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## **Legacy of Memory in Pinter's Dramatic Construct**

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### **Abstract**

Harold Pinter was born on October 10, 1930 in Hackney, East London in a Jewish family. Pinter, a multifaceted genius, has not only achieved unbeatable success in the field of drama, but also in the field of poetry, novel writing, film script writing, screenplay writing etc. He always remained the reflecting mirror of the society of his time. "The modern man is everywhere the subject matter of his investigation."<sup>1</sup> He deals with modern man's psychology, the problems he is facing in the society, with the social systems which are like chains in his feet, the political system, his hidden fears, hopes and ambitions. His innovative and influential theatrical style has created a term Pinteresque. Pinter has contributed greatly to the theatre of the Absurd and pioneered the 'angry young man' movement by staging plays that treat working class social realism. "Pinter's play represents a kind of journey where complex and fragmented matters unfold with the clear image of the Waiter imposing a speech that indicates how vulnerable and intricate emotional connections are."<sup>2</sup> The plotting of the clues has been replaced by a mapping of the absences of knowledge, the vast hiatus between suspicion and certainly for which Pinter is the human condition in modern world. Finally memory occupies a vast space in Pinter's dramatic construct.

**Keywords:** Modern Man, Psychology, Society, Problems, Investigation, Construct

### **Introduction**

Pinter's plays between the time period 1968 and 1982 deal with mind and memory. He has given his attention to man's past and its impact and importance in his present. There are flashbacks and reminiscences of the past by the characters. Sometimes they give strength to him and sometimes they even torment him, making his present a puzzling, disturbed experience. So Pinter has dealt with most common human problems relating to personal relationships like

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marriage, friendship, and other family relationships. Pinter sees the world as a violent place and the theme of violence is essential and inevitable factor in his drama. He understands violence as an expression of the question of dominance and subservience. Harold Pinter was seen by his contemporaries as a young and rebellious playwright. Pinter today is regarded as a giant in the world of enlightenment relentlessly explored theatre and propagated awareness among common people against the strong, rich and powerful.

The play *Landscape* was staged in 2nd July 1969. It shows the difficulties of communication between two people – Beth and Duff. *Landscape* is often studied, read and performed alongside another one-act play *Silence*. Pinter's characters have always been fond of reverie since his first play *The Room* onwards; but here in case of *Landscape* memory distinctly takes over as the motivating force of the play and becomes its actual spine. *Landscape* is not structured in the traditional dialogue form, but instead it consists of two alternating monologues. Among the two monologues, one is a rambling and apparently inconsequential account of the events of the day by the husband, Duff, being addressed to his wife, Beth; and the other is Beth's inner meditation on an experience of love long ago. About the setting of the play John Bull says,

*Landscape* dramatizes separation, symbolised by the long kitchen table centrally placed between married protagonists Duff and Beth, and by speech, since they appear never to hear each other.<sup>3</sup>

Beth in her monologue always refers to her unknown lover with whom she is on the beach. If Duff and the tender lover is one person, this side of Duff exists at present only in Beth's memory of fantasy. The present Duff is anaesthetized to such delicacies of experience. Thus, Beth eventually loses contact with the real world where Duff is living in a tougher and realistic life devoid of any romantic sentiments while Duff for his part, loses traces of the potential lover's sensitivity in himself. Katherine Burkman who traces the archetypal features of Pinter's characters, says about Beth:

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Beth recreates the archetypal reality of her past as a bulwark against the present reality of her husband, whom she neither sees nor hears. Against the yearningly domestic picture of her which her husband paints – that of a good housekeeper and servant and a good wife, who can forgive his infidelities with a kiss – is a picture of herself as a beautiful, childbearing, flower-watering, adored woman – in fact a goodness.<sup>4</sup>

Burkman has grasped the truth about Beth in suggesting that Beth forms ‘the picture of self’ to deny and cast off her husband’s stereotyped image of her and to cherish his earlier romantic image.

*Silence* was written in 1968 and in the words of Elizabeth Sakellaridou,

*Silence* is akin to *Landscape* both stylistically and thematically. The mistiness of memory first introduced in *Landscape* gains a more Proustian tone here as three different people recall similar experiences from three different viewpoints. The characters themselves are in a way reminiscent of the characters in *Landscape*.<sup>5</sup>

A brief stage direction places the three characters – Ellen Rumsay and Bates in three separate areas on the stage, seated in chairs. Thus, in a way the characters look as motionless and desolate as Beth and Duff sitting at either end of their kitchen table in *Landscape*. The structure of *Silence* is based on three intercepting monologues, in which the free use of verb tenses creates the impression of continuous time-shift as in the process of memory. Giving his opinion about the characters, Arthur Ganz says,

As the play begins, they are at these designated ages, and each in a brief monologue, simple in diction but carefully patterned to lift it above the level of realistic conversation, suggests his situation and character.<sup>6</sup>

In *Silence*, Pinter abruptly inserts the transition from one section to another. The beginning section’s monologues refer to a period when the characters were in the prime of their

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youth. When the characters speak again, the audience recognizes that all have grown old. Rumsay has drifted off into a contented remoteness:

RUMSAY: Pleasant alone and watch the folding light. My animals are quiet. My heart never bangs. I read in the evenings. There is no-one to tell me what is expected or not expected of me. There is nothing required of me.<sup>7</sup>

But Ellen, the central figure, is the most severely traumatized of all. Remote even from her memories, she has entered into a state of mental separation in which the reality of her own thought become doubtful:

ELLEN: I sometimes wonder if I think. I heard somewhere about how many thoughts go through the brain of a person. But I couldn't remember anything I would actually thought for sometime. It isn't something that anyone could ever tell me, could ever reassure me about, nobody could tell, from looking at me, what was happening?<sup>8</sup>

The play *Night* opens with a disagreement between a husband (represented by 'man') and a wife (represented by 'woman'), as they try to recall the circumstances of their first meeting. The man says,

MAN: On the bridge. We stopped and looked down at the river. It was night. There were lamps lit on the towpath. We were alone. We looked up the river. I put the river. I put my hand on the small of your waist. Don't you remember? I put my hand under your coat.<sup>9</sup>

Pinter's another play *Old Times* deals mainly with the hidden recesses of mind of the character-Kate. The whole play is a complex web woven by Kate in her memory. In the, words of John Bull:

*Old Times* continued the preoccupation with memory, but Beckettian minimalism was put aside as Pinter returned to his characteristic mixed mode, involving

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dramatized planes of reality and the withholding of a clear distinction between past and present.<sup>10</sup>

Pinter's *Old Times* is clearly related to *Landscape* and *Silence* by its concern with memory, its restraint and concentrated size. Indeed this play has been written in the conventional dialogue form of Pinter's first group of plays. Pinter wants to lay emphasis on the importance of love in everybody's life. He wants to show the negative effect on the person's mind and personality when he or she loves anyone passionately but somehow or other cannot get that love in reciprocation. Pinter has successfully pretended his heart's pain on the stage through the portrait of Kate.

*No Man's Land* can be seen as having some similarities with one of Pinter's own plays of the first group – *The Caretaker*. The 'icy-silent' world of Hirst with his two servants can be compared with the actionless world of two brothers – Mick and Aston of *The Caretaker*. Into his world comes Spooner, a shabby poet seeking a liaison with Hirst. Much in the manner of the imposter Davies of *The Caretaker*, Spooner requires shelter, and like Davies, his comic posing and scheming launch the play's conflict. Like Davies, Spooner's words also do not match with his personality, dress and shabby look. At one place he says to Briggs while taking his breakfast:

SPOONER: Yes, you've reminded me. I must be off. I have a meeting at twelve. Thank you so much for breakfast.

BRIGGS: A board meeting. I'm on the board of a recently inaugurated poetry magazine. We have our first meeting at twelve. Can't be late.<sup>11</sup>

These words of Spooner clearly show that he is lying and trying to make his impression on the servant so that he can consider Spooner to be of the same status as Hirst's. In the course of the play, it appears that Spooner tries to prove his established relationship with Hirst's past:

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SPOONER (to HIRST): Be frank. Tell me. You've revealed something. You have made an unequivocal reference to your past. Don't go back to it. We share something. A memory of the bucolic life. We're both English.<sup>12</sup>

*Betrayal* is a full length stage play that Pinter wrote after *No Man's Land* in 1978. The play moves backward and forward in time recreating Proustian memory. The play is also non-chronological in order. There are in total nine scenes. The first two scenes take place in 1977 and follow sequentially. Then the play jogs back in time, passing through the end of Jerry and Emma's affair in 1975, through their happy days in 1971, finally ending on a scene in 1968, that was the beginning of their affair, when Jerry in a drunken state makes his first declaration of love to Emma in Robert and Emma's bedroom. Pinter's *Betrayal* has been built on an image of human unhappiness and it gives a much more grim and bitter message about human relationship than any other play of Pinter.

The play *Family Voices* deals with a series of interlocking monologues spoken by voices which have been named as Voice 1, Voice 2 and Voice 3. Voice 1 is the voice of a young man, Voice 2 is the voice of a woman who is the mother of this young man and Voice 3 is that of a man who is the father of this young man. *Family Voices* exposes themes involving the vicissitudes of memory and the past – a theme most common in all his memory plays, and also the theme of problems of communication – a theme used frequently in his Comedy of menace group of plays. At times the mother glides back in her past days and cherishes the memory of life when she had her son and husband around her every time:

VOICE 2 : I sometimes walk the cliff path and think of you. I think of the times you walked the cliff path with your father with cheese sandwiches. Didn't you?<sup>13</sup>

In *A Kind of Alaska*, Pinter has portrayed a woman in her mid-forties who erupts to life after nearly thirty years of Sleeping Sickness. The author has depicted her rebellions, bewildered, foolish, angry and gallant responses in a combination of hallucination, childlike language and erotic wish fulfillment. The reality of her lost youth and lost love is finally accepted by Deborah

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as she remembers everything with her sister Pauline's and doctor Hornby's unshakable loyalty, love and care. This play of Pinter is not only a true picture of the sufferings and pains of the patients of Sleeping Sickness but also one of the most touching plays that depicts the power and strength of family ties over every hardship of life. Kerr Walter says:

As a dramatist, Pinter wishes to observe in the same way that, as man and household, he wishes to live.<sup>14</sup>

**Conclusion:**

The discussion reveals the role of the past in the present life of any person. Pinter's primary sources are the images of life drawn from his teenage years in the East of London. The Jewish community, its faiths and traditions, its isolation from the rest of the world, its fears in the wake of the Fascist uprising, the world war and its effects, his evacuation from the East England, his fight as conscientious objector – all of these served as a quarry for the cobblestones for the highway of literary structure he has built. The ethos of Hackney Downs where his youth was spent forms the backdrop for most of his plays. Since the characters and situations are drawn from the familiar and the true, the plays acquire an authenticity and charm. Pinter expressed man in his fear, joy, humour, stupidity and ambition. Pinter's characters are common men belonging to the middle-class society and they never turn out as social protestants. His characters reveal important realities of contemporary life. We can easily find Pinter's characters living around us, walking and talking with us in our daily life. Pinter never gives his final judgment or conclusion in his plays. He leaves it on his audience to brood over the problem taken by him and to derive their own conclusion after correlating the characters or situations of the plays with their own life.

A. C. Ward says:

The world of Harold Pinter is shadowy, obsessed, guilt ridden, claustrophobic and above all private. You are expected to find your way through it without signposts, clues or milestones.<sup>15</sup>

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Pinter's art resists the application of normal criteria of reason and purpose. He uses realistic language to underscore the difference between what people say and they mean and to emphasize his character-disinclination to understand one another. His dramatic conflicts present serious implications for his characters and his audiences leading to sustained enquiry about the point of his work and multiple critical strategies for developing interpretations and stylistic analyses of it.

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