as a guest. Davies's presence turns out to be undesirable when he starts to distort events in order to gain territory. In the end, however, he is not able to break the bound between the two brothers and has to leave. The violence of the other plays is substituted here by the sole use of words that are intent on giving new interpretations to the occurring events. This is done deliberately by

both Mick and Davies, whereas Aston, who has already suffered the consequences of his sincerity, contents himself with simple statements of fact.

In that way, *The Caretaker* marks a new direction in Pinter's work. Although violence, menace, and the unverifiability of the past are still an important integrant part of his plays, they are now expressed through elaborate verbal games, whose ultimate aim is to build alliances. The fate of the figures is not brought about by any exterior agent, but the outcome is a result of their own choices. The play is the most realistic of this phase and definitely breaks away from the non-naturalistic elements, such as the dumb waiter in the homonymous play. The work presents none of the ambiguities of the former plays. While Aston is unequivocal in everything he says, including his most truthful moment when he tells Davies about his mental treatment, "the inevitable moment of reckoning with the past" (John Taylor 110), his brother Mick resorts to ambiguity and word-games only in order to deceive Davies. However, there is no doubt about his intention, which is to make Davies lose favour with Aston and to restore connection with his brother. Even if Davies is the most evasive and contradictory figure, the problem of verification does not concern the world he inhabits. "The minor ambiguities and contradictions are significant in terms of character rather than as implied comments on reality" (John Taylor 113).

Between *The Caretaker* and *The Homecoming* Pinter wrote some radio and television plays as well as screenplays based on other authors' novels, which undoubtedly contributed to the increasing importance he was going to give to the aspects of time and memory in his next plays. This was made possible by the greater flexibility of the medium radio, which allowed Pinter to experiment with more fluid forms of space and time. Because of the possibility offered by both radio and television media of shifting focus with greater ease, Pinter could focus on the inner concerns of his figures. This led to the presentation of episodes that could be either real or imaginary. In that way, for example, in the radio play *A Slight Ache*, the listeners cannot be sure whether the figure of the matchseller is real or whether he is just part of Flora and Edward's imagination. In the case of the television play *Tea Party*, the different juxtaposed viewpoints of the camera, allied to blackouts, close-ups, and disconnection of sound and image expose the

contrast between "objective reality" and subjective perception. This dramatisation of contrasting states of mind sometimes assumes a radical form, in which the communication among the figures becomes impaired, as is the case of the radio sketches *Family Voices* and *Monologue*, where there is no verbal or physical interaction between the figures.

Although Pinter continues to pursue themes such as: territorial possession, autonomy, and intrusion, the radio and television plays introduce new concerns that will become prominent in the following plays. These include the tension between male and female, especially in the married relationship with figures navigating between the platonic and the erotic poles. This involves the tripartite roles of women as wives, mothers and lovers/whores. Somehow, their world stands apart from the male world. They are portrayed either as the strongest figures or as exiled figures in a male world. This is clear in the contrast some of the radio and television sketches of this period show between men's unromantic, erotic, and sometimes violent point of view and women's romantic and sensual picture of reality (*A Slight Ache, Dialogue for Three*, and *Night*).

In terms of time structure, the radio and television plays suggest a certain circularity of events, as if the final tableau were already the first images of a new cycle, which reflects the one just seen. In *Monologue*, the last television play written by Pinter, the figure does not interact with anyone, but revives what is left of the past events. All these elements contribute to Pinter's growing concern with the confusion of the objective and subjective events.

Memory Plays

After *The Caretaker* Pinter shows increased concern with the process of memory. Although the critics usually consider all the plays from this period starting with *The*

Collection up to *Betrayal* and including *Moonlight* as belonging to one category, it is useful to single out two plays: *Landscape* and *Silence*[7]. Thematically, these two short plays also explore the unverifiability of the past. Theatrically, however, they are characterised by a "structural transformation from the dramatic to the lyrical" (Peacock 98). They rely heavily on monologue, being the verbal interaction between the figures almost inexistent. The events must be glued together by the audience from the series of contraposed images evoked in the figures' speech. Because of the differences between these two plays and the other memory plays, as they are generally referred to, this section deals first with *Landscape* and *Silence*, while the other plays are discussed under the heading comedy of mannerism. Although plays like *The Collection*, *The Lover*, *The Homecoming*, and *The Basement* come chronologically before *Landscape* and *Silence*, they will be discussed later.

Landscape was written in 1967 and was first broadcast on radio. Its first performance on stage was as a double bill with *Silence* on 2 July 1969. The play shows practically no physical movement from the actors. Duff, a man in his early fifties, sits on a chair at the right corner of a long kitchen table. His wife, Beth, a woman in her late forties, sits in an armchair away from the table to the left. The secondary text makes their attitude to each other clear: Duff refers normally to Beth, but seems not to hear her voice. She never looks at him nor appears to hear his voice. They are relaxed.

The setting is realistic but the background is dim, showing a first move towards a more abstract conception of space, which will dominate the setting of *Silence*. The kitchen belongs to a country house, as the audience learns from the dialogue. Actually, the figures do not speak to each other, but past each other. They sit isolated in their inner worlds talking about their past, as if cut off from their immediate surroundings. In fact, Beth and Duff's attitude to one another is of two worlds tangent to the world they once

[7] Although not trying to classify Pinter's plays in such terms as it later on became generally accepted by the critics, that is – Comedies of Menace, Memory Plays, and Political Plays – Steven H. Gale also analyses these two plays separately. Similarly, Bernard F. Dukore groups *Landscape* and *Silence* together with the sketch *Night*, under the heading "Memory Plays."

inhabited together. As Regal puts it, "both characters are locked in their independent time zones" (69).

As Beth and Duff recall the past, the images lose their sharpness and become interwoven as in a dream. The chronological order of the events and the identity of those they remember become blurred. Furthermore, "the two narratives follow different tracks that only occasionally run parallel and expose the shreds of an earlier relationship" (Peacock 102). Beth and Duff were former employees of Mr. Sykes, who died and left them the country house. Beth was the housekeeper and Duff was employed as a kind of odd-job man. She has had an affair but it is not possible to say if it was with the more refined Mr. Sykes, or if she is remembering a more romanticised version of Duff. Alternatively, it may even have been with a completely different person. Her memory sometimes betrays her as she tries to recollect the facts, so that she corrects herself. Duff has a much coarser language, implying a ruder set of mind. His images are grotesque, his senses more attuned to his instincts. He remembers having betrayed Beth and telling her about it afterwards.

These reminiscences remain so alive that they do not seem to belong to the past. In fact, it is as though the figures were completely cut off from any present that they might have. The past serves no present purpose in the interaction with the other. As in the comedy of menace, the facts that could explain the events are absent, but so is any objective information. The lack of physical activity transfers the audience's attention solely to their verbal reminiscences, which do not explain the present situation but leaves the audience much room for tentative explanations.

In contrast to *Landscape*, the play *Silence* has no concrete setting. Ellen, Rumsey, and Bates sit isolated from each other in three different areas of the stage, interacting only twice throughout the play. First, Bates moves to Beth and they exchange a short conversation. Then Ellen moves to Rumsey. This, according to Peacock, suggests that there is a shared past, so that the recollections are not simply a product of their imagination. Like Beth and Duff, they talk about different events in their lives without making it clear when they happened or in what order. This time, however, the

chronological structure is further elaborated as referring to three different periods in their lives. The first period covers Ellen's childhood; the second deals with her life as a young woman; and the third refers to the present, when the figures are already old. Their physical appearance on stage, however, dates back to Ellen's youth, when she is in her twenties, Rumsey is forty, and Bates is in his middle thirties.

The references to time remain vague throughout. The sum of the information furnished by each figure separately may lead to the construction of a plausible summary for the story, as Martin Esslin has achieved, in the following manner:

> Ellen, it seems pretty clear, grew up in the country and two men who knew her as a little girl fell in love with her. Rumsey the older of the two men later broke with her and advised her to look for younger men. She may have gone away with Bates, but as she loved Rumsey more, their relationship broke up. So Rumsey lived on, fairly contented on his lonely farm, while Bates and Ellen stayed in town, unhappy, isolated and longing for the country. (qtd. in Regal 73)

Although there is no precision in relation to the actual events, Pinter is interested here in exploring the images that constitute their memories. The structure possesses a lyrical quality, where the use of images contributes to the creation of mood and to the portrayal of the figures' feelings. Moreover, it is important to emphasise the chronological ambiguity in the play. If the figures are presented in their youth, 20, 30, and 40, respectively, the memories that they have of the future time is ambiguous. Do they refer to a future present, that is, are the figures projecting themselves in a distant past where they can still think of their present as future, or are these projections referring to a future that is still to come? This is an open question that cannot be resolved in the play.

What is important to note is a shift in the treatment of memory from the earlier plays. Whereas it is possible to talk about the unverifiability of the past in both periods of Pinter's work, they differ radically in nature. In the comedy of menace plays, the past cannot be pinned down because it is not exposed to the audience. The figures do not need or want to tell us everything about themselves. The situations are simply presented as they would be in the actual world, where people do not explain their motives and the backgrounds to their actions. In addition, because of the delicate situation in which the figures find themselves, it is important to hide the truth about themselves, so that they can

protect themselves better from possible (and actual) danger. In the memory plays, on the other hand, the figures do not talk about the past in order to achieve a calculated result in the present. In the same way, they are not using their memory as a means of controlling the other figure or figures. Rather, they seem entrapped in a time loop of the past, which contradictorily seems to possess an ever present quality, just as if the audience could penetrate in the minds of the figures and see for themselves the impressions left by the past events.

Both conceptions of memory differ radically from that of the plays written subsequently to *The Caretaker*. While continuing to deal with the themes that marked the first phase of his career, Pinter pursued a new direction after the radio play *The Dwarfs*.

Comedies of Mannerism

John Russell Taylor traces the beginning of this new phase in Pinter's writings to the radio play *The Dwarfs*. It was first broadcast in December 1960 but it is in fact based on the homonymous novel that Pinter wrote between 1953 and 1957. The play has three figures, the friends Mark, Pete, and Len. Probably because of jealousy, Mark claims that Len should give up his friendship with Pete. His argument is that he knows how to handle Pete and Pete would never dream of taking liberties with him. Pete, on the other hand, says that Len hangs around too much with Mark, which is not good for Len. Similarly to Mark, Pete says that he knows how to handle Mark. The explanation for this, according to him, is that Len has no elasticity. He is not able to see things from a distance; everything he sees is different from everything else, for he has no power of discrimination. Indeed, the audience can listen to the three friends interacting with each other, but it is Len's voice that is heard alone without the fear of interaction. He puts the central question that will dominate Pinter's plays from that moment on:

> LEN: Do you know what the point is? Do you know what it is?
> MARK: No.

> LEN: The point is, who are you? Not why or how, not even what. I can see what, perhaps, clearly enough. But who are you? It's no use saying you know who you are just because you tell me you can fit your particular key into a particular slot which will duly receive your particular key because that's no foolproof and certainly not conclusive. Just because you're inclined to make these statements of faith has nothing to do with me. It's not my business. Occasionally I believe I perceive a little of what you are but that's pure accident. Pure accident on both our parts, the perceived and the perceiver. It's nothing like an accident, it's deliberate, it's a joint pretence. We depend on these accidents, on these contrived accidents, to continue. It's not important then that it's conspiracy or hallucination. What you are, or appear to be to me, or appear to be to you, changes so quickly so horrifyingly, I certainly can't keep up with it and I'm damn sure you can't either. But who you are I can't even begin to recognize, and sometimes I recognize it so wholly, so forcibly, I can't look, and how can I be so certain of what I see? You have no number. Where am I to look, where am I to look, what is there to locate, so as to have some surety, to have some rest from this whole bloody racket? You're the sum of so many reflections. How many reflections? Is that what you consist of? What scum does the tide leave? What happens to the scum? When does it happen? I've seen what happens. But I can't speak when I see it. I can only point a finger. I can't even do that. The scum is broken and sucked back. I don't see where it goes, I don't see when, what do I see, what have I seen? What have I seen, the scum or the essence? What about it? Does all this give you the right to stand there and tell me you know who you are? It's a bloody impertinence. (111-112)

Len's speech summarises the shift in point of view from plays where the figures know why they do things, although the audience is constantly denied this knowledge, to plays where the figures "do not understand their situation but are trying laboriously to establish the truth about it" (John Taylor 116). It is not simply a matter of saying the truth about the facts but of knowing "the how and the why, the who and the what, at a deeper level than demonstrable fact" (116). Finally, there is the question whether the figures would tell the truth about themselves if they could. Interestingly, it is exactly Len, who sees dwarfs doing a cleaning job and watching over his friends, and Aston, who has undergone a mental treatment, the figures that are most outspoken in the exposition of their true feelings and ideas, which is not characteristic of Pinter's figures.

This new direction in theme is paralleled by an increasingly mannerist texture in dialogue. Although already present in former plays, as for example the verbal attack that

Mick inflicts on Davies using an interior decorator's catalogue-like vocabulary, the mannerist dialogue becomes more often and arbitrarily used afterwards. In *The Caretaker*, it is still an integral part of the dialogue. This mannerist style, however, which is traditionally defined as "a language that excels in playing internal variations on its own verbal themes" (Kennedy 220), becomes the dominant mode after that play[8]. Andrew Kennedy argues that, because of Pinter's principle of unverifiability, fantasy and reality cannot be distinguished in the same way as it is possible in naturalistic drama. This becomes more evident as the verbal texture of the plays is filled "with a patterned collection of vague memories and arbitrary assertions" (224). This resembles verbal combats, which take the shape of the traditional exchanges of the comedy of manners associated with the tense arguments of Pinter's comedy of menace. These verbal combats are defined by Kennedy as comedy of mannerism. According to him, "[the comedy of mannerism] dramatises the playfully noncommittal and indefinitely 'stretchable' word-games that cluster around memory and desire, and the ambiguities of mere potentiality" (225). This means that from *The Caretaker* on, the figures rely more and more on their capacity to play word-games to gain territory over the other and to guarantee a safe condition. This also happens because their selves have gained so much elasticity that they are not a comprehensible unit anymore. They have acquired greater complexity, so that they are now a constellation of many reflections.

Another noticeable change in Pinter's plays after *The Dwarfs* refers to a rise in the social status of the figures. In the early plays the social background of the figures is

[8] Arnold Hauser, in his prominent study on mannerism, defines it as a tension between rational and irrational elements that cannot be synthesised into a unique whole. The reality it strives to express comprises opposite extremes that remain irreconcilable. Its main mode of expression is the paradox, which shows the inherent ambiguity of all things and the impossibility of achieving certainty about anything. This style is often identified by the tense deviation from the natural, rational and by its emphasis on the obscure, which point to the lost link between its rational and irrational aspects (20-23). In terms of language, mannerism excels in the use of metaphors that point from one aspect of experience to another, without ever trying to establish a fixed centre. The profusion of images, jumping from one association to another, frequently fails to describe a given reality and falls into a general relativism that expresses a profound sense of perplexity and inadequacy. Despite all its vitality, the constant flow of images shows the gap between experience and its expression (386-396).

working class; in the sixties they gradually rose, along with the playwright's own condition, to middle-class. This change is also reflected in the language the figures use to communicate. Peacock relates a series of characteristics that define Pinter's middle-class language. First, it is characterised by a concise phraseology, which requires precise intonation. As an example, he cites the word "convolvulus" at the beginning of *A Slight Ache*, which was apparently chosen simply because of its sound. Second, there is a profusion of words such as "adore," "wonderful," and "marvellous." A third characteristic is that, although the general pattern of the dialogue remains short and direct, the grammar and choice of words is more elaborate. The dialogue structure is well defined with repeated words or phrases that work as counterpoised elements. A good example of this is the following exchange in *The Lover*, when Sarah and her husband, Richard, are casually talking about their respective lovers, before the audience comes to realise that, in fact, they themselves happen to be each other's lovers:

> SARAH: Richard?
> RICHARD: Mnn?
> SARAH: Do you ever think about me at all…when you're with her?
> RICHARD: Oh, a little. Not much.
> *Pause.*
> We talk about you.
> SARAH: You talk about me with her?
> RICHARD: Occasionally. It amuses her.
> SARAH: Amuses her?
> RICHARD: (*choosing a book*). Mmnn.
> SARAH: How…do you talk about me?
> RICHARD: Delicately. We discuss you as we would play an antique music box. We play it for our titillation, whenever desired.
> *Pause.*
> SARAH: I can't pretend the picture gives me great pleasure.
> RICHARD: It wasn't intended to. The pleasure is mine.
> SARAH: Yes, I see that, of course. (170)

A fourth noticeable change is that the language of the later plays of this period sometimes becomes epigrammatic, as the following exchange between James and Bill, in *The Collection*, shows:

> JAMES: And then about midnight you went into her private bathroom and had a bath. You sang 'Coming through the Rye'. You used her bath towel. Then

you walked about the room with her bath towel, pretending you were a Roman.

BILL: Did I?

JAMES: Then I phoned.

Pause.

I spoke to her. Asked her how she was. She said she was all right. Her voice was a little low. I asked her to speak up. She didn't have much to say. You were sitting on the bed, next to her.

Silence.

BILL: Not sitting. Lying.

Blackout. (136-137)

Finally, Peacock identifies in Pinter's plays from this period (the period after *The Dwarfs*) a similar economy and precision that characterises Noël Coward's comedies of middle-class manners (107-108). In these, the "use of parodistic exaggeration and zany multiplication, together with the disintegration of language into cliché" serve to emphasise the elements of irrationality in reality, while at the same time giving importance to what is being left unsaid (Innes, 257). Consequently, this shift from working to middle class implies a movement from the more instinctive behaviour of the earlier plays to a more intellectualised attitude, so that the conflicts are now engendered by intelligent and literate figures, who interact using word-games. This conflict of intellect entails a "chess-like strategy of interpersonal relationships" (Peacock 110).

Pinter's first play after *The Dwarfs* was in fact written for television. Although this fact is relevant in the sense that the medium television allows for different strategies in the presentation of time, space and point of view, *The Collection* is considered here in its condition of a theatre play, as it was performed one year after being broadcast on television in 1961. In this play, James, prompted by his wife's revelation of an affair during a dress collection in Leeds, tries to find out more about it. He visits Bill, the alleged lover, to confirm his wife's account of the events. Apparently, he wants to know what kind of man could have attracted his wife, Stella, so much as for her to betray him. His approximation first takes the form of anonymous calls, introducing an element of menace in Bill's life. The mysterious calls also affect Bill's relationship with Harry, with whom he lives. In Bill and James's first encounter, Bill denies having had an affair with

Stella and suggests that she probably invented it. He ends up, however, confirming her story, while adding a few more details to it.

At home James reveals to Stella that he has met Bill in order to talk about the affair. In his attempt to diminish the uneasiness of his situation, he tells her that he will visit him again. Not knowing that the house he has visited is, in fact, Harry's and reflects his style instead of Bill's, James goes on to say that he found Bill a man of very good taste. Back in Bill's house, James and Bill find themselves having an agreeable evening, when James begins confrontation again. This is settled by Harry, who, having just come back from Stella's flat, explains to James that Stella admitted having made up the story. Bill confirms that nothing has happened between them, but – just before James leaves the house – he adds yet another version of the facts. Apparently convinced, James goes home and asks Stella whether it is in fact true that nothing has ever happened between her and Bill. She remains silent and the play ends with the following description: "Stella looks at him, neither confirming nor denying. Her face is friendly, sympathetic" (157). In fact, this final denial to confirm the truth is simply one more refusal to reveal it among so many found throughout the play. Each new version is constantly replaced by another one that discredits what the other person has told, whereas at the same time it casts a shadow over itself. Bill and Stella, who are the only ones to know what has really happened in Leeds, also form the only pair who does not meet during the play. This is significant, since their meeting might reveal the ultimate truth to the audience.

Actually, what James is looking for is not whether Stella has had an affair or not, since she has told him that she has. James wants to know what kind of man could have attracted his wife so much as to lead her to betray him. This, however, is not enough for him, because it does not explain why she would have done it. For James, the truth is more than the visible facts, but knowingly Bill mocks his search:

> BILL: Surely the wound heals when you know the truth, doesn't it? I mean, when the truth is verified? I would have thought it did.
> JAMES: Of course.
> BILL: What's there left to think about? It's a thing regretted, never to be repeated. No past, no future. Do you see what I mean? You're a chap

> who's been married for two years, aren't you, happily? There's a bond of iron between you and your wife. It can't be corroded by a trivial thing like this. I've apologized, she's apologized. Honestly, what more can you want?
> *Pause*. JAMES *looks at him.* BILL *smiles*. (…) (151)

The fact is that James does not know the truth about Stella; and the two people who know the facts do not want to reveal them. Besides, for James, knowing what happened is not the same as knowing the why and the how, which is probably more than Stella and Bill are willing or able to answer. Therefore, the desire for verification is bound to fail, because it is not simply a matter of verifiable fact, but of what is happening deep inside the figures. What James is striving for – to know Stella's motivation to betray him – cannot be reduced to the actual events or to the circumstances surrounding them. Consequently, his search for the truth cannot reveal the true nature of Stella's feelings nor the reasons for her attitude. As Bill maliciously suggests, the investigation of the past should be abandoned, because it is bound to be misinterpreted and, consequently, corrode the present.

In *The Collection* the situations parallel one another, but not exactly. The stage has two living rooms, but one is in a house and the other is in a flat. The former is period décor, and the latter is contemporary furnishing. Each one is inhabited by two people. In one of them, a heterosexual couple lives. In the other, all the evidences available point to the existence of a homosexual relationship. This creates a mirror effect. As Bernard F. Dukore points out, "scenes mirror but do not necessarily reflect" (64). The possibility of a mirror to reflect exactly is discussed by Bill and James. Bill warns James about the deceitfulness of mirrors, but the latter insists on their capacity of reflecting without distortion. Indeed, it is this belief that makes James continue his search for the truth, until versions can confirm one another, which they never do.

Despite this game of always presenting yet another version of the facts, concerning what has really happened in Leeds, all the threads of the play point to a hidden truth, which is never actually revealed, but which, nevertheless, is known to Bill and Stella alone. Knowing the truth, however, is not the main interest of the play. Rather,

it centres on the constant denial of truth and the strategies used by each figure to preserve his/her self in relation to the other.

Old Times, a two-act play written nine years later in 1970, also displays a similar dispute for a credible version of past events. Here again do the figures present different versions of what may have happened. As opposed to *The Collection*, however, the different memories introduced do not refer to a unique fact, to which all the threads of the play point, since in that play what is at stake is whether there has been a love affair in Leeds or not. In *Old Times* the memories are more fluid, so that they seem to change and acquire a new interpretation according to the person who is telling them. This is definitely not the case in *The Collection*, where the ontological existence of the past is not in doubt.

As *Old Times* opens, Deeley is asking his wife, Kate, about an old friend of hers, who is dimly seen standing at the window. As he tries to determine who this friend is and what kind of relationship she and his wife had in the past, Anna turns from the window and comes towards them recalling what fun it was when they both lived together as young girls in London. At first, Anna limits herself to some polite small talk concerning Deeley and Kate's life in the countryside, but soon steers the topic back to the time when they lived together. Deeley feels that he is being left out and refers to Kate's absent-mindedness, which provokes Anna's comment about Kate already being that way a long time ago. In the sequence, they remember events that suggest either their knowledge of a shared past with Kate or a past in which they knew each other. Their recollections soon take the form of a battle for Kate, which includes snatches of songs and appropriation of each other's versions followed by their re-interpretation. These stories include: a revelation that Anna used to steal Kate's underwear, a discussion about life in Sicily, where Anna now lives, the circumstances concerning their seeing the film *Odd Man Out*, and a story about a man crying in their room because Kate had turned him down. Each of these is taken up alternately by Deeley and Anna, who, by adding details to the other's memory, transform it and declare, according to who tells the story, him or herself the true possessor of the past. Whether there is any truth in these recollections is of secondary importance, because what matters is the recreation of the past in the present, "so that it is

actually taking place before your very eyes" (Gussow 17). As Anna appropriately puts it in a much-quoted passage:

> There are some things one remembers even though they may never have happened. There are things I remember which may never have happened but as I recall them so they take place. (27-28)

Meanwhile, Kate is practically ignored by the others. Deeley fails to respond to her in his desire to make up ground on Anna, while Anna talks to Kate only to make her confirm her stories of a shared past. Resentful, Kate complains:

> KATE: You talk of me as if I were dead.
> ANNA: No, no, you weren't dead, you were so lively, so animated, you used to laugh–
> DEELEY: Of course you did. I made you smile myself, didn't I? walking along the street, holding hands. You smiled fit to bust.
> ANNA: Yes, she could be so…animated.
> DEELEY: Animated is no word for it. When she smiled…how can I describe it?
> ANNA: Her eyes lit up.
> DEELEY: I couldn't have put it better myself.
> DEELEY *stands, goes to cigarette box, picks it up, smiles at* KATE. KATE *looks at him, watches him light a cigarette, takes the box from him, crosses to* ANNA, *offers her a cigarette.* ANNA *takes one.*
> ANNA: You weren't dead. Ever. In any way.
> KATE: I said you talk about me as if I *am* dead. Now. (30-31)

Finally, Kate and Anna start to talk to each other as if they were back in the days when they used to share a flat in London, deciding with whom they will go out and what to wear. Having this purpose in mind, Kate decides to take a bath, but refuses Anna's offer to run the bath for her. This marks the end of act one.

At the beginning of the second act, Deeley and Anna are disputing who is going to dry Kate when she comes into the room already dried in a bathrobe, and thus frustrating their expectations. From then on, although Anna and Deeley's battle continues as fiercely as before, Kate dominates the scene. Near the end of act two, she takes up again Anna's story of the man who came to visit her in their room. As she does so, she declares Anna dead and rejects Deeley. In the final moments, the figures re-enact the story told by Anna, Deeley playing the part of the unknown man in the room. There

follows a period of silence preceding the final tableau which shows the figures in isolation:

> *Lights up full sharply. Very bright.*
>
> DEELEY *in armchair.*
> ANNA *lying on divan.*
> KATE *sitting on divan.* (71)

In contrast to the early plays, *Old Times* poses a different kind of questions concerning plot and memory. Whereas in the comedies of menace the play centres on the action of the figures without opening up to their motivations, here there are no clear-cut distinctions between the different levels of "reality" and "fantasy." Kate expresses her preference for such states at the beginning of act two, when she compares life in the country and in the city:

> There aren't such edges here. And living close to the sea too. You can't say where it begins or ends. That appeals to me. I don't care for harsh lines. (55)

The implication of a lack of objective reality is clear, especially if compared to Anna's statement quoted above that whatever is recalled becomes reality. The play, consequently, denies any questions concerning the absolute truth or falsity of events. Memories are used by a figure with the single purpose of achieving an advantage over the other.

The plot structure of *Old Times* is more implicit than in the previous plays and the verbal texture resembles the juxtaposition of intersecting memories of the memory plays. As opposed to these, in this play the figures interact with one another by means of a fierce combat, disputing total command of the past events. Unlike *The Collection*, *Old Times* does not suggest a truth behind the stories being told. All of them seem equally relevant, for they are all likely to lead to the present situation. This is further emphasised by the presence of non-realistic elements in the play. In relation to this, three moments should be considered: Anna's presence on stage while Deeley and Kate are supposedly

waiting for her to come; Anna and Kate's exchange at the end of act one, when they talk as if from the past; and the final mime at the end of the play.

Martin Esslin raises three hypotheses to explain Anna's presence. Her sudden participation in the conversation could signal a cinematic cut. Alternatively, she could in fact be already there, which makes Deeley and Kate's discussion about her inappropriate. A third hypothesis is that the action of the play itself follows a dream-like pattern (qtd. in Mackerras 6: 3). Alan Hughes offers a different and equally valid explanation, for which he finds support in the text. According to him, it is possible to see how the first dialogue between Kate and Deeley constructs Anna. In this case, even though a product of their imagination, Anna gains independence and becomes more menacing as the play progresses. Although some of these explanations are mutually exclusive, it is impossible to find support in the text for only one of them in detriment of the others. What remains clear is the impossibility of ascribing a realistic value to her arrival, as well as to the women's slip into the past at the end of act one and to the final movements of the figures at the end of the play.

The dialogue structure of *Old Times* differs from that of the former plays. The verbal exchanges are primarily mannerist, that is, "characterized by frank artificiality, extreme courtliness, and occasionally a suggestion of wilful mystification" (Mannerism 1). An example of this is found in the following exchange, when Deeley is asking Anna about her life in Sicily and her husband:

> DEELEY: Yes, I know Sicily. Just slightly. Taormina. Do you live in Taormina?
> ANNA: Just outside.
> DEELEY: Just outside, yes. Very high up. Yes, I've probably caught a glimpse of your villa.
> *Pause.*
> My work took me to Sicily. My work concerns itself with life all over, you see, in every part of the globe. With all people over the globe. I use the word globe because the word world possesses emotional political sociological and psychological pretensions and resonances which I prefer as a matter of choice to do without, or shall I say to steer clear of, or if you like to reject. How's the yacht?
> ANNA: Oh, very well.
> DEELEY: Captain steer a straight course?

ANNA: As straight as we wish, when we wish it.
DEELEY: Don't you find England damp, returning?
ANNA: Rather beguilingly so.
DEELEY: Rather beguilingly so? (To himself.) What the hell does she mean by that?
Pause. (36-37)

This structure is also present in the continual evocation of memories and in the song battles. "Nevertheless," says Kennedy, "this mannerist texture is still relatively firm in structure," since all the exchanges point to a final recognition that is re-enacted at the end of the play (224). He calls it integral use of mannerist dialogue, as opposed to more arbitrary uses that Pinter develops in his next full play, *No Man's Land*.

No Man's Land, also a two-act play written in 1974, has a relatively simple plot. In it, Hirst, a successful poet and critic, invites Spooner, a decadent man of letters whom he has met in a pub, to have a few drinks in his house. In his need, Spooner tries to recommend himself as a private secretary but his attempt is doom to failure, since Hirst is already being looked after by Foster and Briggs, who make sure that they are not replaced.

Spooner's method, however, deserves closer examination. In his article "Memory as Role-Play in Pinter's *No Man's Land*," Joachim Möller identifies Spooner's use of the morality play *Everyman* at the base of his plea. In that way, when Spooner asks Hirst: "Let me live with you and be your secretary" (146), he is alluding to the allegoric figure "Knowledge," which offers itself to accompany the title figure on his way to God. By adapting the word "guide" to his present context and using "secretary" instead[9], Spooner makes reference to the superior situation of his host, while still speaking the same language of Foster and Briggs. According to Möller, the variation of *Everyman* – the use of the literary collage in a similar way to T. S. Eliot – builds for Spooner the possibility of finding a solution to his urgent problem, of controlling the situation. Accordingly, he

[9] Everyman, I wyll go with the and be thy gyde / In the most nede to go by thy syde. (qtd. in Möller 56)

attempts to manipulate reality by means of a rich imagination, thus uniting reality and fantasy.

This use of a metalanguage to exchange information knows another variation in the play: the use of memory to manipulate reality. Thus, right at the beginning of the play, Spooner tells Hirst about a Hungarian émigré, with whom he had got acquainted in his youth at the same pub where they met. The memory is supposedly evoked because the foreigner's words have changed Spooner's life. Nevertheless, when Hirst asks him what the words that made such an impression on him are, Spooner evasively replies:

> What he said…all those years ago…is neither here nor there. It was not what he said but possibly the way he sat which has remained with me all my life and has, I am quite sure, made me what I am.
>
> *Pause.*
>
> And I met you at the same pub tonight, although at a different table.
>
> *Pause.*
>
> And I wonder at you, now, as once I wondered at him. But will I wonder at you tomorrow, I wonder, as I still wonder at him today? (87-88)

This piece of disinformation conveyed with such grandeur is in fact a reflex of the present situation, for Spooner still knows too little about Hirst to be able to say what his words would be. Similarly to the foil offered by the morality play, Spooner's story is not simply intent on providing a bit of small talk as they drink, or on showing his desire for a position in Hirst's life. Instead, it indicates an offensive he puts forward to conquer a good starting position. Besides, the use of the memory proves to have the same origin as the twisted citation of *Everyman*. It is a variation of something already available, which is defamiliarised through the transposition of the present into the past.

Therefore, Spooner manifests his willingness to skilfully adapt the fantasy world to the immediate reality in any way that suits him in the present moment. As he puts it himself:

> Experience is a paltry thing. Everyone has it and will tell his tale of it. I leave experience to psychological interpreters, the wetdream world. I myself can do any graph of experience you wish, to suit your taste or mine. Child's play. The

> present will not be distorted. I am a poet. I am interested in where I am eternally present and active. (82)

But Spooner is not the only one who knows how to use the trick. Although not with the same expertise, Foster also tries to use the same weapon against Spooner, when he tells him about his encounter with an Eastern beggar and with a man in the desert carrying two umbrellas. While Spooner skilfully dismisses the first as being "double Dutch" (105), he is left alone in the dark room after Foster tells his second story, which identifies Spooner with a lunatic, who is only trying to confuse him (105).

Briggs's memory, on the other hand, goes back to the time when he first met Foster. According to him, he guided Foster to Bolsover Street, although he had tried to persuade him not to go because he knew people who had never found their way out of it. Nevertheless, he did it, he says, because he took an immediate liking for Foster's "nice open face" (120). Briggs, however, immediately admits that Foster's account of the facts will be different.

Hirst, a poet like Spooner and Foster claim to be, also introduces his personal memory. It is treacherous, however, for he withdraws the promise of help that it contains when he abandons hope. Two examples complement each other in this case. First, Hirst remembers his true friends all looking out at him from some frozen images of the past. But the more he tries to capture their faces, the fainter they get, until he ultimately denies any existence that they could still have in the present. Actually, he ends up doubting their very existence in the past and chooses to live in a timeless present, without memories:

> It's gone. Did it exist? It's gone. It never existed. It remains.
> I am sitting here forever. (108)

The second example of Hirst's denial of taking the consequences of his memories occurs when he tells a dream he has had. In his first account of it in act one, he describes how he sees a drowning man that he could save. In that way, Hirst adumbrates the possibility of saving Spooner. Nevertheless, he negates it near the end of act two, therefore, convicting

himself to inhabit a place where there are no possibilities of changes, which Spooner describes as "a no man's land:"

> HIRST: But I hear sound of birds. Don't I hear them? Sounds I never heard before. I hear them as they must have sounded then, when I was young, although I never heard them then, although they sounded about us then.
> *Pause*
> Yes. It is true. I am walking towards a lake. Someone is following me, through the trees. I lose him, easily. I see a body in the water, floating. I am excited. I look closer and see I was mistaken. There is nothing in the water. I say to myself, I saw a body, drowning. But I was mistaken. There is nothing there.
> *Silence*.
> SPOONER: No. You are in no man's land. Which never moves, which never changes, which never grows older, but which remains forever, icy and silent.
> *Silence*.
> HIRST: I'll drink to that.
> *He drinks.*
> SLOW FADE (152-153)

The examples given show that the use of memory as a way of translating the present into an experience already known and charged with meaning leads nowhere and remains sterile as Hirst decides to abandon his elasticity and not to change the subject again. Like two parasites, Briggs and Foster make sure that Hirst lock himself in an icy and silent winter, so that their position in the house never be threatened. In that way, they are caught in a situation similar to Bolsover street, from where they cannot get away because they are too worried about preserving their "illgotten gains" (120)[10]. For a moment, however, Hirst still hears the birds of his youth, but he soon gives that hope up

[10] Critic John Bush Jones, who identifies in his study the patterns of stasis in the play, considers that the Bolsover story holds the key to understanding the entire play. He tells how Harold Hobson went on a "fact-finding expedition" to that street in order to find out if what Briggs 'says about it is true'" (qtd. in Jones 301). He discovered that nothing could be easier than driving out of that "perfectly ordinary thoroughfare" (qtd. in Jones 302). From this Jones concludes that the figures in *No Man's Land* could easily extricate themselves from their situation of stasis, because it is voluntary rather than determined by external factors. The reason for them to choose this situation of paralysis may be simply stated as fear, just like the figures of the earlier plays fear the invasion of their territory.

as he denies the existence of the drowning man of his dreams, whom he could still have saved. Spooner cannot do anything else but admit that he has failed.

As opposed to *Old Times*, where the memories told lead to a pantomime that serves as a key for their meaning, in *No Man's Land*, probably due to its reliance on pastiche dialogue, the exchanges do not "rise to a re-enactment of the pressures of experience, real or imagined" (Kennedy 227). This is what Kennedy calls arbitrary use of mannerist dialogue. The many literary allusions serve only to give an impression of movement behind the static situation to which the possibility of a hopeful future is denied. In that way, the allusions to Eliot's *The Waste Land*, "Burnt Norton," and "Prufrock" are realised as the absence of a redeemable future.

These allusions are present throughout the play, suggesting a similar use of Eliot's use of collage to evoke feelings, or, as Eliot himself calls it, "the objective correlative." The most noticeable of them occurs in the title itself, where the phrase "no man's land" evokes an image similar to that of "the waste land." This is done more explicitly at the end of the play, when Hirst decides not to ever change the subject again, precluding, therefore, any possibility of renewal. This central image of a timeless present is taken up again in Spooner's account of experience, which was cited above. According to it, the past is only important as long as it is present, and therefore subject to change. Peacock identifies this with Eliot's concept of the homogeneity of time as expressed in "Burnt Norton." He cites:

> Time present and time past
> Are both perhaps present in future time
> And time future contained in time past.
> And all time is eternally present
> All time is unredeemable. (114)

Spooner also echoes Eliot's Prufrock in his recognition of similar experiences in the past:

> I have known this before. The exit through the door, by way of belly and floor. (96)

Consequently, Spooner resembles Prufrock in that both fail to produce the desired change. But whereas the latter evokes the images of countless social gatherings, where

men and women take tea and toast, the former takes the image of the decayed behaviour following the meetings at the male club.

Four years after *No Man's Land*, Pinter wrote *Betrayal*, which owes much of its technique and treatment to his increasing involvement with the cinematographic medium. This was followed by the absence of any full-length play until 1993, when *Moonlight* was staged. This play also deals with the theme of memory, while at the same time carrying the mannerist treatment a step further. However, for the present purpose of this overview of Pinter's work, it is important to analyse the change of interest and style of the short plays written in this interim.

Political Plays

In 1980 Pinter directed the first performance of *The Hothouse*, a play that he had written in 1959, but which he had shelved. It marks a radical change of theme from his previous works because of the play's obvious political content, a dimension which had not been explored previously. The change is even the more striking since Pinter had always denied that his plays were in any way political. Although some critics had detected political resonances in his work before, they were not expressive enough to be considered a major theme.

The Hothouse is set in an obscure institution whose true nature is never completely clear in the play. Its "patients" are referred to as numbers, completely devoid of any identity. The staff makes several mistakes in identifying them when they are discussing the news that a patient has become pregnant (by a staff member) and another has died. Although the kind of institution is never made clear, the fact that it is presided by an ex-colonel and that there are references to the ministry makes the political connotation evident. It resembles in many ways the Soviet mental institutions that held people who opposed the system.

Having been written in the same period as *The Birthday Party* and *The Caretaker*, *The Hothouse* has many affinities with these early plays. It displays the same kind of violence (and comedy) typical of the earlier plays – with the same kind of confrontation and cross-talk. However, it lacks the psychological depth of the figures in the comedies of menace. In *The Hothouse*, the figures never rise above the type. This might explain why Pinter chose not to stage this play at the beginning of his career. However, as his attitude towards politics became more outspoken, he decided to direct the play.

In 1984 Pinter wrote and directed another play whose main concern is the violation of human rights by the state – *One for the Road*. The play is very short and has four scenes. In the first scene, a political prisoner, Victor, is interrogated by a bureaucrat of the regime after having been tortured. The interrogator, Nicolas, has the same sophisticated talk as Goldberg in *The Birthday Party*, except that he need not use subterfuges to achieve his purpose. While he poses as a gentleman having a smart drink at a party, he speaks quite bluntly about his moral superiority. This is admittedly based on force and on his position as a safeguard of the government. In that way, he has total authority over the prisoners, as if he were God:

> You have noticed I'm the chatty type. You probably think I'm part of a predictable, formal, long-established pattern; i.e. I chat away, friendly, insouciant, I open the batting, as it were, in a light-hearted, even carefree manner, while another waits in the wings, silent, introspective, coiled like a puma. No, no. It's not quite like that. I run the place. God speaks through me. I'm referring to the Old Testament God, by the way, although I'm a long way from being Jewish. Everyone respects me here. Including you, I take it? I think this is the correct instance.
>
> *Pause.*
>
> Stand up.
>
> VICTOR *stands*.
>
> Sit down.
>
> VICTOR *sits*.
>
> Thank you so much.
>
> *Pause*. (35-36)

Reference to religion is common in Pinter's persecutors, but besides emphasising that he possesses God's authority, Nicolas specifies that he refers to the Old Testament God, that is, the all-powerful vindictive God that uses power to subjugate his people.

The second scene brings Nicky, Victor's seven year-old son, into view. He shows no fear, but his fate is decided when he reveals that he does not like the soldiers that have dealt with him. Nicolas replies that they are the soldiers of his country and that they have also not liked him.

The third scene shows the confrontation between Victor's wife, Gila, who has been raped several times in prison, and Nicolas. Like Nicky, Gila is also standing and facing the interrogator on the same level. But she is soon made to retract her words back when she says that she has met Victor in her father's house. According to Nicolas, her dead father had respect for the institutions so he should not be associated with them. At the end of the interview, he promises to release her but not without having her entertain them a little bit more before she goes.

Finally, Victor is brought in again. Practically, he cannot speak for his tongue has probably been cut. Deprived of speech, he can now be released. As for the others, Nicolas is clear enough:

> NICOLAS: You can go.
> *Pause*
> You can leave. We'll meet again, I hope. I trust we will always remain friends. Go out. Enjoy life. Be good. Love your wife. She'll be joining you in about a week, by the way. If she feels up to it. Yes. I feel we've both benefited from our discussions.
> VICTOR *mutters*.
> What?
> VICTOR *mutters*.
> What?
> VICTOR: My son.
> NICOLAS: Your son? Oh, don't worry about him. He was a little prick.
> VICTOR *straightens and stares at* NICOLAS.
> *Silence*. (78-79)

The change in style from the other plays is complete. Here, as in the other works of this period, there are none of the jokes or humorous exchanges that have characterized the earlier plays. Even the word-plays are absent, and all that remains is the crude violence against individual freedom.

Pinter has been criticised for the change of direction in his political plays in relation to the earlier ones. Nightingale argues that Pinter's political plays lack the strength of the former works, in which "the experience of a good Pinter play is a lesson in ontological defense" (*Politics* 150). However, he continues, the excessive generalisation of the political plays as to when and where their actions take place, ends up telling the audience no more than it knew before. Because of this imprecision, the audience's feelings of outrage are directed nowhere, and the final effect is one of diminishing impact.

The political plays of this latter phase cannot, however, be simply seen as a propagandistic statement about world affairs. Despite the evident change in style in relation to the previous plays, where the figures' motivations are not so evident, the political plays do possess the power to evoke – in very economical terms – the images that provoke the audience into responding to the figures' plight. In that sense, *One for the Road* shows a balance of realistic detail and characterisation that elevates each figure beyond the status of mere cardboards, as is the case of the much older *The Hothouse*.

This preoccupation with the individual response to the totalitarian state is fully explored in the dense play *Ashes to Ashes*, which is discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter 3

Ashes to Ashes

…human beings who cannot face a terrible truth "block" it or "double their conscience".

Gitta Sereny

Ashes to Ashes was first performed at the Royal Court Theatre at the Ambassadors Theatre (upstairs) on 12 September 1996, exactly three years after Pinter's last full-length play, *Moonlight*. *Ashes to Ashes* remains the author's latest play up to this date. The production was directed by the playwright himself and designed by Eileen Diss, with whom Pinter has worked many times before due to her ability to work within his principle of economy. This economy marks Pinter's style not only as a playwright but also as a director of his and other authors' plays ("Introduction" *Four* xii).

Ashes to Ashes recollects and expands many of the thematic and structural concerns of his former plays while at the same time being a remarkable play in its own right. In it Pinter blends – in different amounts – features that came to characterize respectively his comedies of menace, memory plays, comedies of mannerism, and political plays. The result is a rather elliptical work, which defies understanding on the part of the audience, but which, as critic Hal Jensen remarks, "if you have listened

closely, you should come out soaked in sweat". Indeed, in *Ashes to Ashes* nothing is given away to the audience. The play has an underlying logic which is hidden under several layers of meanings, thus demanding an active engagement from the audience. The general public's response to the first run was not very positive, since many could not understand what it is about. As Darren Dalglish complains through Internet: "What all this means and was trying to say I have no idea, neither did my two friends who were with me." In New York, Martin Denton has a similar reaction and questions whether the 40-minute play was worth the ticket. Although there is no unanimity among critics, as to the rank this new play occupies in Pinter's oeuvre, the response given by those already familiar with Pinter's work has generally been positive. Elyse Sommer, in her review of the New York production through Internet, warns that a proper understanding of any Pinter play demands special attention to every clue. And she continues:

> If the clues don't add up to a neatly pieced together jigsaw, not to worry. Interpreting and misinterpreting Pinteresque visual and spoken language seems to be half of the pleasure of seeing the great mazemaker's plays.

This play displays the same pattern of unverifiability already evidenced in previous plays. The tense dialogue jumps from one image to another, without ever making explicit the connection between them. However, as the play progresses and more images are added, they acquire a broader perspective and meaning begins to accumulate. In terms of language, it resorts to lyrical effects, some of which are common to Pinter's work as a whole: repetition and recurrence, rhyme, assonance, allusions to the playwright's previous plays, and an echo-effect which reaches its highest point at the end of the play.

The Play

Ashes to Ashes opens with the characteristic cast of many of Pinter's plays: three. As the author himself explained, he usually sets off to write a play beginning with "a couple of figures in a particular context" ("Writing for Myself" 10; "Writing for the

Theatre" 10). However, this "couple" has to be further specified. Because if two suffice to create a dialogue, "three [form] the smallest unstable relationship" (Innes 281).

The secondary text refers to a couple in their early forties, whose names can only be known by looking at the written text. The man is called Devlin, a made-up name that is clearly an anagram of devil. The woman's name, on the other hand, is a common Jewish girl name, which associates the female figure to the Jewish people, while, at the same time, alluding to the Old Testament figure[1].

Accordingly, as the play starts Rebecca is telling Devlin, who presumably is her husband, of a former lover. The initial scene is reminiscent of *Old Times*, whose opening also shows a couple in their forties with the husband questioning his wife about a former relationship. The difference is that whereas in the latter Anna, Kate's old time companion, is a real presence, in *Ashes to Ashes* Rebecca's lover remains a physical absence. So much so that his very existence outside Rebecca's mind is often doubted. Consequently, the situation is defined from the start as a dialogue between two people about a third, absent figure, whose presence is felt throughout the play.

This difference in the cast is reflected in the set. In both plays the action unfolds in the drawing room of a country house. Both of which display a large window, but in *Ashes to Ashes* the window shows a garden beyond, which is visible at the beginning of the play. Furniture is sparse. *Old Times* has two sofas and an armchair, thus delineating a first image of the personalities involved. *Ashes to Ashes*, on the other hand, is absolutely symmetrical, with two armchairs and two lamps. The London production is described as a

[1] Rebecca was Isaac's wife. She had been married to Isaac for nineteen years before she could conceive children. Through God's intervention, she became pregnant of twins. They would fight in her womb, causing her great pain. God explained that she would give birth to two different nations. Her two sons, Esau and Jacob, were, in fact, opposites in many ways. The mother's preference for Jacob led her to plot against the eldest son, so that Jacob received his father's blessing instead of Esau. Feeling betrayed and damned, Esau wanted to kill his brother. Seeing this, Rebecca convinced Isaac to send Jacob to her brother, so as to save him from his brother's rage: "until thy brother's anger turn away from thee, and he forget [that] which thou hast done to him: then I will send, and fetch thee from thence: why should I be deprived also of you both in one day?" (Gen. 27, 45). Although the Smith's Bible Dictionary defines the name "Rebek'ah" as Hebraic in origin, meaning "ensnarer," and Fischer informs us that it means "cow" in Hebraic, these meanings seem irrelevant to the interpretation of the play as a whole. More important is the fact that she decided to send away the child who she was trying to protect, in order not to lose both her children.

thoroughly impersonal ambience in shades of beige. This anonymous cut-out was reproduced in New York and in Palermo. The original design of the Italian production, however, had to be changed because of its accumulation of naturalistic detail.

Interestingly, in London the dress style was at odds with the elegant setting, whereas in New York, the actors wore incompatible outfits. The actress playing Rebecca was wearing a bare-armed summer dress, whereas the actor was covered up in a turtle-neck and jacket. Sommer suggests that this could be the first indicative of their conflicting personalities. Most puzzling is the fact that symmetry was abolished in the Basel production. These references to the actual production of the play are important to the extent that they represent a first reading of the work. As mentioned in Chapter One, the performed text acts as a supplement of the written text and provides readings to the existing gaps of the text (see page 6). In that way, each performance is an interpretation of the text. The Basel perspective, which seems to contradict the authorially intended reception-perspective (see page 7), could be suggestive that Rebecca and Devlin, despite their differences, should not be seen as representing a simple dichotomy between opposite poles, but rather as complementary personalities searching for a way to come to terms with the past. Finally, it is important to emphasise that there is very little physical and dramatic action in *Ashes to Ashes*, with the exception of the final tableau (see page 14), which similarly to *Old Times* serves to provide the key to the play as well as point to a possible circularity of time. In terms of plot, there is little change from beginning to end. In this case, the main carrier of drama is dialogue.

The opening situation reminds us of an interrogatory, with Devlin standing while Rebecca is sitting. Disturbed by the information she now imparts, Devlin is eager to know more about this relationship and incessantly presses her for more details. Holding a tumbler in his hand, Devlin assumes the interrogator's position in an attitude evocative of Nicholas in *One for the Road*

The interrogatory, a recurrent motif in Pinter's dramatic work, defines a power relationship, where one of the interlocutors tries to subjugate the other. That is what occurs, for example, in *The Birthday Party*, *The Hothouse*, and *One for the Road*. Albeit

the menacing atmosphere prevailing in all of these plays there are important differences that should be stressed. Whereas the former two are made up of farcical devices, such as "riddles, children's game lines, music hall cross-talk routines" (Innes 284), which create a comic effect despite the general atmosphere of terror that prevails in the end, *One for the Road*, with its clearer political connotation, leaves no doubt about the authorially intended reception-perspective. The exchange between the figures becomes less evocative of a stock comedy, leaving the menace of power completely bare and closer to reality[2]. If, on the one hand, *Ashes to Ashes* has in common with *One for the Road* the lack of a blatant comic effect, on the other, it differs from it in that menace in *Ashes to Ashes* is almost exclusively exerted at the psychological level[3]. Even if Devlin functions mostly as a foil to Rebecca, they both rise above the type as exemplified by the figures in Pinter's political plays.

Despite Devlin's insistent questioning, Rebecca shifts the topic of conversation constantly by using phrases such as: "did I ever tell you (…)?," "oh yes, there's something I've forgotten to tell you," "by the way," to which she adds up her need to tell him what has happened to her: "there's something I've been dying to tell you" or "don't you want to know why? Well, I'm going to tell you anyway." These stories or memories are either prompted by the use of a certain word (such as Devlin's use of the word "darling") or represent complete deviations in the dialogue structure. Although initially disconnected from one another, these images build their cumulative effect by means of a repetition of key words and their reiterate use later in slightly modified contexts, so that they start to point at a metaphorical connection between them. These repetitions create an echo effect that foreshadows the echo at the end of the play. This echo is particularly felt in Devlin's questions, when he picks up Rebecca's last words and repeats them.

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[2] The nature of the menace is also completely different in all these plays. In *The Birthday Party* Stanley is taken away by Goldberg and McCann, who are the representatives of some abstract authority which remains mysterious. The menacing power in *The Hothouse* is vaguely specified as that of a mental institution. *One for the Road* clearly refers to a situation of political dictatorship. *Ashes to Ashes* brings together some of these elements, while at the same time expanding on the psychological response of the figures to the threat represented by authority.

[3] In that sense, Devlin's last attempt to "strangle" Rebecca is not only an act of violence *per se* but, more importantly, it is also indicative of his desire to possess her soul.

What has motivated Rebecca's revelation that she has had a lover remains unknown because the play opens in mid-conversation:

> Well…for example…he would stand over me and clench his fist. And then he'd put his other hand on my neck and grip it and bring my head towards him. His fist…grazed my mouth. And he'd say, 'Kiss my fist.' (3)

However, Devlin's question made soon afterwards concerning whether she feels she is being hypnotised suggests that this might indeed be the case, despite her denial (7). The ease and boldness with which she starts telling him about her lover, the constant shift of topic, and the increasing tension and accumulation of her memories show a pattern typical of the hypnosis process. Irmtraud Fischer identifies Rebecca's final answer to this question as further evidence of this process since her abuse heavily contrasts with her otherwise careful choice of words:

> DEVLIN: What do you think?
> REBECCA: I think you're a fuckpig.
> DEVLIN: Me a fuckpig? Me! You must be joking.
> *Rebecca smiles.*
> REBECCA: Me joking? You must be joking.
> *Pause*. (9)

The subject of this intense questioning admits several layers of meaning. On the surface level, they are talking about their dying relationship, the mixture of love and desire for possession that characterises such plays as *The Collection*, *Old Times*, or *The Lover*. Other layers of meaning are suggested by the images through which Rebecca's memories are evoked. The first and most evident of them refers to the Holocaust perpetrated by the Nazis, although subtly extended to other places by a device typical of Pinter: the displacement of time and place[4]. Closely connected to this theme is that of the biblical fall of man evidenced by the biblical allusions throughout the text. A further frame of reference is provided by literary intertextuality. As Jensen was the first to note, *Ashes to Ashes* evokes some of the same images of T. S. Eliot's poem *The Waste Land*.

[4] Both Devlin and Rebecca are in their forties, linking the generation of those born during World War II to that of their parents. Likewise, Rebecca mention of Dorset, a county in Southern England, and Devlin's talk about an empty stadium (reminiscent of the Chilean centre of repression after the *coup d'état* in 1973) suggest that the reference to Nazi atrocities should not remain confined to that specific historical fact.

This connection is not restricted by occasional imagery, but along with the Holocaust and biblical motives it forms the main concern of the play. This is suggested, among others, by the title itself. The phrase "Ashes to Ashes" comes from the funeral service of the Anglican *Book of Common Prayer*. Known as "The Burial of the Dead," this part serves as the title for the first part of Eliot's poem. The phrase is originally taken from the Genesis, where the fall of man and his consequent expulsion from paradise is related (Gen 3,19). In the play, however, it is cited in the less orthodox context of a funeral Jazz song that combines the sad motif with death to a humoristic turn (Reiter 186).

Reiter suggests that the silences as demanded by the secondary text can determine the structure of the work, much in the same way as they do in the memory plays. Fischer implements this suggestion in her detailed analysis of *Ashes to Ashes*[5]. According to her analysis, the play can be divided into seven parts: an introductory scene made up of two short ones, followed by the four main scenes. Then there is a fifth grouping three short ones, and the final scene, which also comprises two short ones. The main advantage of this division is that it allows a clear vision of how words are repeated in a scene so as to produce an echo, and how they are transformed into a key word with an added meaning when used again in a later scene (319). This structure will be useful here as a chronological division of the play, which will enable the concrete analysis of each memory as they come up, with their function in the play as well as their connection to other works by Harold Pinter. This initial analysis will be followed by a global discussion of the play in terms of theme and structure. These aspects will then provide the basis for an analysis of Pinter's treatment of memory in *Ashes to Ashes*.

The introductory scene presents Devlin's attempt to find out more about this mysterious lover, about whom he knew nothing. His questions are characterised by a great degree of metalanguage, as he presses Rebecca for more details: "What did you say? You said what? What did you say?" (3), "What do you mean, he adored you? What

[5] Both Reiter and Fischer published their papers at approximately the same time. Manuela Reiter acknowledges Fischer's help with the biblical allusions in the play; whereas Irmtraud Fischer informs that she has had her attention drawn to the play thanks to Reiter.

do you mean?" (5), "What then? What are you saying?" (5). Rebecca describes her relationship in an erotic light; nevertheless, the underlying violence of the lover is clearly indicated by his gesture. Rebecca, however, does not seem to be aware of how much aggression her lover's gesture manifests. She describes his attitude as gentle.

The first main scene starts with Devlin's question whether she feels she is being hypnotised. He justifies his inquisitive attitude by saying that he is completely in the dark, and he needs light. If he is to be identified with the devil or Lucifer, as his name suggests, then his need for light can hardly be surprising. Having fallen from grace, the angel of light now searches for the lost light. Reiter finds Devlin's insistence on having a physical description of the lover highly evocative of the voodoo rituals. These rituals involve the use of images of the person who is to be the target of black magic (184). In this context, his question about the eyes is the closest he can get to possessing the other man's soul.

Trying to ingratiate himself with Rebecca, Devlin calls her his "darling." She protests and refuses being called darling by him. For the first time, Rebecca indicates that for her their relationship is already dead. Devlin still attempts to manipulate her so categorical statement by luring her with a song. He transforms her statement from "I'm nobody's darling" into the title of a song, "I'm nobody's baby now,"[6] much in the same way as Deeley and Anna would do to attract Kate in *Old Times*. Rebecca, however, apparently defeats him twice in this exchange. First, by stating that the title is wrong, it should be "You're nobody's baby now," and, second, by denying having used the word baby. Thus, Rebecca manages to say twice that *Devlin* is nobody's baby by turning back his statement against him, just like a mirror. Moreover, her rebuke lays bare his trick with the song. However, this seemingly victory does not last long, because the word baby has surfaced and cannot be put down any more.

According to Fischer, Rebecca's revelation takes the form of an anamnesis process, in which the truth gradually emerges into Rebecca's consciousness as she tries to

[6] There is a song by Benny Davis, Milton Ager, and Lester Stanley with this line. The title, however, is "I'm Nobody's Baby."

cope with it. Therefore, the use of repeated words becoming key words is not only a way of presenting information to the audience, but it also has an important function in the internal communication system, in that the words work as seeds that gradually enable the emergence of repressed content. Consequently, the more unavoidable the final truth is, the greater the psychological tension on the figure's mind. This dynamics is reflected in expressionist terms by the waning light, which can barely illuminate the room in the end.

Rebecca tells Devlin that a physical description of her lover does not matter anymore since his job has taken him away. According to her, he worked as a kind of guide for a travel agency. This is further defined as a kind of factory, although not the usual kind. There the workpeople wore soft caps (a reference to the skullcap worn by male Jews when praying), which they have doffed when her lover led her through the alleys. She can only explain this by using her lover's words. According to him, the workers would do that out of respect for the purity of his conviction. And, she adds:

> They would follow him over a cliff and into the sea, if he asked them, he said. And sing in a chorus, as long as he led them. They were in fact very musical, he said. (25)

This factory also becomes peculiar because it does not seem to have a bathroom since Rebecca says that she could not find one. Soon her description of her lover's job acquires a deadly turn as she tells Devlin what he really did:

> He did work for a travel agency. He was a guide. He used to go to the local railway station and walk down the platform and tear all the babies from the arms of their screaming mothers. (27)

Strange as this story may seem, it acquires a very precise meaning when we take into account that *Ashes to Ashes* was written shortly after Pinter had read Gitta Sereny's biography of Albert Speer (Billington 374; Reiter 176; Peacock 159), who was Hitler's Chief Architect (1933-45) and Minister for Armaments and War Production (1942-45). During this last period he "expanded a system of conscript and slave labour, supplied primarily from concentration camps" (Britannica). Pinter was struck by the fact that the man who devised these factories was also horrified by what he saw in them. The visit to the underground installations in the Harz Mountains – Dora, where rockets were being

produced with slave labour, was a great shock to Speer. There were no sanitary installations and the overall conditions of the workers were one of the worst of all the labour camps. According to Pinter's own account, the biography "triggered lots of other associations" connected to the Nazi regime (qtd. in Billington 375). After finishing the book, Pinter was haunted by the idea of writing about it. But *Ashes to Ashes*, though dealing specifically with the Nazi holocaust in Germany, is not thematically circumscribed by it.

Therefore, the reference to the absent bathroom has a double function. First, it refers to the atrocious conditions imposed on other people under Nazi rule. Second, on a deeper layer of meaning, it defines Rebecca as a survivor of the Nazi extermination camps, since people, mostly Jews, doomed to die in the gas chambers were euphemistically sent to the showers. Furthermore, Rebecca's revelation of her lover's real occupation becomes then clearly associated with the deportation trains of the Second World War, and the selection that was carried out when the trains arrived to their destination. The word guide, then, becomes clearly associated to its German equivalent: Führer, the epithet for Hitler.

In the second main scene, Rebecca tells Devlin how upset she is because she has just heard the sound of a siren fading away. The fact that it will leave her and echo to somebody else makes her feel very insecure. Devlin soothes her, as one would soothe a child, saying that she will never be without a police siren. He even makes it a promise. Indeed, being Devlin an agent of the devil, he can guarantee that there will always be state repression. Rebecca needs this guarantee, for it had been exactly the protection provided by the lover in the extermination camp that kept her alive. In order to be able to live with him, however, she must repress having knowledge of the brutal acts that he committed and interpret them as gestures of love, as the erotic stranglehold. This repression of a known fact is part of Rebecca's life-lie.

After complaining about the loss of the siren sound, Rebecca comes up with another memory. When they start discussing the innocence of the pen, with which she had been writing a laundry list, they do so in a context that can only be understood

retrospectively. Because this story is central to the understanding of the play, it will be discussed later in the chapter.

The third main scene brings a new round of questions by Devlin. He affirms that he is trying to help her, to bring her out of trouble. But he is afraid to be himself the one who is slipping, because he feels he is "in a quicksand" (39). Rebecca compares this situation to God's position. Devlin, however, cannot accept this interpretation, since, to live in a world without God, would mean to live in a world without a winner. His defence of God reminds Goldberg's and Nicholas's similar attitudes in *The Birthday Party* and *One for the Road*, respectively. For all of them, the existence of God assures them unlimited power. Another example that reinforces that view is found not in a Pinter work but in Pakula's film *Sophie's Choice* when a Nazi doctor reports to another officer what he had told his father when inquired about his occupation in Auschwitz: "I do the work of God," and then he adds "I decide who lives and who dies." Similarly, Devlin, Goldberg, and Nicholas do not need to fear the actions and judgement of a superior; it is the victims who cannot afford to believe in justice. While the oppressors are the winners, it is convenient to have God on their side and postulate His power for themselves.

When Devlin asks Rebecca what her authority to discuss such atrocities is, she acknowledges having no such authority, since nothing has ever happened to her. Indeed, if she has survived in an extermination camp it is only because she has always counted on her lover to protect her. He has never tried to suffocate her (in a gas chamber?):

> REBECCA: No, no. He didn't try to murder me. He didn't want to murder me.
> DEVLIN: He suffocated you and strangled you. As near as makes no difference. According to your account. Didn't he?
> REBECCA: No, no. He felt compassion for me. He adored me. (45)

Attributing himself the authority of a superior mind, Devlin insists that Rebecca should have trusted him "like a priest" (45). He would have understood her. On the other hand, he says: "I wouldn't dream of telling you about my past" (45). His evaluation is that he always had his mind on other things and could not be bothered with the "humorous realities" (45). Except, maybe, the chambermaid's bottom. This suggests an identity between Devlin and the lover, supported by the idea that, in this case, Rebecca

would be the chambermaid (who has let the pen fall in the extermination camp's laundry?). Indeed, Devlin's idea that a man can follow his duty and at the same time not care for anything else, suggests the rigid duty performed by the Nazi, who would not be disturbed by questions such as the righteousness of their actions.

As she remembers a scene she has witnessed in Dorset, Rebecca shifts topic again. Apparently beginning to recognise Devlin as being the same person as the lover, she asks him whether he also remembers that scene. But, before he is able to answer, she considers it better and decides that she was alone[7]. She looked out of the window into the garden and saw a crowd of people ushered by guides leaving the woods and walking towards the beach. As she went upstairs to catch a glimpse of them, she could see how they entered the sea, until all she could see was their bags bobbing about in the waves.

Before Devlin has a chance to ask her any question concerning when it all happened, she tells him about a condition called elephantiasis. According to the person who told her about it, this state is characterised by an abnormal disturbance of perception, so that the person becomes both victim and cause of his or her own state. Fischer characterises this process as an attempt made by the lover of "blaming the victim". In this case, Rebecca is accused of causing the stranglehold (which she incited the lover to do). Furthermore, as a representative of the persecuted Jewish people, Rebecca is also held responsible for her own fate at the extermination camp. Here Rebecca takes her responsibility for having handled the bundle, a word she uses here for the first time. She uses the same word again in a different context but it is not until almost at the end of the play that it will become clear that, in fact, she is referring to her own baby girl, whom she tried to disguise as a bundle. Therefore, Devlin's question about whether she prefers to live in guilt or to die to save her people is pertinent to her guilt:

> So what's the question? Are you prepared to drown in your own gravy? Or are you prepared to die for your country? (51)

[7] Apparently, Rebecca's first recognition scene occurs when she asks whether she has already told him about the "factory" (21). According to her, she could swear she has told him.

His attempt to divert her attention to something else fails as she remembers having woken up from a dream and heard this voice calling her. She walked out into the frozen city with its blood-stained snow until she got to the train station, where she saw her lover tearing the babies from their screaming mothers.

The fourth main scene is yet another attempt Devlin makes of avoiding her total recall of the past. He asks about Rebecca's sister, Kim. Rebecca has been to her house and has met the kids. After some small talk about the family, they discuss Kim's decision not to accept back her husband, who has left her for another woman and now wants to come back. Actually, Kim's family works as a counterpoint to Rebecca's own situation, since she has children and the courage to say that she will never accept her husband back.

After the visit, Rebecca goes to the movies where she sees a comedy about a woman who is taken to the desert in a caravan and has to learn how to live there. The apparent lightness of the film is replaced by the presence of a man in the audience who looked "like a body with rigor mortis" (65). Her fear made her move away from him as far as she could. The description of the film clearly parallels Rebecca own situation in the extermination camp, since she also had to learn how to live in that horrible place (in the Bible, the desert has always been identified as the place where the devil inhabits). Therefore, her fear of the man who looked like a corpse can be identified both with her fear of meeting death in the extermination camp as well as a manifestation of her recent decision to finish her relationship with Devlin.

The three short scenes that follow represent Devlin's last attempt to prevent Rebecca's full anamnesis. In the first one, in a way typical of Pinter's figures[8], Devlin still tries to impose on Rebecca what she thinks:

> Now look, let's start again. We live here. You don't live…in Dorset… or a*nywhere else*. You live here with me. This is our house. You have a very nice sister. She lives close to you. She has two lovely kids. You're their aunt. **You like that**. (65, my emphasis)

[8] This is especially the case in the comedies of menace, where any attempt to gain physical territory requires a similar attack on the opponent's mind.

It is especially interesting that Devlin insists that Rebecca tend to the garden. This implies two possible interpretations. First, the garden as Eden, where there is total trust in God and no need for self-judgement. In such case, staying in the garden would mean oblivion of the past and subjection to another person's judgement. Second, the garden as a place where women show their disposition for love, as suggested by the image Rebecca portrays of her encounters with the lover. Fischer remarks that it closely resembles the woman's description of love in the *Song of Salomon* (330).

Faced with Rebecca's statement that it is not possible for them to start again, he tries another way of approaching her. As Rebecca begins to sing a funeral song to bury their relationship, Devlin joins her, so that they take it in turns to sing the first four verses. He, however, misinterprets the message, preferring to see it as a proof that they can still complement each other.

The third attempt is made up of only one speech by Devlin, in which he expresses his anger:

> Why have you never told me about this lover of yours before this? I have the right to be very angry indeed. Do you realise that? I have the right to be very angry indeed. Do you understand that? (71)

The final two scenes take up again the story Rebecca has told of going to the train station in an icy night. This time, however, she observes how a family of refugees walks through the snowy streets. First, a man and a boy carrying suitcases pass by holding each other's hand. Then, before she has the time to draw the curtains, she sees the woman carrying a baby in her arms. As she describes the lyrical maternal moment, when the woman gently listens to the baby's heart and breathing, her voice merges with the woman's, so that Rebecca and the runaway woman are identified as the same person. Parallel to the change of pronouns from "she" to "I", equally important there is another one: The baby becomes "she" (73).

Assuming his total identity with the lover, Devlin tries to re-enact the scene between Rebecca and her lover, as told in the beginning of the play. Rebecca, however, ignores him. Now, there is only the bare violence which she is not willing to repress once

again. Experiencing it all once again, she reveals how she arrived at the train station trying to disguise her baby as a bundle. Unfortunately, the girl cried and she had to handle her baby over to the man who later became her lover. An echo repeats her last words, while she tells how a woman she knew asked her about her baby and how she denied having a baby.

The Fall into Memory

On the surface level, this story is highly evocative of a film dealing with the same subject: that is, the guilt felt by a mother who has had to hand over her baby at her arrival at a concentration camp. In the film *Sophie's Choice*, Sophie is caught smuggling a piece of ham to take to her ailing mother. As punishment, she is sent with her children to Auschwitz. The images of her arrival in Auschwitz and the ensuing selection process match Rebecca's description of her own arrival at the train station. Desperate to save herself and her two children, whom she carries very close to her, Sophie makes a last desperate attempt to use her seduction to escape her fate. As the officer remarks that he would like to have her as a lover, she begs him to release her and her children, for they are true Christians. The officer replies that she must choose one of her children, if she does not want to lose both. Screaming, she tells him to take the crying girl, whom she was carrying on her arms.

Another common characteristic between the film and the play is the number of children. Both Sophie and Rebecca's sister, Kim, as well as the family that Rebecca sees escaping during the night, have two children: a boy and a girl. Although Sophie has tried to save the boy, she never sees him again, because he is taken to a different place. Exactly how she managed to survive the war in the camp is never made clear in the film. Did she escape by taking a lover, as Nathan, her Jewish American boyfriend, suggests? This is probably what the Nazi officers' attraction for her indicates. Finally, the connection between the film and the play is further enhanced by Rebecca's biblical name.

On a deeper level, however, the play has other far-reaching intertextual connections. As critic Hal Jensen emphasises, "to stay at the level of a simple equation between sexual domination and Nazism is not to grasp the full meaning of the play." Its literary allusions link it to at least two important works of Western tradition: T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* and the Bible, especially the *Genesis* and the *Song of Solomon*. These can be used as interpretative frames for the play.

The Waste Land is a poem divided into five parts, the first of which contains the committal "… earth to earth; ashes to ashes, dust to dust" that gives the play its title. The expression was originally taken from the Genesis, where it describes man's expulsion from Eden after the fall. Accordingly, the first part of the poem, "The Burial of the Dead," by means of a complex set of images, suggests human exile and the absence of the love that could heal their hearts. Just as Tristan dies before seeing his beloved Isolde again, the approaching summer does not bring comfort but disillusionment. Spring mixes "memory and desire" (3) but cannot bring life again to dried tubers. Similarly, Rebecca remembers her lover, but instead of love, she finds only the dreadful truth which she has tried to hide from herself.

The second part of the poem, "A Game of Chess," portrays a sterile relationship. While the lady sits suffocated in her exquisitely decorated boudoir, a picture portrays a garden. The verse actually refers to "the change of Philomel," described in Ovid's *Metamorphosis*. This indirect reference to her rape by Tereus, her sister's husband, implies an underlying violence and aggression disguised into courteous civility. This part can clearly be associated to Devlin and Rebecca's dying relationship. If, on the one hand, she professes that she is "nobody's darling," consequently implying her disgust of him, on the other, he claims to possess a detached superior attitude capable of understanding her, but in fact trying to maintain the situation as stuffed as it is.

The third part, "The Fire Sermon," builds on the previous one, expanding the images of loveless lust. These images can be paralleled to Kim's husband's declaration that he has been with another woman, but this should not be held against him, for "it was

only sex" (59). This image of men trying to satisfy their appetite is emphasised in both the poem and the play[9].

The fourth part of the poem, "Death by Water," although very short is crucial to the understanding of the poem. As the title says, it describes the drowning of a man. This image is reflected in Rebecca's story of the group of people who followed their guides into the sea.

Finally, the fifth part, "What the Thunder Said," is directly transposed into the play (consciously or not) as the final echo to Rebecca's words.

Although *Ashes to Ashes* can be said to borrow its general structure from *The Waste Land*, there are many other reverberations throughout the play that do not follow the same chronological order. The first one refers to the highly stressed rhythm employed by Devlin in his initial questions. It has a similar pattern to that employed by the woman in the second part of the poem:

> "What's that noise?"
> The window under the door.
> "What's that noise now? What is the window doing?"
> Nothing again nothing.
>
> "Do
> "You know nothing? Do you see nothing? Do you remember
> "Nothing?" (117-123)

Many other images evoked by the poem are explored in the play. The first to be mentioned is also the one that immediately came to Hal Jensen's mind when he saw the play: the crowd of people walking over London Bridge (60-65). The second image occurs earlier in the poem. In it, fear is connected to the dust to which mankind will return and to the desert, a place closely associated with the devil (both Moses and Jesus were tempted in the desert) (30). Rebecca's fear of the man who looks like a corpse at the movies can be associated to that image. Not the least because she is not only watching a film about a

[9] See especially lines 296-299, which portrays a woman after accepting her husband's promise for "a new start."

woman learning how to live in the desert but she herself has to learn how to live in the desert. The clear implication is that the film reflects Rebecca's own situation. A third image is connected to the idea of a game, as suggested by the title of the second part of the poem. The notes to the poem refer to a book of the seventeenth century, which describes a woman kept occupied with a game of chess while her daughter-in-law is being seduced elsewhere. The seduction is described in terms of chess. Likewise, Devlin describes a world without a God as a soccer game without audience. In such terms, human life for Devlin is reduced to a game with winners and losers, and he is prepared for anything to be the winner:

> When you have a wife you let thought, ideas and reflection take their course. Which means you never let the best man win. Fuck the best man, that's always been my motto. It's the man who ducks his head and moves on through no matter what wind or weather who gets there in the end. A man with guts and application. (47)

A fourth image is related to the sound of horns and motors, which are associated with the return of spring. Finally, the sound of the thunder is meaningful not only because it parallels the final echo of the play, but also because it resounds in the air as:

> Murmur of maternal lamentation (368)

Thus, alluding to the function that the echo has in the play.

In short, Eliot's poem *The Waste Land* provides an extension to the play by means of association of images, which incorporate the poem as a whole. In that way, Pinter not only makes use of images to evoke mood, but also builds upon them in such a way as to incorporate the whole message of the poem, which is of disillusionment at God's abandonment.

Fischer's biblical reading of the play supports this conclusion. As her detailed analysis of the play shows, Pinter has systematically perverted the biblical references evoked in the play. The most important ones, which have not been mentioned yet, are the Exodus motive, which Pinter transforms not into salvation but in death by water (330), and the blasphemous distortion of the Jewish main prayer: the "Listen Israel": "JHWH is the only one" (331), which in Devlin's mouth becomes:

He's the only God we have. (39)

Consequently, the intertextual reference found in *Ashes to Ashes* concerning both biblical motives and Eliot's *The Waste Land* add several layers of meaning to the play, especially in its interpretation as a whole. If, on the one hand, Rebecca is able to go through the process of anamnesis until the end, on the other, her total absorption with the past events may indicate that, the same way as the figures in the memory plays, she has become trapped into a time loop in the past. This would imply that she has lost her capacity of acting in the present.

The play, however, offers another perspective that has not been fully explored yet. This is best explained relating Rebecca's memory of the falling pen with the use Pinter makes of two dramatic forms: the analytical drama and the history drama.

The use of both the analytical and the history drama forms in *Ashes to Ashes* implies a serious of consequences in the treatment of content. The analytical form involves the use of a special form of presentation, since by definition all the important action has happened prior to the play itself. This involves creating a situation in the internal communication system that, usually in form of dialogue, but not necessarily, makes the past known to the audience. In terms of structure it has many similarities with the detective story, since the plot involves a certain search for the "whodunit." The history drama is not a genre that involves a specific form. Rather, it permits a great variety of approaches, in which case what matters is not the form but the treatment given to content.

The twentieth century analytical play is defined by a specific presentation of temporal sequence. Accordingly, *Ashes to Ashes* is a play whose main action is prior to the point of attack. All the important action has already happened and what the audience witnesses are the final moments before the climax of the play. The analytical play is defined as a form in which the main concern is the full understanding of the implications of a past decision taken by one or more figures of the play. The process of awakening to the real dimension of the figure's acts means that the figure has acted unconsciously in the past. The process of discovery of moral values is traditionally triggered by another

figure, whose moral standards are higher. In that way, the confrontation with a different point of view is what enables a revision of the past and the discovery of an immoral act.

In accordance with the worldview of Pinter's plays, the audience cannot expect to find the complete background to the present situation nor can they hope motivations will be made clear at the end of the play, as was the case in Ibsen's plays. As the curtain opens in *Ashes to Ashes* (supposing there is a curtain), Rebecca has already started to tell Devlin about her former lover. It remains unknown to the audience what exactly has caused her revelation. Even if the hypothesis of hypnosis mentioned before seems plausible enough, other possibilities cannot be excluded, such as Rebecca's desire to end up their relationship. Another possibility is, as already suggested by the Basel production, that Devlin is integrant part of Rebecca's personality. In this case, the conflict experienced by Rebecca could be internal, much like the female and male aspects of everybody's personality[10].

As far as Devlin's moral superiority is concerned, however, *Ashes to Ashes* subverts the model. Devlin has been described, like Deeley in *Old Times*, as "a blunt coarse-grained, puzzled man who knows that common sense and brisk, sensible decisions are virtues to fall back on and cannot imagine a situation in which they might seem irrelevant or useless" (Peter *Without Within*). Therefore, what moral authority could he have in order to help Rebecca see further into the past? Interestingly, in this case, Devlin is helpful not for his superior understanding (as he claims to have) but exactly for his affinity with the evil side of life. For when he asks Rebecca whether she prefers to drown in her own gravy or die for her country (51), he expects her to choose none of the alternatives but to remain in total oblivion of the past. Significantly, he suggests a drive into town or going to the movies.

Rebecca, however, is prepared to face the consequences of her life-lie. She continues her process of reconstitution of the past even when Devlin tries to force her to live as if in the past (as suggested by his last attempt to win her back by putting his hand

[10] A similar interpretation has been offered to explain Anna and Kate in *Old Times*. There, however, they represented a dichotomy between mind, or spirit, and body.

on her throat). Nonetheless, in the end, it is not possible to say whether her investigation has succeeded in freeing her or not.

The choice of resorting to a form like the twentieth century history drama seems to be a crucial new direction in Pinter's work. The history play is a form that gives the playwright almost total liberty to deal with his content in any desired way. It imposes no restrictions in terms of a realistic treatment of history. Nevertheless, the main concern of the play must be to achieve a better understanding of the past based not only on knowledge of a specific historical period but, more importantly, on the human response to the possibilities available in that past. This is of crucial importance, since it is not possible to change the past but to try to see the many possibilities that it held and to relate differently to it. As Hal Jensen explained in his review in the Internet:

> Resisting self-deception, Pinter (like Rebecca) cannot forget, or conveniently explain away, his uneasy engagement with history – whether that history constitutes merely the influence of his literary predecessors or a common, less quantifiable and more disturbing burden of responsibility and guilt.

This is the reason why Rebecca's memory of the fallen pen holds such a central meaning in the play. Just as the other stories told by Rebecca, it also admits several layers of meaning. First of all, the pen suggests not only a connection between Devlin as the lover and Rebecca as the chambermaid (of the extermination camp), but it also evokes the bureaucratically controlled genocide. In that sense, it is significant that Rebecca was writing a laundry list as it rolled off onto the carpet. After all, a laundry list is just a register of the bundle that has been sent away. This is suggestive that Rebecca was an active part of the process. Considering a biblical reading of the play, it is important to notice that the biblical Rebecca is in line with Eve, who was co-responsible for the expulsion from Eden. Similarly, if Rebecca fears for her children, it is only because she made Jacob intercept his brother's blessing. Becoming aware of the fact that it was she who handed over the bundle, also implies losing sight of the Garden of Eden, which was visible through the window in the beginning of the play.

Above all, what this story of the fallen pen seems to imply is that losing memory, especially historical memory, implies not knowing whether you are innocent or not, for

you do not know what you have done, you don not know what your parents have done. In this sense, Pinter's option for the analytical play marks a new important direction in his writing. Because if, on the one hand, he has not gone back to a world where the past can be fully explained, the use of the analytical form allied to the concerns attached to the history play allows for a moral investigation not only of personal guilt and responsibility but also of collective memory, as the final echo of the play suggests.

Pinter's treatment of memory has undergone great changes since his early plays. Whereas in the comedies of menace the emphasis was on action rather than ideas, the past had different values for different characters. Because it was not considered as a key to explain the present situation, the figures did not feel the need to explain themselves. In *The Birthday Party* and *The Room*, for example, the figures make reference to their childhood memories as a kind of loss of innocence. So, for instance, Meg's father has abandoned her, without taking her to Ireland as he had promised; or Stanley remembers the "fast one" that he received and buried all his hopes of making a career as a musician. In *The Dumb Waiter*, Gus makes an effort to think about the past, an attitude that will cost him dearly.

In the memory plays, the past is interpreted differently by the figures. The past is not something that has happened to them, but something that exists between them and their immediate reality. In fact, the major change here is that the past is viewed not through what is shown but is expressed almost without intermediation from within.

The comedies of mannerism reflect so many possible pasts, with varying interpretations, that the audience cannot possibly decide which version is more likely to have happened. What is at stake here is interpreting the past in the light of a present situation. The shift is from the traditional attitude expressed in terms of "the past holds the answers" to a more versatile one of "who holds the past, holds the present." in that way, not only the subjective mind interferes in what is perceived, but also tries to present it in the most suitable light.

A quite different attitude in relation to the past is evidenced in the political plays. In these plays, the figures generally belong to one or to the other pole of the spectrum. On

the one hand, the figure may occupy a position of power, which is either the cause or a consequence of a hubris. In this case, they are not concerned with either personal or collective memory. On the other hand, there are the victims of some absolutist power. For these, memory is a private haven with which they dream but which brings no comfort as they are cut out from society. These individuals, however, represent those who succumbed in their attempt to construct a collective memory.

Ashes to Ashes is a combination of these different conceptions of memory, while being more than simply a reworking of these past forms. In it Pinter combines the highly intimate perspective of the memory plays, in that memory in *Ashes to Ashes* is also evoked through lyrical images that must be put together by the audience in order to form a coherent past. In common with the comedies of mannerism, *Ashes to Ashes* has the concept of incorporating the literary tradition as an additional layer of meaning. In that way, the past is not depicted as an individual appropriation of the past but as a cultural one. Finally, Pinter's latest play builds upon the concerns expressed in the political plays and invites a questioning over collective memory that has never reached that depth before. Especially because it explores collective responsibility and guilt in a perfect blend with psychological realism.

Conclusion

Meaning in the theatre is carried out in different ways from other literary forms. Because of the collective nature of its production, the irreversible tempo of the performance, and the density of signs, a theatrical production requires an active engagement of the audience for a proper understanding. In theatre, more than perhaps in any other genre, reliance on a specific literary tradition helps orientate the audience as to the intended authorial reception. These forms, however, are not immutable categories but they are constantly being modified to create new meanings. In that way, the form of the analytical play, the history drama, or the theatre of the absurd relate to a set of techniques of presentation closely connected to the themes that they want to explore.

Since the beginning of his career as a playwright, Pinter has constantly innovated the form to suggest new ways of conceiving the surrounding world. His first play already shows what came to be known as “the principle of inverifiability.” This means that, for Pinter, the world does not go about explaining itself. Most of the reasons and motivations that guide people’s action are never explicitly stated. In such a world, Pinter’s figures move and try to get away the best way they can. This involves a series of negotiations, which frequently involve the revelation, or not, of the figures’ identity, including the way

they see and value their past. Because Pinter deals with the concrete world we inhabit, the figures are well aware of the dangers lurking around them. These may be concrete, as the threat to their individual territory, psychological, connected to the figure's emotional needs, or social, especially in relation to the threats to individual freedom.

In *Ashes to Ashes* Pinter resorts to a traditional form, the analytical play, in order to investigate our collective relation to the past. The most conspicuous theme in the play is related to the way we deal with the horrors of the Holocaust. However, by alluding to the Bible and T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, Pinter suggests that humanity does not have the moral superiority necessary to redeem the past, as it is usually the case in the analytical drama. Instead, in *Ashes to Ashes* Rebecca confronts the truth about her past having Devlin/the devil as interlocutor. Although she faces the truth and becomes aware of her share of responsibility, she does not seem able to look at it from a distance that would allow her to understand it and transform her present situation. Rebecca, like humankind, was doomed to fall. However, pessimistic as this portrayal of her situation may be, by writing about it, Pinter invites the audience to undergo their own anamnesis of history. Repression of our knowledge of the past is most likely to produce its repetition. Consequently, even if Devlin grasps Rebecca's throat at the end of the play, her response is not the same as before.

In short, with this new play, Pinter suggests the need of relating to our historical past. It is only by remembering it (through the use of the pen) that we can fully relate to it and take full responsibility. This is Pinter's politics of memory.

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Appendix A

Chronological Overview of Pinter's Plays

	Play	Date	1st Performance	1st Director	Cast
comedies of menace					
1	The Black and White (short story)	1954-5			
2	The Examination (short story)	1955			
3	The Room	1957	Bristol Univ. Drama Dept. 15 May 1957	Henry Woolf	Rose + Bert (The Hudds) Mr. Kidd Mr. and Mrs. Sands Riley
4	The Birthday Party	1957	Arts Theatre, Cambridge 28 Apr 1958	Peter Wood	Meg + Petey (The Boles) Goldberg McCann Stanley Lulu
5	The Dumb Waiter	1957	Hamstead Theatre Club 21 Jan 1960	James Roose-Evans	Gus Ben
6	A Slight Ache	1958	BBC Radio Third Programme 29 July 1959	Michael Codron	Edward Flora
			Arts Theatre, London 18 Jan 1961		Matchseller

	Play	Date	1st Performance	1st Director	Cast
7	The Hothouse	1958	Hamstead Theatre, London 24 Apr 1980	Harold Pinter	Roote – in his fifties Gibbs – in his thirties Lamb – in his twenties Miss Cutts – in her thirties Lush – in his thirties Tubb – fifty Lobb – fifty
8	Revue Sketches—Trouble in the Works; The Black and White	1959	Revue *One to Another* Lyric, Hammersmith 15 July 1959		
	Request Stop; Last to Go; Special Offer		Revue *Pieces of Eight* Apollo Theatre, London 23 Sept 1959		
	That's Your Trouble; That's All; Applicant; Interview; Dialogue for Three		BBC Radio, Third Programme Feb-Mar 1964		
9	A Night Out	1959	BBC Radio's Third Programme 1 Mar 1960		Albert Stokes Mrs Stokes, *his mother* Seeley Kedge Barman at the coffee stall Old Man Mr King Mr Ryan Gidney Joyce Eileen Betty Horne Barrow The Girl
10	The Caretaker	1959	Arts Theatre, London 27 Apr 1960	Donald McWhinnie	Mick Davies Aston
11	Night School	1960	Associated Rediffusion Television, London 21 Jul 1960		Annie Walter Milly Sally Solto Tully
12	The Dwarfs	1960	BBC Third Programme 2 Dec 1960		Mark Pete Len

	Play	Date	1st Performance	1st Director	Cast
comedies of mannerism					
13	The Collection	1961	Associated Rediffusion Television, London 11 May 1961 Aldwych Theatre, London 18 June 1962	Peter Hall and Harold Pinter	Harry 40's James 30's Stella 30's Bill late 20's
14	The Lover	1962	Associated Rediffusion Television, London 28 March 1963 Arts Theatre 18 Sept 1963	Harold Pinter	Richard Sarah John
15	Tea Party (short story)	1963			
16	Tea Party	1964	BBC-1 TV 25 March 1965		Disson Lois Wendy Father Diana Mother Willy Tom Disley John
17	The Homecoming	1964	Aldwych Theatre, London 3 Jun 1965	Peter Hall	Teddy – middle 30's Ruth – early 30's Max – 70 Joey – middle 20's Lenny – early 30's Uncle Sam – 63
18	The Basement	1966	BBC Television 28 Feb 1967 Duchess Theatre, London 17 Sept 1970	James Hammerstein	Stott Jane Law
memory plays					
19	Landscape	1967	BBC Radio 25 Apr 1968 Aldwych Theatre 2 Jul 1969	Peter Hall	Ellen – 20's Rumsey – 40 Bates – middle 30's

	Play	Date	1st Performance	1st Director	Cast
20	Silence	1968	Aldwych Theatre 2 Jul 1969	Peter Hall	Beth – a woman in her late forties Duff – a man in his early fifties
21	Night (Revue Sketch)	1969	revue *Mixed Doubles* Comedy Theatre, London 9 Apr 1969	Alexander Doré	Man Woman
22	Old Times	1970	Aldwych Theatre, London 1 Jun 1971	Peter Hall	Deeley Kate Anna (all in their early forties)
23	Monologue	1972	BBC TV 13 Apr 1973		Man
24	No Man's Land	1974	National Theatre at the Old Vic, Waterloo, London 23 Apr 1975	Peter Hall	Hirst 60's Spooner 60's Foster 30's Briggs 40's
25	Betrayal	1978	National Theatre, London 15 Nov 1978	Peter Hall	Emma Jerry Robert (in 1977 Emma is 38, Jerry and Robert are 40)
	15-year gap (Pinter's next full play after Betrayal is Moonlight (1993))				
26	Family Voices	1980	BBC Radio 3 22 Jan 1981		voice 1 – a young man voice 2 – a woman voice 3 – a man
	The Hothouse	1958	Hamstead Theatre, London 24 Apr 1980	Harold Pinter	
27	Victoria Station A Kind of Alaska	1982	Performed with *Family Voices* as triple bill titled *Other Places* National Theatre 14 Oct 1982	Peter Hall	Controller Driver Deborah Hornby Pauline
political plays					
28	Precisely	1983	sketch (part of an anti-nuclear gala – *The Big One*) Apollo Theatre, L. 18 Dec. 1983		two men

	Play	Date	1st Performance	1st Director	Cast	
29	One for the Road	1984	Lyric Theatre Studio, Hammersmith 15 Mar 1984	Harold Pinter	Nicolas – mid 40's Victor – 30 Gila – 30 Nicky – 7	
30	Mountain Language	1988	National Theatre 20 Oct 1988	Harold Pinter	Young Woman Elderly Woman Sergeant Officer Guard Prisoner Hooded Man Second Guard	
31	Party Time		Almeida Theatre, London 31 Oct 1991	Harold Pinter	Terry Gavin Dusty Melissa Liz	Charlotte Fred Douglas Jimmy
32	The New World Order		Royal Court Upstairs, London 19 Jul 1991	Harold Pinter	Des Lionel Blindfolded man	
33	Moonlight		Almeida Theatre, London 7 Sept 1993	David Leveaux	Andy 50's Bel 50 Jake 28 Fred 27	Maria 50 Ralph 50's Bridget 16
34	Ashes to Ashes	1996	Royal Court Theatre at the Ambassadors Theatre (Upstairs), London 12 Sept 1996	Harold Pinter	Rebecca Devlin	

Radio Plays

Television Plays

Political Plays

Memory Plays