Synesthetic Landscapes in Harold Pinter’s Theatre: A Symbolist Legacy

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Abstract

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Graça Corrêa

Adviser: Professor Daniel Gerould

In the light of recent interdisciplinary critical approaches to landscape and space, and adopting phenomenological methods of sensory analysis, this dissertation explores interconnected or synesthetic sensory “scapes” in contemporary British playwright Harold Pinter’s theatre. By studying its dramatic landscapes and probing into their multi-sensory manifestations in line with Symbolist theory and aesthetics, I argue that Pinter’s theatre articulates an ecocritical stance and a micropolitical critique.

Chapter One explains the dissertation’s theoretical framework (landscape theory, Symbolist theory, ecocriticism, phenomenology, and sensory analysis), while arguing for an ecophilosophical reading of Pinter’s landscapes that engages not only with spatial patterns but also with the bodyscapes and psychic ecology of his characters. Chapter Two examines the theoretical/aesthetic Symbolist qualities of Pinter’s dramaturgy. Chapter Three connects Pinter’s sensory scapes to the theories of space and time developed by Henri Bergson, revealing how they are concerned with subjective time as it is lived, with the spatiotemporal circularity of past, present, and future (related to the ouroboros symbol), and with the way one can imaginatively re/create one’s own self through life. Chapter Four discusses how Pinter’s apocalyptic landscapes evoke the horror of the Holocaust, and denounce the tradition of oppression (or the structures of uncontrolled violence) that repeatedly produces new social and ecological catastrophes. Chapter Five draws upon feminist philosopher Luce Irigaray’s concepts of sexual
difference to demonstrate the negative ecological effects of a monological patriarchal system of moral values upon family and conjugal life, as expressed in Pinter’s oppressive and abusive homescapes.

Throughout this study I activate an interdisciplinary dialogue between Pinter’s landscapes and those found in works by Symbolist (and Decadent) artists/thinkers (Mallarmé, Rilke, Briusov, Maeterlinck, Rachilde, Patrício, Yeats, Munch, Sacher-Masoch, and Kafka.). Adopting phenomenological views of subjectivity (suggested by Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Gaston Bachelard, and Stanton Garner, among others), I invoke Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s notion of micropolitics, as well as the latter’s concept of a combined ecology—mental, social, and environmental—to discuss how a study of sensory scapes reveals the presence of ecophilosophical and political concerns all through Pinter’s dramatic œuvre.
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I offer my profound gratitude to Jean Graham-Jones for having given me a mental and emotional enthusiasm for theatre theory that I will nourish always. Her interest concerning my essay on Pinter’s *Party Time* was very significant towards this thesis.

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I would also like to thank Pamela Sheingorn who taught me the route towards high quality research. Among my knowledgeable professors at the Graduate Center, from the Theatre, Film, English, and Comparative Literature programs, I wish to particularly thank Felicia Bonaparte for her passionate lectures (from which I gained a philosophical-aesthetic desire of seeking), and for her encouragement in my quest. Among my colleagues, I want to thank Zeneida for her affectionate support throughout. I am most grateful to Lynette Gibson, not only
for her help with paperwork, but also for her unwavering assistance in all matters during my course of studies. Thanks are also extended to Professor Nuno Nabais (UL-University of Lisbon) for having read this study and provided me with some response on its philosophical aspects.

This dissertation received inspiration and support from several beings, animate, and inanimate. Primarily from Harold Pinter, whose work will always be inspiring for me. Also from other dead artists/writers who are living in my mind and (physically) present all over my desk/top and bookshelves.

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To the forest of my heart, Buçaco, to the creatures of the woods, to all the animals, plants, things that surround me and which I cherish, to a most lovable and intelligent companion whom I had the luck of meeting one day in my life path. To the joy I have had of growing up and living side by side with you, Luis.
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Introduction

Within the emerging interdisciplinary scope of landscape theory, this dissertation explores the innovative concept of synesthetic landscape in the field of theatre studies, taking as its object of study the work written for the stage by contemporary British playwright Harold Pinter. The artistic concept of synesthesia, denoting an interconnectedness of our sensory perceptions resulting from a direct experience or interaction with the material medium of an artwork, was first underscored by artists and theorists of the fin-de-siècle Symbolist movement, subsequently by Phenomenology, and most recently by Sensory Theory, and Ecocriticism. When applied to theatre, the reading of synesthetic landscapes in a text—be it a play-text or a performance-text—should attempt to go beyond a probing of its visual aspects, and entail additionally an imaginative and embracing phenomenological experience of its many overlapping sensory “scapes” (such as mindscapes, bodyscapes, soundscapes, touchscapes, smellscapes, and tastescapes).

This synesthetic perspective may be particularly productive of new insights in the field of theatre studies: firstly, because in reading drama we inevitably perform it in our “minds,” and therefore any techniques of enhancing this reading may be invaluable for both producing and teaching theatre; and secondly, because theatre is a performing art that involves all of our sensory perceptions, both as performers and spectators, and therefore also an art of space and “scaping,” which intermingles both living and inanimate bodies within a connecting environment. Such an investigation will convey new critical insights and reveal innovative interpretive possibilities for performance of Pinter’s work, as well as unexplored political and environmental aspects of his theatre that specifically relate to our times.

1 I use mindscape in the sense of what French Symbolists termed an “inner landscape” (paysage intérieur). Such a “landscape of the mind” or “inscape” (Gerard Manley Hopkins’s concept) entails a correspondence between material and spiritual, between outer and inner worlds.
The choice of Pinter’s theatre as the ground for my landscape analysis entails dealing
with a “canonical” dramatist, on whose work voluminous criticism has been published. ¹ Pinter’s
theatre has been theorized through many lenses—Mythic, ² Existentialist, ³ New Critical, ⁴
Marxist, ⁵ Freudian, ⁶ Lacanian, ⁷ Foucauldian, ⁸ Wittgensteinian, ⁹ and Feminist in diverse
theoretical combinations. ¹¹ Most of these critical works were produced in the period spanning

² Susan Hollis Merritt’s Pinter in Play (1990) is a thorough study of Pinter criticism until the late 1980s.
³ A mythic line of research has been predominantly carried out by Katherine Burkman, starting with her book The
Dramatic World of Harold Pinter: Its Basis in Ritual (1971). Building upon J. G. Frazer’s The Golden Bough, Burkman argues that Pinter’s secular dramaturgy enacts the ritual sacrifice of a scapegoat. While his male characters regularly must suffer death or banishment, his female characters take on the role of fertility goddesses. Pinter’s characters’ dwelling rooms function as mythical spaces of a “cyclic transfer of power.”
⁴ Martin Esslin in The Theatre of the Absurd, as well as in other critical studies written between 1961 and 1993, and Walter Kerr (Harold Pinter, 1967) interpret Pinter’s dramaturgy in the light of Existentialist philosophy.
⁵ In his essays and book, “Butter’s Going Up:” A Critical Analysis of Harold Pinter’s Work (1977), Stephen Gale identifies four stages in Pinter’s “thematic evolution” (from generalized to particularized “menace”), and interrelates them with five “basic concepts” of his drama: love, loneliness, menace, communication, and verification of truth.
⁶ In their essays on Pinter’s work, Marxist critics Terry Eagleton and Drew Milne consider that his plays express a nihilistic view of the existing power structures, but never expose oppositional practices to the dominant political order; as a result, they are not politically effective or suggestive of potential social change.
⁸ From a Lacanian perspective, Marc Silverstein’s Harold Pinter and the Language of Cultural Power (1993) holds that it is language that produces Pinter’s characters’ subjectivity—that determines their desires, their political and ethical values, and their gender identities. More recently, Ann Lecerelle also approaches Pinter’s oeuvre from a Lacanian lens in Le théâtre d’Harold Pinter: stratégies de l’indiscible, regard, parole, image (2006).
⁹ From a Foucauldian perspective, Charles Grimes’s Harold Pinter’s Politics: A Silence Beyond Echo (2005) argues that Pinter’s plays denounce the “insidious process of self-silencing at work in our societies.” Although this silence seems permanent or “beyond echo,” for Grimes it also conveys the necessity of resistance, and the idea that an oppositional ethics cannot be explained nor articulated by language.
¹⁰ Austin Quigley was one of the first critics to investigate Pinter’s work from a linguistic theory perspective, in The Pinter Problem (1975). In his study, Quigley argued for an investigation of the interrelational function of language, thus opposing reference theory, and breaking away from the trend of “thematic literary criticism.” Building upon Wittgenstein’s notion of language games, Quigley claims that Pinter’s characters utilize sentences as instruments, and thereby create (not just refer to) the structure that regulates their own reality, truth, and personal relationships.
¹¹ Basing her study of Pinter’s Female Portraits (1988) on Jungian theory, Elizabeth Sakellaridou claims that although Pinter’s initial sexist attitude produced stereotypical female characters in the models set by patriarchal society, in his later plays his characterization of women has become more “androgynous,” leading the reader/spectator to identify with the male and female figures equally. Within a biological approach to gender, Victor Cahn’s study Gender and Power in the Plays of Harold Pinter (1993) argues that Pinter’s female characters have greater awareness of their own “nature” as well as of the “nature” of men; as a result they are emotionally stronger in their capacity for survival, in spite of the physical dominance of males. Drawing upon Luce Irigaray’s feminist concepts, Anne Hall, in A Kind of Alaska: Women in the Plays of O’Neill, Pinter, and Shepard (1993), insists that Pinter’s female characters disrupt the male gaze that objectifies them, thus suggesting that gender ideologies can be dismantled through women’s exercise of power, agency, and desire. In Staging the Rage (1998), both Katherine Burkman and Judith Roof claim that Pinter’s dramas provide a critical anatomy of misogyny. In The Pinter Ethic: The Erotic Aesthetic (2000), Penelope Prentice suggests that Pinter combines “aesthetic and ethic” to convey the dominant/subservient conflict of human beings at the private, public, and global levels of life; his characters engage in this “struggle for survival” in order to obtain the respect and the love of others.
from the early 1970s to the late 1990s, having been written mainly from a linguistic point of view that focused on the plays’ verbal language rather than on all the other constitutive elements of live performance. Although Pinter criticism has fostered a lively critical practice and dynamic ongoing conversation that I am pleased to join, the field seems ripe for alternative developments from novel and/or renewed theoretical perspectives.

Currently, Pinter criticism is debating whether he may be viewed as a realist, or else as a non-realist/absurdist playwright; whether he was a political playwright from the start of his career, or else became politically committed during the late 1970s (Thatcher’s rule) and only then started writing political plays; whether his female figures are empowering from a feminist perspective, or rather reproduce the existing patriarchal order; and, finally, whether he may be considered one of the last modernists, or else one of the earliest postmodernist playwrights. My research on the sensory landscapes of Pinter’s plays builds upon some of these current theoretical concerns while counter-balancing a predominantly linguistic approach to his theatre works.

An analysis of *scapes* in Pinter’s theatre enables us to situate his works, both aesthetically and theoretically, within the legacy of fin-de-siècle Symbolism. Although Pinter has often been considered a “modernist” and hence supposedly influenced by the historical “avant-garde”

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12 Pinter as a postmodernist playwright has been the object of many considerations. In *Harold Pinter and the Twilight of Modernism* (2005), Varun Begley claims that Pinter complicates clear-cut distinctions between the modern and postmodern. Austin Quigley, in *The Cambridge Companion to Harold Pinter* (2001), claims that Pinter’s “voice” is alternately that of the avant-garde artist, the high modernist, and the postmodernist. The latter, however, is the “voice” most often found in his plays, since his characters struggle to come to terms with social complexity on a local scale, and are therefore concerned with the postmodernist values of diversity, otherness, difference and discontinuity (13). Stephen Watt, in *Postmodern/Drama* (1998), claims Pinter as a “postmodernist,” but associates the playwright’s work with a postmodernist “strain problematically related to high modernism,” as opposed to the other strain which “embraces mass culture.” Rodney Simard, in *Postmodern Drama* (1984) considers Pinter a postmodernist because he synthesizes “the realistic mode with absurdist techniques,” reconciling “a variety of recognizable but very different modes and playwrights” (such as Chekhov and Beckett) into “a unified dramatic vision” (25). Decrying the critics that provide “meaning” to Pinter’s plays, Guido Almans and Simon Henderson in *Harold Pinter* (1983) argue that the playwright is “a master of deception” (19), and that his works are postmodernist texts meant to baffle (21). I suggest that, at least in the case of Pinter criticism, the labels “modernist” and “postmodernist” seem practically interchangeable, and therefore constitute unworkable keywords for research, i.e., not helpful towards productive insights in the field of theatre and performance.
movements of the early twentieth century, whenever critics argue in favor of Pinter’s “modernist” style they tend to emphasize his breach with past dramatic practices. Highlighting the novelty of his work, they identify in his drama an exploration of time, memory, and language, as well as projections of individual consciousness that distinguish the “modernist” English novelists and poets (such as James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, and T. S. Eliot), without taking into account the antecedent, and largely international experiments in theatre and drama within those same areas, carried out by Symbolist thinkers and artists of the late nineteenth century. Further, and although some early Pinter critics recognize that the “theatre of the absurd” (to which his dramaturgy allegedly belongs) is the outcome of trends already apparent in the literature and theatre experiments of the historical avant-gardes, they mostly underscore the Expressionist and Surrealist influences, omitting the impact of Symbolism.

My dissertation is the first attempt at a sustained in-depth study that relates Pinter’s dramatic images and synesthetic landscapes to Symbolist theatre and theory. I build upon the work of scholarly precursors who have suggested that there are significant connections between the playwright’s dramaturgy and Symbolism, but whose insights in this direction have remained largely overlooked. Critical works by Katharine Worth, Bernard Dukore, and Margaret Rose have all placed Pinter in the Yeats/Maeterlinck “drama of the interior” tradition because of the musical quality of his dramas (rhythmic and associative patterning of images and sounds); the expression of the ineffable through silence; the use of stage-pictures to evoke patterns of interior life (in lieu of a psychological depiction of characters); and the blurring of boundaries between imaginary and real worlds. Throughout this dissertation I often cite passages of criticism

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on Pinter’s plays by authors other than the ones above mentioned, in which the latter discuss
traits of his dramaturgy that are manifestly Symbolist, although they do not articulate such an
aesthetic and/or theoretical connection. Since I propose to discover in Pinter’s theatre works
unexpected affinities with Symbolist theory and aesthetics, in each chapter of the dissertation I
activate an interdisciplinary “conversation” between the landscapes or areas of non-verbal
expression of Pinter’s plays, and landscapes in works by proto-Symbolist, Symbolist, and post-
Symbolist artists and thinkers.

Chapter One, “Landscape Theory in Theatre: Toward an Ecocentric and Synesthetic
Reading,” provides a review of my theoretical framework and methodology (landscape theory,
Symbolist theory, ecocriticism, phenomenology, and sensory analysis), and explains some key
concepts (micropolitics, synesthesia, and sensory *scapes*), so as to clarify the goal and design of
my research. Part I concerns a literature review of academic works done on space, place, and
landscape (specific to the field of theatre studies, and also interdisciplinary), that have
significantly explored such keywords. In Part II, I argue for an ecocentric reading of Pinter’s
dramatic landscapes that sensorially engages not only with the recurrent forms, images, rhythms,
and spatial patterns manifest in his dramaturgy, but also with the bodyscapes and psychic
ecology of his characters. This line of inquiry is pursued across the four chapters that follow, in
each of which I assess the sensory *scapes* in selected plays written by Pinter, and perform an
interdisciplinary dialogue with landscapes found in works by Symbolist and post-Symbolist
artists/thinkers, so as to reveal the micropolitical and ecocritical aspects of his theatre.

Chapter Two, “Pinter’s Dramatic Landscapes: A Symbolist Legacy,” extensively
examines the Symbolist qualities—both theoretical and aesthetic—of Pinter’s dramaturgy.
Symbolist aspects examined in this chapter include: the use of the stage as a monodramatic space
(or as a projection of individual consciousness); the fusion of imaginary and real worlds; the exploration of stasis; the motif of the double; the role of objects and scenic elements, and their ecocritical resonances; the action of silence, pauses, rhythms, and vibrations in their relation to Symbolist *soundscapes*; the use of ambiguity in its relation to Symbolist theory; and the micropolitical implications of *ghostscapes* and *deathscapes*. Such concepts are elucidated by the writings of Symbolists such as Stéphane Mallarmé, Rainer Maria Rilke, Maurice Maeterlinck, Valerii Briusov, António Patrício, Hugo von Hoffmansthal, and William Butler Yeats; as well as through paintings by Edvard Munch, Fernand Knopf, and Xavier Mellery. Although Symbolist traits may be found across Pinter’s oeuvre, I offer a more detailed explanation of their features as they occur in the following playtexts: *The Room* (1957), *A Slight Ache* (1958), *The Caretaker* (1959), *The Basement*, (1966), *No Man’s Land* (1974), and *A Kind of Alaska* (1982).

Chapter Three, “Time is Cyclical: Space Becomes All,” analyzes the sensory scapes found in selected plays by Pinter—*The Dwarfs* (1960), *The Collection* (1961), *Landscape* (1967), *Silence* (1968), *Old Times* (1970), *Betrayal* (1978), and *Remembrance of Things Past* (inspired by Marcel Proust’s novel, 2000)—in the light of French philosopher Henri Bergson’s theories of inner time. Instead of portraying the effects of a linear or “objective” clock time over his characters (as in dramatic realism), Pinter’s synesthetic landscapes offer a non-Euclidean space where the boundaries between objective and subjective events are either blurred or removed. His dramaturgy seems concerned with individual subjective time as it is *lived* (phenomenological), with the spatiotemporal circularity of past, present, and future, and with the way distinct human beings imaginatively re/create their own selves through life.

Chapter Four, “Apocalyptic Landscapes of Human-Engendered Horror,” compares the scapes of Pinter’s theatre (in *The Dumb Waiter*, 1957; *The Birthday Party*, 1957; *The Hothouse*,
1958; *Mountain Language*, 1988; *Party Time*, 1991; *Ashes to Ashes*, 1996; and *Celebration*, 2000), with those found in the “Decadent” fiction of Franz Kafka\(^\text{16}\) (*The Metamorphosis*, *The Trial*), and in the dystopian novels of Portuguese author José Saramago\(^\text{17}\) (*Blindness*, *All the Names*). Apocalyptic aspects examined in these mutual Symbolist landscapes include the depiction of humans as apathetic beings, automatons, or ciphers; the suggestion of a machine-like surround that converts figures/events into components/instances of its all-inclusive mechanism; the delineation of an outside natural environment that is as claustrophobic and physically damaged as the inside world; and an exploration of confined places that systematically suppress, but are nevertheless haunted by non-human worlds.

Chapter Five, “Unsustainable Homescapes,” explores how Pinter’s dystopian treatment of home resembles that of proto-Symbolist and Symbolist artworks, in aesthetic, micropolitical, and ecocritical terms. This chapter focuses on the negative ecological effects of a patriarchal system of moral values upon family and conjugal life, as expressed through the sensory landscapes of *A Night Out* (1959), *The Lover* (1962), *Tea Party* (1964), *The Homecoming* (1964), *Family Voices* (1980), and *Moonlight* (1993). As contemporary French philosopher Luce Irigaray’s critique of patriarchy suggests, a dwelling built on the negation of nature, or upon a denial of sexual difference, is devoid of alterity to the masculine norm, and inevitably becomes monological and authoritarian. In depicting hostile and abusive homescapes, Pinter utilizes techniques of “surreal” defamiliarization—chiefly brought about by his use of realistic surface


\(^{17}\) An important line of research which I would like to engage in following this dissertation concerns a more comprehensive investigation of the Symbolist resonances in Portuguese José Saramago’s latest fictional and dramatic works—in novels such as *The Year of the Death of Ricardo Reis* (1984), *The Stone Raft* (1986), *Blindness* (1995), *All the Names* (1997), *The Cave* (2001), and *Seeing* (2004); and in plays such as *In Nomine Dei* (1993).
details in the depiction of implausible and/or imaginary views—that are related to the Symbolists’ own (namely perceptible in the drama of Madame Rachilde).

An investigation of the Symbolist synesthetic landscapes of Pinter’s plays can disclose unexplored *ecocritical* and *micropolitical* resonances of his theatre for our times. Despite their distinct theoretical approaches, critics of Pinter’s theatre usually divide his works into three distinct phases: the first consisting of his early “comedies of menace,” in which the playwright “subverts” the realistic play; the second a middle period of “memory plays,” in which he develops a lyrical and static theatre; and the third a final phase of “political” plays, allegedly arising from the playwright’s newly acquired political consciousness during the Thatcher years. To the contrary, my investigation of landscapes in Pinter’s plays reveals the presence of political concerns throughout his oeuvre, thereby indicating a previously undetected consistency of his approach.

Ecocritically, Pinter’s theatre landscapes evoke a sense of warning against the end of “nature,” or against the ending of vital connections between human and extra-human realities. Space in Pinter’s plays is immanently expressive and productive of relations, rather than just a setting for human actions. Not only does it produce a material effect on the characters/bodies that inhabit it, but it also emanates from their inner imaginary energies. In the ethical line of Symbolist apocalyptic dramaturgy, Pinter’s plays present broken and catastrophic worlds brought about by uncontrolled human violence. Furthermore, his dramatic landscapes expose a concern with the ethical dimension of individuals, and with the ecology of their relationships within a commonly shared space. Accordingly, his sensory and aesthetic scapes reveal the significance of a combined ecology: mental, social, and environmental.
Chapter One

Landscape Theory in Theatre: Toward an Ecocentric and Synesthetic Reading

In the late twentieth century a critical approach to spatial notions has been prominently manifest in the fields of philosophy, geography, urban planning, literature, theatre, and performance, transforming the terms *space*, *place*, and *landscape* into keywords for research and discussion across many disciplines. This “spatial turn” seemingly relates to at least three major processes: the mass-scale migrations of human individuals and entire populations, both voluntary and enforced, with the ensuing crises of cultural identity and displacement; the shift from an Euclidean to a non-Euclidean paradigm of space-time; and the recently generalized recognition of an ecological interdependence between organic life forms and their surrounding environments or dwelling spaces.

In order to clarify why I have chosen to read the synesthetic landscapes of Harold Pinter’s theatre in the light of phenomenology, Symbolist theory and aesthetics, and sensory analysis, as well as demonstrate the validity of these theories and methods for the investigation of ecocritical and micropolitical resonances in his drama, in this chapter I want to start by situating my study in the context of recent academic works (not only specific to the field of

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18 In his influential text *Elements*, the Greek geometrician Euclid (c.300 B.C.E.) saw time and space as separate entities. Later, Isaac Newton viewed time and space as a series of containers. Kant argued that space and time are perceptions of the human mind: our own interiority is perceived as time, and all exteriority as space. More recently, Einstein’s theory of relativity has led to a major shift away from thinking of space and time as separate entities. Whereas Euclidean is a zero-curvature space in which parallel lines keep an even and constant distance between each other, a non-Euclidean geometry is pitted, pocked, and broken up, twisted, tangled, and intertwined. Euclid’s assumptions provided the basis for classical Western scientific notions of space, and even today “commonsense” experience remains under the influence of such assumptions. See David Abram, *The Spell of the Sensuous: Perception and Language in a More-Than-Human World* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1996).

19 Michel Foucault’s concept of “micropolitics” refers to networks of coercive power that operate at the “capillary” level of an individual’s body, desire, and subjectivity. Writing at a similar time than Foucault, Félix Guattari proposes a “micropolitics of desire” in which the micropolitical plane may also work as a space of “molecular” resistance to the “molar” (i.e. superstructural/macropolitical) commodification of desire. See *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, ed. Hubert L. Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1983); and Félix Guattari, *Soft Subversions: Texts and Interviews 1977-1985*, ed. Sylvère Lotringer, trans. David L. Sweet and Chet Wiener, et al. (New York: Semiotext(e), 1996).
theatre studies but also interdisciplinary) that have significantly explored the above mentioned spatial keywords.

I – Landscape, Space, and Place in Current Criticism

As acknowledged by critics from different fields, space and place are concepts that often intertwine, although the former is typically considered more abstract, and the latter more particular and associated with an actual site. In *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* geographer Yi-Fu Tuan defines place as a space that is endowed with value. Philosopher Edward Casey, in *The Fate of Place: A Philosophical History*, argues that place is not a stable entity, but part of something ongoing and dynamic. We understand the idea of space and place primarily because we inhabit them physically and mentally; but while place can be viewed as the room of a body, space gives room for a body. Place is viewed as defined, specific, occupied; whereas Space offers the potential for occupation, it is endowed with the quality of infiniteness. Ecofeminist Carol H. Cantrell adds that “place is where our embodied selves experience the world, and through which we receive the sources of energy and nurturance.”

Landscape interconnects with both space and place, since it suggests a framed or bounded view of space from a situated space, or place. The word in English derives from the Dutch *landtschap* and was first introduced in the sixteenth century as a technical term in painting, to refer to a picture representing natural inland scenery. Because it refers to a view, a prospect, or a vista, landscape as a concept implicates the incidence of a “gaze.” This gaze might correspond to a somewhat autonomous, subjectively felt/expressed, both psychic and corporeal view,

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21 Edward Casey, *The Fate of Place: A Philosophical History*, (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1997), 94, 117.
according to Romantic, Symbolist, and some Phenomenological theory; most current criticism, however, generally considers that landscape corresponds to a perspective that is always ideologically (therefore culturally and socially) produced.

As a concept, landscape has often been debated in geography and other related social sciences, as well as in literary and art theory within a long tradition of criticism that examines the signification of nature imagery in texts/artworks. In the field of Theatre Studies, however, landscape as a theoretical keyword was only recently introduced through a collection of essays entitled *Land/Scape/Theater*. According to editors Una Chaudhuri and Elinor Fuchs, landscape is a mediating term between space and place:

> If *space* is too unfeatured, *place* is overly particular. Landscape is more grounded and available to visual experience than space, but more environmental and constitutive of the imaginative order than place. It is *inside* space, one might say, but *contains* place. (…) [Landscape] can therefore more fully represent the complex spatial mediations within modern theatrical form, and between modern theater and the world.

For Chaudhuri and Fuchs, landscape theory can open up “a new conceptual space” in the field of theatre studies in three significant ways: by reflecting upon the implications of the recent *spatial turn*; by exploring the role of spatial experience in constructing *cultural meaning*; and by focusing on the presence of the *non-human order* in theatre/drama/performance. The essays in the collection reflect these concerns, and I want to briefly refer a few here.

Elinor Fuchs focuses her study on how landscape gradually became foregrounded in relation to character in twentieth-century U.S. drama. Basing her analysis on three co-existing North-American *land myths*—wilderness, utilitarian ground, and pastoral land (a ‘middle

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24 In the field of geography notable works on landscape include Douglas Porteous’s *Landscapes of the Mind: Worlds of Sense and Metaphor*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990).
landscape’ seeking a balance between civilization and nature, which finds its expression in the suburban backyard)—she argues that whereas in Arthur Miller’s works landscape is mimetic and stands back from character as picture, in Sam Shepard’s drama it becomes an outward presentation of an inner state, a tragic figure in itself.  

Natalie Schmitt focuses on the actual sites that inspired W.B. Yeats’s plays, and argues that there is a relationship between these real settings (and of their association to Irish myth and folklore) and Yeats’s Symbolist dramatic form. Linking Antonin Artaud’s theatrical landscapes to the primitivist aesthetics of the first decades of the twentieth century, Julie Peters claims that the forms of his “metaphysical theatre” emerged from the landmarks and patterns of the Mexican Sierra Madre, and due to a desire of recapturing a pre-textual essence of culture. Jane Bowers claims that, by calling her plays landscapes, Gertrude Stein is drawing an analogy to a genre of art, the landscape painting. Bowers coins Stein’s compositions for the theatre “lang-scapes” since Stein paints with words that are related to each other spatially, and in so doing turns the writing of a play into a performance event. Joseph Roach argues that the landscape of Samuel Beckett’s Waiting for Godot is desolate but not empty; it is haunted by a cultural memory that has been “deferred, displaced, even disavowed,” by history’s ghosts or dead voices, namely those of the million or more Irish people that starved to death during the potato famine of 1845-51. Daniel Gerould suggests that Symbolist aesthetics’ equivalency between landscape topography and the inner

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30 Jane Palatini Bowers, “The Composition That All the World Can See: Gertrude Stein’s Landscapes,” in *Land/Scape/Theater*, 121-44.
31 Joseph Roach, “‘All the Dead Voices:’ The Landscape of Famine in ‘Waiting for Godot,’” in *Land/Scape/Theater*, 84-93.
world of the psyche led to innovative reconfigurations of stage space in both drama and theatre performance.  

Although landscape as a theoretical keyword is practically new to theatre criticism, its two immediately connective terms—*space* and *place*—have been comprehensively explored. Consequently, I consider that an understanding of the theoretical ways in which these two spatial terms have been approached is crucial in order to contextualize my own perspective on landscape in the present study. In general terms, the concepts of space and place have been envisioned in three distinct ways: as stable signifying systems; as dynamic material texts with historical, cultural, and political implications; and as perceptually embodied entities that are subjectively and sensorially experienced. The contrast among these spatial perspectives may be clearly perceived through an example of three texts that endorse correspondingly distinct spatial modes in theatre.

Peter Brook’s influential book *The Empty Space* (1968) posits a binary distinction between “rough theatre” (physical, popular, grotesque, of social thematic), and “holy theatre” (idealistic, elitist, hieratic, of metaphysical overtones), claiming that in order to overcome a “dead theatre” the ideal form is that of Shakespeare’s theatre, an unreconciled combination of esoteric and popular at one and the same time. The ideal spatial model is that of the Elizabethan theatre, an interior set-up of a practically bare stage surrounded on three sides by spectators of all social classes, and therefore a place of social debate. For Brook, space in theatre is inseparable from the presence of the actor, for it is the actor that energizes the space, that fills its “emptiness.” Thus what gives “meaning” to space in the theatre—which otherwise would be an

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“empty” expanse—is the human interaction between performers and spectators, which is generated by the actor’s performance.

In *Space and Time in Epic Theatre: The Brechtian Legacy* (2000), Sarah Bryant-Bertail considers that in Brechtian epic theory—as exemplified by Brecht’s own directorial practice, and also through the stagings of epics by Erwin Piscator, Peter Stein, Bharucha, and Ariane Mnouchkine—space calls attention to itself as “constructed space.” Arguing that there is an affinity between epic theatre and the principles of semiotics, Bryant-Bertail contrasts the static areas and centralized stage of “dramatic theatre” to the “dynamic spatiality in process” and “montage space” of the epic mise-en-scene, which “allows more freedom and mobility of gaze.” Whereas “dramatic theatre” aims at enveloping the spectator in an illusory space-world, epic theatre holds up its sign systems for semiotic analysis and draws attention to its own process of temporal-spatial codification.33 Through a semiotic presentation, epic theatre demonstrates how space and time are but “the constructs of historically specific cultures, classes, and eras,”34 and therefore stages “history” as changeable.

In two recent articles that focus on space and place in the theatre (published in 2000 and 2003 respectively),35 Dean Wilcox argues in favor of those theatre works that “engage with space as space,” or with “space as given” in a phenomenological manner. Wilcox considers that most theatre works charge stage space with an energy derived from a locating and mimetic narrative of “place.” According to him, a different type of theatre is manifest in the works of Oskar Schlemmer, Samuel Beckett, and Richard Foreman, all of which show that space has a

34 Ibid., 11.
substance and presence of its own, and that it can be experienced independently of narrative value (i.e., without a conversion of space into place). For Wilcox, a conventional type of theatre/drama/performance grounds the theatrical space within the narrative action, endows it with narrative content, and subsumes space into place; whereas a different type of theatre embraces space in a phenomenological manner. Wilcox argues that although space *appears* abstract, unfamiliar, and undifferentiated, it has a presence of its own that can be charged or energized through relationships among concrete stage elements.

These texts by Brook, Bryant-Bertail, and Wilcox share a focus on two major categories of space—namely *theatre space* (place of performance), and *theatrical space* (space/place produced through performance)—and discuss their significance in the audience’s reception process during the event of the performance. In effect, they share this interest with most of the critical works that reflect on questions of space and place in the theatre, as I will explore below.

In terms of *theatre space*, Bryant-Bertail seemingly considers that different types of playhouse are suitable for the performance of epic theatre; Brook values a thrust stage and interior architecture that offers multiple audience sight lines and a relation of proximity between performer and spectator; and Wilcox seemingly endorses the “centralized” proscenium stage (favored by Schlemmer, Beckett, and Foreman), and the ensuing separation between stage and audience. In terms of stage setting or *theatrical space* the three texts all seem to agree in favor of an indexical, non-mimetic, non-representational spatial mode, in contrast to an illusionistic one. Further, the three perspectives exposed by Brook, Bryant-Bertail, and Wilcox all seem to endorse open *structures of time-space* in drama and performance, as opposed to the closed structures of
time and place of modern theatre’s most successful aesthetic—realism—which seek to bring fictional presentation as close as possible to “empirical” or normative reality.\(^{36}\)

Where the three texts actually differ is in their theoretical approach to space. Whereas Brook’s text envisions space as a unifying system that communicates meanings, Bryant-Bertail views space as an ideological construct that can become perceptible through the disjunctures and contradictions of epic theatre, and Wilcox wants space in the theatre to be experienced as an element in itself, “space as given.” Such differences in spatial understanding can perhaps be summed up through three correspondingly distinct questions: 1) is space/landscape a signifying system?; or 2) is space/landscape a cultural construct, a “text,” or a discursive category of “other”?; or 3) is space/landscape a substance/material presence that can be felt or experienced?

Across some major critical works on space and place in the field of theatre studies, I have discerned three predominant lines of approach to these keywords. The first is a structuralist approach based on a linguistic model; it envisions space as language or as signifying system, and often adopts semiotics to interpret how space communicates or produces meaning.\(^{37}\) A second approach, poststructuralist (postmodern and/or deconstructionist), reflects upon space as a social/cultural/ideological construct; although based on the incompetence of the linguistic model, this perspective nevertheless affirms that all—including spatial notions—is textuality and

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\(^{36}\) As Manfred Pfister observes in *The Theory and Analysis of Drama* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1988), Shakespeare’s theatre offers panoramic and expansive structures of time and space, instead of making drama “credible” through the unities of time/place/action, therefore making the audience aware of the fictiosity of the stage. Brecht’s theatre – like other types of epic theatre – often implies a “narrative function” and exposes a discontinuity of time and space. In Oskar Schlemmer’s, Beckett’s, and Foreman’s works the conception of space is abstract and stylized, and the notion of time is usually neutral and indefinite.

\(^{37}\) By positing an undivided sign, in the Saussurian sense of the union of signifier and signified, Semiotic readings are dependent upon the invocation of specific signifieds, equating representation with signification. This simple one-to-one relationship of signifier to signified is disrupted by Jacques Derrida (in such works as *Of Grammatology*), among other poststructuralist thinkers. More recent semiotic analyzes usually acknowledge that the relation between signifier and signified is arbitrary. Nevertheless they assume that sign systems are stable in their study of structural relations within objects and events. See Kaja Silverman, *The Subject of Semiotics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983); Catherine Belsey, *Critical Practice* (New York: Routledge, 2002).
A third approach is based on an extra-linguistic model that affirms the materiality of space within a phenomenological, and/or feminist perspective (the latter inspired by the pre-linguistic concepts of Julia Kristeva and Luce Irigaray). These three categories, as all theoretical perspectives, are evidently not “pure,” and there is often a crossing or interpenetration between them. Moreover, there is what I consider to be a fourth conjoining perspective—often found in works of cultural theory and interdisciplinary criticism—that ensues from a dynamic combination of the above mentioned approaches, since it reflects upon space both as individually felt/perceived, and as social/cultural construct.

Prior to the demise of structuralism (or to the critique of stable systems of meaning enacted by post-structuralism), studies on place and space in the theatre from a semiotic perspective tended to focus on the location, configuration, and dynamics of both the theatre space and the theatrical space; as well as on their inscription in drama, and interaction during the social event of the performance. Accordingly, in *Places of Performance: The Semiotics of* Deconstruction questions the underlying metaphysics of meaning in texts. Texts are made up of traces or of deferred meanings, there is no fixed locus of meaning. Meaning is a passing product of words or signifiers, shifting and unstable, part-present and part-absent, the effect of a wider and deeper history of language of the unconscious, of social institutions, and of cultural practices. Throughout the Western philosophical tradition, writing has been considered a derivative form of speech. Derrida argues that writing is prior to utterance, that the self is written (i.e., it is not autonomous). Writing constructs and marks subjects; it is not something that they execute. By suggesting that all is textuality, and that “writing” constructs subjects, Deconstruction implies the conceptual disappearance of extra-linguistic “presence,” as well as of any subjective agency. See Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (Minneapolis, MN: Minnesota University Press, 2008).

Phenomenology stems from the Greek word *phainomenon* (from *phainein*, to show) meaning “that which shows itself,” in the sense of the revealed, the visible, which is manifest prior to interpretation. In *Bodied Spaces* Stanton Garner defines Phenomenology as the study of givenness, “of the world as it is lived rather than the world as it is objectified, abstracted, and conceptualized” (26).

Julia Kristeva’s concept of the semiotic *chora* is that of a pre-Oedipal and pre-linguistic space that provides a position for everything that comes into being. It is the subject’s point of origin (synonymous with a womb where the child’s drives are directed towards the mother. It is “semiotic” in the sense of existing at a pre-linguistic level prior to the linguistic structuring of the “symbolic” law of the father; and because it returns as a semiosis of poetic language.

Luce Irigaray’s work explores the possibility of mapping out a female imaginary and an ethics of psychosexual difference, denouncing both the monosexual/monologic patriarchal culture and the poststructuralist assumption that masculinity and femininity are but social and cultural constructs. Irigaray's books contain appreciative discussions of phenomenological philosophers, such as Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Jean-Paul Sartre, Emmanuel Levinas (*An Ethics of Sexual Difference* 1984, *Sexes and Genealogies* 1993), and Martin Heidegger (*The Forgetting of Air: In Martin Heidegger* 1983).
Theatre Architecture, Marvin Carlson argues that the performance-audience interaction should be seen as an event embedded in a complex spatial matrix that frames the theatre experience by providing a variety of “messages” for those who utilize it (performers, organizers, and spectators). Carlson examines how ideas of theatre across history may be read in the text of theatre architecture (size, shape, exterior and interior decoration, articulation and hierarchy of interior spaces), and of its placement or built location within the larger urban space of the city. The theatre building with its surrounding context and interior organization is accordingly envisioned as a signifier that emits various signifieds.

In a similar vein, the essays that comprise The Theatrical Space, edited by James Redmond, concern either different historical forms of theatre space; or different historical forms of theatrical space, set up through dramatic conventions, set design, and directing practice. Concerning theatre space, some essays analyze how spatial characteristics of theatre buildings and/or sites are reflected in, or transformed by, drama throughout different historical periods. In relation to theatrical space, the critical discussion often verges on questions of scenery, decoration, iconology; on the shaping and transformation of stage space through sound effects, lighting, and stage machinery; on spatial activation by actors (movements, acting styles, etc.), and on the relationship between seen and unseen, or between the on-stage and off-stage areas of performance. Within a structuralist perspective, this collection typically debates questions of space terminology. For example, whereas Michael Issacharoff examines the differences between diegetic (described) and mimetic (shown) spaces of the theatrical space, Hanna Scolnicov

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45 Essays by Christopher Baugh, Barbara Cooper, Stephanie Arnold, Niall Slater, Hanna Scolnicov, and Michael Issacharoff.
distinguishes the *theatrical space within* (a fictional onstage space concretely perceived by the audience) from the *theatrical space without* (a fictional offstage space, implied in the text, and imaginatively conceived by the audience).

In her own book-length study on *Woman’s Theatrical Space*, Hanna Scolnicov associates the female gender with “interior space” itself, due to women’s historical confinement within the house. She therefore finds that changing spatial conventions in the theatre express corresponding changing attitudes in society toward woman and her sexuality. In her evolutionary account of Western drama Scolnicov argues that the house interior space is associated to the woman figure in Greek tragedy, Roman comedy, Renaissance drama, and Baroque comedy. Gradually, however, men start sharing women’s interior theatre space—a development that reaches a climax with Ibsen, when woman leaves the house. Since in late twentieth century drama (such as in Harold Pinter’s and Samuel Beckett’s works) the house interior is undifferentiated in terms of gender, Scolnicov concludes that women’s special links with space have ceased: “space is no longer a woman.”

Studies on place and space in the theatre from a poststructuralist perspective usually take up Jacques Derrida’s strategy of deconstruction, as well as his critique of logocentrism, of the metaphysics of presence, and of such categories as the subject, representation, and history. Accordingly, most of the essays that comprise *Space and the Postmodern Stage*, assert that there is a striking difference in terms of stage space between a modern staging/design characterized by a singular quality and displaying a unity of metaphorical images; and a postmodern staging/design that brings together a collage of quotations, and elements of different

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47 Ibid., 154.
48 Irene Eynat-Confino and Eva Sormova eds., *Space and the Postmodern Stage* (Prague: Divadelni ustav Theatre Institute, 2000).
styles, resulting in an ambiguous and hybrid stage picture. According to most of the essays in this anthology, postmodern stage space is characterized by superficial decorativeness, narcissistic self-reference, lack of unity and coherence, and indeterminacy of meaning. Differently from modern theatre, which is based on genres and foregrounds the presence of the author/playwright, postmodern theatre is marked by a new “écriture,” by a hybridization of texts and images that juxtapose and result in a hypertext, within a privileging of spatialization over temporality. Thus, in contemporary theatre performance the real is mediatized (becoming the absence of presence), and the body becomes “posthuman.”

In *Death of Character*, Elinor Fuchs argues that the postmodern does not refer to a style but rather to a cultural condition, a “legitimation crisis”—the crisis of the subject, who no longer stands for an essence, a presence, or a position. When theatre is no longer of character (since all is “writing” and the human being or character becomes just another sign), we encounter the *landscape stage*, or “a thing held in full view the whole time,” in Gertrude Stein’s words. Consequently, the spatial principle replaces the temporal principle of the dramatic mode, and theatre performance becomes interested in the field, the terrain, the environment. In response to the crisis of subjectivity, the new postmodern theatre foregrounds spectacle; it tends towards a visual dramaturgy, and becomes a *textscape* (i.e., language as an exhibited object).

Complementing Fuchs’s thesis, Hans-Thies Lehmann depicts *Postdramatic Theatre* (i.e., a “dedramatized” theatre beyond representation) primarily as a response to a new scientific and technological paradigm that affects the configuration of time, space, and “mediality” of theatre. Postdramatic theatre emerges in a mediatized society, due to the accelerated technologization and spread of the media in everyday life that flourished in the late 1970s, along with a

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transformation of the human body from “destiny” to a programmable “techno-body.” Lehmann argues that this “anthropological mutation” leads to a theatre characterized by a low density of signs, muteness and silence, and an *empty stage* space (as evidenced in the stagings of Robert Wilson, Jan Fabre, and Peter Handke). In some cases it leads to a plethora of signs, a multitude of “rhizomatic connections.” In any case, space in the postdramatic theatre has no hierarchy, causality, unity or meaning; it is a place of traces or intertexts.

From a phenomenological perspective, studies on place and space in the theatre tend to emphasize a phenomenal experience of space through an embodied subjectivity unrelated to psychology. In *Great Reckonings in Little Rooms*, Bert O. States views Artaud’s theatre as “phenomenological,” since it seeks to retrieve a “naïve perception of the thing” before it is defined by language (i.e., a pre-linguistic or extra-linguistic perception). According to States, theatre—through performance—is a site of sensory engagement with the inanimate, where objects become theatricalized by being placed into “an intentional space.” A phenomenological approach to the theatre focuses on the theatre’s essential materials—bodies, objects, settings, speech, sound, movement, etc.—and “wraps” its analysis in their presence, liveliness, and corporeality. States calls attention to theatre’s duality, of being present and yet absent, of being real and yet fictional/unreal. For him theatre is the space where the real is both itself, self-given; and presented as image or imaginary/fictional space. As such, theatre brings us spectators into phenomenal contact with what exists and with what it is possible to do with what exists.

In contrast to Fuch’s suggestion of a “death of character,” in *Empty Figure on an Empty Stage*, Les Essif reinstates the significance of subjective interiority, and claims that a new type of *hypersubjective* character has emerged in the second half of the twentieth century in the

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52 Les Essif, *Empty Figure on an Empty Stage: The Theatre of Samuel Beckett and His Generation* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2001).
“nouveau théâtre” (French language theatre of the 1950s-1970s). For Essif, the empty space of this new dramaturgy stands for an extra-linguistic realm, the inside of the psyche. It relates to a space that is non-representational and non-referential, and to a realm of hypersubjectivity not contaminated by psychology. Whereas scholars of Beckett have read the emptiness in his works as a sign of existential nihilism or “absence,” Essif regards Beckett’s empty stage as standing for the empty space of the minds of his characters, within a continuous spatial embedding that creates the effect of a surrealist “mise-en-abyme.” Essif claims that this spatial exteriorization of the inner life of the character, this theatre of the mind, actually started with Romanticism, and was subsequently explored by Symbolism, Expressionism, Surrealism, and by the theories of Artaud. Thus, rather than refusing the Romantic concept of outside/inside, Essif reinstates the significance of a subjective interiority, and of a “metaphysical-phenomenological” perspective of spatial concepts. According to him, the focus of late twentieth century theatre has shifted to the inner cosmos, which, like the outer cosmos, is characterized primarily by extra-linguistic vacuity (or chaos).

In *Bodied Spaces: Phenomenology and Performance in Modern Drama*,53 Stanton Garner seeks to uncover through phenomenological strategies the relationship between the human body and its environment (or immediate spatiality) that is latent within late twentieth century playtexts (by Beckett, Shepard, Pinter, among others). According to Garner, the dramatic text is a valuable means of access to the spatial dialogue between the characters’ bodies and the objects that articulate their perceptual fields, through its directions for setting, speech, action, light, sound, movement, handling and presence of objects, and suggested bodily configurations. Garner

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further argues that phenomenology has the potential of offering a return of both experience and subjectivity to the discourse of space and body in the theatre.

Some critical works on spatial notions in the theatre propose a combination of theoretical/methodological approaches. In *Space in Performance: Making Meaning in the Theatre*, for example, Gay McAuley proposes to combine a semiotic analysis with a phenomenological approach that recalls Bert O. States’s suggestion of a “binocular vision” of space. Her systematization of spaces is so exhaustive, however, that it seems to invoke predominantly a semiotic approach, such as when she analyzes the two major spaces that interact in the theatre process (the *fictional space* and the *presentational space*), and subdivides them into multiple analytical sub-categories so as to demonstrate “the ways in which space functions.” According to McAuley, the most important *spatial fact* in theatre—which she locates at the heart of theatre semiosis—is the constant dual presence of the presentational and the fictional worlds created. The space the spectator is watching is always both *stage space* and *fictional space*, even in postmodern performance practices that challenge this fictional framing. From this duality she derives the concept of “denegation” (adopted from French theatre semiotician Anne Ubersfeld’s works) to describe the process through which spectators in the theatre both “believe” and “disbelieve.”

As I mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, there is yet (and at least) a fourth perspective of critical convergence—often found in interdisciplinary critical works—that reflects upon space both as subjectively or individually felt/perceived, and as social/cultural/ideological construct. These works tend to investigate questions of territoriality and boundaries, of cultural

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belonging and circulation, of difference and otherness, and of historical memory as tied to place, within a concept of space as ideological discourse, or as structure of power/knowledge.

Such interdisciplinary works seem evidently influenced by the theoretical writings of Michel Foucault and Henri Lefebvre, who are both key figures in the cultural investigation of spatial practices and spatial meanings. Writing at a similar time as Foucault but within a Marxist dialectical perspective, Lefebvre argues in *The Production of Space* (originally published in 1974, available in English translation in 1991) that space is socially produced through language and other signs—visual, gestural, architectural, literary, and so on: “space is a means of control and hence of domination, of power.”55 Space is both a structure that affects the social (through the politics of space, such as that exercised by urbanism over the spaces of consumption and habitat), and an expression of social relations. “(Social) space is a (social) product,” therefore every society produces “its own space.”56

Foucault’s concept of space as a structure of knowledge (explored in works such as *Discipline and Punish, Madness and Civilization*, and *History of Sexuality*) derives from a post-structuralist perspective that views knowledge (including self-knowledge) as determined by the subject’s position in, and by her/his relationship to, a particular spatial environment. Not only is our knowledge situated but space is always embedded in a social matrix—and therefore it is gendered, sexed, class-demarcated, racialized, and medicalized. Since Foucault’s structures of knowledge are also structures of power, space in his works is usually envisioned as a means of social control, through the discipline and surveillance of individual subjects. Consequently, critical texts inspired by Foucault’s theories often tend to textualize subjectivities and articulate them in relation to spatial terms such as zones, sites, centers, borders, and margins.

56 Ibid., 31.
Such is the case of Joseph Roach’s study, *Cities of the Dead*, which focuses on two urban spaces of the “circum-Atlantic world” (New Orleans and London) that make visible the play of cultural identity and difference. Following Schechner’s concept of performance as “restored behavior,” Roach argues that disparate kinds of performance, both written and non-written, are ways of restoring memory—the “dead,” or history not remembered. For Roach, just as modernity has separated the dead from the spaces of the living, it has also replaced environments of memory (oral and corporeal retentions of traditional cultures) with places of memory such as archives, monuments, and theme parks. Nonetheless, certain urban spaces/environments—such as the urban cemeteries in New Orleans—are haunted by cultural memories that can be activated through performance. Geographically located at the margins of the city’s center, the cemeteries are places segregated from the living, “outside of all places” (heterotopic places in Foucauldian terms), but sites of cultural self-invention through rites and rituals (vortices of behavior).

Una Chaudhuri’s *Staging Place: Geography of Modern Drama* proposes a geography of theatre instead of a history, since according to her one of the most crucial contemporary critical projects on space is the *recovery of place*, or of *platiality*. For Chaudhuri, modern drama is above all a discourse about place. As of the late nineteenth century, modern drama has grounded its meanings into two tropes of place: 1) the trope of home, which is a site of identity but also a site that denies difference, thus a potential prison; and 2) the trope of exile, which implies loss and separation, but also endows the characters with a distanced perspective and self-realization. From a tension between these two ambivalent spatial tropes emerges what Chaudhuri calls a *geopathology*, i.e. the sense of ill-placement defining every character and relationship,

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the sense of place as problematic. Chaudhuri claims that geopathologies are basically caused by a deeply felt alienation of human beings from nature, or a “dispossession” of nature (most apparent in the plays by Chekhov and Ibsen). Around mid-century, she argues, the dominant trope of place becomes that of homecoming, except that there is no recuperation possible either of home or of nature. In postmodern contemporary drama the figure/image of America is used as a vehicle for both a critique and a revisioning of place. America stands for a betrayal of place (production of sameness, imperial homogeneity, as in the “Great Hole of History” of Susan Lori-Parks’s *The America Play*); but is also associated with the challenge of multiculturalism and a celebration of placelessness (as in Tony Kushner’s *Angels in America*).

Questions of *platiality* are markedly emphasized in studies of space/place written from a feminist perspective. As manifest in critical works written mostly by women, the spatial debate within feminism reflects a particular concern with place as identity, and with making meaning of space, of territory, and of land—which clearly distances them from a “pure” poststructuralist or deconstructionist stance.

Inspired by the feminist theories of Luce Irigaray, in *Embracing Space* Kerstin Shands contrasts two contrasting spatial metaphors that have recurred across the three historical waves of Feminism—the topophilic “embracing” space (from *topophilia*, a term coined by geographer Yi-Fu Tuan, to refer to an affective attachment between humans and places), related to the house space and body interiority; and the hypertransgressive “bracing” space of mobility, which valorizes speed, stress, and instability.59 Shands argues that the feminized space of the house is a dwelling place analogous to that of the female body (related to the inside/outside landscapes of the vulva, the vagina, and the womb), and may be charged with an upturned sense of power,

linked to liberation. She thus calls for a feminism that demystifies *patriarchal spatial constructs*, and empowers a feminine spatial rhetoric related to concepts of rest, immobility, dwelling, house, cave, grotto, etc. According to Shands, the feminist topophilic impulse turns “inward” to primordial and pre-discursive time-spaces—approaching Kristeva’s concept of the semiotic *chora*, of a pre-Oedipal physical space. The feminist embracing impulse searches for a center, a place, an identity, and a wholeness; whereas the hypertransgressive impulse (which Shands claims is predominant in poststructuralist feminism) negates place (associated with referential closure), turns outward, and is concerned with margins, the excentric, and the transgressive.

Like Shands, Marzena Grzegorczyk focuses on actual sites/places that “attract,” or become affective, by being lived and produced by human beings as dwellers in space, while introducing two keywords of analysis: 1) *implacement*; and 2) *private topographies*. Implacement refers to the process of converting space (abstract, indefinite, undifferentiated) into place (defined; differentiated). Private topographies are territories endowed with a meaning by the individual, resulting from a co-production between subject and space. These territories become spaces of belonging, of presence and agency, and consequently raise issues of boundaries, and of control.

Viv Gardner draws a powerful argument against Kerstin Shands’s feminist “inward” impulse, when she claims that individual perceptions of space are shaped by one’s *mobility* and *freedom of gaze*, making behavior and space mutually dependent. This is particularly manifest in the social maps of men and women, which are strikingly distinct on account of their gendered differences in mobility. Santa Arias and Mariselle Meléndez in “Space and the Rhetorics of

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Power” similarly argue that space is gendered, and that women have been relegated to the domestic space in order to limit their mobility and agency in the public space. Yet they argue that from these same points of location, women have also been able to define themselves and transgress the spatial divisions imposed upon them.

As manifest in the different works mentioned, space and place are significant keywords in current critical discourse, and give rise to many productive discussions, whether they are envisioned as language/signifying systems, as texts/écriture, or as embodied entities/substances. The same can be said of landscape, which according to Chaudhuri may be characterized by “an underlying tension between thing and idea, between matter and meaning, place and ideology,” and has therefore produced, through critical studies, at least “ten views” of the term: “as habitat, as artifact, as system, as problem, as wealth, as ideology, as history, as place, [and] as aesthetic.” Having overviewed academic works (not only specific to the field of theatre studies but also interdisciplinary) that have significantly explored spatial concepts, I will now elucidate my perspective of the term landscape, as well as the reading strategies that I will use to explore the suggested landscapes/images/spaces in Harold Pinter’s plays.

University Press, 2000), 25-45. In her essay on London’s West End during the late nineteenth-century, Gardner observes that even though women’s freedom to circulate in this geographical/architectural space became real, their mobility was achieved through the creation of private, “domesticated” and “feminized” spaces within the existing public space. Thus, in contrast to the visible male spectator that engaged in many aspects of the public sphere, woman became an “invisible spectatrice.”


Ibid., 27, note 14.
II - Toward an Ecocentric and Synesthetic Reading of Landscape

A) Ecocentric Phenomenological Experiences of Space/Landscape

Although the above mentioned approaches to spatial notions are theoretically distinct (linguistic, post-linguistic, extra-linguistic), all seem to agree that space, place, and landscape as critical terms cannot be considered neutral or inert, but should rather be regarded as both determining factors and open-ended processes, co-produced by those who inhabit or view them. Further, some of the approaches connect the debate on space, place, and landscape to questions of environment. This relates to what Chaudhuri and Fuchs assert in Land/Scape/Theater when they argue that “the nonhuman order should acquire a presence in considerations of dramatic form and meaning,” thus pointing toward a crucial link between landscape theory and ecocriticism.

As I mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, this link is extremely relevant for our times, given that we are currently witnessing a generalized recognition of the interdependence between organic life and space, which should call for the activation of post-anthropocentric ties to an environment that is also made up of non-human beings and entities.

What strikes me, therefore, is that apart for some interdisciplinary critical works and a few spatial studies inspired by existentialist phenomenology, most structuralist, poststructuralist, and phenomenological perspectives on space, place, and landscape seem tacitly anthropocentric. In humanist trends of phenomenology spatial perception is centered on the human body; in structuralist interpretations space is read as a signifying system of signs resembling that of human language; and in poststructuralist approaches, space/place/landscape are seen as ideological constructs of a fundamentally human culture.

Michel Foucault argues that “A whole history remains to be written of spaces—which would at the same time be the history of powers—from the great strategies of geo-politics to the

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little tactics of the habitat, institutional architecture from the classroom to the design of hospitals, passing via economic and political installations.” For Foucault space has been treated as a dead, fixed, and immobile entity, due to Western history’s obsession with time (or with temporal tropes such as development, suspension, crises, cycles). Although I do not dispute Foucault’s proposition, such a history of spaces, if ever accomplished, would still be an insufficient account within a holistic view of space, landscape, and place that also includes the dynamic materiality of a non-human order. For Foucault—as for most structuralist and poststructuralist thinkers—the concept of space is always and exclusively tied to human development. As a result, landscape is considered to be an ideological and cultural construct, a “way of seeing” conditioned in its framing of space by social structures. Further, in such thinkers’ approach to landscape there is always an emphasis upon seeing and visuality, with an implied downgrading of other cognition channels (an aspect to which I will return below). Since in most of these views landscape is never free from cultural coding, and “land” seems to have lost its presence to become but an “essentialist” notion, the term “landscape” might as well be replaced by “culturescape.”

A concept of culture exclusively concerned with human development proceeds from, and is usually tied to, a dualistic vision of culture/nature. This dualistic ideology of separation started in the modern age with the Cartesian definition of “culture” as the opposite of “nature,” to arrive at the notion of nature as fabrication or at the postmodern concept that there is no such thing as “nature,” since there is nothing outside the text of culture. Thus, it rather seems, as Terry Eagleton observes in After Theory, that much contemporary postmodern criticism that typically only emphasizes cultural contexts and frameworks, has replaced an old kind of essentializing notion (nature) with another (culture):

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Instead of doing what comes naturally, we do what comes culturally. Instead of following Nature, we follow Culture. Culture is a set of spontaneous habits so deep that we can’t even examine them. And this, among other things, conveniently insulates them from criticism. (. . .) Culture thus becomes the new Nature, which can no more be called into question than a waterfall. Naturalizing things gives way to culturalizing them. Either way, they come to appear inevitable.67

In every cultural explanation there is always a political viewpoint, as well as a production of historical narrative, even if these are not acknowledged or made explicit (in which case they seemingly assume an “anti-theory” stance in the words of Eagleton). In this sense, I suggest that anthropocentric cultural readings—because of their conception of culture as the totality of social human practices that make up a human community, and a human everyday life; because of the way they explain concepts and artworks through the anthropocentric cultural climates in which they were created, and as shaped by the social forces of human ethnicity, race, class, and gender; and because they often contextualize cultural products in terms of an unquestioned progressively linear human historical time—mostly work within, or fundamentally endorse, the “mechanical” Western humanist paradigm of knowledge.

As David Abram observes,68 the first assumption of the “mechanical philosophy” initiated by René Descartes is that nonhuman matter has no life or creativity of its own; the second assumption is that if the earth can indeed be described as a “machine,” then it functions according to a set of predictable and fixed rules and structures that it itself did not generate, which implies that it was constructed from “outside” by an inventor, maker, or builder (God, in a religious perspective; Humanity, in a secular view).69 In its time, the Cartesian mechanical

69In “Some Principles of Ecocriticism” (The Ecocriticism Reader, 1996) William Howarth notes that classical scholars sustained an equity of body and earth by reading or mapping them “as analogous realms, using theoria and investigium (speculating and tracking), to define the limits of scientia (knowledge).” (71) With the publication of Descartes’s Meditations in 1641, material reality started being envisioned as a mechanical realm with a determinate structure, whose laws of operation may be discovered through mathematical operations and measurements. Thus, a
philosophy of science entailed a scission with (and indeed a persecution of) the practice of an organicist experimental science by “natural magicians” and “alchemists” who experienced nature as a complex, animate, and sensitive organism, and who “viewed the material world, and indeed matter itself, as a locus of subtle powers and immanent forces.” Contrastingly, “by presenting nature as an assemblage of working parts that have no internal relation to each other—a set of parts, that is, that can be readily taken apart or put back together,” the mechanical paradigm “ensures that the human researcher has a divine mandate to experiment upon, to operate upon, to manipulate earthly nature in any manner that he or she sees fit,” and therefore to put the world to use for exclusively human needs. Abram notes that the concept of “mechanism” gained historical ascendancy and eventually became a central tenet of modern sciences, both “pure” and “social,” leading to the assumption that the nonhuman material world is a determinate object incapable of reciprocity and response, and to increasing claims that all phenomena (including social ones) may be explained and mapped through quantifiable and measurable “facts.”

In the same vein, I argue that an anthropocentric cultural reading of landscape tends to downgrade all traces of the organic/biological in the human, as well as the material agency and dynamic presence of an extra-human world. By distancing itself from all organic interaction it is often accompanied by a “post-organic” stance that celebrates human “progress” and history as a continuous onward movement towards general improvement through increased industrialization or technological innovation (resulting in a deification of the future), and by a narrative of dichotomy was established between “mechanical” unthinking matter (animals, plants, minerals, and the human body), and pure thinking mind (of humans, and God).

70 In pre- and early modern Europe, many practitioners of such an organicist experimental science were women. In the Cartesian age they were demonized, and executed. Other “natural magicians” include (among some currently undisputed scientists) Marsilio Ficino (1433-1499, founder of the Florentine Academy, and the first translator of Plato’s works into Latin; Paracelsus (1493-1541); Giordano Bruno (1548-1600); and Tommaso Campanella (1568-1639). See Constance Classen, “The Witch’s Senses: Sensory Ideologies and Transgressive Femininities from the Renaissance to Modernity,” in Empire of the Senses: The Sensual Culture Reader, ed. David Howes (New York: Berg Publishers, 2005), 70-84.

collective agency that negates those actions of transformation brought about by individual difference.

In contrast to a technophilic and anthropocentric celebration of human progress, in *Space-Place-Environment* Lothar Hönnighausen considers that there is a strong case for reopening the debate on space in a world of electronic simultaneity marked by a globalized economy that accelerates displacement and placelessness. In the same collection, James Peacock argues that place is existential, biological, and connected to inner life, a central aspect of human existence which is now being dissolved by the “Weberian iron cage” of capitalism.

Globalization—the interconnecting of “everyone” and “everything” around the world, through commerce, cyberspace, migration, etc.—challenges localization, the idea of space as place, and the meaning of locale. How far can this process go in transcending place? Heide Ziegler adds that through electronic information media our communication has gained in scope and immediacy, but has lost in “humanness,” in allowing the “other” to impinge on our actual lived

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73 James Peacock, “From Space to Place,” in *Space-Place-Environment*, 88-100.

74 I suggest that it is important to associate the emergent postmodern *placelessness* with the postmodern economic mode of a market system utterly “free” or deregulated—or with what Edward Luttwak has designated by “turbo-capitalism” (*Turbo-Capitalism: Winners and Losers in the Global Economy*, New York: HarperCollins, 1999).

Since the mid-1980s a global kind of corporate capitalism has “turbo-chaed” the speed of structural change, brutally exceeding the adaptive capacities of both individuals and communities. Further, and due to ever-inflated costs of real-estate, it has led to an increasing homogeneous gentrification of urban centers, and to an ensuing loss of non-profitable spaces (such as meeting places for oppositional artistic expression and social intervention). Luttwack considers that “free” markets and unfree societies go hand in hand, and in fact we are now witnessing stricter enforcement of socio-spatial control, through an increasing surveillance of public and private spaces, and an aggravated “modernist” spatial zoning—for dwelling, for work, and for leisure—the latter of which has been basically reduced to consuming merchandise goods, including those of the normative mass-entertainment culture industry.

75 Otherness can be addressed from various perspectives. For the purpose of this dissertation the Other refers to: 1) at the micropolitical level, any different being from the perceived self, including an alterity (doubleness or multiplicity) within the self; 2) at the social level, to the non-normative, the oppositional, the “lesser” one (within a patriarchal morality/order) in terms of race, gender, class, and ethnicity.
space. She also notes how the “desktop” has become for many individuals their solipsistic and most concretely lived existential place.\textsuperscript{76}

I suggest that this “despatialized” and allegedly “post-organic” condition of human beings is strikingly exposed in Harold Pinter’s plays, but that more often than not it is not related to specific local British cultural contexts. In cultural terms, the works of Pinter do not seem concerned with depicting local circumstances and historical particularities, but rather appear to entail a critique of a Western humanist line of civilizational “progress” actively chosen or adopted, at the local and global scale, by individual human beings. In this sense I argue that Pinter’s theatre articulates an ecocritical stance and a micropolitical critique, calling for both an awareness of our environmental surroundings and the empowerment of our individual subjectivity. The “post-organic” shrunken dwellings of Pinter’s characters, as well as their existential despatialization, appear to be the spatial culmination of a humanist mechanistic view of knowledge/life/culture that should be questioned politically within an ecological ethics.\textsuperscript{77}

It is mostly in “existentialist” developments of phenomenology—particularly those found in or inspired by the works of Gaston Bachelard and Maurice Merleau-Ponty—that I claim it is possible to find a way of reading/understanding/sensing space in a non-anthropocentric and eco-philosophical way. Within a phenomenological approach, Merleau-Ponty posits that space is not the setting in which things are disposed or arranged, but rather \textit{the means whereby all things connect}.\textsuperscript{78} Space is a pre-linguistic phenomenon, it is existential just as our existence is spatial.\textsuperscript{79}

\textsuperscript{76}Heide Ziegler, “‘Place’ in the Internet Age or, Borges and I,” in \textit{Space-Place-Environment}, 31-41.
\textsuperscript{77}As Greg Garrard observes, Eco-Feminism questions the \textit{anthropocentric} dualism humanity/nature along with the \textit{androcentric} dualism man/woman (rational/emotional; mind/body; abstract/material; culture/nature). I find it interesting to note that within a mechanistic paradigm of knowledge women become valued as reproduction machines, but are often referred to in organic terms/metaphors. As for animals, they become “bodies without minds, effectively machines” (Garrard, \textit{Ecocriticism} 23-27).
\textsuperscript{79}Ibid., 293-94.
Our relationship to space is not that of a disembodied subject to a distant object but that of a being who dwells in space and is intimately connected to its habitat. Rather than a mind and a body, a human being is a mind with a body; her body is anchored in space, and it is her lived spatiality and coexistence with the world that binds her to things and links them to each other. The things of the world are not simply neutral objects, each speaks to our body and to the way we live.

In the same vein, Gaston Bachelard considers that space is the abode of all material things, and therefore concentrates his study, *The Poetics of Space*, on one of the primal “intimate” and “felicitous” spaces that “attract:” the house. He finds that the houses of humans, the houses of animals (nests, shells), the houses of vegetal seeds, and the houses of things (drawers, chests, wardrobes) all bear witness to the activity of the imagination, and to a play of relationships (small and large, open and closed, within and without, minute and immense) that are not antithetical or mutually opposed, but rather interchangeable, and affectively produced. I suggest that Bachelard’s images evoke a direct connection between phenomenology and ecological criticism. The house is the oikos, the dwelling of life, a space that according to him protects, connects, and is invested with imagination. Thus oecology—the relationship between living beings and their oikos or dwelling spaces—is not just a practical matter of functional, utilitarian or useful relations between human beings and their settings (such as the current “new green” consciousness that promotes little deeds like buying compact fluorescent lamps in order to prevent global warming and thus help “save the planet”). Ecology in Bachelard’s terms presupposes a reciprocally affective, imaginatively invested, and co-created relationship between living beings and things.

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For both Merleau-Ponty and Bachelard there are no true objective spaces, but rather as many spaces as there are distinct spatial experiences.\textsuperscript{81} This means that phenomenology calls into question the modern assumption of determinable and objective realities. Merleau-Ponty goes to the extent of suggesting that those spaces experienced in dreams, myths, and schizophrenia are “genuine” spaces, instead of “disturbances of perception,” as is often assumed. The actuality of these strange spatial experiences is typically repressed by rational thought and “commonsensical perception,” both of which effect a shrinkage on our experiential and subjective spatiality, by subscribing to the idea of an uniform truth and objectivity, or to a oneness of the world.\textsuperscript{82}

The concept of “lived experience” raised by phenomenology contends with the anthropocentric notion of an objective spatial experience of “everyday life,” as if we were all collectively immersed in a common and factual plane of “reality.” Everyday life is usually defined in exclusively socio-cultural terms, in which variation and diversity are mostly determined by local cultural differences, and by the positions of the subject within the field of social relations. Such a view leaves out the possibility of differentiation through individual imagination, emotionality, subjectivity, and self-experience, since the individual as experiencing agent is always recast in terms of race, gender, ethnicity, nationality, and other “subject positions;” further, it also suppresses the dynamic effects upon spatial experience of an other-than-human materiality. In contrast to this sense of a “real” world that can be objectively studied, measured, and revealed by the natural and social sciences, phenomenology posits that art and philosophy “allow us to rediscover the world in which we live, yet which we are always prone to

\textsuperscript{81} Merleau-Ponty, \textit{Phenomenology of Perception}, 340.
\textsuperscript{82} Ibid., 335-37.
forget.”

This world which we are to rediscover, is the world “as we perceive it” (*le monde perçu*), the world as perceived by the entirety of our senses.

In phenomenological terms there is never an absolute separation between space and landscape—for both are embodied experiences. In Merleau-Ponty’s words, “[Our] world lacks the rigid framework once provided by the uniform space of Euclid. We can no longer draw an absolute distinction between space and the things which occupy it, nor indeed between the pure idea of space and the concrete spectacle it presents to our senses.”

Further, landscape can never be understood *merely* as an ideological construct, for that would imply the imposition of a unifying perspective.

In Euclidean and Newtonian physics space is “absolute,” and within it objects have an absolute location. This uniform space can be equated to a landscape painting based on the laws of perspective. The painter arranges the objects and provides them with a size, colors, and aspect that are not those of his gaze, but rather the conventional size that they would present if the gaze were directed at a vanishing point in the horizon, a gaze fixed at infinity. By subjecting all details to his analytical vision, the painter fashions a representation of the landscape that does not correspond to his own free visual impressions.

In contrast to this landscape painting based on “objective” laws of perspective, and upon the assumption of a stable point of view, Merleau-Ponty alludes to Cézanne’s paintings—which are structured by a plurality

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84 Ibid., 51.
85 The term *ideology* originated during the French enlightenment period, to designate “the scientific study of human ideas.” Later, Marxist thinkers elaborated on the notion of ideology to arrive at two main meanings. The first meaning (held by Karl Marx, among others) equates ideology with “false consciousness,” i.e., with the way social subjects are subordinated by the mode of production of the economic “base,” and led to reproduce through cultural practices the prevailing system of class relations, and defend as their own the ideas of the ruling class (“deceptive mystification”). A second sense of ideology, proposed by the sociological tradition within Marxism, refers to “the general process of the production of meanings and ideas” (Raymond Williams). In this latter sense *ideology* is not determined by the modes and relations of production of the economic “base” of society, but is nevertheless conditioned by the assumption that “it is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness” (Karl Marx). In any case, *ideology* is exclusively made up of meanings and ideas that are *socially* produced.
of overlapping perspectives within which different aspects are somehow seen together, connected—so as to exemplify the way in which the visual world forms itself through our gaze. Within the “lived” experience of space held by phenomenology, landscape entails a point of “anchorage” within space (my body in a given environment); multiple levels of perception (e.g. the “upright” world and the “slanted” world which I experience in succession); and a temporal, or historical continuity between them (to which my body constantly adjusts itself, usually imperceptibly).

Our take/position/perspective on the debate over space, between a post-structuralist perspective, and a phenomenological approach—on whether space is culturally constructed, or is rather a medium that connects all things—is vital in order to clarify our own ethical stance and political viewpoint in relation to the current environmental crisis. If we accept that nothing exists outside language/culture, that there is no extra-linguistic perception, then nature is evidently also a cultural construct—a position that not only justifies the historical human mastering of nature, but also a reliance on future environmental “engineering” so that humankind can proceed with “business as usual.” If on the contrary we consider that space precedes language, that it is a medium that connects all things, then nature becomes the larger context of culture/s (not only of humans but also of other living beings, such as plants and animals, as well as of all matter). This implies that human beings are inevitably part of a natural environment, even if they can control and manipulate large parts of it.

**B) - Micropolitical Views of Aesthetic Landscapes**

My reading of the landscapes of Pinter’s drama emphasizes ecocentric values by acknowledging

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87 Ibid., 53-54.
the existence of a nonhuman world in its analysis of space; therefore it associates a
phenomenological method/theory to a micropolitical or individual ethical stance. In this sense, I
want to invoke Félix Guattari’s suggestion that we need to link environmental ecology to social
ecology and to mental ecology, so as to articulate an “ecosophy” or ecocentric ethics:

The ecological crisis can be traced to a more general crisis of the social, political and
existential. The problem involves a type of revolution of mentalities whereby they would
cease to invest in a certain kind of development, based on a productivism that has lost all
human finality. Thus the issue returns with insistence: how do we change mentalities,
how do we reinvent social practices that would give back to humanity—if it ever had it—
a sense of responsibility, not only for its own survival, but equally for the future of all life
on the planet, for animal and vegetable species, likewise for incorporeal species such as
music, the arts, cinema, the relation with time, love and compassion for others, the
feeling of fusion at the heart of cosmos?89

Differently from the narrow pragmatics and departmentalization of several current ecological
views, Guattari proposes a generalized ecology that associates environmental responsibility to
individual agency and ethics (the production of a new mentality), to a change in the economic
mode of production of our society, and to a reinvention of social practices. His concept of three
interacting and interdependent ecologies of mind, society, and environment stems from an anti-
dualistic view of culture/nature, from a notion that the materiality of “nature” is not the
definitional opposite of “culture,” but rather its larger context.90 Culture not only constructs but
is also constructed; nature is produced but produces as well.

In a recently published essay on the ecological resonances of Gilles Deleuze and Félix
Guattari’s works, Bernd Herzogenrath observes that in their view,

Materiality—the unconscious, nature, ultimately life—is productive and autopoïetic; the
culturally discursively constructed materiality/unconscious/nature is only one small part

89 Félix Guattari, *Chaosmosis: An Ethico-Aesthetic Paradigm*, translated by Paul Baims and Julian Pefanis
90 In “Logos of Our Eco in the Feminine” (*Merleau-Ponty and Environmental Philosophy: Dwelling on the
Landscapes of Thought*, Albany: SUNY Press, 2007, 91-115) Carol Bigwood notes how the ancient pre-Socratic
Greek word for “nature,” Phusis, was “understood as the coming to be and passing away of all that is. It emphasizes
nature as movement, growth, and decay” (94).
of the whole, and not even the most important one, more like the tip of the iceberg. Below the socially/linguistically constituted reality, there is the noise of the nonhuman, of the viral, chemical, biological, and so on, energy transformations.91

In one of their collaborative works, *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari state that all matter is “molecular material”92 equipped with the capacity for self-organization. Matter is therefore *alive, informed* rather than *informe* (formless): “matter . . . is not dead, brute, homogeneous matter, but a matter-movement bearing singularities, qualities . . . and even operations.93 Matter is therefore autopoeïtic94 in the sense that it carries in itself latent possibilities of engendering formations and differentiations.

The recognition of space’s immanent materiality is extremely relevant for my phenomenological and ecocentric reading of landscape in Pinter’s playtexts. Space in most of Pinter’s plays figures not only as a mental/imaginary emanation of the characters that inhabit it, but also seems to produce or have a material effect on these characters’ bodies and minds. It is a space immanently expressive and productive of relations, rather than a setting for human actions or an effect of representation. What I am arguing therefore, is for an eco-philosophical landscape analysis that articulates a continuity between body and space, or that reflects upon the reciprocality or participatory relationship between character and environment. In doing so it takes into consideration the multifaceted and dynamic interaction of the three ecologies referred to by Guattari, namely of: 1) an ecology of the mind, of individual subjectivity, of the

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93 Ibid, 542.
94 Significantly, *poïesis* is etymologically derived from an ancient Greek verb that means creating, producing, transforming—a term that is also at the root of “poetry.” By stating that matter is autopoeïtic, Deleuze and Guattari seem to imply that it has immanent artistic/aesthetic potentialities, which recall both Artaud and Bachelard’s observations of the imagination at work in nature’s own formations.
micropolitical/ethical choices made at the smallest scale;\textsuperscript{95} 2) an ecology of the social, that interrogates the macropolitical, and collectively produced cultural relations between humanity and environment; and 3) an ecology of the environment that emphasizes the agency and dynamic materiality of an other-than-human space. In this sense, I disagree with the suggestion of reading for landscape and space in a playtext in terms of its representation of green spaces and/or natural landscapes. This would be reading \textit{nature} in a play as if it were just another \textit{text}, reading but the cultural constructions or representations of nature, and ignoring nature as materiality, the nature/culture inter-relationships (or what Deleuze calls “feedback loops”).

If, on the contrary, we read for nature in a play as its own context, as an ecocentric phenomenological way of sensing suggests, we find that there are striking ecocritical resonances in plays that have been dismissed as “complicit with the dualistic, distanced, and ecologically disastrous ideologies of modernism.” I am specifically alluding to Una Chaudhuri’s words in her essay “Animal Rites: Performing beyond the Human,” when in reference to some “mid-century modernist dramas of alienation, stories of the “little man” lost in the vast machinery of the corrupt state,” she argues that “the politics of that drama, because of their exclusive focus on the individual, are largely irrelevant to ecoperformance.”\textsuperscript{96} Differently, and within an eco-philosophical perspective, I propose that playtexts “focused on the individual” are immanently environmental and therefore susceptible to an ecologically informed reading. An ecocentric reading of landscape should also focus on the mental ecology of individual human beings, and therefore bring back to our current critical discourse the notion of subjectivity, and of its impact on environment and space.

\textsuperscript{95} Individually ethical in the sense of evaluating distinctions between “good” and “bad” based on one’s existential experience, rather than adopting moral judgments based on universal principles.

Stanton Garner argues that phenomenology, both as method and theory, has the potential of offering a return of both experience and subjectivity to the discourse of space and body in the theatre. According to Garner,

Semiotics has shifted “meaning” from the intending consciousness to signifying systems, relocating the perceptual object within the codified boundaries of the sign and abandoning a dialogue with phenomenology that characterized both traditions at an earlier time. For its part, deconstruction has attacked the notions of constituting subjectivity and self-presence as well as such binary categories as subject and object, inside and outside, the essential and the sensory, on which (so it is claimed) phenomenology hinges. Marxism, gender and cultural studies, and other modes of materialist analysis have furthered the “depersonalizing” of experience by proposing that subjectivity is discursively constituted, a function of cultural, political, and socioeconomic operations. On the artistic front, certain currents of postmodernism have extended this assault on the subject through an aesthetic (or anti-aesthetic) of decentering and fragmentation. Indeed, perhaps nothing links the diverse movements of contemporary literary and performance theory more completely than this turning away from the subject as experiencing agent.97

The concept of individual subject or subjectivity has been viewed by structuralists and post-structuralists alike as an essentializing notion. However, as Kurt Taroff notes, this assault on, or outright rejection of, subjectivity is based on a simplistic (and humanist) view of the subject as a free, rational, and autonomous self; as a result, when such notion of the subject collapses, it translates into a complete rejection of any reference to subjectivity:

The basis of the rejection of the subject has been a belief that the posited ‘subject’ of humanism and modernism represents a universalized epistemological position—one that can see, know, and even do all that he or she (although essentially always, historically, he) desires. That position, it is argued, is presented as fixed and essential.98

Most postmodern theorists argue that subjectivity is ideologically/socially/culturally constructed. In Louis Althusser’s theory of ideology, subjects are hailed to inhabit a role to the point of recognizing themselves in terms of such an identity; as a result, subjectivity is an effect of relations of power. Several cultural approaches claim that similar socio-cultural configurations

create similar individual perceptions, experiences and interpretations of the world. However, even within Marxist theory there is some debate over the primacy of either “structure” or “agency.” While some theorists consider that the perceived agency of individuals is in fact determined by their position within the overall structure of society, others stress the possibility of a limited individual agency. Whenever acknowledged by postmodern theorists, however, the fluid realm of subjectivity and individual experience is typically attributed a psychological causality, and its analysis relegated to the dominant Freudian-Lacanian psycho-analytical interpretation.

Because phenomenology puts into play a “microperception” of the subject, it is especially pertinent to my research of synesthetic or bodily-lived landscapes in Pinter’s theatre. The notion of subjectivity that I want to bring to this study is not the intentional consciousness of an autonomous individual or unitary self-presence/personality; but rather subjectivity as the differentiated, sensuous, and corporeal experience of a concrete lived-body anchored in space. In this sense I would like to invoke once more Guattari’s concepts, when he states that subjectivity is polyphonic and plural. According to Guattari, subjectivity has no dominant or determinant instance which guides a fixed subject to being-in-the-world; differently, subjectivity is always in the making or in process, it is a becoming-in-and-with-the-world: “One creates new modalities of subjectivity in the same way that an artist creates new forms from the palette.”

Consequently, subjectivity can engender micropolitical agency, and have effects upon the world, since it is capable of re-inventing itself, and of resisting to forms of subjection.

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In his essay “The Subject and Power,”100 Michel Foucault seemingly agrees with Guattari when he states that his analysis of power systems is a research into the different “modes of objectivation which transform human beings into subjects,”101 and asserts that “we have to promote new forms of subjectivity” different from the ones imposed upon us; if the idea of a person involves that of freedom, resistance to authoritarian networks of power presupposes “freedom’s refusal to submit.”102 This notion of subjectivity particularly relates to Pinter’s work since, as Stanton Garner insightfully observes, Pinter “challenges our theoretical models of ‘the political’ by confronting the political from a more deeply phenomenological perspective, and his primary political interests are rooted in his investigation of the body and its performance fields.”103 In this sense, I suggest that those early and middle plays that many Pinter critics consider to be “a-political”—because their action is apparently sheltered from outside “reality,” focusing instead on their protagonists’ inner worlds—may reveal, through a study of their synesthetic landscapes, how physical and mental atmospheres are deeply affected by, or resist to, ideological macropolitical structures. Additionally, I argue that Pinter creates worlds in which there is individual agency, contrary to the view that he only shows subjects conditioned, constructed, and objectified by structures of power (in an purportedly Foucauldean sense). In Pinter’s plays the characters have micropolitical and ethical choices, there is agency not only in the materiality of their environment but also within them, and that is why it becomes so shocking for us readers/spectators to witness the ways in which many of them actively participate in their own imprisonment.

100 Michel Foucault, “The Subject and Power,” in Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics, 208-26.
101 Ibid., 208.
102 Ibid., 221.
Pinter challenges our models of political theatre because his works do not politically argue a case—as most British political plays of the twentieth century do—but rather offer images with micropolitical reverberations. In other words, his works have been misjudged as “apolitical” because their aesthetic form does not comply with that of a British political theatre accomplished in dialectically discursive Brechtian molds. This is further aggravated by the fact that Pinter was labeled, very early on in his career, an “absurdist” playwright (namely by Martin Esslin in *The Theatre of the Absurd*, 1961), and thus became associated with a trend of ritualistic, metaphysical, and “apolitical” theatre, rather than with what most scholarly criticism of the mid-twentieth century considered to be the opposing faction, i.e., a political theatre loosely based on Brecht’s epic model. This incompatibility between two theatrical strands (existential and political), was particularly felt in England in the 1950s, as Dan Rebellato points out, where it was marked by a debate between the defenders of an “intellectual” and French-influenced dramaturgy (*absurdist theatre*), and those who upheld a British realist theatre of social concerns, depicting plausible situations and debating viable solutions. By arguing that Pinter’s dramaturgy is consistently “political” since the start of his playwriting career, my investigation of his dramatic landscapes is also an aesthetic one. As such it engages sensorially with the recurrent material forms, images, structures, patterns, and rhythms manifest in Pinter’s playtexts, and with what these aesthetic elements articulate in micropolitical and ecocritical terms.

It is currently often assumed that aesthetics may not transcend ideology (since it is determined by social and cultural contexts), that there is no aesthetic object per se (an

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105 Aesthetics in its original Greek meaning (*aisthesis*) does not correspond to the Enlightenment notion of the aesthetic as “concerned with beauty” or “experiencing the sublime” through the appreciation of art; but rather to a domain of human perception and sensation that contrasts with the domain of conceptual thought (i.e., pertaining to things felt and apprehended through the senses).
essentialism of the past), and consequently that artworks should be approached primarily as cultural products, and analyzed through the methods and theories provided by the social sciences. An aesthetic approach, therefore, is often identified with an “art for art's sake” attitude, or with a conceptualization of art as a realm autonomous from social reality, and compliant with capitalist commodification, and the hierarchical categorization of artworks by arbiters of taste (high-art, popular art, etc.).

The aesthetic, however, is a contradictory and ambiguous concept. If, on the one hand, it may entail a conformism (or an internalized repression of the agent-artist) to the dominant ideology of social powers, so as to produce works that elicit a consensus with the political hegemony, or that comply with the hegemonic aesthetization of everyday life; on the other hand, within an empowered notion of subjectivity and differentiated bodily experience, it may provide a non-alienated mode of cognition, as well as an oppositional alternative to these dominant ideological forms.

In this sense I want to recall Guattari’s concept of a generalized ecology or ecophilosophy, which embraces ecologies not only of corporeal species but also of what he calls “incorporeal species” aesthetically produced by the imaginary (“such as music, the arts, cinema…”). Given Guattari’s notion of subjectivity as potentially emancipatory, works of art may simultaneously provide a reflection on “real” experience, as well as evoke a form of “possible” experience. This relates to what Erika Fischer-Lichte proposes in “Theatre Studies at the Crossroads” when she states that theatre should also be studied as “art studies” today, i.e., in its aesthetic dimensions. For Fischer-Lichte there is no justification to assume that aesthetic

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experience is less fundamental than the “liminal experience” of rituals. In effect, she argues that it could be considered a particular kind and modern version of liminal experience.\textsuperscript{107}

In “Imaginary Space; or, Space as Aesthetic Object,” Winfried Fluck notes that the aesthetic does not refer to an inherent quality of an object, but rather to a “potential function” of an object. Therefore, in principle,

any object can become an aesthetic object if an aesthetic attitude is taken toward it and its aesthetic function becomes dominant. This shift to an aesthetic attitude can be encouraged by the object, however, by suggesting to us that we should take such an attitude. This is especially obvious in the case of fictional texts (in the broadest sense of the word as any form of ‘invented’ representation, including, e.g. literature, paintings or film).\textsuperscript{108}

Aesthetic experience is not just ideologically conditioned by the superstructure; it is also constituted by a communication/interaction of imaginary, mental, and subjective spaces. It is a “transfer” between the aesthetic object and the recipient which “can become the basis for the articulation of otherwise inexpressible dimensions of the self.”\textsuperscript{109} Consequently, “The crucial question arising at this point is what the recipient brings to the transfer that constitutes aesthetic experience.”\textsuperscript{110} Once again, it is a question of subjective and micropolitical agency.

Both Bachelard and Merleau-Ponty stress the importance of art and philosophy in allowing us to rediscover a world that we have tended to forget (due to the “film of familiarity,” or to impressions blunted by reiteration), and therefore valorize artworks that challenge “normative” everyday perception, and those forms of expression that create reverberations in the reader/spectator/beholder, giving us back “spaces of being.”\textsuperscript{111} This idea is similarly expressed

\textsuperscript{107} Victor Turner observes that rituals have a “liminal” character, i.e., that they are performed at the threshold of everyday life. Fischer-Lichte seems to imply that aesthetic experience can be somewhat autonomous from the real and still produce significant cultural and social effects.

\textsuperscript{108} Winfried Fluck, “Imaginary Space; or, Space as Aesthetic Object,” in Hönnighausen, Lothar, & Julia Apitzsch, Wibke Reger eds, \textit{Space, Place, Environment} (Tübingen: Stauffenburg, 2004), 20.

\textsuperscript{109} Ibid, 22.

\textsuperscript{110} Ibid, 25.

\textsuperscript{111} Gaston Bachelard, \textit{The Poetics of Space}, 33.
by Gilles Deleuze, when he argues that art can render perceptible the processes of thought and
the workings of dream through “mental images.” For Deleuze, “the task of art is to produce
‘signs’ that will push us out of our habits of perception into the conditions of creation;” art
should not be “recognized” but rather “sensed.” Recognition implies “representation;” it accords
to a model of perception in which sense data is ordered according to habits and “common sense,”
and in which “we see with a stale eye pre-loaded with clichés.” Differently, an “art encounter”
should force us to experience and to think.

Such an aesthetic experience or art encounter entails an interplay between the visible and
the invisible as part of our “vision.” Merleau-Ponty argues that the visible is intertwined with the
invisible, in both material earthly spaces, and imaginary mental spaces, that “there is a body of
the mind, and a mind of the body.” Our experience of the earth is “at once both visible and
invisible, incorporating both the deep ground that supports our bodies and the fluid atmosphere
in which we breathe.” Our mental universe is invisible but intrinsically supported and
provoked by our visible body. There is here a suggestion of a direct correspondence between the
valorization of mental/imaginary spaces and that of an ecology of the mind. Bachelard further
considers that the poetic imagination holds an ontological function, for it creates vital/cosmic
images (different from intellectually generated metaphors) that cannot be read through causality
but connect to our most personal thoughts, memories, and dreams, making us reverberate with

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114 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, edited by Claude Lefort, translated by Alphonso Lingis
115 David Abram, “The Mechanical and the Organic,” 69. Concerning Merleau-Ponty’s perspective on the invisibility
of the air Abram adds: “The air can no longer be confused with mere negative presence or the absence of solid
things; henceforth the air is itself a density—mysterious indeed for its invisibility—but a thick and tactile presence
nonetheless. We are immersed in its depths as surely as fish are immersed in the sea. It is the medium, the silent
interlocutor of all our musings and moods. We simply cannot exist without its support and nourishment, with its
active participation in whatever we are up to at any moment” (69).
them. Imagining activity opens up utopian spaces. Imagining activity points to the potential otherness of reality and thus to an endless capacity for change and transformation.

**C) Symbolist Synesthetic Explorations of Space/Landscape**

The concept of aesthetic experience as the result of a combined imaging activity of both producers/artists and receivers/beholders—to the point that there is a co-creation of imaginary space—is central to Symbolist theory and directly relates to the micropolitical and ecological dimensions of art and subjectivity that I have explored above. My approach to Symbolism in this dissertation is not restricted to its most narrow definition as an allusion to the Paris cenacle of the 1880s-1890s, even though it takes into account the significance of Stephane Mallarmé’s writings in the elucidation and shaping of symbolist theory. In effect, Symbolist theory is difficult to characterize as if it were a coherent system, given that it evolved over several decades and was the plural result of contributions from artists/theorists of various nationalities working in different media. Whereas Anna Balakian argues that much of this international Symbolist movement constituted a “translation” of French symbolism under the forces of local myths,\(^{116}\) Lothar Hönnighausen utilizes the term “late romantic symbolism” to suggest a continuity between English Symbolism and its native Romantic tradition.\(^{117}\) Yet another stance is expounded by Patrick McGuinness when he observes that it is difficult to ascertain when Symbolism started or ended, and indeed whether it ended.\(^{118}\) McGuinness seems to suggest that Symbolism may consist of a cyclical return of ideas that were previously intuited by the Romantics, though not originated by them.

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As McGuinness observes, Symbolism is a misnomer. The very term “symbolist” is controversial from the start, if we take into account that it was introduced by Jean Moréas (in an article of 1885) to designate the new promising French poetry of Mallarmé and Verlaine, and salvage it from being labeled “decadent.” Yet Mallarmé—whose work inspired some of the central tenets of symbolist theory—never used the term to describe his own poetry nor did he ever consider himself the leader of a “symbolist” aesthetic movement. Nevertheless, as Richard Candida Smith points out in *Mallarmé’s Children,* it was Mallarmé who argued that experience could be intuited and expressed through “symbols,” or through compositional scores of ideas, sensations, and emotions, which in turn would be apprehended by keen readers/viewers. In Symbolist theory the symbol is a synthetic element, the expression of a lived and embodied experience that renders the singularity of the moment through a play of associations; by seeking to open the material medium of the artwork to new configurations through an interaction with the imaginative activity of the beholder, it does not refrain from ambiguity – in contrast to an analytical and descriptive way of writing or of perceiving experience.

Most importantly, and differing from the most frequent usage of the term by several critics, the “symbol” in Symbolist theory is neither a metaphor nor an allegory, since it does not substitute one range of ideas for another, nor does it provide an illustration of the general by the particular. From a Symbolist perspective, therefore, symbols may never be turned into *symbolic* fixed meanings, since they are polysemic, generating various signifieds and correspondences among signifieds. In this sense, as most recent critics of Symbolist theory suggest, Symbolism

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119 Ibid, 1.
121 As Martin Puchner observes in *Stage Fright: Modernism, Anti-Theatricality and Drama* (Baltimore, ML: John Hopkins UP, 2002), symbolist writers distinguish the symbol from the sign for its refusal to participate in an economy of signification: “the idea shines through the symbol’s materiality, but it ultimately remains inaccessible” (126).
does not designate a style, an epoch, or a school, but rather invokes a set of concepts and
designations on writing and beholding, a drift of specific ideas on the role of art that have
cyclically returned, “recombined, accentuated and synthesized.”¹²² Thus, by proposing the use of
symbols in art, Symbolist theory heralded a new consciousness of the nature of language that
anticipated the twentieth-century critique of representational systems.

This critique of representational systems is directly linked to the empowerment of the
imagination referred to above, and which is one of Symbolist theory’s central tenets. Symbolism
seeks to suggest a manifoldness of alternative realities, and therefore articulates a critique of
positivist, empiricist, and rationalist theories of knowledge. Ernst Behler argues that this critique
can be traced back to the early German Romantic artists and philosophers who considered
imagination to be the shaping power of artistic creation.¹²³ Dee Reynolds’s study on Symbolist
imaginary spaces,¹²⁴ however, is most instrumental in making us aware that Symbolism’s aim is
to reinstate imagination as a central concept not just in artistic creation, but moreover in its
reception process. Rather than envisioning the reception of an artwork as being shaped by the
artist’s a priori intentional ideas (as in Romanticism), in Symbolist aesthetic experience the
imagining activity of the beholder/perceiver performs a central role. The content of the artwork

Symbolist theory is its dialogue with specific historical pasts. As Frantisek Deak points out in Symbolist Theater
(1993), the Symbolists were aware of an alternative and often subterranean tradition of human development, a
tradition that functioned both as a reservoir of knowledge and as a model toward a different life, opening the way for
a philosophical counterculture. Such an alternative tradition weaves a serpentine or spiral line (suggesting the
unwinding of the Ouroboros symbol) that reaches far back, at least to Ancient Egypt and Pre-Socratic Greece,
resurfacing in Medieval Provençal poetry, in the organicist Renaissance philosophy of science, in German
Romanticism, then forward in Surrealism, in some trends of French Existentialism, and through to our own times. In
contrast to a Modernist stance proclaiming a future that radically breaks with the past, endorsing a continuous
“progressive” line of human development or “evolution” through technological innovation, Symbolism embraces
particular cultural pasts, and endorses an idea of an incremental development. It may be qualified as a “backward-
looking intercultural avant-garde”—to use Richard Scheckner’s words upon being interviewed by James Harding in
Contours of the Theatrical Avant-Garde: Performance and Textuality (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press,
2000)—since it usually finds its models in archaic cultures and rituals.
¹²³ Ernst Behler, German Romantic Literary Theory (Edinburgh: Cambridge University Press, 1993).
¹²⁴ Dee Reynolds, Symbolist Aesthetics and Early Abstract Art: Sites of Imaginary Space (Cambridge, UK:
Cambridge University Press, 1995).
derives from an event or interaction between the beholder and the object, through the act of “feeling oneself into” or “living with” an object, and the material qualities of the object, the medium itself. Whereas the Romantic concept of imagination involves a return to an ethos of unity (an ontological closure), Symbolism privileges the process of “imagining,” a process of image-production that does not culminate in a final, coherent and stable image/message but rather in an open-ended one—thus making imagination an activity of forever becoming, or of ontological transformation.

Where space and landscape are concerned, the fin-de-siècle Symbolist movement was directly involved in the emergence of “abstract art,” and therefore contributed significantly to an innovative spatial dimension of theatre, in which space ceased to be a decorative background or contextual surround, and became instead a figure on its own. A Symbolist exploration of non-representational abstract forms was particularly developed in the works and theoretical writings of two separately working artists, Gordon Craig (1872-1966) and Adolphe Appia (1862-1924). Dismissing words as a bad means of communicating “ideas,” Craig considered that the essential meaning of drama might be brought about by an abstract choreography, through patterns of moving and grouping of both geometric scenic shapes and stylized acting figures. Inspired by correspondences that he envisioned between music, light, bodies, and space, Appia conceived what he termed “rhythmic spaces”—non-representational settings made of rigid, sharp, and geometric three-dimensional shapes which would contrast with the softness, roundness, and subtlety of the human bodies of the performers. Significantly, this aesthetic exploration of space in theatre occurs at a time when Western nations are experiencing unprecedented industrial

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growth and environmental loss, and coincides with the publication of founding papers in modern ecology.\footnote{William Howarth, in “Some Principles of Ecocriticism” (The Ecocriticism Reader, 1996) notes that “founding papers in modern ecology” were written by scientists of mid-America, around the late 1880s.}

The foregrounding of space in theatre brought about by the Symbolists continued through the first decades of the twentieth century, and was manifest in the dada, Futurist, and Surrealist performances, as well as on the concept of “landscape theatre” explored by Gertrude Stein. Spatial features in performance were further accentuated in the late twentieth century, when theatre moved beyond drama to approach performance art, in parallel to the deconstructionist critique of logocentrism. Consequently, as Chaudhuri and Fuchs point out, “landscape” is not an innovative concept both for practitioners and critics of post-realist staging, having in fact become one of the dominant directorial approaches—as manifest in the works by Samuel Beckett, Tadeusz Kantor, Robert Wilson, Richard Foreman, Elizabeth LeCompte, and La Fura dels Baus.

Symbolism’s innovative exploration of space, however, is also strikingly manifest in its drama, by playwrights Maurice Maeterlinck, W.B. Yeats, Gabrielle D’Annunzio, António Patrício, Valle-Inclán, Andrei Bely, and Tadeusz Miciński, among others. In drama, Symbolist theory led to a highly poetical language that relies on suggestion, rather than on statement; to a de-materialization of characters and contexts; to innovative configurations of stage space, making “spectacle” assume a prominent role; and to an exploration of immobility, stillness, silence, and absence (thus defying the Aristotelian emphasis on “action”). By trying to theatricalize “inner life,” the unseen, the metaphysical, and the extra-rational, many dramatists wrote plays that were practically unperformable, but which decisively contributed with innovative forms and techniques to the theatre, thus enlarging its potential resources. In many cases, Symbolist playtexts experimented with challenging notions of time and space, and with
elaborate light and special effects to such a degree that they approximated or anticipated the form of cinematic scripts. As Daniel Gerould observes, Symbolist playwrights turned the stage into a “magical space:”

An extension of the human mind, such invented space was fluid and multilayered, existing along shifting planes and given to undulation and pulsation. In apparent violation of the law of theater that mandates only one unchanging point of observation between spectator and represented reality, magical space could accommodate close-ups and long shots at one and the same time, as well as two or more simultaneous actions, as in film or medieval mystery plays.¹²⁸

Many of these Symbolist aesthetic traits can be found in Pinter’s playtexts, and I will explore them in detail in Chapters Two and Three of this dissertation.

Symbolists emphasize the experience of space and landscape in playtexts, even when these are not performed or performable. What this suggests is that theatre is an art of space and “scaping”—of colors, sounds, light, inanimate and animate bodies, static images, movement, imaginary space, mental space, etc.—not only through performance but also on the written page. For Mallarmé, the act of reading is equated to a theatrical process, in which the beholder stages in her mind/body the images/symbols/ideas/sensory impressions evoked by the text. Perception, in Merleau-Ponty’s work, is similar to such reciprocity, like an ongoing interchange or a sort of silent conversation between our lived body and the things that surround it. And, as David Abram notes, this reciprocity or imaginary co-creation between living beings and things is at the center of the concept of ecology. Indeed there is a certain kind of “magic” in this participatory relation of the senses towards the visible letters of the alphabet:

As nonhuman animals, plants, and even “inanimate” rivers once spoke to our tribal ancestors, so the “inert” letters on the page now speak to us! This is a form of animism that we take for granted, but it is animism nonetheless—as mysterious as a talking stone. (…) Today it is virtually impossible for us to look at a printed word without seeing, or rather hearing, what “it says.” For our senses are now coupled, synaesthetically, to these

printed shapes as profoundly as they were once wedded to cedar trees, ravens, and the moon. As the hills and the bending grasses once spoke to our tribal ancestors, so these written letters and words now speak to us.\(^{129}\)

Thus, when in *Land/Scape/Theater* Chaudhuri and Fuchs observe that landscape in drama has seldom been explored, I would like to add that there is a current sense in theatre studies that criticism should approach drama only when it has been, or is being, performed; and otherwise leave the exploration of playtexts for literary critics. In *Space in Performance: Making Meaning in the Theatre*, Gay McAuley goes to the extent of writing “now comes the vexed question of the text”\(^{130}\) when about to acknowledge that there is spatial information contained in the written playtext. Further, McAuley claims that although the playtext contains “the potential” for many spatializations, “textual space is made really meaningful only in performance.”\(^{131}\) As Martin Puchner expresses it, the opposition between drama or text on the one hand, and ‘actual life’ [of the performance] on the other, is indicative of a deeply rooted antitextualism that presumes that the text in and of itself, ‘drama as such,’ is dead, so many dead letters on paper, and that it is only through performance that it can be awakened, resurrected, and endowed with ‘actual life’ once more.\(^{132}\)

Defying this binary opposition between “presence” and “absence,” between live “performance” and lifeless “drama,” I argue that the liveness of playtexts may reside in their being contingent on the *live* imagination of each one of their readers; on the fact that they may be experienced in different epochs, elsewhere, and otherwise; and can never be exhausted by a single performance, or production. Spatially speaking, they are not tied to “space” in objective or fixed terms, but rather to the multiple and fluid “synesthetic scapes” of their beholders—recalling Mallarmé’s


\(^{130}\) Gay McAuley, *Space in Performance*, 32. My emphasis.

\(^{131}\) Ibid, 32.

conceptual staging of drama by every reader, which necessarily entails the empowerment of their imagination.

The literary/artistic notion of synesthesia, denoting an interconnectedness of our sensory perceptions resulting from a direct experience or interaction with the material medium of an artwork, was first underscored by artists and theorists of the fin-de-siècle Symbolist movement, subsequently by Phenomenology, and most recently by Sensory theory. Synesthesia etymologically derives from the Greek syn, for together, and aisthèsis, for perception through the senses. Since the original form of the term suggests inter-sense analogy (of one sense modality experiencing what should belong to one or more of the other senses), it is frequently used by contemporary neuroscience to designate an abnormal condition. Thus, in Synesthesia: Phenomenology and Neuropsychology (1995) Richard Cytowic uses the term synesthesia to refer exclusively to involuntary experiences of cross-modal association (clinical synesthesia), distinguishing it from “the deliberate contrivances of sensory fusion” effected by nineteenth-century artists. With this categorization Cytowic seems to imply that a genuine synesthesia is not to be found in art/artists, and may only occur as an involuntary neurological aberration.

Inspired by Charles Baudelaire’s sonnet “Correspondances,” written in 1857, the fin-de-siècle Symbolists considered that there were correspondences among the arts, natural phenomena, and the bodily senses, and therefore associated the process of synesthesia to the concept of correspondences, considering both to be epistemological principles of Symbolist theory. The notion of correspondences was derived from the philosophy of Emanuel Swedenborg (1688-1772), who argued that all things that exist in nature, from the least to the greatest, are interconnected and constitute correspondences; and consequently that there is a reciprocity

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between the physical world and the inner world (\textit{physis} and \textit{psyche}). Baudelaire further links this concept to the process of “synesthesia” when he observes that “Everything, form, movement, number, color, smell, in the \textit{spiritual} as well as in the \textit{material} world, is significant, reciprocal, converse, \textit{correspondent}.”\textsuperscript{134} According to Paul de Man, the Symbolists sought correspondences under the influence of both Swedenborg and Neoplatonism as a means to recover a “lost unity of all being.”\textsuperscript{135} Anna Balakian, however, argues that the Symbolists did not understand correspondences as a direct communication with a Divine being, but rather envisioned them as complex sensual and “superrational” connections, apprehended as “mood” and evoked through poetic language.\textsuperscript{136} I suggest that the Symbolist conjoining of synesthesia and correspondences asserts an ecocentric correlation between sensory lived-body perceptions and all forms of matter at a cosmic level.

Most recently, the concept of synesthesia has been particularly explored by sensory theory, which seeks to reflect upon environmental, cultural and historical phenomena not only in visual terms, but rather by investigating the ways in which the various other media—auditory (verbal and non-verbal), gestural, olfactory, gustatory, tactile—interact. Sensory critics generally argue that the human sensorium is culturally formed,\textsuperscript{137} that it is mediated by the ways of sensing unique to a given culture, but that it is also negotiated by each individual.\textsuperscript{138} Further, they claim that sensory reading may help correct the excesses of “textualism” and “ocularcentrism,” as well as the idea that everything (including culture and the unconscious) is structured like a language.\textsuperscript{139} Within this context, several sensory critics consider that the concept of synesthesia

\textsuperscript{135} Paul De Man, “The Double Aspect of Symbolism,” 7.
\textsuperscript{138} David Howes, “Culture Tunes Our Neurons,” in \textit{Empire of the Senses}, 22.
\textsuperscript{139} David Howes, “Forming Perceptions,” in \textit{Empire of the Senses}, 399.
is pivotal in order to assert a multi-directional interaction of the senses, or what may be called
“intersensoriality.”

Synesthesia involves short-circuiting the conventional five sense model and experience of perception. It establishes cross-linkages between the modalities at a subconscious level, and so opens up a whole new terrain—the terrain of the inter-sensory.¹⁴⁰

This inter-sensory perspective corresponds to Merleau-Ponty’s understanding of the act of perception as a dynamic participation between things and the various intertwined sensory systems of the lived-body. According to him, the overlap and interweaving of the senses corresponds to our primordial, preconceptual experience, which is inherently synesthetic. We are culturally led to experience the sensory world as a place of orderly segregation, and to consider the intertwining of sensory modalities as unusual because we have become estranged from our direct experience with the entities and elements that surround us:

Seen in the perspective of the objective [Cartesian] world, with its opaque qualities, and the objective body with its separate organs, the phenomenon of synaesthetic experience is paradoxical. (. . .) Synaesthetic perception is the rule, and we are unaware of it only because scientific knowledge shifts the center of gravity of experience, so that we have unlearned how to see, hear, and generally speaking, feel, in order to deduce, from our bodily organization and the world as the physicist conceives it, what we are to see, hear, and feel.¹⁴¹

Isolating the senses into the usual five categories (established after Aristotle’s work *De Anima*) means following a predominantly Western notion of embodiment, where mind, will, desire, and dream are separated from “body.” Further, it means to compartmentalize the body/ies in autonomous sensory sectors (or organs) that are hierarchically arranged. As Susan Stewart points out, there is a whole history of the senses which is “the history of an economy that ranks the senses and regulates the body’s relation to the social world in a transformed and transforming

¹⁴⁰ David Howes “Hyperesthesia, or, The Sensual Logic of Late Capitalism,” in *Empire of the Senses*, 292.
¹⁴¹ Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 265, 266.
Stewart further notes that in our Western-based civilization the senses of seeing and hearing have been ranked as the highest, and taste and touch as the lowest, since the latter are allegedly dominant in all other animals.\footnote{143}{Susan Stewart, “Remembering the Senses,” in Empire of the Senses, 62.}

Within a similar critique of the historical hierarchization of the senses, there are contemporary trends in neurological studies concerned with exposing the fundamental flaws of classical (i.e. Cartesian and mechanicist) neuroscience, namely the view of the human mind as a machine (or computer), and the notion of a localized specialization of brain functions. In the words of neurologist Oliver Sacks, “There is increasing evidence from neuroscience for the extraordinarily rich interconnectedness and interaction of sensory areas of the brain, and the difficulty, therefore, of saying that anything is purely visual or purely auditory, or purely anything.”\footnote{144}{Oliver Sacks, “The Mind’s Eye,” in Empire of the Senses, 33.} At this light, the term synesthesia ceases to designate a pathological experience to which only certain persons are prone, or to a contrived “metaphorical” way of composing by particular artists and movements, but rather alludes to a common participatory tendency and undivided experience of the senses.

A study of synesthetic landscapes in Pinter’s drama is particularly relevant since most of his plays revolve around sensory perceptions or the lack thereof, revealing a fascination with eyesight/blindness, with hearing/deafness, with the desire for and absence of sensual touch, and with repetitive connecting rituals of taste such as eating and drinking. My sensory analysis in this study argues for an intertwined perceptual experience of his playtexts, and for a reading of their landscapes not just in terms of their actual physical surroundings and visible/palpable relations, but also by examining their sensuous interactions with “unseen” and imaginary spaces. Since my reading of synesthetic landscapes in a playtext implies a phenomenological experience of its
many interconnected sensory “scapes.” I have decided to use keywords for textual analysis containing the suffix *scape*—such as *mindscape*, *bodyscape*, *soundscape*, *touchscape*, *smellscape*, *tastescape*, *ghostscape*, *deathscape*, and *lovescape*. Since all of these combinations are formed in imitation of *landscape*, I am often retaining the original noun while opening up its connotative implications of overlapping sensory perceptions through the adjective “synesthetic.”

Retaining the word *landscape* is also vital for my study, since it intends to reflect upon the reciprocality or participatory relationship between body and environment, between human and non-human materiality, within an ecocentric stance. In *The Visible and the Invisible* Merleau-Ponty argues that we are not *on* the earth but rather live *within* the earth. As David Abram notes, this entails an interweaving and synaesthetic communion between body and space at every level of experience:

In *The Visible and the Invisible* Merleau-Ponty supplements his earlier perspective—that of a body experiencing the world—with that of the world experiencing itself through the body. Here he places emphasis upon the mysterious truth that one’s hand can touch things only by virtue of the fact that the hand, itself, is a touchable thing, and is thus thoroughly a pan of the tactile landscape that it explores. Likewise the eye that sees things is itself visible, and so has its own place within the visible field that it sees. Clearly a pure mind could neither see nor touch things, could not experience anything at all. We can experience things, can touch, hear and taste things, only because, as bodies, we are ourselves a part of the sensible field and have our own textures, sounds, and tastes. Indeed, to *see* is at one and the same time to feel oneself *seen*; to touch the world is also to be touched by the world.

I suggest that this reciprocal aspect of perception—what Merleau-Ponty designates as “reversibility,” and Gilles Deleuze calls “feedback loops”—is akin to the Symbolist conjoining of bodily synesthesia with cosmic non-human correspondences. It implies that there is never an

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146 “Insertion of the world between the two leaves of my body; insertion of my body between the two leaves of each thing and of the world” (*The Visible and the Invisible*, 264).
absolute separation between space and landscape (for both are embodied and reciprocal experiences), just as there is never a severance between body and environment, and between human beings and nature. Even if we are to consider landscape as “a view of space” from a certain “place,” this place is always immanently dynamic, and opens up a manifoldness of multisensory perspectives as we move, experience, and live within it.

Therefore, and although I acknowledge that landscape as a way of seeing/experiencing is conditioned by cultural factors, in the present study I argue for an ecocentric reading of landscape that comprises the interdependent impacts and agencies of non-human material environments, social contexts, and individual subjectivities. Many studies of Pinter’s theatre have dealt with the social, historical, and cultural circumstances of both his dramas and their performance, and I want to redress this over-determination of cultural context, as well as the ensuing focus on the ideological constructedness of his verbal imagery.

In this study I want to argue not for a “binocular vision” (as in Bert. O. States’s proposal of a merging of phenomenology with semiotics), but rather for a multiple perspectival experience of Pinter’s playtexts. Although I am committed to a social, historical, and cultural understanding of Pinter’s dramatic landscapes, in this study I will be performing a phenomenological, ecocentric, and Symbolist reading of his playtexts, so as to draw out the latent spatial/corporeal/imaginary activity that exists within them on a variety of scales, and thus reveal micropolitical and environmental aspects of his theatre that specifically relate to my own epochal contexts.
Chapter Two

Harold Pinter’s Theatre: A Symbolist Legacy

I write visually—I can say that. I watch the invisible faces quite closely. The characters take on a physical shape. I watch the faces as closely as I can. And the bodies. ( . . . ) Each play is quite a different world. The problem is to create a unique world in each case with a totally different set of characters. With a totally different environment. It’s a great joy to do that.148

“This is a tale of spring,” “a stained-glass tale”—so does Portuguese Symbolist António Patrício introduce his play Dinis e Isabel (1919).149 These words are indicative of the dramatic mood that follows, and I remember that upon reading them for the first time they induced in me a sense of warmth and quietness as I entered the dream world of the play to experience a medieval tale of love told by flat delicate figures, as if seen from a sacred interior space,150 their still gestures illumined from without by shafts of sunlight. A distinguishing trait of Symbolist drama is the use of a synesthetic language that renders sensory experience by means of images. In a strictly visual sense, the images of Symbolist aesthetics are usually characterized as flat, two-dimensional, and stylized—in the line of Patrício’s stained-glass shapes. Symbolist poet and playwright W. B. Yeats calls for a physical theatre in which bodies are expressive but refrain from naturalistic actions, moving instead in a rhythmic and ritual manner, as if they were Byzantine-like figures or icons in a frieze.151 The idea is to accomplish a “symbolic” use of gesture and space so as to realize poetic images materially onstage, since the “art of the stage is the art of making a

150 In Portuguese the reference to a “stained-glass window” tends to evoke a consecrated space.
succession of pictures.” Consequently, and due to its close affinity with painting, Symbolist drama is often referred to as a “painterly theatre.”

The poetic images that Symbolists wish to concretize are not just visual, however, but also multi-sensorial, as well as both mentally and emotionally reverberating. Symbolist theory/aesthetics involves the creation and evocation of mental concepts through artworks, and therefore emphasizes the collaborative and imaginative role of readers/spectators/beholders, through their intuitive perception and individual way of tuning to atmospheric effects, or shades of feeling.

Characteristics of Pinter’s work that may place it within a Symbolist legacy are: the musical quality of his dramas (by which I mean a rhythmic and associative patterning of both images and sounds); the expression of “the ineffable” through silence (within an implicit critique of conventional language); the blurring of boundaries between imaginary and real worlds (and subsequent exploration of the dark underside of normative reality); a circular rendering of both space and time (often leading to a cinematic kind of structure and effects); the exploration of total subjectivity in drama (to the extent of making space become “psychic”); a pervasive animism (which endows objects or non-human elements with agency); and an apocalyptic sense of history, indicative of a critique of the humanist line of civilizational “progress.”

This chapter elucidates some of these Symbolist concepts through examples of their use in selected Pinter playtexts: The Room (1957); A Slight Ache (1958); The Caretaker (1959); The Basement (1966); No Man’s Land (1974); and A Kind of Alaska (1982). Throughout the chapter, I relate Pinter’s Symbolist scapes to those expressed in dramas by Maurice Maeterlinck, Valerii Briusov, and Hugo von Hoffmannsthal; and shown in paintings by Edvard Munch, Ferdinand Kknopef, and Xavier Mellery. In the initial two subsections of the chapter, I refer past critical

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approaches to the Symbolist qualities of Pinter’s theatre, as well as social similarities between fin-du-siècle and post-WWII epochal contexts in Western Europe. In the subsequent segments, I approach Pinter’s stage spaces, soundscapes, bodyscapes, and objects, as well as his Symbolist use of ghostscapes, deathscapes, and doubles to evoke patterns of interior life. Given that the above mentioned Symbolist concepts are interrelated and often intersect, the subdivisions offered in this extensive chapter on Pinter’s Symbolist legacy are intended as guides toward a more comprehensive reading, and not as discrete sections.

1) Past Approaches to Symbolism in Pinter’s Theatre

There is ample evidence for the Symbolist roots of Pinter’s ideas and dramaturgical style in his own claims to have been an avid reader of W. B. Yeats, Arthur Rimbaud, Marcel Proust, Franz Kafka, T. S. Eliot, and Samuel Beckett, all of whom are considered to be symbolist or post-symbolist by several literary and theatre critics. It is not my intention, however, to approach Pinter’s theatre works in the light of his literary preferences, but rather to investigate the Symbolist characteristics and traces that his plays actually evoke. According to Symbolist poet Stephane Mallarmé, what speaks in any work is the writing—a text made up of “multiple writings,” a “multi-dimensional space” in which a variety of writings blend and clash, and whose multiplicity may only be focused in the “space” of its reader—rather than its author, “his person, his life, his tastes, his passions,” or his “theological” message.154

In relating Pinter’s sensory landscapes to Symbolist theatre and theory, I build upon the work of scholarly precursors who have suggested that there are significant connections between

153 For more information on Pinter’s reading of these authors see Michael Billington, The Life and Work of Harold Pinter (London: Faber & Faber, 1996), or its revised edition with the title Harold Pinter (London: Faber & Faber, 2007).
the playwright’s dramaturgy and Symbolism, but whose insights in this direction have remained largely overlooked. Perhaps the most striking argument for placing Pinter within a “Symbolist legacy” can be found in Katharine Worth’s *The Irish Drama of Europe from Yeats to Beckett* (1978). In this study, Worth places Pinter in the Yeats/Beckett “drama of the interior” tradition and asserts that he is “the most Maeterlinckian” playwright of the English theatre.

Pinter’s technique of “little words,” pauses, silences, repetitions, hesitations, is the closest thing to Maeterlinck’s art of the unexpressed that the English theatre has yet seen. (. . .) [He] is the most Maeterlinckian in certain aspects, above all in his emphasis on life as an enigma and on the universal fear of silence. (. . .) His musicality relates him to the “interior” tradition, as also his feeling for the visual symbolism of the stage. His settings are always “composed” to suggest interior patterns, as in the fantastic changes of interior decoration which represent the characters’ changing view of themselves in *The Basement* or in the room with the dominating window of *No Man’s Land.*

Following Worth’s suggestions, Italian scholar Margaret Rose assigns a chapter of her book, *The Symbolist Theatre Tradition from Maeterlinck and Yeats to Beckett and Pinter* (1989), to the study of the Symbolist methods used by Pinter in his first play, *The Room.* Rose claims that Pinter is an inheritor of Symbolism since he “works through the representation of stage-pictures rather than through a psychological analysis of characters.” Both his stage settings and carefully selected stage properties operate symbolically, and hint at areas of human experience or enigmatic realms beyond surface reality. Moreover, his language contains “an orchestrated musicality and carefully planned repetitions, pauses, and silences, which bring it

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156 Katharine Worth, *The Irish Drama of Europe from Yeats to Beckett*, 208-9.


158 Ibid., 200-1.

159 Ibid., 193.
close to the language of Maeterlinck,” approaching the kind of language Mallarmé and the
Symbolists were seeking to achieve, in which meaning is suggested rather than stated.\textsuperscript{160}

In a similar vein, in his early assessment of Pinter’s theatre, Bernard Dukore briefly notes
that the playwright’s expression of ideas through stage-pictures recalls that of Belgian Symbolist
playwright Maurice Maeterlinck, evidently not through a direct influence but “by way of
Beckett, perhaps by way of W. B. Yeats.”\textsuperscript{161} According to Dukore, “Pinter’s visual imagery
reflects his themes,”\textsuperscript{162} and the meanings of the plays are embodied in the images he offers.

In an essay on Russian Symbolist poet, playwright, and theatre theorist Valerii Briusov,
Daniel Gerould observes how Pinter in \textit{A Slight Ache} utilizes comparable Symbolist techniques,
by creating a stage world in which there are no perceived boundaries between dreaming and
waking life, between the imaginary and the real world.\textsuperscript{163}

Christopher Innes, who in a chapter of his study on \textit{Modern British Drama} insists that
Pinter’s dramaturgy is essentially realistic,\textsuperscript{164} admits, in a later essay, that Pinter’s “memory
plays” of the 1970s stand for “a drama of the mind” directly related to Walter Pater’s idea of a
literature that aspires to the condition of music through the emotionally evocative, rhythmic
patterning, and associative repetition of images.\textsuperscript{165}

More recently, Patrick McGuinness, in \textit{Maurice Maeterlinck and the Making of Modern
Theatre} (2000), notes how Pinter’s theatre is related to Maeterlinck’s, not only in the use of
silence, but especially in the way he makes space, time, light, and sound (essential elements to

\textsuperscript{160} Ibid., 197.
\textsuperscript{161} Bernard Dukore, \textit{Harold Pinter} (New York: Grove Press, 1982), 126-27.
\textsuperscript{162} Ibid., 96.
\textsuperscript{164} Christopher Innes, \textit{Modern British Drama: 1890-1990} (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1992). The
book was republished in 2002 with the title \textit{Modern British Drama: The Twentieth Century}. The chapter on Pinter
has remained unchanged although the playwright wrote several new plays after the original edition of Innes’s study.
\textsuperscript{165} Christopher Innes, “Modernism in Drama,” in \textit{The Cambridge Companion to Modernism}, ed. Michael Levenson
(Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 154.
the theatre event) the subject of theatre itself. According to McGuinness, the modern “theatre of waiting” of both Pinter and Beckett was anticipated by Maeterlinck’s one-act plays.

Yet other authors point to Symbolist resonances in Pinter’s work. In The End of the World: Introduction to Contemporary Drama, Maurice Valency refers to Pinter as a post-Symbolist playwright, but claims that his theatre corresponds to a terminal phase of nineteenth century symbolism, at which point the symbol ceases to convey anything, and meaning becomes a purely subjective consideration. In The Language of Silence: On the Unspoken and Unspeakable in Modern Drama, Leslie Kane acknowledges a relation between Pinter, Maeterlinck, and Chekhov, while arguing that twentieth-century drama has increasingly shown the tendency of expressing the ineffable aspects of life.

Martin Esslin is evidently the first to intuit Pinter’s relationship to Symbolist aesthetics in The Theatre of the Absurd (1961), since the formal attributes of “absurdist drama” that he singles out—namely “plotless plays,” sets filled with mysterious suggestion, “mechanical puppets” or stationary figures instead of recognizable characters, not a theme exposed but rather “reflections of dreams and nightmares,” not a pointed dialogue but rather the use of discontinuous talk, of extended monologue, and effects of silence—constitute distinctive characteristics of Symbolist theatre. In his renowned thesis, however, Esslin associates the aesthetic of the absurd with Surrealism and Expressionism, only mentioning in passing the impact of “Symbolist or Imagist” poetry.

170 Ibid., 403.
This neglect may stem from what Daniel Gerould has termed the “subterranean” influence of the fin-de-siècle Symbolist movement upon late-twentieth-century theatre;\textsuperscript{171} until very recently there has been little awareness of how much Symbolism has contributed to both contemporary dramatic writing and stage practice—as manifest in the works of Antonin Artaud, Samuel Beckett, Tadeusz Kantor, and Robert Wilson, whose theatre has by now been widely acknowledged as “post-Symbolist.”\textsuperscript{172} In the anthology of essays Around the Absurd, Ruby Cohn also observes how “the avant-garde of the 1890s,” namely Symbolism, was very slowly assimilated in the theatre; and of how its de-emphasis on plot and fragmentation of dialogue only became evident in the “absurdist” theatre of the 1950s.\textsuperscript{173}

2) Contextual Affinities

Esslin considers that absurdist works of theatre express the reaction to a world that is “essentially” meaningless, and that the unsettling form of these plays is a reflection or a symptom of a society that has lost its values. Since the world has lost the unifying factors of logic, reason, and rationality, the theatre cannot present the “real” by means of realism, within conventional or recognizable forms. As a result, in absurdist theatre the action focuses on the “poetic” stage image, characters are usually opaque, and there is no dramatic conflict. By maintaining that absurdist plays reflect an “absurd” human condition, Esslin perhaps unwittingly


\textsuperscript{172} Les Essif’s Empty Figure on an Empty Stage (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001) is a recent example of interpreting Samuel Beckett’s theatre as post-Symbolist. In Maria Shevtsova’s study of Robert Wilson (New York: Routledge, 2006), the performance works of the writer/director/designer seem manifestly inspired by the Symbolist movement through Wassily Kandinsky, Gordon Craig, and Adolphe Appia. Both Harold Segel in Pinocchio’s Progeny (Baltimore, ML: John Hopkins UP, 1995), and Daniel Gerould in “The Apocalyptic Mode and the Terror of History,” Theater 29, no.3 (Fall1999) 47-69, have suggested that the theatre works of Kantor and of Grotowski may be viewed as post-Symbolist.

failed to stress the oppositional political resonance of many “absurdist” plays, thereby giving rise to the idea that “absurd” techniques reflected a particular philosophical perspective (essentially Camusian),174 rather than a fierce critique of existing social norms and normative subjectivity. In this sense, Esslin was undoubtedly influenced by one of the absurdist playwrights, Eugène Ionesco, who professed himself to be “apolitical” by famously arguing:

Absurd is that which is devoid of purpose. Cut off from his religious, metaphysical, and transcendental roots, man is lost; all his actions become senseless, absurd, useless. (. . .) If man no longer has a guiding thread, it is because he no longer wants to have one. Hence his feeling of guilt, of anxiety, of the absurdity of history.175

Plays that give primacy to the “poetic image” generally tend to be considered apolitical. Pinter’s early and middle plays are so regarded by most critics, perhaps because their action is sheltered from outside “reality,” and focuses instead on their protagonists’ inner worlds. More recently, a few critics find political traits in Pinter’s early works176 (such as in *The Birthday Party* and *The Dumb Waiter*), but mostly owing to their violent plots, rather than to their suggestive critique of normative family relationships and religious institutions by means of images. Similar to Symbolist artworks that reject an overt political commitment, Pinter’s plays are political in an ethical sense, in that they articulate a micropolitical critique and call for collective social change effected through the transformation of individual consciousness. As Dee Reynolds points out, a key aspect of the political dimension of Symbolist aesthetics can be explained within the context of “a social-political ideal of an internally generated order as

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174 With his essay *The Myth of Sisyphus* (first published in 1942) Albert Camus, perhaps unintentionally, gave an “absurdist” reading to existentialism, by expressing the meaninglessness of human existence, and the idea that once nothing is meaningful the world is inevitably absurd. This reading is quite contrary to the more representative existentialist idea (advocated by Jean-Paul Sartre, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Simone de Beauvoir, among others) that each individual is responsible for creating her own values and providing her life with meaning.


opposed to one imposed from without.’’ The very structure of Mallarmé’s L ivre implied an
diameterally opposed to the accepted norms of bourgeois, materialist culture.

At this stage it is perhaps helpful to raise two relevant questions: 1) why is there a need to
relate Pinter’s work to Symbolism, i.e., what is there in his work that may be revealed anew by
establishing this kinship?; and 2) why do we find in Pinter’s, as we do in fin-de-siècle Symbolist
works, the disposition to suggest or to “symbolize” inner visions with political and ecocritical
resonances, i.e., what are shared characteristics of their respective historical contexts? I reply to
the first question by reiterating that an analysis of Pinter’s playtexts through the lens of
Symbolist theory and aesthetics may help reveal ecocritical and micropolitical resonances that
have been thus far largely overlooked. Regarding the second question, it certainly seems—as
Esslin proposes—that Pinter’s early theatre relates to the Zeitgeist of the European postwar
period, marked by the memories not only of the Holocaust but also of the Hiroshima bombing,
and influenced by the existentialist philosophies of Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus (or by the
notion of the world as a nauseating void). In my view it seems significant to add that Pinter grew
up during World War II, when the Nazis were occupying most of Europe while not always
countercing resistance to their deeply set authoritarianism; and that he wrote all of his plays in
an era where nuclear holocaust is a real threat.

In a similar manner, Symbolists experienced the end of the nineteenth century (which for
them effectively “ended” with World War I) as the tragic closing of an era. As Gerould argues,

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178 Ibid., 216. According to Mallarmé, the “Book” was to be a vast undertaking, a work in many volumes “unconsciously attempted by everyone who has ever written,” and aimed at understanding the Orphic mystery of the universe. See “Autobiographique (16 November 1885),” in Œuvres complètes (Paris: Pléiade, 1946), 662.
179 Martin Esslin, “Harold Pinter’s Theatre of Cruelty,” in Pinter at Sixty, 35. Already in the Theatre of the Absurd, Esslin holds that “the convention of the Absurd springs from a feeling of deep disillusionment, the draining away of the sense of meaning and purpose in life, which has been characteristic of countries like France and Britain in the years after the Second World War” (311).
many Symbolist works express an apocalyptic sense of impending destruction, and reveal an eschatological sensibility that was particularly heightened in nations suffering from repressive social regimes (such as Russia and Poland). Thus, not only in France, but also in other countries of the European periphery such as Ireland and Portugal, Symbolism was marked by a distrust of the ongoing civilizational progress. In Portugal, where the term was afterwards assimilated into the wider movement of *modernismo*, Symbolism led to a movement in arts and literature that contested scientism, while often expressing a nostalgia and longing for mysterious realms of mind and body, through leitmotifs such as the sea, and the unknown.

Most significantly, as Guy Cogeval points out, there is a striking contrast between Symbolism’s social and economic context—a time of financial prosperity, and of collective faith in unlimited industrial progress—and the movement’s own doubt with regard to the future of human civilization, to the point of forecasting its extinction. In this sense the European turn of the century resembles the post World War II era in Western Europe, since they are both periods of unprecedented technological and capitalist prosperity owing to an economy of war and the ensuing market expansion. Most notably, in both periods individual subjectivities seem threatened by a flattening massification insinuated through spectacle and novel economic modes of production.

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180 Daniel Gerould, “The Apocalyptic Mode and the Terror of History,” *Theater* 29, no.3 (Fall 1999): 47-69. As Gerould explains, in both Poland and Russia an apocalyptic sensibility was often combined with a millenarian vision of a new beginning. As a result, many Symbolist artworks stimulated a reawakening of collective consciousness, toward a fight for autonomy and/or for social revolution.

181 This particularly complex feeling of nostalgia combined with longing is expressed through the word *saudade*, and corresponds to a key Portuguese cultural myth that led to the Symbolist branch of *Saudosismo*. See Jacinto Prado Coelho, “Symbolism in Portuguese Literature,” in *The Symbolist Movement in the Literature of European Languages*, ed. Anna Balakian (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1982), 549-63.

182 According to Jacinto Prado Coelho the movement in Portugal enjoyed two waves, the first from 1890 to 1897 (influenced by the writings of poet Eugénio de Castro); and the second in 1915 with the publication of the periodical *Orpheu*, by poet-philosopher Fernando Pessoa, poet and fiction writer Mário de Sá-Carneiro, painter Amadeo de Sousa Cardoso, and other artists. The latter wave corresponded to a Portuguese renaissance in arts and literature, and was permeated by a misty nationalism, idealism, animism, and pantheism.

Raymond Williams proposes the concept of “structures of feeling” as a critical term to understand the elements at play in the actual lived experience and formative process of culture. Williams’s structure of feeling is an ambiguous keyword for it has both to do with the *Zeitgeist* or “spirit of the age,” and with how a particular author senses or feels this same context. In his words, “It is as firm and definite as ‘structure’ suggests, yet it is based in the deepest and often least tangible elements of our experience. It is a way of responding to a particular world.”\(^{184}\) It is a “living structure” that leads to the making of new conventions, new forms.\(^{185}\) Williams’s notion suggests an emphasis on subjective vision, or on the differentiated inner perceptions of artists even if placed in a similar cultural context. Pinter and Arnold Wesker, for instance, come from the same generation of British playwrights of Jewish ancestry, from an identical socio-economic class and immersed in a similar historical and cultural context, yet their dramatic works seem quite disconnected.

What I find distinctive in both Pinter’s works and in Symbolist aesthetics is above all a similar ethical or micropolitical attitude, which partly translates itself in a reaction against the tide of positivist approbations of progress, and in a sad (somewhat nostalgic) state of mind over the collective fate of human beings. Further, there is in both cases a sense that the art of “poetic images” can be an alternative way of expressing and “seeing,” while at the same time providing a deeper critique of the status quo. Yeats voices a similar yearning when he asks, “How can the arts overcome the slow dying of men’s hearts that we call the progress of the world, and lay their hands upon men’s heartstrings again, without becoming the garment of religion as in old


\(^{185}\) Ibid., 19.
As McGuinness notes, Symbolism is more a tendency than a school, and it apparently recurs at different times of history like a wheel of a Yeatsian kind.

3) A Theatre of Images

Pinter’s drama has long been considered “a theatre of images,” starting with Esslin’s remarks in *The Theatre of the Absurd*.

The action in a play of the Theatre of the Absurd is not intended to tell a story but to communicate a pattern of poetic images. (. . .) The whole play is a complex poetic image made up of a complicated pattern of subsidiary images and themes, which are interwoven like the themes of a musical composition, not, as in most well-made plays, to present a line of development, but to make in the spectator’s mind a total, complex impression of a basic, and static, situation. In this, *the Theatre of the Absurd is analogous to a Symbolist or Imagist poem*, which also presents a pattern of images and associations in a mutually interdependent structure.

In Esslin’s view, by striving to convey “thematically” the senselessness of the human condition, the theatre of the Absurd abandons rational devices and discursive thought in its “form”; accordingly it devaluates conventional language and tends toward an expression of absurdity through concrete stage images. Specifically in the case of Pinter, Esslin considers that he is “a lyric poet whose plays are structures of images of the world, very clear and precise and accurate images, which however, and that is the point, never aspire to be arguments, explanations or even coherent stories.”

Pinter himself has frequently mentioned how his plays spring from images that in turn “freely engender” other images. Apparently, he usually starts off with particular images in his

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189 Ibid., 24-26.
190 Esslin, *Pinter the Playwright*, 47.
191 Pinter, “Writing for the Theatre,” *Plays One* (New York: Grove Press, 1976), 14. In a later interview Pinter adds that “the image that starts off doesn’t just engender what happens immediately, it engenders the possibility of an
mind—which are “unrelenting” and “insist upon being written”\textsuperscript{192}—and then lets them “dictate the writing from there.”\textsuperscript{193} Pinter’s portrayal of his writing as a flow of “engendering images” evokes Yeats’s celebrated lines, “Those images that yet/ Fresh images beget,” from his poem \textit{Byzantium};\textsuperscript{194} and Yeats’s own concept of theatre when he asserts that it is “the art of making a succession of pictures.”\textsuperscript{195} Pinter’s creative process also calls to mind Mallarmé’s well-known passage:

To \textit{name} an object is to suppress three-quarters of the enjoyment of the poem, which derives from the pleasure of step-by-step discovery; to \textit{suggest}, that is the dream. It is the perfect use of this mystery that constitutes the symbol: to evoke an object little by little, so as to bring to light a state of the soul or, inversely, to choose an object and bring out of it a state of the soul through a series of unravelings.\textsuperscript{196}

While poetry in general may be viewed as a language of images, in Symbolist poetry proper there seems to be a distinct relation between “thing” and “image.” Whereas in non-Symbolist poetry the “thing” constitutes the theme and the “image” exemplifies it (thus functioning as a metaphor), in Symbolism the “image” gradually assumes materiality, becoming the “thing.” Although the image assumes materiality and is part of the thing, the full view of the thing (or object) remains hidden, not due to intentional obscurity but rather because the thing resists being represented, it is ineffable and can only be evoked “little by little.”

A similar concept is expressed by Gilles Deleuze, when in \textit{Cinema Image} he speaks of “mental images” in art, or of images that take as their object \textit{relations} that are both intellectual

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and affective. These images are not abstractions or metaphors, they are “real” things, literally, that radiate or present images of relations; therefore they are symbols.\textsuperscript{197} Thus, as I stated in Chapter One, it is important to distinguish the use of “symbol” in the linguistic semiotic sense as a thing that stands for something else (metaphor), from the Symbolists’ meaning of the term, as a thing/image that sensorially—from Latin \textit{sens}, perceived, from verb \textit{sentire}—evokes an idea of which it constitutes a part. Bachelard also takes up this distinction in phenomenological terms when he writes that a metaphor has no phenomenological value since “at the most, it is a \textit{fabricated image}.”\textsuperscript{198} Differently, the “true” image is a product of absolute imagination, a phenomenon of being.\textsuperscript{199}

Pinter himself has repeatedly denied the metaphorical and \textit{symbolic} aspects of his works, countering that they are about actual things or “matters of fact.”\textsuperscript{200} As a result, the playwright has resisted the label of “symbolist” applied to his works, as when he argues in an interview: “I feel very strongly about the particular, not about symbolism. People watching plays tend to make characters into symbols and put them up on the shelf like fossils. It’s a damned sight easier to deal with them that way.”\textsuperscript{201} Although Pinter’s reaction is understandable once placed into context—he is after all reacting to critics who accuse him of “wallowing in symbols” and “reveling in obscurity” so as to deliberately mystify the readers and spectators of his works\textsuperscript{202}—it

\textsuperscript{198} Gaston Bachelard, \textit{The Poetics of Space} (New York: Orion, 1964), 74-75.
\textsuperscript{199} Pinter asserts: “If I write about a lamp, I apply myself to the demands of that lamp. If I write about a flower, I apply myself to the demands of that flower.” Cited in Martin Esslin, \textit{Pinter: The Playwright}, 268.
\textsuperscript{200} In “Writing for Myself” Pinter additionally states: “I certainly don’t write from any kind of abstract idea. And I wouldn’t know a symbol if I saw one.” In \textit{Harold Pinter: Complete Works 2} (New York: Grove Press, 1977), 10.
\textsuperscript{202} The quoted terms of these typical (and still current) accusations of Pinter’s deliberate obfuscation derive from a negative review of \textit{The Birthday Party} by Milton Shulman in 1958. See Michael Billington, \textit{The Life and Work of Harold Pinter}, 89.
is also characteristic of the habitual misapprehension of the concept of “symbolism” mentioned earlier.

In my view, Pinter’s work may be situated within the Symbolist legacy only if we adopt the Symbolists’ notion of symbol. As I indicated in Chapter One, within Symbolist theory the symbol is a synthetic element, the expression of a lived and embodied experience that renders the singularity of an experienced and embodied moment through a play of associations. As a result, the Symbolist poetic image is noted for its ambiguity and capacity to suggest multiple elements of sense association, since its “openness” is consciously contrived. According to Umberto Eco within the conscious poetics of the open work that appeared in fin-de-siècle Symbolism the important thing is to prevent a single sense from imposing itself at the very outset of the receptive process:

This search for suggestiveness is a deliberate move to “open” the work to the free response of the addressee. An artistic work that suggests is also one that can be performed with the full emotional and imaginative resources of the interpreter. Whenever we read poetry there is a process by which we try to adapt our personal world to the emotional world proposed by the text. This is all the more true of poetic works that are deliberately based on suggestiveness, since the text sets out to stimulate the private world of the addressee so that he can draw from inside himself some deeper response that mirrors the subtler resonances underlying the text.203

The image-symbol of Symbolist poetics encourages a subjective process of meaning-making that contrasts with the notions of “symbolic” whether in the linguistic, or in the psychoanalytical sense. As Anna Balakian remarks, whereas Symbolist poetry is a lucid spreading of a fan of meanings, “the psychological symbol crystallizes the ineffable, involuntary motivations and desires inherent in human behavior.”204 Such an approach to the Freudian-

Lacanian *symbolic* aspects of Pinter’s drama is evident in Katherine Burkman’s mythic criticism,\(^{205}\) as well as in psychoanalytical interpretations of his plays by other critics.\(^{206}\)

According to Dukore, and in agreement with Symbolist aesthetics, meaning in Pinter’s plays is embodied in the “thing” or “image” itself:

> To deal with the type of meaning embodied in his plays, one might bear in mind Samuel Beckett’s description of James Joyce’s work that was later to be called *Finnegans Wake*: “Here form is content, content is form . . . His writing is not about something; it is that something itself.” Pinter’s plays are not “about” something; they embody that something in dramatic and theatrical form. Meaning inheres in the direct impact of what happens on stage, not in an explanatory character or discursive dialogue.\(^{207}\)

This immanent “meaning” of the image is neither single nor unified, but rather multiple and dynamic, corresponding to Pinter’s own comments on his drama: “There is no end to meaning. Meaning which is resolved, parcelled, labelled and ready for export is dead, impertinent—and meaningless.”\(^{208}\) Meaning embodied in the thing/image is also particularly highlighted by phenomenology, as I will further explore below.

### 4) The Room Image

In terms of images, the “room” is perhaps the most recurring motif in Pinter’s theatre. It happens to be the title of his first play, and practically its main subject, if we notice how its protagonist, an elderly woman named Rose, constantly and obsessively chatters about her

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\(^{206}\) Psychoanalytical interpretations of Pinter’s drama can be found notably in Marc Silverstein’s *Harold Pinter and the Language of Cultural Power* (Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Presses, 1993); and in Ann Lecercle’s *Le théâtre d’Harold Pinter; Stratégies de l’indicible: regard, parole, image* (Paris: Klincksieck, 2006).


dwelling’s physical condition. Although the room image recurs throughout Pinter’s oeuvre, I will just refer a few obvious instances at this stage. In *The Basement*, the owner of an underground room is visited by a friend, and a contest seemingly ensues between them for the possession of this living territory. In *Night School* a room stands for one’s place in the world. The fight for a living space of one’s own as a means of acquiring a social position is equally evident in *The Caretaker*. Finally, in *The Dwarfs* the protagonist Len feels his room, and in fact all other interior spaces, as constantly subject to change:

LEN. The rooms we live in . . . open and shut. (*Pause.*) Can’t you see? They change shape at their own will. I wouldn’t grumble if only they would keep to some consistency. But they don’t. And I can’t tell the limits, the boundaries, which I’ve been led to believe are natural. I’m all for the natural behaviour of rooms, doors, staircases, the lot. But I can’t rely on them.\(^\text{209}\)

For Esslin, Pinter’s use of the room motif signals “a return to some of the basic elements of drama—the suspense created by the elementary ingredients of pure, preliterary theatre: a stage, two people, a door; a poetic image of an undefined fear and expectation.”\(^\text{210}\) Esslin’s interpretation of this image seems apolitically essentialist, however, when he states that the room “becomes an image of the small area of light and warmth that our consciousness, the fact that we exist, opens up in the vast ocean of nothingness from which we gradually emerge after birth and into which we sink again when we die.”\(^\text{211}\) Perhaps inspired by Esslin’s interpretation, critics generally envision the “room” as a womb-like space that is invaded by external agents,\(^\text{212}\) and consequently consider that Pinter’s plays are mostly about territorial displacement, psychological defeat, reversals of power, and the quest for dominance in human relationships.

\(^{209}\) Pinter, *The Dwarfs*, in *Pinter Plays Two* (London: Eyre Methuen, 1977), 99.
\(^{211}\) Ibid, 235-36.
\(^{212}\) Arthur Ganz, in his introduction to *Pinter: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Ganz (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1972) writes: “in Pinter’s work the room repeatedly, almost regularly, becomes a crucial element: a place of shelter, a refuge tenuously maintained against the assaults of the outside world, in which the entrance or exit of any character and the resulting shift in relations is a matter of the utmost consequence” (18).
In her book on space in the theatre, for example, Hanna Scolnicov remarks, “For Pinter the starting point of writing a play is the relationship between a man and his spatial environment. The division between within and without is formulated by Pinter as an existential experience. Between these two separates is the door.” Scolnicov goes to the extent of arguing that in Pinter’s plays “the house or interior is undifferentiated in terms of gender” (which in my perspective it is not, as I will argue in Chapter Five), and that it represents “a frail refuge menaced from the outside (anyone may enter from a door at any moment and alter the balance if there ever is one).”

Lois Gordon reiterates the same idea when she states that in Pinter’s drama “a single pattern predominates”:

Within a womblike room rather ordinary people pursue their rather ordinary business; a mysterious figure enters, and the commonplace room becomes the violent scene of their mental and physical breakdown. Whether Pinter is dealing with a triangular situation among the lower class, as he does in the early plays, or with the better-educated, better-heeled middle class . . . this womb-room, expulsion theme and its accompanying light-dark, dry-damp, warm-cold imagery establish the Pinter mode.”

The expulsion theme associated to the room space is also adopted by Barbara Kreps in her essay on “Time and Harold Pinter’s Possible Realities: Art as Life, and Vice Versa”:

His early plays show human isolation as a condition imposed from outside, which is undoubtedly why it was spatially defined through the contrast of a room and everything outside the room. There is society, or a nexus of social relationships of various sorts, and then there are the individuals who do not quite fit (for reasons that are never clear either to them or to us), and who are therefore gradually excluded. What we watch, then, in Pinter’s early plays is the process of eviction and the struggle against that process on the part of the individual excluded.

214 Ibid., 154.
215 Lois Gordon, Stratagems to Uncover Nakedness, 1.
Kreps, nonetheless, considers that in Pinter’s later works, “His vision of a world that contains inexplicable forces of aggression that could destroy us at any minute has been replaced by the view that the individual is ultimately incapable of being touched by any world that is not self-defined.”

In other words, the intruder is no longer physically situated outside the room, the intruder is the Other, or all others, whether or not they are inside. “Pinter’s world is bounded no longer by doors, but by ego.”

I propose that Kreps’s significant insights in relation to the later plays may also apply to the early ones in which there are actual doors.

Applied to Pinter’s oeuvre the reading of the “room” space as an existential refuge turns out to be a simplified and univocal interpretation of such an image, perhaps influenced by Pinter’s early statements, “We are all in this, all in a room, and outside is the world… which is most inexplicable and frightening, curious and alarming.”

Contrastingly, I suggest that only occasionally does the room figure as a defensive environment, protecting the inside characters from the outside (A Slight Ache, Party Time, Celebration); most regularly it is a materially menacing and oppressive space for its own inhabitants (The Birthday Party, The Dumb Waiter, The Hothouse, A Night Out, The Collection, The Homecoming, One for the Road, Ashes to Ashes). Frequently it seems to be a monodramatic setting, or a reflection of a single character’s mind (The Dwarfs, Tea Party, The Basement, No Man’s Land, Family Voices, A Kind of Alaska); but sometimes it seems to exteriorize different characters’ inner scapes (The Caretaker, Old Times, The Lover, The Collection). Yet at times, the room image/space seems to encompass all of the above qualities (as in Pinter’s first play, The Room). Sporadically, however, it is almost non-existent as a spatial structure, giving way to a superimposition of settings and overlay of

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217 Ibid., 56.
218 Ibid.
219 Pinter, cited in Esslin, Pinter the Playwright (London: Methuen, 1977), 39.
time periods within an undefined setting or abstract stage-space (Landscape, Silence, Night, Monologue, Betrayal, Mountain Language, Remembrance of Things Past).

The “room” is unquestionably a significant and recurrent environment/space/landscape in Pinter’s oeuvre, but it is a multidimensional image. As Austin Quigley insightfully remarks, the evocative nature of Pinter’s images is such that it is impossible to pin down definitive causes and effects for them.220 As Pinter’s character Beth expresses in the play entitled Landscape,

Objects intercepting the light cast shadows. Shadow is deprivation of light. The shape of the shadow is determined by that of the object. But not always. Not always directly. Sometimes it is only indirectly affected by it. Sometimes the cause of the shadow cannot be found.221

This corresponds to what Balakian observes in relation to the original Symbolist group under the impetus of Mallarmé, that it triggered both a poetics of language and a perception of poetics in which “the well of meaning is inexhaustible because meaning is not linear, but rather a circular vortex in perpetual motion”222 allowing for “prismatic dissipations in the path of communication”223 in various forms. This is made possible through a “symbolist technique of terse and open-ended communication that defies analytic attempts at exterior deciphering or decoding of ambiguities of meaning.”224

I sustain that a critical reading of Pinter’s plays must be essentially intuitive, exploratory, and inconclusive in terms of definitive truths and significations. His plays stir critics to a wide variety of interpretations (which attests to how his texts interact with their individual imagination), and are therefore capable of being approached from different theoretical perspectives. In the course of my investigation I have found that, more often than not, any single

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221 Pinter, Landscape, in Harold Pinter: Complete Works 3 (New York: Grove Press, 1978), 196.
222 Balakian, Fiction of the Poet, 7.
223 Ibid., 14.
224 Ibid., 105.
play by Pinter allows for multiple readings. This potential manifoldness is characteristic of what Eco calls the “open work” and evidence of Pinter’s use of Symbolist techniques.

5) An Anxious and Haunted Interior: The Room

Like Symbolist artworks, Pinter’s plays are able to sustain a vast number of readings. As an example, there have been several different interpretations of the space, images, and landscapes of Pinter’s first play, The Room. Scolnicov considers that in this play space is concrete, localized, and determinate, with a definite topographical division between “within” and “without.” While the theatrical space without is a “potential menace,” the space within is relatively secure. “Most disturbing of all is the dark and damp basement, a theatrical space without.”

Ruby Cohn claims that Pinter’s earlier plays depict “victims and villains acting out their dramas in dilapidated rooms,” but mostly focus on the plight of the victims. Accordingly, The Room “ends in the virtual annihilation of an individual,” given that “after a blind Negro is kicked into inertness, the heroine, Rose, is suddenly stricken with blindness.” In The Pinter Ethic:

225 The Room (written in 1957, first staged by the Bristol Drama Department in May 1957) opens with a woman of sixty (Rose) busily preparing breakfast and incessantly chatting about her dwelling’s comfort and security, while her husband Bert Hudd silently reads a magazine. What seems at first a lower-class marital comedy atmosphere soon assumes a threatening quality due to Bert’s insistent and unnerving muteness. The landlord Mr. Kidd enters, supposedly to look at the pipes, and incoherently reminisces about his past in the apartment building. After he leaves, Bert heads off for work. Soon after, Rose opens the door to the dark stairwell and faces a couple, Mr. and Mrs. Sands who is looking for a vacant room. A confused conversation about the landlord and the building ensues; as Rose denies the rumor of a vacancy in the building, Mr. Sands insists that a man in the basement indicated that number seven (Rose’s room) is available. When the Sands couple leaves Mr. Kidd reenters to tell Rose that the man in the basement has been waiting for over a week to come up and see her. She denies knowledge of the man, but after much insistence consents to see him. As a blind Negro enters the room, Rose screams that she doesn’t know him, and that his name is not Riley, as he claims. Riley calls her “Sal” and delivers his message: “Your father wants you to come home… I want you to come home.” As Rose touches Riley’s eyes and head, Bert reenters and speaks for the first time, describing in a language charged with sexual innuendo how he drove his van through the cold streets. As Riley addresses him, “Mr. Hudd, your wife—,” Bert cries, “Lice!,” knocks Riley down, and kicks his head against the gas stove. As the Negro lies unconscious (perhaps dead), Rose clutches her eyes, crying “Can’t see. I can’t see. I can’t see.”


The Erotic Aesthetic, Penelope Prentice apparently holds a similar perspective while adding an ethical justification. Prentice claims that Pinter’s characters generally “fight most fiercely not to gain what they do not have, but to maintain what they already possess.” Accordingly, the character Rose in The Room clings to the illusory safety and comfort of her living space (like all human beings who existentially fight for shelter), although what she truly seeks is affection from her husband Bert: “What The Room ironically dramatizes is that the rigid or obsessive desire to maintain the sine qua non of existence—shelter—may be the very attitude which produces the action to destroy it when that attitude is attended by a belief that there is no other choice, no way out.”

Within a mythic perspective, Burkman sees the room as a sacrificial site, and the figure of the Negro Riley as a pharmakos or sacrificial scapegoat, a victim whose destruction serves to reestablish certain basic relationships in the family or community. In The Room “Rose can no longer hide behind her ritual breakfasts with her husband when Riley appears from the basement and involves her in his fate as pharmakos.” The foreigner-scapegoat emerges from the underground, is killed by Rose's returning husband, and Rose is stricken blind. According to Burkman, the Negro may stand for thoughts Rose has wished to avoid, namely of deserting her husband. Thus, Rose's fear of dispossession may actually correspond to a fear of her deepest desires for a “new” old man.

Adopting a Freudian framework of analysis, Lois Gordon sees the room as the site of struggle within Rose’s warring personality. Throughout her entire life Rose has attempted to lock herself into her room, which functions as “an internal defensive system.” Each intruder into the

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229 Ibid., 54-55.
231 Ibid., 72.
room menaces to expel her from it, to “bring her closer to herself,” and as a result she is terrified. According to Gordon’s reading, the basement is equated with the unconscious, and the blind old Negro named Riley is “a concrete yet suggestive dream symbol” that allows the audience to project onto it all of its own associations with lurking violence, darkness, dampness, and cold.  

The scene with Riley makes explicit Rose’s basic hatred toward all men:

Clearly [Riley] functions not so much as an external character as the inevitable return of [Rose’s] unconscious. (…) Rose identifies him with her father and acts out the initial incestuous relationship, either real or fantasized, that has necessitated her life’s games. Her guilt—not only from experiencing her buried feelings toward her father but also from acknowledging her everyday castration of males—is so great, she cannot witness the slaughter (the reality), and hence it is she who becomes blinded.

Contrastingly, Michael Billington seemingly reads the play’s space straightforwardly, as if it were a naturalistic play. The room is basically a family household or ‘home,’ which makes “clamorous demands” upon the individual who is seeking to evade its clutches: “Six times Riley invokes the word “home.” Five times he calls Rose ‘Sal.’ (…) All this implies Rose has shed her past and is living under an assumed name. And, when it looks as if she may succumb to Riley’s urgent blandishments, Bert returns home and, in a mixture of sexual and racial fury, beats him to pulp.”

From a cultural materialist perspective, Ronald Knowles examines The Room in the light of its historical contexts, namely Britain’s colonialist inheritance, postwar racism, the cold war, and the British class structure of the 1950s. Accordingly, he finds that the figure of the blind Negro clearly invokes the late 1950s reality of black encroachment on white neighborhoods:

As a blind black man, Riley embodies the foreign, the alien, and the bereft, and, as such, he objectifies Rose by symbolizing the condition she hides from herself but inadvertently reveals to the audience. (…) To an audience of 1957 the transference of Riley’s blindness/identity to Rose by way of her touching “his eyes, the back of his head and his

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232 Lois Gordon, Stratagems to Uncover Nakedness, 16.
233 Ibid.,18-19.
234 Michael Billington, The Life and Work of Harold Pinter, 68-69.
temples” would have been deeply shocking not only for its symbolic reversal of identity but also in the sexual implications of its tenderness. Pinter has reversed a stereotype. Blacks were supposed to show deference before their colonialist “superiors.” Part of the unnerving experience of The Room is Pinter’s covert demonstration that the British were as capable of persecuting a racial minority as anyone else.235

In a similar vein, but from the viewpoint of postcolonial theory, Gail Low reads The Room “as a political allegory of Britain at the end of empire.”236 According to Low, the play depicts the anxieties over housing and the proximity of strangers in postwar Britain; and addresses “how race impacts on home, hearth and the discourses of the nation.”237 Throughout the play, the audience realizes that Rose is living under a cloud of generalized insecurity about her home, and that she is anxious about who might be living in the other rooms, particularly in the damp and dark basement:

Ensconced in the protectiveness of her room, Rose comments, “this room’s all right for me. I mean, you know where you are. You can come home at night, if you go out, you can do your job, you can come home, you’re all right.” But Rose’s remarks beg the question of a room “where you [don’t] know where you are,” a home that you cannot return to and a place where you have no job.238

Low notes how the appearance of the Negro Riley confirms Rose’s fear that home and hearth have become racialized. He sits down uninvited and is verbally harangued by Rose, before being violently hit by Bert at the play’s ending.

Finally, critic Margaret Rose sees the room as an image of Rose’s interior life, in the line of Symbolist drama and theatre, where space is often “psychic.” She observes how through the play Rose voices her deepest fears concerning the outside space of her one-room apartment, and describes the basement as a dreadful space, with sinister implications recalling Maeterlinck’s

235 Knowles, Understanding Pinter (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1995), 24-25.
236 Gail Low, “Streets, Rooms, and Residents: The Urban Uncanny and the Poetics of Space in Harold Pinter, Sam Selvon, Colin MacInnes and George Lamming,” in Landscape and Empire 1770-2000, ed. Glenn Hooper (Hants, UK: Ashgate, 2005), 169-70.
237 Ibid., 169.
238 Ibid., 170.
underground areas in *Pelléas et Mélisande*. In a Symbolist mode, Pinter “conjures up a dreadful labyrinthic area where an unseen individual is said to abide,” and “guides the reader/spectator from the exoteric level of surface reality towards the esoteric realms of Rose’s interior life.”

Margaret Rose’s comments approach my own readings of the room image, since I envision the space of *The Room* as embodying a hybrid fusion of stage décor and human character. As depicted by the room’s repeated “intruders,” the apartment building where the character Rose resides seems endowed with a Piranesian architecture of intricate corridors, dark and deep staircases, indefinably extended. Neither the landlord Mr. Kidd, nor the tenant Rose seem to know how many floors there are in the building. Further, and although all the apartments are said to be occupied, the proprietor asserts that he sleeps about in any room of his choosing. Searching for a vacancy in the building, the Sands couple seems uncertain of whether they have ascended or descended the dark stairwell in order to reach Rose’s apartment; they also repeatedly declare that it is as dark inside the building as outside of it, probably darker. The man in the basement emerges from the dark and is both black and blind. In the manner of a Symbolist monodrama, or of what Les Essif terms a “hypersubjective play,” everything that takes place in the room seems to exist chiefly in Rose’s mind or imagination.

Time seems to have been flattened in *The Room* as if different temporal layers had been juxtaposed in space, to become somehow concurrent. Mr. Kidd recognizes Rose’s chair as having been his sometime ago, remembers her room as having been his own, but is markedly vague about his own origins, place of residence, past or present circumstances. The Shands are

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240 Ibid., 211.
241 Eighteenth-century Italian artist Giovanni Battista Piranesi’s etchings of imaginary interiors are notable for their dark labyrinthine architecture, filled with endless platforms, stairways, niches, and all sorts of mechanical devices.
242 See Les Essif, *Empty Figure on an Empty Stage: The Theatre of Samuel Beckett and His Generation* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2001).
quite sure that Rose’s room is vacant, and seem to think that the landlord is Rose’s husband.

Regarding the apartment located in the basement, Rose speaks of its space with such detail that she seems to actually inhabit it.

As in subsequent dramas, in *The Room* Pinter explores questions of spatial-temporal circularity by establishing symmetry between the opening and the closing sections of the play. The introductory image is that of a woman moving about in a room, robotically busy with preparing food and drink for a man, while she chatters her time away; and of a muted man sitting at a table almost motionless, looking at a magazine and munching food in a mechanized way. The last image is that of the same man vigorously kicking the head of a “Negro” against the gas-stove, while the woman, now practically immobile, clutches her eyes because she has suddenly gone blind. This symmetry seems to indicate that the play is about a couple’s relationship, the “Negro” appearing to be either a figure of Rose’s past, or else a unacknowledged part of her desiring mind. This is in tune with Pinter’s own interpretation when he states that the intruder in *The Room* enters “to upset the balance of everything,” pointing to the illusion upon which Rose has been building her own life: “This old woman is living in a room which she is convinced is the best in the house, and she refuses to know anything about the basement downstairs. She says it’s damp and nasty, and the world outside is cold and icy, and that in her warm and comfortable room her security is complete.”  

In other words, Rose seems oblivious of the true nature of her relationship with Bert, or perhaps prizes “security” above all else. In this sense the play raises questions about her micropolitical patriarchal ethics, which is intimately tied to her macropolitical racist views and behavior.

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However, space in *The Room*—as in most of Pinter’s plays—figures not only as a mental/imaginary emanation of the characters that inhabit it, but also seems to produce a material effect on these characters’ bodies and minds. Pinter presents us with a room with one door and one window, where two people eat, sleep, sit, talk, stand, and eventually die in. It is an image of extreme human isolation, a hole of urban existence, a hostile interior where no-one really relates to one another or to anything. This landscape recalls the playwright’s own comments on his early plays,

I’m dealing with these characters at the extreme edge of their living, where they are living pretty much alone, at their hearth, their home hearth . . . there comes a point, surely, where this living in the world must be tied up with living in your own world, where you are—in your room.245

No matter how much Rose praises the security of her room the fact remains that it is a small, austere, and unfriendly space—and so is her vision of the outside world. As Bachelard observes, “the house images move in both directions: they are in us as much as we are in them,” since there is a close relation between their topography and our intimate being.246 Space is not indifferent, but always affective; one carries one’s own room inside.

I find that Rose is obsessed with touchscapes, the feeling of being warm or cold, damp or dry, and also with the idea of what is “up” or “down,” “inside” or “outside” her living space, as if she lacked bodily orientation. Twice she goes to the window to look out, thinks she sees someone, but “no.” She is desperate to seek out, to find who or what lives down in the dark basement but never goes out or down to “see” for herself, and at the end becomes blind. In my view Pinter’s room image has ecocritical resonances, evoking the claustrophobic scapes of Symbolist painters such as Edvard Munch, whose characters are seemingly unable to get outside.
of their house’s window, to where there is (or may be) sunlight, vitality, or well-being. The recurrent image of the sixty-year old Rose rocking in her chair while chatting with herself belongs to the Symbolist legacy of images of stasis, where each person seems haunted, still, alone, and surrounded by ominous presences.

The room image in Pinter’s first play seems therefore to reflect upon the participatory relationship between character and environment. In this sense, I want to invoke Randall Stevenson’s insights when he compares Rose to one of Franz Kafka’s creatures, i.e., to the nameless animal in The Burrow who obsesses himself with the security of his hole, but never feels secure enough, and therefore is never free from anxieties inside it. Like Kafka’s creature, “Rose finds her eagerness to confine herself to the security of her lair qualified by a fearful fascination with the outside world and its menaces.” Like Kafka’s hole, Pinter’s “room” is an anxious interior.

Baker and Tabachnick similarly remark how Rose in The Room expresses that “only on home territory, following a routine, can one feel safe. Safe against what?” Safe for the sake of being safe disturbingly evokes our own post-911 epoch, in which “security” seems to be prized above all else, including personal freedom. Rose and her husband appear to have walled themselves in a room so as to carry on a weary routine that they identify as “living.” In the words of Symbolist poet Rainer Maria Rilke, “their life is running down, unconnected with anything, like a clock in an empty room.” Unlike critic Victor Cahn, who argues that the fear of

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247 As Kynaston McShine remarks, the theme of windows appearing behind or to the side of Munch particularly recurs in his own self-portraits, as well as in his depictions of family reunion scenes, suggesting the presence of a sunny outside that contrasts with the gloomy interiors. Kynaston McShine, “Introduction,” in Edvard Munch: The Modern Life of the Soul (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2006), 11-15.
intrusion in the room is biologically determined by “the human animal” in us, I propose that the voluntary and compulsive immurement of Pinter’s characters against outside elements provides an image of what has become of us, socially speaking.

As I stated earlier, sensory scapes are particularly highlighted in Pinter’s theatre, and there is frequently either a lack or an excess of a sensory faculty in one or more of his characters. Blindness is one of the most recurrent sensory scapes in Pinter’s drama—the other sensory deficiencies being deafness in Tea Party; muteness in Mountain Language and One for the Road; numbness in A Kind of Alaska; and tastelessness in Party Time. Episodes of a character becoming blind appear in five plays, namely in The Room, The Birthday Party, A Slight Ache, Party Time, and Tea Party. Since blindness occurs mostly to male protagonists, however, critics tend to interpret it as symbolic of castration or impotence, or of an oedipal loss of authority within a Freudian perspective. Perhaps because in Freudian psychoanalytic theory the female sex is naturally “castrated,” Rose’s blindness is seldom dealt with, and necessarily left out of this symbolic equation. While there may be multiple ways of interpreting her loss of sight, I suggest that we should approach the blindness in Pinter’s characters in a more phenomenological manner, as perhaps simply indicative of a deteriorating physiological-mental state; or of an immured condition; or even, at times, of a newly acquired inner insight.

For Austin Quigley, Rose’s blindness directly links to Riley’s blackness. Among the “unspecified fears” and “uncertain facts” that Pinter presents in The Room, for Quigley the most important and perceivable connections in the play associate “Rose’s desires and fears to a

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252 “Blindness” is Symbolist playwright Maurice Maeterlinck’s preferential image for the human incomprehension of life’s mysteries, as evidenced in his drama Les Aveugles (The Blind). It is a typical image of post-Symbolist literature, found in works such as Ensaio sobre a Cegueira (1995) by Portuguese novelist José Saramago. The book was translated by Giovanni Pontiero, and first published by Harvill Press (UK) in 1997 with the English title of Blindness. Associations between Saramago’s and Pinter’s apocalyptic images will be explored in Chapter Four.
presence in the basement and to an irrevocable acknowledgement of the division between herself 
and Bert. (. . .) Both Bert and Riley are essential to Rose, but they also manifest incompatible 
demands.”

Knowles insightfully observes that in *The Room* “Rose’s presumed security is 
undermined by Bert’s dumbness, Mr. Kidd’s deafness and finally by Riley’s blindness.”

“You’re all deaf and dumb and blind, the lot of you,” says Rose close to the play’s ending.

When Rose suddenly becomes blind, it is as if she had absorbed the darkness that Riley stands 
for, which corresponds to the lack of knowledge of her inner self:

In *The Room*, the blind negro Riley, rising from the blackness of the basement and 
entering Rose’s room with the darkness of night, is vulnerable, incapacitated and alien— 
and yet the bearer of identity. (. . .) Amidst the seemingly secure, comfortable and 
familiar, this middle-aged woman is ultimately estranged, fearful and alien.

In this sense, Rose’s fears of the cold and damp, of down and up, of the dark inside and the 
perilous outside, of foreigners and others, are all projections of an internal terror, of the 
oppressed Other situated within the Self. There is here an evident contiguity between human 
element and space. In this respect, Pinter’s use of blindness is comparable to that which recurs in 
the theatre of Maeterlinck, suggestive of “how hopelessly we are all in the dark. A brutally 
physical dark.”

As evidenced by these many different readings of *The Room*, there is neither one truth 
behind a playtext that needs to be unveiled, nor a dialectical contradiction to be discussed and 
solved, since in Pinter’s works the image has multiple repercussions and its significations remain 
indefinable. Recent criticism on Pinter’s theatre both acknowledges and highlights this intrinsic

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257 Katharine Worth, *Irish Drama of Europe from Yeats to Beckett*, 208.
suggestive character of his dramaturgy in the light of postmodernism. Within this perspective, Varun Begley states that Pinter’s plays “whatever their specific content, are engaged in the negation of conventional meaning-making.” However, he also warns that “resistance to interpretation is not the same thing as meaninglessness.”⁵⁵⁸ Although the Symbolist/post-Symbolist image evokes a manifoldness of scapes, there is necessarily a range to its suggestiveness, as I will explore below.

6) Soundscapes

For stage director Peter Hall, “Pinter has brought poetic drama back into the theatre.”⁵⁵⁹ Critics generally agree with this assertion but chiefly when referring to Pinter’s “middle” period of “memory plays,” in which his language is noticeably lyrical (i.e., in plays such as Landscape, Silence, Night, Old Times, and Monologue). The poetic quality of soundscapes, however, is manifest in all of his works. By soundscape I mean a sonic landscape brought about through the alternating presence and absence of sounds, including words but downplaying their referential value. In this respect soundscapes in drama may resemble musical compositions, and be heard either as progressing harmonically, or atonally.

For the Symbolists, as for the Romantics before them, music is the archetype of a language of the unconscious, capable of expressing metaphysical realms, and ineffable phenomena. Music has no recourse to representation and leads its listeners to ponder beyond any definable content, making them experience a subjective time of consciousness. Further, in Symbolist theory the elements of movement, rhythm, and vibration—particularly evident in the

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musical medium—are considered to be the underlying principles of the cosmos, permeating both the physical and the spiritual worlds.

Just as Mallarmé’s imagery broke with narrative structure, composers such as Claude Debussy, Aleksandr Scriabin, Arnold Schoenberg, and Béla Bartók changed the harmonic and tonal vocabulary, broke away with the traditional major and minor scales, and transformed a hierarchical syntax (hypotaxis) into a juxtaposition or side-by-side arrangement of elements (parataxis). In the context of the cross-fertilization between the arts of the fin-de-siècle, Symbolist fiction, poetry, and drama underwent a similar and complementary kind of non-representational experimentation. In *The Tuning of the Word*, David Hertz explains how Symbolist poetics was nurtured in ideas of music, by providing as an example Yeats’s lyric play *Shadowy Waters*, which is not concerned with characterization, but rather with an exploration of asymmetrical rhythms through sound effects, visual imagery, and poetic diction:260 “Couplings are made by the repetition of phrases from the dialogue, by sounds that are promoted from the background into the heart of the play, or by recurrent visual symbols. The [Symbolist] lyric play creates a theater of atmosphere, of *Stimmung*, and not a theater that expresses the logical resolution of problems.”261

Although critics of Pinter’s theatre have placed a great deal of emphasis on both his use of verbal language and his characters’ linguistic power games, there has not been to my knowledge any in-depth study of the soundscapes in his plays. Through such a study (made along similar lines of Hertz’s investigation), it would be fascinating to discover what patterns, rhythms, and recurring sounds his lines of dialogue make up, or what kind of musical


261 Ibid., 172-73.
composition they might achieve. In my view, many of the verbal interchanges between
characters that constitute the plays’ dialogues are so distant from any referential purpose that
they are able to evoke a particular atmosphere or mood merely through soundscapes, i.e., even if
performed before an audience not familiarized with the meanings of the language being spoken.
In other words, in many instances it is not “what” the characters say that is evocative, but rather
“how” they say it, through the kind of soundscapes they help form. The repetition of the same
word-sounds, the recurrence of similar tones through rhymes, the cadence of the phrases, and the
alternation between voices is so elaborate in Pinter’s theatre that his plays often read like musical
scores.

Ronald Hayman associates the sound textures of Pinter’s plays to the contemporary
compositions of Pierre Boulez, “in which the intervals between the notes are almost more
important than the notes themselves.” In a review of an early play, Pinter’s soundscapes were
also compared to the music of Anton von Webern (1883-1945), a leading exponent of the
compositional technique of “serialism,” which was invented by Symbolist composer Arnold
Schoenberg (1874-1951). This technique is based on a repetition of a fixed series of notes,
recurring at regular intervals, and forming an overall pattern or mood which is subject to change
only in minimal ways. Significantly, Pinter states that he continually senses music in the process
of writing his works, and actually considers Webern and Boulez as two of his favorite
composers.

263 Review in The Times, 21 January 1960: “To find another artist with whom Mr Pinter may fruitfully be compared
one must look farther afield than drama, or even literature, to Music—to Webern, in fact, with whose compositions
Mr Pinter’s plays have much in common. Like Webern he has a taste for short, compressed forms, as in his revue-
sketches which are really complete plays five minutes long, and like Webern he inclines to etiolated pointillist
textures, forever trembling on the edge of silence, and to structures elusive, yet so precisely organized that they
possess an inner tension nonetheless potent because its sources are not completely understood.” Cited in Martin
Esslin, Pinter the Playwright, 24.
As mentioned earlier, the notions of movement, rhythm and vibration were central to Symbolist aesthetics. According to Dee Reynolds, painter Wassily Kandinsky drew on these concepts so as to create content without recourse to representation in a painting:264

The foregrounding of rhythm is crucial both to challenges to conventional modes of meaning and representation and to interactions between “matter” (here, the medium of the work) and imagining activity. Rhythmic structures which create these interactions effect changes in the way the receiver experiences the medium, and it is these changes, rather than conceptually definable subject matter, which constitute the principle content of the work.265

In this light, I want to consider some of Pinter’s soundscapes, formed by Meg’s repeated questions, and Petey’s monosyllabic answers in The Birthday Party:

MEG. Is that you, Petey?
   Pause.
Petey, is that you?
   Pause.
Petey?
PETEY. What?
MEG. Is that you?
PETEY. Yes, it’s me.
MEG. What?
PETEY. Yes.
MEG. I’ve got your cornflakes ready. Here’s your cornflakes. Are they nice?
PETEY. Very nice.
MEG. I thought they’d be nice. You got your paper?
PETEY. Yes.
MEG. Is it good?
PETEY. Not bad.
MEG. What does it say?
PETEY. Nothing much.
   (. . .)
MEG. What time did you go out this morning, Petey?
PETEY. Same time as usual.
MEG. Was it dark?
PETEY. No, it was light.
MEG. But sometimes you go out in the morning and it’s dark.

264 Dee Reynolds, Symbolist Aesthetics and Early Abstract Art: Sites of Imaginary Space (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 53. Reynolds notes that the etymology of the word ‘rhythm’ suggests that it was originally applied to the physical act of drawing, inscribing, engraving, and was used to mean something like form, shape, or pattern.
265 Ibid., 40.
PETEY. That's in the winter,
MEG. Oh, in winter.
PETEY. Yes, it gets light later in winter.
MEG. Oh.\textsuperscript{266}

Both the rhythm and tone of this dialogue is evidently repetitive, monotonous, minimalist, to the point of becoming annoying. This chatter of pointillist sounds, incessantly alternating between questions and answers, actually approaches a monologue since one of the two vocal pitches predominates. Although the content or subject matter of the dialogue becomes practically irrelevant, or referentially “casual,” the sound score it helps form evokes what I consider to be a recognizable couple/family torturescape.

Synesthetic torturescapes recur in Pinter’s drama: manifest in its repetitive bodily configurations, in his characters’ constant engagement in rituals of taste, and through their reticence and/or aggressiveness in touching one another. Very often, however, they may be simply achieved through an illogical repetition of speech rhythms and vocal sounds that convey an oppressive mood, such as in his typical interrogation scenes. These consist of unnerving sequences of questions by victimizers, which systematically provoke silent or barely audible responses from their victims, expressive of both bafflement and paralyzing terror.

CUTTS. Are you often puzzled by women?
LAMB. Women?
GIBBS. Men.
LAMB. Men? Well, I was just going to answer the question about women—
GIBBS. Do you often feel puzzled?
LAMB. Puzzled?
GIBBS. By women.
LAMB. Women?
CUTTS. Men.
LAMB. Uh—now just a minute, I…do you want separate answers or a joint answer?
CUTTS. After your day’s work, do you ever feel tired, edgy?
GIBBS. Fretty?
CUTTS. On heat?
GIBBS. Randy?

CUTTS. Full of desire?
GIFFS. Full of energy?
CUTTS. Full of dread?
GIFFS. Drained?
CUTTS. Of energy?
GIFFS. Of dread?
CUTTS. Of desire?

Pause

LAMB. Well, it’s difficult to say, really—

Although *The Hothouse*, to which the above interrogation scene belongs, is considered by most Pinter critics to be a “political” play, *torturescapes* in his work are not confined to the social sphere but also abound in domestic interiors, as I have shown above.

Regarding Meg’s incessant chatter sequences in *The Birthday Party*, Almansi and Henderson argue that her speeches are a stratagem to cover the nakedness of a vacuous existence:

Meg’s conversation is the paradigm of existential chat, whereby you talk about nothing (or about the weather) in order to make sure that you exist—and that other people are aware of it. She plays her futile word games for the serious purpose of having her own existence confirmed by the sound of a reciprocal voice, by the mere sequence of a mutual exchange.

Almansi and Henderson note that this *phatic* mode of exchange is a “customary gambit” in Pinter’s early plays. I consider that it is consistently used in nearly all of his works, providing them with a minimalist atmosphere in sonic terms. Soundscapes of chatter and interrogation abound in his oeuvre, regardless of the psychological differences of the characters involved in such dialogues.

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269 Ibid., 35.
As defined by the “speech event” theory of Roman Jakobson, the *phatic* mode is a way of making linguistic contact that is not designed to elicit or offer any information.\(^{270}\) McGuinness observes how the *phatic* mode is strikingly present in Maeterlinck’s Symbolist plays, in which words are not valued for their semantic or informational content but rather serve as both a way of passing the time, and of just providing confirmation of presence.\(^{271}\) Daniel Albright demonstrates Samuel Beckett’s debt to the “old symbolist tradition” by arguing that both Maeterlinck and Beckett write “phatic dialogue in which metadiscursive speakers are anxiously checking the communication channel.”\(^{272}\) In the same vein, I suggest that large sections of Pinter’s dialogue should not be interpreted referentially, but rather be heard as soundscapes evocative of the surface patter of mundanity. In Pinter’s *phatic* mode human characters speak somewhat automatically to come to terms with their surrounding space, to mask an inner uneasiness, their fear of silence or of the unknown. It matters little what they say, for their chatter is a form of contact, of verification, of “being there.”

In *The Pinter Problem*, Quigley similarly suggests that Pinter’s characters use language for various different purposes other than conveying information. Quigley seems to imply that the playwright’s dialogues are *performative* like speech acts: they establish alliances, dictate relationships, and can be used as physical weapons.

As long as [Pinter] criticism is handicapped by an implicit belief that language is primarily referential, that it is mainly concerned with the transfer of verifiable facts, we will continue to be puzzled by the connective thread which links successive statements in Pinter’s plays. ( . . . ) But once it is realized that other language functions can predominate, we will look again at these connections and find them anything but “obscure.”\(^{273}\)


\(^{273}\) Austin Quigley, *The Pinter Problem*, 50.
Ruby Cohn has written about Pinter’s phonic and verbal repetitions, and use of serial patterns of words/sounds that are emptied of meaning, i.e., cut loose from both story and character, thus distant from the conventions of dramatic realism. Cohn finds that the use of *refrains* (line, or lines, or part of a line, repeated at intervals throughout a poem) that intensify the mystery, and of *incantations* created through a combination of rhyme and rhythm, is particular evident in *No Man’s Land*. Here is one of Cohn’s examples of a *refrain*, voiced by Hirst through the play:

I was dreaming of a waterfall. No, no, of a lake, I think it was… just recently. (43)
It was the dream, yes. Waterfalls. No, no, a lake. Water. Drowning. Not me. Someone else. (44)
What was it? Shadows. Brightness, through leaves. Gambolling. In the bushes. Young lovers. A fall of water. It was my dream. The lake. Who was drowning in my dream? . . . Am I asleep? There’s no water. No-one is drowning. (46)
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 am mistaken. There is nothing there. (95)

Various types of repetitions shape the soundscapes of *No Man’s Land*. Cohn categorizes them as *single doublets* (a single speaker repeats his words at once or soon after first utterance), *echoing doublets* (exact echoes between two speakers), *distanced doublets* (repetitions distanced over a long period), *triplets* (successions of three repetitions), *multiplets*, *crescendos*, *volleys*, and *pounders* (a single speaker pounding the same word or words in an extended passage).

In terms of the tapestry woven by these various sound patterns, Cohn claims that, for instance, “simple repetitions may slow the rhythm, conveying uncertainty or reassurance. Echo repetitions usually speed the pace, thrusting, parrying, and building to a volley. Distanced repetitions and

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refrains tend to be weighted by what is signified.”

According to her, Pinter’s “dramatic opalescence of repetition” recalls Gertrude Stein’s sonorous investigations in her “landscape plays.” Finally, Cohn argues that the qualities of the play’s landscape of sounds, its stasis, repetitiousness, and circularity, actually corresponds to what it wants to convey, namely that the two haunted characters (Hirst and Spooner, both writers) have mechanized the meaning out of the words: “[the] phrase ‘comedy of menace’ is still apt for No Man’s Land, but the menace arises not only from a linguistic battle of wills, but also from a linguistic heritage gone stale: ‘long ghosts . . . making noises’.”

Concerning Pinter’s soundscapes, Richard Schechner notes his use of stichomythia, observing how he transforms dialogues into rituals, by writing long scenes between two characters where they voice brief exchanges alternately, and at a steady rhythm. These litanies, are “built on trivial, idiomatic ideas and rhythms which half-reveal sinister intentions,” or by using words and phrases that have no direct connection to the play’s action. Schechner provides as an example the “antiphonal” speeches of McCann and Goldberg in The Birthday Party, which convert “tough guy” talk (as they are attacking Stanley) into “ritual form”:

McCANN. Take you for constitutionals.
GOLDBERG. Give you hot tips.
McCANN. We'll provide you with skipping rope.
GOLDBERG. The vest and the pants.
McCANN. The ointment.
GOLDBERG. The hot poultice.

As Schechner observes, this litany continues for seventy-three lines, and “at the end of it, Stanley can no longer speak coherently.” It is important to refer that through the action of The

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276 Ibid., 188.
277 Ibid., 203.


Birthday Party Stanley is a character gradually rendered mute and blind by McCann and Goldberg. A common pattern in Pinter’s plays, in fact, is that these seemingly endless “litanies” are often performed by couples of torturers/executioners/thugs/victimizers in the presence of their spectating silent or muted victim/s. Pinter’s litanies relate to the interrogation scenes mentioned above, and thus help compose torturescapes.

Silence in Pinter, however, is not always enforced, and therefore should not be interpreted univocally. In the words of the playwright,

There are two silences. One when no word is spoken. The other when perhaps a torrent of language is employed. This speech is speaking of a language locked beneath it. That is its continual reference. The speech we hear is an indication of what we don’t hear. It is a necessary avoidance, a violent, sly, anguished or mocking smokescreen which keeps the other in its place. When true silence falls we are still left with echo but are nearer nakedness. One way of looking at speech is to say it is a constant stratagem to cover nakedness.  

The idea that beneath what is verbally proffered lies an unvoiced subtext, frequently elusive and unwilling, expressed through gestures, looks, sighs, or bodyscapes, brings to mind Anton Chekhov’s dramaturgy. In effect, several critics (Esslin, Hinchliffe, Knowles, and Kane, among others) have associated Pinter’s drama with Chekhov’s, mainly due to a similar use of silences and pauses, and to a common exploration of apparently trivial but profoundly obscure or ambiguous dialogues. Yet none of these critics has highlighted the fact that Chekhov experiments with Symbolist techniques in all of his four full-length plays. In The Seagull, for instance, not only is Treplev’s play a prototype of an apocalyptic Symbolist/Decadent one-act play, but there are also whole sections of dialogue that echo Maeterlinck’s phatic mode and pathos, such as in the opening of Act Four:

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281 Schechner, “Puzzling Pinter,” 178.
282 Pinter, speech given at the Seventh National Union of Students Drama Festival at the University of Bristol in 1962. This speech was first published in the London Sunday Times, 4 March 1962. Republished as “Writing for the Theatre,” in Harold Pinter: Complete Works 1 (New York: Grove Press, 1976), 14-15. My emphasis.
MASHA. Hello? Are you there? (Looks round.) No one. The old man keeps asking every minute, ‘Where’s Kostya? Where’s Konstantin?’ He can’t live without him…

MEDVEDENKO. He’s frightened of being alone. What terrible weather! All yesterday, too, all last night.

MASHA. There are waves on the lake. Huge waves.

MEDVEDENKO. The garden’s quite dark. They should tell someone to knock down that theatre. It’s as hideous as bare bones, and the curtain slaps in the wind. As I passed there last night I thought I heard a voice weeping in it.  

Symbolist playwright Maurice Maeterlinck spoke of a “dialogue of the second degree,” meaning that at the side of a first level of trivial surface dialogue, there is a second kind of exchange that reveals the true inner experience of the characters. This dialogue of “soul-states” is likely indescribable through words, since the complexity of inner experience is ineffable. Pinter’s works for the theatre resemble Maeterlinck’s static drama of internal action and phatic speech in many aspects. Worth claims that especially in *Péleas and Mélisande* the Belgian Symbolist playwright seems an important progenitor of Pinter, since in this play, above all others, “he brilliantly conveys both the fearful difficulty of knowing people and on the other hand the communication that takes place without being willed or understood or even wanted.”

Silence is closer to nakedness in Pinter’s dramaturgy, but there are many kinds of silence in his plays. As seen earlier, the playwright distinguishes between two types, “one when no word is spoken,” and “the other when perhaps a torrent of language is being employed,” the former corresponding to a “pause,” and the latter to a “silence” that communicates. There are, however, several other kinds of silence in Pinter’s soundscapes. According to Stanton Garner, speech in Pinter plays a crucial role in the struggle of bodies for space or territoriality. Within this contest, the silenced body represents “an enforced reversion from linguistic commerce into a

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285 Worth, *The Irish Drama of Europe*, 94.
fixity without linguistic recourse,” becoming an emblem of the hegemony of language.\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}, 33.}

Nevertheless, Garner argues, Pinter’s use of silence is paradoxical. On the one hand the subject is fixed as object and rendered mute (e.g., Stanley in \textit{The Birthday Party}, or the women and men in \textit{Mountain Language}); on the other, silence is also used as a resistance to linguistic demarcation, a refusal of speech, the assertion of “a kind of pre-verbal sovereignty.”\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}} “This paradox of silence as counter-field, as a claim of subjectivity in the midst of its objectification,” or as “a withdrawal from language, a standing apart from its coercions and configurations,”\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}, 33-34.} is evident in many of Pinter’s plays. For Garner “we misread the interrogation dynamics of \textit{The Birthday Party}, \textit{One for the Road}, and \textit{Mountain Language} if we do not understand the silence of its victims as—in part, at least—the claiming of a place,” of a no-man’s land, of a kind of Alaska, “an arena outside linguistic reach.”\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}, 34.}

Leslie Kane, in her study of silence in modern drama, finds that menace in Pinter’s plays derives in large extent from the unexpressed that is both unspoken and unspeakable.\footnote{Leslie Kane, \textit{The Language of Silence: On the Unspoken and the Unspeakable in Modern Drama}, 134.} According to Kane, the characters’ experience “of the emptiness and the inexplicable in their lives,”\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}, 156.} of their isolation, separateness, bewilderment, and terror, is made acutely apparent through their silences. For Kane, the absence of speech intensifies the impression of stasis in Pinter’s plays, since silence is a “nonverbal, nonanthropomorphic mode of communication” that emphasizes the gap between comprehended experience and articulated experience.\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}, 179.} Similarly

\begin{footnotesize}
\item[288] \textit{Ibid.}, 33.
\item[289] \textit{Ibid.}
\item[290] \textit{Ibid.}, 33-34.
\item[291] \textit{Ibid.}, 34.
\item[292] Leslie Kane, \textit{The Language of Silence: On the Unspoken and the Unspeakable in Modern Drama}, 134.
\item[293] \textit{Ibid.}, 156.
\item[294] \textit{Ibid.}, 179.
\end{footnotesize}
to Garner, Kane observes that the muteness of Pinter’s characters is often socially imposed, but may be also self-imposed.295

Consequently, silence in Pinter’s playtexts is not always to be felt as the contrary or the absence of language. It is haunted by the sensuous and carnal, and thus communicates. Further, I suggest that not all verbal language in Pinter functions as “a mask to cover one’s nakedness.” Occasionally—in those rare lovescapes found in plays like Mountain Language, Landscape, and Silence—words work like gestures and constitute amorous touchscapes, or synesthetic landscapes in tune with a vast world of thunderous and sighing things other than the human:

*Lights to half. The figures are still. Voices over:*

**MAN’S VOICE**

I watch you sleep. And then your eyes open. You look up at me above you and smile.

**YOUNG WOMAN’S VOICE**

You smile. When my eyes open I see you above me and smile.

**MAN’S VOICE**

We are out on a lake.

**YOUNG WOMAN’S VOICE**

It is spring.

**MAN’S VOICE**

I hold you. I warm you.

**YOUNG WOMAN’S VOICE**

When my eyes open I see you above me and smile.296

In the above scene taken from *Mountain Language*, the dialoguing characters are physically apart, and in effect separately incarcerated. They are silenced bodies, muted bodies that are able to communicate sensorially, through recalled or imagined landscapes of the amorous body. The pastoral atmosphere that this passage evokes is usually shown by Pinter to be the most powerful political counter-discourse, the assertion of a utopian realm of the imagination invulnerable to the strictures of authoritarianism. Additional lovescapes in his work will be explored in the next chapter.

295 Ibid., 147.
The above passage noticeably contrasts—in its rhythm, tone, and sound vibrations—to the soundscapes exposed before, produced by incessant compulsive chatter, or by mechanized unnerving interrogations. Whereas the soundscapes of the amorous body create a warm and soothing musicality, the other sonic patterns mentioned approach a rattle of sharp and dull sounds produced by characters that “are the puppets of language,” a language “made of dead spittle.” As Almansi and Henderson observe, these chatterers and interrogators believe that they are in control of language while in fact they are being controlled by it. They are bound “to a purely repetitious production of alien sounds and alien concepts, as if the vocal apparatus were merely the loudspeaker of a cheap hi-fi system.”

According to Pinter, “the more acute the experience the less articulate its expression.” Implicit in this statement, as well as in Pinter’s soundscapes, is a critique of language similar to that which the Symbolists proclaimed. Randall Stevenson holds that Pinter’s use of language resembles that of modernist fiction writers (Virginia Woolf, Ernest Hemingway, James Joyce, among others), for whom language has somehow “fallen out of phase with experience.” Like these artists, Pinter seems concerned with the failure of words to connect with the world, and with a referential instability in language which allows it to be used to manipulate and distort rather than represent actuality. A similar idea is expressed by Varun Begley when he calls attention to the “undigested” and “imagistic” quality of Pinter’s dialogues, and his regular use of a language emancipated from the strictures of reference and significance. Begley claims

297 Almansi and Henderson, Harold Pinter, 41-42.
298 Ibid., 41.
301 Varun Begley, Harold Pinter and the Twilight of Modernism, 137.
302 Ibid., 100.
that Pinter’s dramaturgy alerts us to the constructedness of language, and thereby complicates clear-cut distinctions between the modern and postmodern.\textsuperscript{303}

It is important to remember, however, that prior to modernism and to postmodernism a critique of language was already perceptible in the writings of some Romantic poets and theorists. In \textit{A Defence of Poetry} (1821), Percy Shelley writes that poetry (by which he means \textit{creative writing} in any field) “purges from our inward sight the film of familiarity” and is capable of creating anew the universe, “after it has been annihilated in our minds by the recurrence of impressions blunted by reiteration.”\textsuperscript{304} Some decades later, Mallarmé holds that a conventional use of language has to be questioned since it only allows for communication at a superficial level. To convey new or deep experience language has to recover its creative power, “language has to become poetry.”\textsuperscript{305} Echoing Shelley, Mallarmé claims that “Our inner experience tends to be falsified by the conventional nomenclature and stock categories of everyday speech.”\textsuperscript{306}

In the same manner, I consider that Pinter’s soundscapes—like music and poetry—are able to evoke perceptions and emotions in the listener/reader that are often estranged from the usual referential or denotative meaning of the words he uses. In effect, the playwright is able to achieve a poetic quality in his works through what appears to be banal quotidian talk in seemingly realistic settings. This and other aspects of Pinter’s estrangement techniques and effects will be the subject of Chapter Five.

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{303} Ibid., 5.
\item \textsuperscript{305} Loyd James Austin, “Presence and Poetry of Stéphane Mallarmé: International Reputation and Intellectual Impact,” in \textit{The Symbolist Movement in the Literature of European Languages}, ed. Anna Balakan (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1982), 44.
\item \textsuperscript{306} Mallarmé, cited in Loyd James Austin, “Presence and Poetry of Stéphane Mallarmé: International Reputation and Intellectual Impact,” 53.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
7) Architectural Design of Space

In *Revolutions in Modern English Drama*, Katharine Worth considers that Pinter expresses a “romantic attitude” towards language, wishing to preserve the mystery in his plays. Differently from a commonly accepted idea, Worth argues that Pinter’s brilliantly oblique and haunting drama is unlike that of English realism, placing him “pretty firmly in the nineteenth century Ibsen/Chekhov tradition.”

Worth claims that on a first level his plays seem credible in ordinary social terms, but “then comes the level of sharper stylization where distortion from the characters’ inner life creeps in.” Unlike realistic playwrights, Pinter does not represent “slices of life,” or a portrait of “social men” in a style of ordinary social probability. Moreover, “his settings are not realistic houses.”

Pinter’s concept of spatial design is seldom approached, perhaps due to a recurring understanding of his settings in realistic/naturalistic terms, both by critics and stage directors. Peter Hall appears to be one of the exceptions when he observes that Pinter has “an immensely architectural sense,” and that his plays are all “about space.” Referring to *The Homecoming*, which was originally conceived for the ample stage of the Aldwych theatre in London, Hall recalls:

> [Pinter’s] description of the set is that it is enormous, and actually the staircase was twice as tall as an actual staircase would have been. The area they were fighting over, which was the father’s chair and the sofa where the seduction takes place, and the rug in front, was an island in the middle of antiseptic cleanliness—that scrubbed lino, acres of it. And the journey from that island where the family fought each other, across to the sideboard to get the apple, was very perilous, and this was all quite deliberate—a few objects in space, and a feeling of absolute chilliness and hostility. ( . . . ) If the set for *The Homecoming* is a naturalistic representation of a house in North London, then the glass of water makes almost no impression, because it’s one glass among many knickknacks.

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308 Ibid., 93.
309 Ibid., 5.
310 Peter Hall “Directing Pinter,” 8.
Pinter’s initial idea of a large barren space conveying an atmosphere of collapse and claustrophobic dereliction was noticeably overlooked in the last production of the play in New York City, at the Cort Theatre in 2007. Concerning the set of this production I agree with reviewer John Lahr when he notes that the room was undersized, and overdecorated with naturalistic detail (colored pitchers, glasses, mirror, carpet, dumbbells, record-player, etc.).

This is actually a common practice, at least in the several productions of Pinter’s plays that I have witnessed. Most directors tend to focus on characterization and dialogue, as if the plays were realistic, ignoring their evocative scenic features, spatial articulations, and ensuing non-naturalistic corporeal relationships.

Noteworthy studies on Pinter’s spatial design include a brief essay by Worth concerning some recurring aspects of his scenic imagery; Margaret Rose’s comments on the creation of scenery for the performance of A Kind of Alaska in Italy, and Barbara Kreps’s exploration of the “hypersubjective” space in The Basement. Worth notes how Pinter’s indications of space in stage directions often accentuate a vertical architecture that conjures up thoughts of Freud (stratification of the ego/id; and of conscious/unconscious), and of Christian mythology (heaven/hell)—as apparent in plays such as The Room, The Dumb Waiter, The Hothouse, The Basement, and The Caretaker. As a result, Worth claims that Pinter’s sets are “expressive” rather than naturalistic; apparently solid and mimetic, Pinter’s “rooms” are in effect fragile psychic spaces, haunted by invisible forces. In A Kind of Alaska, for instance, the playwright uses

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311 Directed by David Sullivan, with skilful performances by Ian McShane as Max, and by Eve Best as Ruth.
315 Barbara Kreps, “Time and Harold Pinter’s Possible Realities: Art as Life, and Vice Versa,” Modern Drama 22 (1979): 47-60. Kreps labels The Basement a fantasy or dream play.
whiteness to suggest Deborah’s state of mind: “White surface reflects white surface as in the
vision of her entrapment in a hall of mirrors where ‘glass reflects glass. For ever and ever.’”

Pinter wrote *A Kind of Alaska* inspired by *Awakenings*, a book where neurologist
Oliver Saks describes his experience with patients formerly affected by the “sleeping sickness”
(*encephalitis lethargica*), and who awoke after three decades of sleep (in the 1960s), when they
were given a newly discovered drug called L-Dopa. In her essay on Pinter’s play, Margaret
Rose focuses on its scenic translation for a production in Italy, describing how stage director
Quasimodo visualized the space:

While Pinter states “A woman in a white bed” without mentioning a room, the director
imagined a coldly ascetic room resembling an “involute” or “shell,” as he repeatedly
called it… The objects in the room, such as the bed, the chair, and table were all painted
white, while the sheets, doll, and bra that were placed on the bed were covered in plaster
of Paris to show that they are frozen in time and space. The lighting of the room also
helped to create a kind of vacuum and further reinforced the idea of a place suspended in
space and time whose unlit outer boundaries give the impression of a no-man’s-land
beyond. This room contrasts sharply with the room of Deborah’s childhood and
adolescence which exists only in memory. The lost room can be evoked only through the
language of lost childhood which grows animated and colourful as the protagonist recalls
it as being cosy, with lilacs decorating the wallpaper.

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316 Ibid., 38.
317 *A Kind of Alaska* (first produced at the Cottesloe Theatre, October 1982) depicts the awakening, after twenty nine
years of a coma-like sleep, of a woman of forty-five through an injection administered by Doctor Hornby, who is
also married to her sister Pauline. The play concludes in an ambiguous tone: Deborah is promised a pathetic birthday
party but ends lying silently on the bed, as if terrorized by her new “consciousness.” As Ann Hall states in *A Kind of
the play clearly brings to mind the well-know fairy tale “Sleeping Beauty” written by the Brothers Grimm. From a
feminist theoretical perspective, the character of the man, Hornby, is clearly in charge, “as the arbiter of value,
power, and language” throughout the situation” (87); differently, Deborah seems to obey the law of the body,
resisting to be educated in the “objective” law of patriarchy. “Deborah’s stories appear diseased, while Hornby’s
appear truthful, logical, and scientific” (86). Thus, “the play illustrates that neither her sleep nor her awakening
permit feminine desire within patriarchy” (82). However, according to Penelope Prentice (*The Pinter Ethic: The
Erotic Aesthetic*, 2000), Pinter depicts Doctor Hornby as a compassionate man (263-68). In the play Hornby says “I
have never let you go;” and adds, “I have lived with you. ( . . . ) Your sister Pauline was twelve when you were left
for dead. When she was twenty I married her. She is a widow” (35). In this sense I suggest that it would be
interesting to compare Pinter’s *A Kind of Alaska* with Spanish director Pedro Almodovar’s film *Habla con ella*
(2002), which also focuses on the relationship between a man-keeper and a woman-patient in comatose. However,
while the former resembles an eternal vigil, the latter is a tendering of life.
318 In *Awakenings* (1973), Sacks surveys twenty clinical cases. In spite of the apparently successful treatment with
L-Dopa, the drug had terrifying side-effects. Pinter bases the story of Deborah on the real case of a patient named
Rose R.
According to Rose, this set expresses the dominant theme of the play, which is Deborah’s quest for a self, following her awakening. The white frozen space also stands for the coldly hostile world to which Deborah returns after twenty-nine years of sleep, and where she must live out her tragic hour, caught in “the unbridgeable gap between the world of lost childhood and the present-day world.”\textsuperscript{320} As she is unable to come to terms with the reality of the present, “the shell-like, frozen space is ready to suck her back again at the play’s conclusion.”\textsuperscript{321}

In her essay on Pinter’s \textit{The Basement},\textsuperscript{322} Barbara Kreps similarly argues that space in Pinter’s plays is psychic. Kreps categorizes \textit{The Basement} as a fantasy or a “dream play,” perceiving the continual changes in furniture and space throughout the play as happening inside the mind of one of the characters:

Until \textit{The Basement}, Pinter’s plays were firmly planted in the objective world of space and time. But with \textit{The Basement}, the audience are not aware until very well into the drama—if, indeed, they are ever aware—that none of this is really happening, that the whole thing, or most of it, is a fantasy, or a dream, or a memory that is being acted out in Law’s head.\textsuperscript{323}

According to Kreps, what happens in \textit{The Basement} is entirely Law’s own construction, “it is he who peoples his loneliness, he—like the artist—creates, defines, and destroys relationships as a private act of imagination. As they come into his mind, Jane and Stott really exist for Law, just

\textsuperscript{320} Ibid., 39.
\textsuperscript{321} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{322} \textit{The Basement} seems a development of Pinter’s prose-poem \textit{Kullus} (1949) and short story \textit{The Examination} (1955), in both of which two men of apparently interchangeable personalities compete for the possession of a room; at the end the narrator who was previously the examiner becomes the examinee, while Kullus (the object of study) takes over the narrator’s room. In the case of the two men in \textit{The Basement}, their friendship-rivalry apparently extends back into an unclear past, and they compete not only for a room but also for the possession of a woman. As one or the other attain a position of dominance over the other, there are corresponding changes of furniture and decoration—alternatively between a hyper-modern Scandinavian spatial arrangement, and an Italian Renaissance heavy style. \textit{The Basement} was broadcast on B.B.C. TV in 1967, directed by Charles Jarrott, and with Harold Pinter as Stott. A stage version opened in 1968 at the East Side Playhouse, New York. The play was originally written as a film script to be titled \textit{The Compartment}.
\textsuperscript{323} Barbara Kreps, “Time and Harold Pinter’s Possible Realities: Art as Life, and Vice Versa,” 52.
as they really exist on the stage.” The truth or falseness of their existence is beside the point, for Pinter is staging Law’s imaginings as real, he is staging the character’s own perceptions of reality.

Although very early on Esslin also characterizes The Basement as a “daydream” or a nightmarish vision, most critics tend to interpret the play’s use of space as a struggle for dominance between two characters in the typically established Pinter “room” situation. Some commentators, however, seemingly agree with Kreps; William F. Dohmen, for example, observes how the play can readily be interpreted as Law’s fantasy, and that “this perhaps explains Pinter’s final choice of The Basement as his title, with its connotation of the subconscious.”

8) Monodrama

Kreps and Dohmen’s readings of The Basement as a play taking place inside someone’s mind evoke a most favored genre of fin-de-siècle Symbolist theatre—the monodrama—which typically uses the stage as a subjective (or “hypersubjective”) space. Monodrama is a form concerned with the external expression of one or more characters’ internal experiences, seeking to suggest what their self or selves perceive at any moment. Since all elements of the drama

324 Ibid., 53.
325 Martin Esslin, Pinter the Playwright, 166-73.
327 In his study of monodrama, Kurt Taroff explains that although this form of drama can be found earlier, the first articulations of monodramatic theory arise out of the French symbolist movement (Edmond Picard in 1887; Saint-Pol-Roux in 1993), and are subsequently discussed by Russian theorists Fyodor Sologub (“The Theatre of a Single Will”), and Nikolai Evreinov (“Introduction to Monodrama”). Kurt Taroff, “The Mind’s Stage: Monodrama as Historical Trend and Interpretive Strategy” (PhD diss., Graduate Center of the City University of New York, 2005).
328 Ibid., 130.
evoke the protagonist/s mindscapes,\textsuperscript{329} it is a form aimed at involving the audience in an experience of the Other’s subjectivity or interiority. Privileged by the Symbolists, this dramatic genre implies a theoretical empowerment of the notion of subjectivity, a rejection of realistic or mimetic representation because it only depicts surface reality rather than the inner experience of life, and an opposition to scientific or univocal “true” objectivity. The subjacent idea is analogous to that which Pinter expresses in one of his most cited passages: “there can be no hard distinctions between what is real and what is unreal, nor between what is true and what is false.”\textsuperscript{330}

In exteriorizing subjective perception, Symbolist/post-Symbolist monodrama tends to express psychic states through spatial relationships, sensory scapes, and synesthetic language. Since it aims at fleshing out momentary impressions, it is a form that theoretically approaches phenomenology. According to the phenomenological criticism of Leonard Powlick, Pinter has developed “a unique form of dramaturgy” through the elucidation of the psychic states implicit within spatial relationships. Like Kafka, the playwright is able to present a situation through images or “emblems in silence.” Both authors seem to follow Gaston Bachelard’s suggestion that “All great, simple images reveal a psychic state.”\textsuperscript{331} In the line of Kreps’s interpretation of The Basement, Powlick reads A Slight Ache\textsuperscript{332} as a drama filtered through the inner consciousness of

\textsuperscript{329} Mindscape, according to the O.E.D. online edition 1989: “The range of a person's thoughts and imagination, regarded as a panorama capable of being contemplated by another person; mental landscape or inner vision.”

\textsuperscript{330} Pinter, “Writing for the Theatre,” in Harold Pinter: Complete Plays I, 11.

\textsuperscript{331} Leonard Powlick, “‘What the Hell Is That All About?:’ A Peek at Pinter’s Dramaturgy,” in Harold Pinter: Critical Approaches, ed. Steven H. Gale(Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1986), 33-34.

\textsuperscript{332} A Slight Ache was originally written for the radio medium, and afterwards performed on stage without any alteration in dialogue. Set on the day of the summer solstice, the play at first recalls a British marital comedy, since it starts with an upper-class couple (Edward and Flora) in a refined outdoor setting, breakfasting and bickering over the flowers in their garden. Edward seems imperceptive to both his wife Flora and the flora she cares for; moreover, he complains of a growing aching pain in his eyes. At some point the couple engages together in the killing of a wasp by blinding and imprisoning it viciously into a pot of marmalade. Soon after this incident they spot the figure of a “Matchseller” who has apparently been standing at their back gate for weeks, and never seems to move, day or night. Oddly enough, Edward invites the intruder into the house, and once inside his office, he interrogates the Matchseller, who barely moves and says nothing. As a philosopher supposedly immersed in writing a book “on the
its main character—Edward—arguing that, in phenomenological terms, it is his Dasein or "being-in-the-world" that is being dramatized, making the fear or menace in the play internal, rather than external.\(^{333}\)

In an essay on Russian poet and dramatist Valerii Briusov, Daniel Gerould also notes how \textit{A Slight Ache} utilizes techniques drawn from Symbolist monodrama, namely in the way the figure of the Matchseller materializes Flora’s (Edward’s wife) suppressed desires:

Briusov’s revelation [in his play \textit{The Wayfarer}] of Julia’s secret self through her response to the mute wayfarer calls to mind Harold Pinter’s similar technique in \textit{A Slight Ache}, in which the silent Matchseller calls forth Flora’s hidden dreams and longings. \textit{The Wayfarer} perfectly illustrates Briusov’s contention that “There is no fixed boundary between the real world and the imaginary world, between ‘dreaming’ and ‘waking,’ ‘life’ and ‘fantasy.’ What we commonly consider imaginary may be the highest reality of the world, and the reality acknowledged by all maybe the most frightful delirium.”\(^{334}\)

\textit{A Slight Ache}, then, may be considered a “multi-character monodrama,” since it seems to stage alternatively both Edward’s and Flora’s perceptions or mindscapes. The fusion of fantastic and realistic levels mentioned by Briusov—which is typical of Symbolist theatre—is characteristic of Pinter’s dramaturgy, as I argue in one of the sections below.

\textit{The Wayfarer}, a one-act drama written in 1910 by Briusov,\(^{335}\) starts by depicting an apparently realistic situation: during a wet and stormy night someone is knocking at the door of a forester’s house; in the dimly lit interior the forester’s daughter, Julia, is peering through the

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window and excusing herself before the invisible visitor for not opening the gate, since she is alone for the night. As the knocking becomes increasingly insistent, Julia finally lets in a wayfarer (a characteristic pilgrim figure of Briusov’s Russia), who turns out to be mute, pale, thin, weak, and sickly looking. As Julia’s monologue unfolds, the play gradually transforms into a drama of her psyche, revelatory of her fantasies and desires. Having longed for a passionate prince to rescue her from a miserable life, Julia suddenly recognizes the wanderer as her beloved fiancé, and offers her “virginal tenderness” to him (exactly as in Pinter’s A Slight Ache Flora offers her body to the hideous and silent Matchseller). As Julia throws herself at the wanderer and presses her lips against his, she realizes he is lifeless. The wanderer is a figure of death that has been let into the house, and Julia’s monologue an enraptured dance toward death’s embrace.

In my view, Pinter’s No Man’s Land echoes a similar uncanny atmosphere, after a figure of death has been brought inside (or perhaps summoned to) an apparently ordinary household by its host. Yet again, this work has been interpreted as a “dream play,” or as a monodrama that stages the fantasies of a desperate alcoholic, Hirst. Other authors, however, consider it a monodrama in which “Spooner is dreaming that he met Hirst.” In effect, the cryptic events of the play approach the typically disconnected flow of dreams, and it is hard to make any logical...
sense of a meeting between two aged poets (Hirst and Spooner), presumably old literary friends, who compare their (forged?) memories of a misty past, and compete for verbal virtuosity while being watched over by a pair of younger male nurses (perhaps jailers?) dressed in suits (Foster and Briggs).

9) Deathscapes and Ghostscapes

As in several other Pinter plays, the central landscape of No Man’s Land has been interpreted in many different ways. For Nicholas de Jongh the “no man’s land” that “does not move . . . or change . . . or grow old,” and which “remains . . . forever . . . icy . . . silent . . .” may refer to a mindscape of dementia, generated by the conflicting fantasies of elderly or confused people. According to Knowles, “no-man’s-land is the alcoholic stasis in which Hirst deliberately isolates himself to escape into the memory of the past, as enshrined in his totemic photograph album;” it is a landscape of misrepresentations filtered through the delusive memory of alcoholism. Ian Mackean argues that “no man’s land” stands for the space where characters play the typical Pinter game of dominance and subservience, this time resembling the moves in cricket, a dignified gentlemanly game.

In my view the play seems an extended and panoramic Symbolist deathscape. Not only does Spooner resemble a medieval figure of death that has entered a house to call upon its host, Hirst; but Hirst also seems to be living entombed in an existential wasteland in which “it is winter forever.” Similar to the world view of many Symbolist works, this drama offers a

342 Pinter, No Man’s Land, 150.
dualistic vision of human mortality, for Spooner’s resemblance to the dark messenger that scythes human lives contains an implicit denunciation of the “death in life” of Hirst’s existence. The action, if there is one, unfolds over the period of one night during which, at some point, Hirst recognizes that Spooner finds him “in the last lap of a race [he] had long forgotten to run,” this race being life itself.

Pinter’s play particularly echoes Hugo von Hofmannsthal’s Symbolist monodrama *Death and the Fool* (1893), in which a young artist and aesthete (Claudio) who views life with detachment, as if it were a murky dream, is suddenly confronted with his own mortality. By introducing a figure that personifies death, Hofmannsthal’s play evokes the genre of the medieval everyman morality play. In his drama, however, death arrives as a creative force, in the guise of a street musician; not only does it confront Claudio with ghosts from his past but also makes him overcome his existential remoteness. The play’s last image is a medieval-like dance of death, in which all figures, from both past and present, participate.

Like the character of Death in Hofmannsthal’s monodrama, Spooner appears as a medieval impersonation of death, assuming different personas, and countering Hirst’s remembrance of past events with contrasting versions of the facts. “Temperamentally I can be what you wish,” he states. Unlike an earthly creature of flesh, he congratulates himself on his ability to live without ever being loved, and takes comfort in the indifference shown him by “others,” who never wish him to remain with them “for long.” He describes himself as an outsider, an observer of life rather than a participant, a man liberated from claims of the past and from desires for the future. On all three occasions in which Hirst collapses from his chair,

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343 Ibid., 94.
345 Pinter, *No Man’s Land*, 147.
Spooner unconcernedly reacts with a rhymed incantation, “I have known this before. The exit through the door, by way of belly and floor.”  

Unlike Claudio in Hofmannsthal’s piece, Hirst is slow to recognize Spooner as an announcer of death, and therefore does not “draw back terrified” at first. At some point, however, his questions are very much the same as Claudio’s “Who called you?,” “Who let you in?,” “What is your business here?” Both Claudio and Hirst are conceited solitary artists whose daily life resembles a living death; and the objects that surround them, as well as the dead beings they evoke from their pasts seem more alive than themselves. Claudio shows his love letters to Death, in order to demonstrate that he has not yet grasped the essence of joy, pain, love, or hate. Hirst tells Spooner of his photographic album, where he finds “faces of others, in shadow, or cheeks of others, turning, or jaws, or backs of necks, or eyes, dark under hats,” dead faces from which emanates “a sidelong glance,” faces that “possess all that emotion . . . trapped.” They are fixed and imprisoned figures that will never be released from their chains, as if kept in glass jars.

HIRST. Deeply, deeply, they wish to respond to your touch, to your look, and when you smile, their joy . . . is unbounded. And so I say to you, tender the dead, as you would yourself be tendered, now, in what you would describe as your life.

Like Hofmannsthal’s Death, Spooner offers himself as Hirst’s “boatman,” a guiding hand through the long “hike” up the river’s “deep and dank architecture.” But his is not a redeeming hand, rather a detached and icy one; for Spooner is both death and Hirst’s double, as I will explore below. Pinter’s play evokes Hofmannsthal’s not only in its characterization but also in terms of style. In both plays the characters talk past or alongside the other, and not with each

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346 Ibid., 96.
347 Ibid., 106-7.
348 Ibid., 137.
349 Ibid.
350 Ibid., 95.
other, presenting self-reflexive statements rather than engaging in psychologically grounded dialogues. Both works are pictorial and static dramas filled with suggestive words/sounds.

In “Words Working Overtime,” Cohn insightfully remarks that *No Man’s Land* is a ghostly play in which words constantly overflow, as if its four characters were haunted by a verbal language that has become repetitive and stagnant.\(^{351}\) Almansi and Henderson similarly observe that “Spooner and Hirst are linguistic shells made of words words words . . .”\(^{352}\) Further, they claim that the play seems haunted by ghosts who threaten to reveal some “guilty secret, imagined or real, hidden in things that [other characters] have long forgotten.”\(^{353}\) Such *ghostscapes* abound in Pinter’s oeuvre, and appear to be a legacy of both Ibsen and Chekhov’s proto-Symbolist dramaturgy. In all three cases, these ghostscapes are frequently linked to a claustrophobic sense of home and of family relationships, and to the seemingly unending reproduction, from generation to generation, of identical ethical values and practices within analogous relational structures.\(^{354}\) Such suffocating and haunted *homescapes* in Pinter, and their relation to Symbolist theory and aesthetics will be discussed in detail in Chapters Three and Five. I find that Pinter’s ghostscapes are also closely linked to his Symbolist-style depiction of dramatic time as circular and ceaselessly recurrent (see Chapter Three); as well as to his concerns with political censorship and historical terror (see Chapter Four).

In an article printed soon after Pinter’s death, stage director Dominic Dromgoole writes that Pinter’s plays are remarkable for “the imminent impression of death”: “There are no actual fatalities, just an insidious fog sneaking in through the window. You feel the presence of death

\(^{351}\) Ruby Cohn, “Words Working Overtime: Endgame and No Man’s Land,” 203.  
\(^{352}\) Guido Almansi and Simon Henderson, Harold Pinter, 90.  
\(^{353}\) Ibid., 83.  
\(^{354}\) Such ghostscapes associated to family relations and moral legacy are evident in all of Chekhov’s full-length plays: *The Seagull, Uncle Vanya, Three Sisters,* and *Cherry Orchard.* In Ibsen they permeate his oeuvre, but are most apparent in *Ghosts, The Wild Duck, The Master Builder, Little Eyewolf,* and *When We Dead Awaken.*
everywhere in his work, the knock on the door, the noise on the stairs, the unseen character. Yet no one dies, they all just wait.”

Perhaps because fin-de-siècle Symbolist artists witnessed an emotional and spiritual atrophy of the notion of subjectivity and individualism, in an age marked by the triumph of shallow collectivism and scientism, one of the main Symbolist topoi is that of death, or of the tragic transience of life. As Symbolist poet and theorist Saint-Pol-Roux argues, in a preface to one of his dramas from 1899, “[death] is the principal reality, the principal character. Its presence can be felt even when it is not present.”

Frantisek Deak remarks how Symbolists make a radical attempt at reclaiming through art the fullness of life, by bringing “onto the level of discourse those aspects of life that society chooses to neglect, disregard, or openly suppress”—such as an anxiety before the enigma of life, or a consciousness of death. In my view the recurrence of death in Symbolist aesthetics anticipates ecocritical concerns by eliciting an awareness of essential organic aspects of existence that normative discourse either chooses to avoid, or explain through shallow scientific reasoning. Like many Symbolist artworks, most of Pinter’s plays and poems are haunted by a sense of irreversible termination, or by landscapes of death and decay that can be read in multiple ways.

*A Kind of Alaska* presents us with one of the numerous *deathscapes* found in Pinter’s works. What we learn from Deborah—who has practically returned from the dead, suddenly awaken by “a shot”—after twenty-nine years of coma—is that she has been dancing in a “very narrow” space, one of “the most crushing,” “the most punishing spaces:”

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358 Pinter does not specify the substance of the injection given by Hornby in the play.
DEBORAH. But sometimes the space opened and became light, sometimes it opened and I was so light, and when you feel so light you can dance till dawn and I danced till dawn night after night, night after night . . . I think . . .

Otherwise Deborah does not remember much, and it remains unclear whether or not she was dreaming while her body was deadly still, or “corpsed.”

In my view, *A Kind of Alaska* is clearly not a play about a medical condition, since Pinter only used particular circumstances described in Oliver Sack’s book. The play’s first scenes remain shrouded in obscurity as we fail to understand why Deborah is lying in bed, why Hornby is coldly sitting by her side, and what relationship exists between the two of them. Evidently, what Pinter wants to explore is the strangeness of the situation, the inability to identify what are states of sleep or of waking, the frail borders between death and life. The play’s synesthetic scapes and sinister imagery immediately evoke Edgar Allan Poe’s and Charles Baudelaire’s fascination with the beauty of inertia, for catalepsy, and other sensory states of torpor—which was taken up by the Symbolists. These scapes suggest that *A Kind of Alaska* is about sensory disconnections, about the horror stemming from a body-mind inconsistency (an active mind trapped in a paralyzed body), about the ambiguities generated by a teenage consciousness frozen inside a mature woman’s body.

Like Munch’s paintings of family reunions (such as “Death in the Sick Room,” 1893), where a sick human being lying on a deathbed is surrounded by family members who all seem strangely haunted, haunting, and alone, Pinter’s *A Kind of Alaska* is a negative homescape. Deborah regains consciousness to experience a confined and oppressive bodyscape, as if she had gone back to a stale adolescent world: obsessed by feelings of jealousy and sibling rivalry, aware of an emotional distance from her parents, and fixated with dating, love affairs, sexual

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360 As I argued in Chapter One, Symbolism may be envisioned as a cyclical return of ideas that were previously proclaimed by some Romantic and post-Romantic artists, though not originated by them. See page 51, note 122.
encounters, upcoming engagements or marriages. Halfway through the play Deborah starts a
dance which seems like a first-time orgasmic release, “intense and unrepeatable.” However,
soon after reencountering her sister Pauline—who has been onstage all along, maybe in reality,
or perhaps only in Deborah’s mind—she prefers to retreat to her former state of immobility, back
inside her bed. The long sleep seems preferable to being awake in such an inhospitable world.
Isolation in space and time is a major aspect of Pinter’s œuvre, as Knowles remarks. Thus, in A
Kind of Alaska we find yet another “no man’s land,” this time between sleep and waking,
between life and death—“a reverse tragedy, in which life is denied and death preempted.”

10) A Theatre of Stasis

Worth talks about the influence, upon some contemporary playwrights, of a Yeatsian
theatre that explores the depths of the mind through what appears to be an improvised
collaboration of the performers’ mental processes. Such a theatre opens up

the stage for subjects which might have been thought intractable to dramatisation; the
simple subjects that are also the most difficult; the experiences of solitude; remembering
and dreaming, dying, being born, looking into one’s own dark, growing old.
Maeterlinck’s vision of a static theatre, built round some unremarkable figure, “an old
man, seated in his armchair, waiting patiently, with his lamp beside him,” has been
realized.

Worth is referring to the impact of Yeats’s Blind and Lame Beggars in The Cat and the Moon on
both Beckett’s creation of Hamm and Clov in Endgame, and Pinter’s Hirst and Spooner of No
Man’s Land—claiming that all three works belong to the legacy of Maeterlinck’s “drame
statique.”

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362 Ronald Knowles, Understanding Pinter, 150.
363 Katharine Worth, The Irish Drama of Europe, 9.
364 Peter Szondi, in Theory of the Modern Drama (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), claims that in
the drame statique (a paradoxical term which Maeterlinck coined to describe his own work) the “situation” is the
In an essay on *No Man’s Land*, John Bush Jones posits that the play’s structure is packed with verbal imagery suggestive of various aspects of stasis. Its stage pictures are marked by the immobility of the characters (Hirst remains seated throughout, except when he collapses or crawls on his four limbs to the liquor cabinet; Spooner is always standing and practically stationary). In addition, the images evoked by the dialogue are of stagnation (blackened tennis balls that were lost a long time ago); of inanimate suspension in a fluid element (four times Hirst alludes to dreaming of a person drowning in a lake); of bondage (chains, bonds); and of entrapment (references to a quicksand). Not only is physical activity sparse, but there is no change or development of character or of situation, and any notion of plot is totally absent. Thus, according to Jones “the shape of the play is what it is about”: stasis.

In response to Jones’s essay, Quigley refuses to consider the central image of the play (a “no man’s land forever icy and silent”) as its governing motif, perceiving instead “the remarkable diversity of the images invoked in the dialogue and also the tendency of several of them to depict not fixity but motion.” He concludes, however, that these images depict a repeatedly interrupted action, or the stasis of arrested motion, as if both Hirst’s and Spooner’s potentials in life had somehow failed, been trapped or unfulfilled. Be as it may, this is a drama of stasis both in form and subject.

Not only Yeats’s theatre, but nearly all Symbolist drama is marked by images of “waiting,” and renowned for its stasis. As McGuinness notes in relation to some of Maeterlinck’s early plays, “the wait itself” becomes the central dramatic issue; consequently, the process of its

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366 Ibid., 300.
367 Austin E. Quigley, “Time for Change in *No Man’s Land*,” 39.
368 Ibid., 51. My emphasis.
unfolding as felt by the characters’ senses, as well as the spatial relationships developed between them, become the plays.\(^{369}\) Whereas naturalist/realist drama traditionally relies on conflict and plot, dramatic tension in Symbolist drama is produced through the exploration of inwardness. It is a drama of inner action, a drama of being “walled in” or immured. As in Symbolist paintings by Fernand Khnopff, Symbolist dramatic figures evoke statues—self-contained, self-enclosed, frozen, and silent; they are often seated or standing still with their arms folded.\(^{370}\) The same happens in Pinter’s plays, contrary to the notion that his dramatic bodyscapes are naturalistic or realistic. His is a theatre of containment and of stasis, and this is strikingly expressed in his bodyscapes, as I will clarify in a section below.

11) Doubles and Demons, or the Dark Underside

In “Notes towards the Archetypal Pinter Woman,” Thomas Adler observes, in relation to A Slight Ache, that “it is quite possible” to consider the Matchseller and Edward as “two sides of one person.”\(^{371}\) In the same manner, in No Man’s Land the protagonists seem to be reversed images of one another, each an apparition of the other, an inverted double or doppelgänger. This corresponds to what Burkman states, in her mythic interpretation of the doubles in Pinter:

In three of Pinter’s major plays, A Slight Ache (1961), Old Times (1971) and No Man’s Land (1975), confrontation with death involves the struggle of the protagonist with a double. In these dramas, the protagonists’ encounters with a double initiate an inward journey which brings them face to face both with their mortality and with previously unknown aspects of themselves. (. . .) These Pinter doubles are partially the central

\(^{369}\) Patrick McGuinness, Maurice Maeterlinck and the Making of Modern Theatre, 177-78.

\(^{370}\) The figures of Symbolist painter Fernand Khnopff are known for their isolation and introspection, such as in “Listening to Schumann” (1886), “Portrait of Marguerite Khnopff” (1887), “Memories (Lawn Tennis)” (1889), “The Veil” (1890), “I lock the door upon myself” (1891), “White, Black, and Gold” (1901), among others. A different kind of inwardsness opening up to the universe beyond may also be found in Symbolist artworks, such as in Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s self-enclosed female figures, or in Odilon Redon’s color paintings.

\(^{371}\) Thomas Adler, “Notes toward the Archetypal Pinter Woman.” In Theatre Journal 33, no.3 (Oct., 1981): 381.
characters’ mirror images, partially their projections, and partially allegorical figures of good and evil come to save or damn them.\textsuperscript{372}

Accordingly, Hirst and Spooner are doubles in \textit{No Man’s Land}, just as Edward and the Matchseller are so in \textit{A Slight Ache}, as well as Anna and Kate in \textit{Old Times}. The list could go on, I think, to include several more characters from other plays, as will be shown through the next chapters. For the moment—and although I do not agree with Burkman’s redeeming conclusion, since I see neither “salvation” nor “damnation” in Pinter’s dramaturgy—I consider that the motif of the double is most prominent in his theatre, first and foremost in a Symbolist mode rather than in a symbolic, psychoanalytic, or allegorical way.

The trope of the divided self has a long tradition, and one needs only to be reminded of English Gothic fiction, of Poe’s tales and poetry, and of much of nineteenth-century French and German Romantic literature.\textsuperscript{373} However, as noted by Taroff, the dramatic presentation of the fragmented parts of a self in dramatic form is closely tied to Symbolist aesthetics.\textsuperscript{374} The motif of the double in Symbolism is somewhat paradoxical, since it is related to the myth of Narcissus, of the handsome youth who falls in love with his own reflection, and thus discovers a double self: “Separated from his own being, Narcissus yearns to unite with his twin self, but joining the image in the depths means a descent into the unconscious and a loss of outer shape. Destruction lurks in the pool; the narcissus is the death flower.”\textsuperscript{375} According to the myth of Persephone/Demeter, the narcissus is also a flower that signals the abyssal border which separates the dark and underground realm of Hades from the luminous and airy earth world of

\begin{footnotes}
\item[373] The motif of the double may be often found in English Gothic fiction, such as in \textit{The Monk} by Mathew Gregory Lewis. French Romantic Alexandre Dumas père is noted for his use of doubles (e.g., \textit{The Man in the Iron Mask}, 1850), as is German Romantic Friedrich Schiller (e.g., \textit{The Robbers}, 1781). The theme of the double in literature throughout history was taken up by Otto Rank in his study \textit{Der Doppelgaenger/ The Double} (1914).
\item[374] Kurt Taroff, “The Mind’s Stage: Monodrama as Historical Trend and Interpretive Strategy.” 222.
\end{footnotes}
Demeter. Hence, the Narcissus myth is the expression of a continued death/rebirth in nature, evocative of how the complex balance of the cosmos may only be maintained through an “alternation of opposites constantly resolving and renewing each other,” as August Schlegel expressed it.\(^\text{376}\) Perhaps due to this correspondence between contraries,\(^\text{377}\) deathscapes are closely tied to birthscapes in both Symbolist and post-Symbolist drama (such as Pinter’s own), as I will discuss in Chapter Four.

The motif of the double is present in most of Pinter’s works, and can be detected not only in the characters’ construction, but also markedly in the plays’ settings and visual imagery. In No Man’s Land, for instance, and as Dukore remarks, the setting “bespeaks of wealth.”\(^\text{378}\) In his stage directions, Pinter asks for a well-furnished room, a wall of bookshelves, an antique liquor cabinet, and heavy curtains across an expanse of upstage windows. Whereas Hirst is “precisely dressed,” with well-cut trousers and a sport jacket, Spooner’s suit is very old and shabby, with a dark faded shirt, and a creased tie. This makes Hirst’s wealth particularly contrasting with Spooner’s poverty, and suggests that they both operate as a double of the other.

In my view the motif of the double seems to indicate the contrast between the powerful play of the surfaces and what lies buried deep inside, not just in individual scapes but also in social and familial contexts. The double usually suggests the instability between the inner and the outer worlds. However, it may also express the necessity of seeking a sensory balance between inner and outer realities, since as David Abram notes, knowledge, phenomenologically


\(^{377}\) The principle of coincidentia oppositorum was most favored by the Symbolists. Enunciated by Heraclitus, and afterward by neo-Platonic Nicholas of Cusa in the Renaissance, it derives from an idea of divine immanence in all things, from the concept that not only “God” but also opposite terms exist equally everywhere. As such, all things carry with them their opposite. See Daniel Gerould, “The Apocalyptic Mode and the Terror of History,” *Yale Theater* 29, no.3 (Fall 1999): 47-69; and Sanford Kwinter, *Architectures of Time: Toward a Theory of the Event* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001).

and ecologically considered, is always carnal knowledge, or sensuous cognition—a wisdom born of the body’s own attunement to that which pervades it, and to the earth itself.  

In this light, blindness as an inability of looking outward may in effect be the symptom of the necessity of an inward seeing. The awakening of this “inner seeing” is apparent in at least two of Pinter’s sightless characters, namely Edward (A Slight Ache) and Disson (The Tea Party). In both cases the characters acquire an awareness of themselves that they previously failed to have, a new kind of knowledgeable vision which evokes the experience of Rilke’s equally distressed protagonist Malte Laurids Brigge:

> I am learning to see. I don’t know why it is, but everything enters me more deeply and doesn’t stop where it once used to. I have an interior that I never knew of. Everything passes into it now. I don’t know what happens there.

Sensory lack or excess relates to Symbolist theory and aesthetics, which in the words of Jean Clair “became an exploration of the correspondences that, in human physiology, are evidence of the harmony that exists between our senses and the outside world.” Anticipating ecological concerns of a reciprocal relation between living beings and their surrounding environments, Symbolist theory seeks a balance between our personal sensorium and the outer world, and therefore conducts an investigation of the imbalance between the two at the frontiers of the normal and the pathological, and through an exploration of those border states of sensory excess or deficiency that express the pain of this cosmic or organic disharmony. Maeterlinck, for instance, considers that “perhaps illnesses are the various and authentic poems of the flesh,” suggesting that mind and body may generate anomalies whenever they feel out of tune with their surrounding environment. Given that this outer world or environment is usually bleak and

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380 Rilke, The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge, 5.
oppressive in Maeterlinck’s as well as in most Symbolist plays, these diseased poems of the flesh may be signs of an individual hypersensitivity of the senses that runs counter sensory “normality,” or normative “placated” consciousness.

Like the Symbolists before him, Pinter seems fascinated in conveying sensory experience through a poetic intensity of images and sounds. His recurrent interest in states of muteness and blindness seems directly related to an exploration of the underside of human nature and to a fascination with repressed material. For both mouth and eye are frontier surface organs that lead inward, toward the core of the living creature, toward the non-rational and inscrutable realm of the organic.

The end of the nineteenth century was noted for its fascination for what is unknown in the mind: for the shadowy, undefined, and elusive regions of consciousness; for the non-rational, concealed, or dark side of human behavior. As Gerould points out, “doubles and demons” are characteristic of Symbolist drama, since Symbolism is interested in what lies “buried within the psyche and concealed behind the mirror.” Symbolists endorsed poetry for its capacity to “suggest” meanings that cannot be brought about through rational or conventional discourse; the complexity of their images should therefore never be reduced to a Freudian (or psychoanalytical) figuration of the unconscious. Freud appropriated the concept of the “unconscious” (a term coined in 1868 by Eduard von Hartmann in his book *Philosophy of the Unconscious*) and declared it to be an inherently sexual one. I therefore suggest that in Symbolism and post-

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384 Leibnitz’s notion of “micro-perceptions” is a seventeenth century forerunner of the modern notion of unconscious. The term was also used by the German Romantics; but only in the fin-de-siècle did it come to be recognized as a way of speaking about the self, and of feeling the self—largely in response to the challenge of Darwinism, within the fear of converting individualism into automatism. Turn-of-the-century Paris was the “theatre” for the exhibition of the unconscious (as exemplified by Charcot’s shows of hypnosis, hysteria, and suggestion, at the Salpêtrière in the 1880s). For more on the fin-de-siècle unconscious see Jeremy Stubbs’s “Between Medicine and Hermeticism: ‘The’ Unconscious in fin-de-siècle France,” in *Symbolism, Decadence, and the Fin de Siècle:*
Symbolism it is best to speak in terms of the “subconscious,” i.e., of a substratum of consciousness that operates “invisibly, in the darkness, perpetually growing and mutating beneath the clarity and rationality of the surface,” which corresponds to the enigmatic realm of our extra-rational “inner life,” and of other unseen energies.

Bert O. States considers that Pinter “may come out in the end as the Poe or Huysmans of the Absurdist theatre,” since all three authors release the imagination into a realm of its own. The reference to Joris-Karl Huysmans seems particularly relevant when we observe how much of Pinter’s work deals with pathologies or the “dark underside” of humans, and how often it blurs the boundaries between imaginary and real worlds. Written in 1884, Huysmans’s À Rebours is perhaps the archetypal novel of both Decadence and Symbolism since it focuses on human civilization’s crisis and decline with the sense that life can no longer be found in wholeness. This loss of wholeness leads Reynolds to state that whereas Romantic painters...
looked upon landscape as a state of mind, “Symbolism invites us to invert this formula: the state of mind becomes the landscape.” In the realm of Symbolist and post-Symbolist drama, the characters’ inner scapes become exteriorized; their dark underworld becomes materialized, synesthetically felt or made visible. This exteriorization is often performed through the motif of the double.

12) Domestic Interiors

A stage direction at the opening of Act Two of Pinter’s *Old Times* makes the scenic structure visually expressive:

The divans and armchair are disposed in precisely the same relation to each other as the furniture in the first act, but in reversed order.  

As mentioned above, patterns of symmetry, duplication, reversal, and circularity recur in Pinter’s landscapes, providing suggestive traces towards multiple dramaturgical readings of his plays. Most strikingly, nearly all of Pinter’s scenic spaces are domestic interiors, and it is from these ordinary spaces of everyday life that he shapes disturbing landscapes haunted by unknown forces. Dukore states that Pinter’s characters at first seem recognizable human beings, but only through minute details of behavior or in individual sections of dialogue; soon we find that the overall pattern of “reality” to which they belong is in effect a bizarre world. To borrow Dukore’s terms, Pinter’s dramatic landscapes have an *unreal reality*, especially because they are set in what appears to be the recognizable surface world of everyday life.

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392 With the exception of *The Hothouse, Victoria Station, Mountain Language, The New World Order*, and *Celebration*.
Surface believability is an important feature of Maeterlinck’s dramaturgy, as pointed out by Worth in “Maeterlinck in the Light of the Absurd.” Worth argues that Maeterlinck opened up a broad avenue for modern drama, not just by depicting a strange reality in his enchanted scenes of princesses and magic wells, but above all by revealing an infinite strangeness in the most commonplace-seeming domestic interiors. According to her, “Pinter’s is nothing if not a ‘drama of the interior,’” and his plays resemble Maeterlinck’s “shadowy prototypes, Interior and The Intruder,” where domestic interiors are invaded and penetrated by dark, intimidating forces.

As mentioned earlier, Pinter states that he is dealing with characters “at the extreme edge of their living, where they are living pretty much alone, at their hearth, their home hearth.” As in Maeterlinck, Pinter’s characters are usually caught up in the trivial flow of daily life and therefore “blinded” to other presences, experiences, and occurrences; and especially to an awareness of their inner selves, to a lived experience of decay and death, and to the agency or dynamic materiality of other-than-human elements. In micropolitical terms, it is as if their cultural positivism had thrown into obscurity all unexplained or inconvenient phenomena, instead of integrating them as part of their knowledge.

In both Pinter and Maeterlinck, however, domestic interiors are not always spaces of imprisonment, but also (at times) spaces of protection. On such occasions, domestic interiors become manifestations of a mental and spiritual interiority. In The Caretaker, for instance, we are led to experience the interior of Aston’s home and its profusion of malfunctioning objects within his own strange understanding and diligent care for the life of these things. The

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394 Katharine Worth, “Maeterlinck in the Light of the Absurd,” 27.
395 Katharine Worth, The Irish Drama of Europe, 98.
396 Ibid., 207-8.
exploration of the “life of things” inside a human dwelling, and of the material power of both objects and architectural configurations of an interior space, evoke the etchings and drawings of Symbolist Belgian artist Xavier Mellery (e.g., “The Staircase,” “Kitchen Interior,” and “Entrance to the Studio”). The quiet but animated quality of the interiors and objects in Mellery’s artworks—evidence of the Symbolist fascination for both silence and interiority—may be equally found in Pinter’s plays, as discussed below and through the next chapters.

13) Interior Frames and Focal Points

Worth states that, in Maeterlinck’s dramaturgy, “[d]oors are a focal point, but they are ordinary ones in an ordinary living room.”398 These doors are “ominous, threatening, immensely hard to open (and to close),” and may be releasing and promising; “there seems no end to Maeterlinck’s inventiveness of this stage image.”399 Gerould similarly observes that in Maeterlinck’s stagecraft, “the silence of doors and windows” suggests “perspectives on eternity, points of access to a transcendent world.”400 Windows seem to be privileged spatial structures in Symbolist aesthetics: they delimit, reflect, and offer openings or passages to someplace other.

Doors and windows are also critical scenic elements in Pinter’s drama. Although this might indicate that his sets correspond to the standard domestic interior of naturalism, the use of these architectural frames in his plays suggests otherwise. Because Pinter is not just speaking of ordinary rooms but rather of psychic spaces, there is often dread in the idea of someone opening the door—manifest in plays such as The Room, The Birthday Party, The Dumb Waiter, and The Caretaker. At times, however, a door is markedly evocative of what is happening outside or beyond the room’s “reality,” such as in Party Time:

398 Worth, The Irish Drama of Europe, 88.
399 Ibid., 89.
Two doors. One door, which is never used, is half open, in a dim light. (1) The lights in the room dim. The light beyond the open door gradually intensifies. It burns into the room. The door light fades down. The room lights come up… (20) The light beyond the open door gradually intensifies. It burns into the room. The door light fades down. The room lights come up… (33) The room lights go down. The light from the door intensifies, burning into the room. Everyone is still, in silhouette. A man comes out of the light and stands in the doorway. (37)

From a door that is never used throughout the play Pinter brings in, at the end of Party Time, a male character that, we rapidly find out, is in fact dead. This door is therefore part of an invisible off-stage “other place,” and it is also the point of entry of a “ghost,” engendering a ghostscape that superimposes on the interior “reality” of the party for purposes that I will explore in Chapter Four. This combination of imaginary and real is similar to what Worth terms “the sharp juxtaposition of the solid with the nebulous” of Maeterlinck’s doors and windows.\(^402\) In The Intruder, one of the set’s four doors opens at the silent moment of the end to let death pass. In Interior two young girls take up positions at two of the interior’s windows, as if they were drawn there by watchers from the outside that they cannot see. Through the Symbolist use of doors by both Maeterlinck and Pinter, the solidity of an ordinary interior is invested with strangeness.

Within Pinter’s most characteristic “domestic interior” the human figures are often obsessively focused on, or drawn towards, windows and doors, or to the boundary-surfaces where outside and inside may either join or separate. Although doors are sometimes absent in Pinter’s sets, windows figure prominently in nearly all of them. In effect, one of the most recurrent images in his drama is that of single character standing at the window and looking out. We are never quite sure, however, of whether the character sees through to the outside, or merely gazes at his/her own reflection. In particular plays the character’s position by the window seems

\(^{401}\) Harold Pinter, Party Time (London: Faber & Faber, 1991). Numbers in brackets indicate pages from this edition. \(^{402}\) Katharine Worth, The Irish Drama of Europe, 30.
premeditated, a conjured bodyscape within a mapped space from which he/she derives power. Pinter suggests such a use of windows in one of his earlier writings, *The Examination*: “Kullus’s predilection for windows was not assumed. At every interval, he retired to the window, and began from its vantage, as from a source.”

Thus, what Kynaston McShine writes of Munch’s windows seems quite applicable to these recurring images in Pinter’s plays: “this transparent screen is in [Munch’s] hands peculiarly claustrophobic: he tells us that there is a world beyond, but that neither he nor we are in it.” As Donald Friedman notes, the Symbolists reverse the romantic motif of gazing out from an open window and being able to see the outer world of nature; instead, in Symbolist art we are confronted with impenetrable windows that protect, veil, or signal the menace of the interior.

In “Modernist Myths,” Rosalind Kraus refers to the windows in Mallarmé’s poem *Les Fenêtres* (1863), and in Odilon Redon’s lithograph (1891), to observe that in both cases these spatial structures are ambivalent. These windows not only transmit the outside, but also reflect the interior, like a surface of glass, of mirror, or of ice (here Krauss plays with the meanings for the French word *glace*); they are at the same time transparent and opaque, evocative of both the amniotic fluid surrounding birth, and the stasis of death. Significantly, McGuinness observes a similar quality in Maeterlinck’s images, in that they are “at once transparent and opaque, revealing and distorting,” like two mirrors: one clear, providing distinct images; the other dark, emitting oblique reflections. This dual consciousness of in and out, of transparency and

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403 Pinter, *The Examination*, in *Harold Pinter: Complete Works 1*, 252.
406 Krauss is referring to Odilon’s lithograph “Le jour” from the series “Songes” (1891).
opaqueness, is equally evident in Pinter’s use of windows; but what the outside and inside landscapes evoke varies with each play and will be discussed accordingly in the next chapters.

14) Objects

The calling of attention to an extra-human order is particularly manifest in Symbolist aesthetics, therefore evident in both Maeterlinck’s and Yeats’s plays, and also in the proto-Symbolist plays of Chekhov, Ibsen, and Villiers de l’Isle-Adam. Both in Symbolist and in Pinter’s dramaturgy, the objects, sites, and surroundings are no less animated and imbued with a “soul” than the characters themselves—thus constituting powerful emotional landscapes. This pervasive animism partakes of a perspective within which all things and beings of the universe are envisioned as endowed with material agency, or “alive.”

Walter Kerr finds that objects in Pinter’s dramas acquire such self-importance as to seem ominous:

They are important because they are there, because they exist. (. . .) There is no comment in all of this, no suggestion that plate or teapot, salt or sauce, contains a meaning that will serve as metaphor for some larger value. (. . .) We are to attend to these things as things. The deliberateness, the patience, the concentration with which these companions in existence are listed and then handled breeds a kind of awed respect for them.409

In Pinter’s plays, these “companions” of human existence are of different kinds, and correspondingly handled in distinctive ways. Such dissimilarities are important since, as Bachelard argues, “objects that are cherished” attain an intimate reality of being, differently from that of “indifferent objects,” or those that are defined by geometric reality.410

John Russell Brown has drawn attention to how “cleverly” Pinter uses physical objects in The Caretaker. Brown focuses on the bucket suspended from the ceiling (in order to catch rain

410 Gaston Bachelard, Poetics of Space, 68.
from a leaking roof), and dangling above the room. He considers that this physical object has been placed conspicuously and is capable of making a sound of its own accord. Further, the reactions it elicits help “define and expose the course of the action within the minds of the characters, the level at which the prime concerns of the drama are fully operative.” In effect, the drips from the bucket always occur during silences or pauses of the dialogue, calling attention to the presence of a dynamic non-human material reality surrounding the characters.

Hall observes that Pinter’s decision to describe the set of *The Caretaker* as very cluttered is a point in itself, since “nobody would dream up that clutter in [the play] unless it was specified.” The opening stage directions immediately convey a stage space littered with junk:

An iron bed along the left wall. Above it a small cupboard, paint buckets, boxes containing nuts, screws, etc. More boxes, vases, by the side of the bed. A door up right. To the right of the window, a mound: a kitchen sink, a step-ladder, a coal bucket, a lawnmower, a shopping trolley, boxes, sideboard drawers. Under this mound an iron bed. In front of it a gas stove. On the gas stove a statue of Buddha. Down right, a fireplace. Around it a couple of suitcases, a rolled carpet, a blow-lamp, a wooden chair on its side, boxes, a number of ornaments, a clothes horse, a few short planks of wood, a small electric fire and a very old electric toaster.

According to Dukore “the scenic clutter and disarray reflect the mind of the room’s occupant,” Aston, and “the absence of an orderly world in which everything has a place.” This is quite marked, I think, but it is important to note that Aston cherishes each and every dysfunctional object with extreme care, whereas his brother Mick wants to replace the old with the new or else destroy all of these things (as he does by smashing the Buddha’s statue at the end), and the tramp Davies both fears and despises this “junk.”

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412 Peter Hall, “Directing Pinter,” 8.
Thus if the cluttered stage is a powerful image of Aston’s mind, it is also a landscape animated by things that, even though out of order and no longer serving their normative function, are nevertheless vibrant. It is the landscape of a schizoid mind which, as Deleuze and Guattari note, occupies itself in assembling fragments and accumulating additions not intended for any purpose. The usual functionalist meaning of objects subordinated to specific assignments is therefore challenged by the schizoid desire of occupying one’s mind in the very process of producing such assemblies. As Worth suggests, Aston’s room is an image of disorderliness in a state of flux. In contrast to Aston, “Davies struggles to find a place for himself in this defunctionalized environment, to regain a mastery of objects through their subordination,” to establish a relationship to matter by regaining the structures of objectivity and usefulness.

“Unseen objects” also play a large part in *The Caretaker*, such as Davies’s unreclaimed “papers” in Sidcup, Aston’s never-to-be-built shed in the garden, all the junk up in the room’s attic, and the unseen but sonorous vacuum cleaner that appears close to the end of Act Two. The latter has a powerful dramatic role when it is buzzing in the dark, and seething across the room, with its nozzle after Davies, “who skips, dives away from it and falls, breathlessly.” The vacuum cleaner is used by Mick to clean the space of an unwanted element, Davies the tramp, who smells and snores. However, this equipment also belongs to a large set of domestic utilities in the play, many of which are functionless, starting with Aston’s never-to-be-fixed electric toaster, and including a sink and a stove that are disconnected.

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416 Katharine Worth, “Pinter’s Scenic Imagery,” 34.
418 See Ronald Knowles, *Understanding Pinter*, 52-53.
419 Pinter, *The Caretaker*, 54.
As Varun Begley insightfully perceives, in *The Caretaker* we are constantly reminded, through the clutter of objects, of “the perpetual newness of a consumer culture that perpetually discards older forms and products of human work.”\textsuperscript{420} Although the play seems at first more narrowly realistic than other works by Pinter, and more connected to its immediate cultural context of the 1950s, Begley claims that it “complicates social interpretation” and “subtly undercuts the invitation to read it as topical social realism.”\textsuperscript{421} Consequently, the play comes across as a perplexing political metonym of capitalism itself:

I think that the play’s power derives in part from its capacity to mobilize basic fantasies about the nature of alienated labour itself. Focusing on the issue of labour provides a way of grappling with the play’s sheer junkiness, its insistent juxtaposition of an oppressive object-world with themes of alienated production and work. Examined closely, *The Caretaker’s* configuration of labour and its objects transcends the frame of reference of Britain in the 1950s and engages the reality principle of capitalism more generally. *The Caretaker* probes what we might call the capitalist unconscious, an arena of anxiety, malevolence, and guilt that the sunny storefront of commodity culture strives so hard to conceal.\textsuperscript{422}

By creating a space filled with discarded, broken, and useless things, Begley holds that Pinter’s play goes beyond offering images of negation of the commodity culture of the 1950s, to expose “a veritable junkshop of modernity.”\textsuperscript{423} In my view this junkshop has become even more massive and disastrous in our contemporary times. As geographer Douglas Porteous puts it, “We live enmeshed in a cretinous popular culture that, through omnipresent ‘media,’ urges *Homo sapiens*, now known collectively as ‘consumers,’ to surround themselves with ever more of the junk that they are assured constitutes the good things in life.”\textsuperscript{424}

\textsuperscript{420} Varun Begley, *Harold Pinter and the Twilight of Modernism*, 52.
\textsuperscript{421} Ibid., 48.
\textsuperscript{422} Ibid., 49.
\textsuperscript{423} Ibid., 52.
A similar critique of capitalism in terms of images of negation rather than through dialectical arguments (and therefore considered by Marxist critics to be too diffuse, poetic, and ineffectual) can be found in several Symbolist artworks. Thus, contrary to certain views—such as those exposed by Edmund Wilson in *Axel’s Castle*—I suggest that Symbolist theory and practice call for both ethic and social changes, effected through the transformation of individual consciousness. At the macropolitical level, many Symbolists espoused anarchistic views, and their critique of capitalism was centered on its formative role upon individual experience, and on the ensuing invasion of materialist values and alienating spectacle into all realms of existence. At the micropolitical level—and as Richard Candida Smith points out—the Symbolists considered that human beings needed to develop a “new order of subjectivity,” and their critique of language implied the awakening of a vital part of consciousness that they considered to have been forced into dormancy. Consequently, they saw art as actively involved in the development of self-knowledge, and thereby essential towards collective social change.

In her book *Symbolism and Modern Urban Society*, Sharon Hirsh explores the trope of the city in Symbolist artworks in political terms. Hirsh argues that the many facets of this trope—the overcrowded city, the de-structured city, the sick city, the feminized city, the dead city, the ideal city—articulate what the Symbolists consider to be a crucial struggle between individuation and modernity. In Hirsh’s view, Symbolists regretted the loss of individuality and

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425 Edmund Wilson, *Axel’s Castle* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1959). Wilson claims that the Symbolists supplied no ethic, just an aesthetic. Differently from the Romantics that rebelled against society, the Symbolists detached themselves from society and are indifferent to it; they replaced the outward world by an inward world, and their relation to the outer world is only possible through irony (257).

426 In the second part of his book *Mallarmé’s Children: Symbolism and the Renewal of Experience* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), Cándida-Smith links Symbolism to individual and social transformation. He argues that “aesthetic practice occupied a strategic place in the struggle for liberation” through self-knowledge (166). Aesthetic work straddles both public and private worlds: “Within an interpretative structure that flows from the posing of labor and nature as primary realities, the arts stood forth as a domain, perhaps the only domain, where labor and nature must exist in unity” (168).

“inner being” brought about by massive urbanity. I further suggest that by assigning catastrophic effects to incessant demographic and capitalistic growth, to massification and industrialization, Symbolists were forewarning against the end of “nature,” against the ending of vital connections between human and extra-human realities, against diversity and difference. In this sense Symbolist theory is clearly a precursor of contemporary ecocriticism, as pointed out previously, in Chapter One.

Ecocritical resonances can be found in all of Pinter’s plays. In The Caretaker, for example, Aston’s garden is overfilled with inorganic litter and disintegrated technological devices whereas its pond is empty of fish. Further, and as Benedict Nightingale observes, Pinter frequently leaves us with an unsettling sense of the environment beyond the rooms in which his plays are characteristically set, The Caretaker being a good example, “with its junk shops and cheap cafés and public toilets and rainy streets, not to mention the asylum where Aston was given electric shock treatment.” The impression of the environment outside cumulatively left by many of his plays is that of a “seedy and dilapidated” mega urban space, a place where lonely people slump around in filthy corners or else hide in their tight cells, belonging to it “as much as cockroaches to a decaying tenement.” Nightingale adds that it is not a question of these characters’ attitudes, feelings and behavior being determined by their environment as in realist/naturalist drama, but quite the reverse. These characters are “human animals” that seem only glad to perpetuate the unpleasantness and crowdedness of their surroundings.

In The Caretaker, as argued by Garner, the elements of the environment “impinge on the body: the air from the window is cold, as is the rain that comes through it; the bedcovers are

\[\text{\textsuperscript{429}}\] Ibid., 142-43.
dusty; the light bulb on the ceiling is bright; objects are in the way, needing to be moved.”

In ecocritical Symbolist terms, it is significant to find that Aston solely argues with Davies because of the room’s window. Whereas Aston needs the window open, because it gets “very stuffy” inside, and he has “got to have a bit of air,” Davies wants it shut, arguing that “there’s too much air coming in” although he is used to sleeping out: “it isn’t me has to change, it’s that window.” Further, while Aston expresses sorrow for no longer being able to dream (ever since his “treatment’), Davies is horrified at the idea of dreams—a trait which makes Almansi and Henderson state that he is one of the many “enemies of inner life” found in Pinter’s drama. In the same way that Davies wants to regain control of the objects through objective subordination, we see his behavior toward the “mad” Aston become increasingly oppressive. In effect, and as noted by Baker and Tabachnick, Davies stands closer to the “semi-fascist” Mick than to Aston, since he understands brutality more easily than he can tolerate kindness. He is even upset by Aston’s smiles, resistant towards any sort of intimacy, and constantly suspicious of anything he says or does.

Knowles considers that through the character of Davies, The Caretaker “challenges conflicting impulses of charity and contempt” for at the same time that the audience feels compassion towards the social deprivation of Davies, it is also “sidetracked by his unremitting opportunism and nastiness” and encouraged to join Mick’s side in comically baiting the tramp. Unlike Knowles, I do not see Davies as “a victim of circumstance.” I suggest that through the unsympathetic figure of the tramp, Pinter shows that a mature individual’s behavior

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430 Stanton Garner, Bodied Spaces: Phenomenology and Performance in Modern Drama, 115.
431 Pinter, The Caretaker, 61-62.
432 Guido Almansi and Simon Henderson, Harold Pinter, 51.
433 William Baker and Stephen Ely Tabachnick, Harold Pinter, 81.
434 Ronald Knowles, Understanding Pinter, 60.
435 Ibid., 59.
436 Ibid., 60.
is not wholly determined by social circumstances (such as class), but rather is, in part at least, actively exercised through personal will, or chosen by one’s own mind within a myriad of micropolitical options. Davies’s prejudice against blacks, Indians, foreigners, women, aliens, and finally against his host Aston (who provided him with food and shelter in a time of need) is not just a defensive move, or an assertion of some sort of superiority in order to obtain the recognition of the same society that has excluded him. Beyond being a social victim, Davies is micropolitically an exploiter who actively wants to displace Aston of everything he cherishes, including his own shelter. In personal terms, therefore, Davies is anything but a “caretaker,” for he has no care left to give, either to people or to things. Close to the play’s end, and even after he manages to get the window shut, Davies wants to place “a stronger piece of sacking” over the window; but Aston asks him to leave: “You make too much noise.” A noise which is literal (Davies snores) but also evocative of the old man’s emotional disease, and contrary to the silence of interiority. Significantly, the play’s last image is that of Aston motionlessly facing the window (one of Pinter’s recurrent bodyscapes, as discussed before), with his back to Davies while the latter pointlessly pleas with him to stay. In Begley’s words, the character of Davies in the play “shows racism in action as a state of mind.”

If the appliances are functionless and disconnected in *The Caretaker*, so are the bodies of humans. Davies is an unwanted element, his body is aged and worn-out, and has (voluntarily or not) outgrown any usefulness. As for Aston, we learn that his body was treated as an appliance, “fixed” by the medical authorities so as to prevent him from “talking about things,” or from “seeing things very clearly”:

ASTON. They used to come round with these . . . I don’t know what they were . . . they looked like big pincers, with wires on, the wires were attached to a little machine. It was

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437 Pinter, *The Caretaker*, 86.
438 Varun Begley, *Harold Pinter and the Twilight of Modernism*, 49.
electric. ( . . ) There was a man holding the machine, you see, and he’d . . . turn it on, and
the chief would just press these pincers on either side of the skull and keep them there.
( . . ) Anyway, he did it. So I did get out. I got out of the place . . . but I couldn’t walk
very well. ( . . ) The trouble was . . . my thoughts . . . had become very slow . . . I couldn’t
think at all . . . I couldn’t . . . get . . . my thoughts . . . together . . . uuuhh . . . I could . . .
ever quite get it . . . together. 439

Here we have a whole world of objects and devices turned against the human, similar to the ill-
meaning and unstable inanimate objects in some of Maeterlinck’s plays, which conspire against humanity, and thus give “a new twist to the Symbolist ‘au delà’ (‘beyond’).” 440 According to McGuinness “Maeterlinck’s is one of the first theatres in which objects are given not only a life of their own, but one which frequently unfolds against that of the human characters who inhabit the stage.” 441 In a similar way, and as Begley writes, Pinter’s “object-world is menacing and recalcitrant; it is heavy with the pathos of a denatured, inhumane society.” 442

15) Maeterlinckian echoes

As discussed throughout this chapter, Pinter’s dramaturgy frequently evokes that of Maeterlinck, 443 who is perhaps the most renowned Symbolist playwright. McGuinness claims that Maeterlinck seeks out and questions the “invisible” and “unknown” through theatre’s non-verbal materials—lights, props, sounds, space, and time (intensely felt through the “wait” that characterizes his plays); but that at the same time he also dematerializes theatre by turning it into

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441 Ibid., 87.
442 Varun Begley, Harold Pinter and the Twilight of Modernism, 51.
443 As McGuinness writes, in Maurice Maeterlinck and the Making of Modern Theatre, there are many Maeterlinks, since his is a multifaceted oeuvre (1). For the purpose of this chapter I am referring to his earlier Symbolist plays.
a medium of philosophical or metaphysical inquiry. In his theatre of stasis (exemplified above all by the one-act plays that invoke the tragedy of the quotidien, L’Intruse, Les Aveugles, Interieur; and also by early dramas such as Pélleas et Mélisande, La Mort de Tintagiles, and Aglavaine et Séléysette), he makes use of “second degree dialogue,” making apparent beneath the language of surface rationality a “substractum” level of consciousness, of what words either hide or are unable to convey. His dramaturgy is noted for the use of “fecund intervals,” or for periods of silence during which the characters undergo “quasi-botanic” transformations, as if they were not solid personae but instead forces, or states of the soul. Further, and similarly to what happens in Pinter’s dramas, many of his plays are set in seemingly realistic settings but manage to generate estrangement, mystery, and terror through colloquial and phatic dialogue.

According to Gerould, “Maeterlinck was the first playwright to make penetration into the depths of consciousness the essential, and sometimes the sole, dramatic event, finding strange equivalencies between topography and the psyche.” His theatre is one of excavation, of downward transcendence, anticipating Pinter’s dramatic architecture of the psyche. Both express embodied human experience by means of landscapes that contrast upward with downward, outside with inside, darkness with light, transparency with opaqueness.

Maeterlinck’s characters are usually unable to understand the extraordinary mystery of the sheer fact of living, or to escape the terror of human destiny. The playwright opened up regions which the theatre had seldom dared to contemplate: “Death and birth are among his

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444 Mallarmé considers that Maeterlinck brought the theatre into the book (“[il] a inseré le théâtre au livre”), since in seeing a Maeterlinck drama being performed the play returns to the immateriality of the page and of the individual imagination (cited in McGuinness, Maurice Maeterlinck and the Making of Modern Theatre, 167).

445 Maeterlinck’s conception of the human situation is defined in “Le Tragique quotidien,” an essay from 1896 in which he describes the emblematic modern drama as “a theatre of immobility, a theatre of suspension as well as suspense” (McGuinness, Maurice Maeterlinck and the Making of Modern Theatre, 172).

446 In relation to the concept of “second degree dialogue” McGuinness writes: “The ‘aspect nocturne des mots’—that is, not what the words ‘illuminate’, but what they hide—is what Maeterlinck seeks to foreground in his drama” (157).

audacious subjects, and life at these extremities merging into some ‘other’ existence, a mighty continuum behind recurring cycles of being.”

Deathscapes and birthscapes therefore abound in Maeterlinck’s plays, as they do in Pinter’s. However, and as McGuiness significantly points out, “it is not death in his plays that is tragic, but rather what happens, or fails to happen, before it.”

I suggest, in other words, that it is because of what human characters make of life and living in their daily routine that tragedy arises. In Maeterlinck, as in Pinter, the quotidian human tragedy is one of voluntary incomprehension, generational replication, blindness, miscommunication, and neglect.

In spatial terms, Maeterlinck’s landscapes are of confinement and entrapment. We witness his characters wanting to escape their places of captivity, but they are paradoxically unable to move. Anticipating Pinter’s dramaturgy, the exterior world in Maeterlinck’s plays a dominant role. As McGuinness remarks, “apart from what is evoked on-stage and seen by the audience (…), the dialogue continually opens up vistas of unseen space.”

Margaret Rose makes an interesting point when she refers the contrast in A Kind of Alaska between the white frozen space of Deborah’s awakening to the present world, and the recollected unseen flowered room of her childhood. I find that in Pinter’s dramatic landscapes (as in Maeterlinck’s) there is always a striking lack of correspondence between the austere stifling rooms in which the characters move/survive, and the landscapes these same characters evoke of “other places” and “other spaces”—which are frequently oneiric, and densely filled with expectation and mystery. Through a stream-of-consciousness technique, Pinter evokes for the audience/readers an unseen reality, making us imagine/experience a synesthetetic landscape occurring in some other place, time, or mind.

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448 Katharine Worth, Irish Drama of Europe, 84.
450 Ibid., 159-60.
In a preface to the publication of his early plays in 1901, Maeterlinck refers to the “impenetrable night” of nature, or to “the indifference of nature” in relation to the fatality that inevitably intervenes in the actions and lives of humans.\textsuperscript{451} In view of the material agency of nature that I find in Maeterlinck’s plays it is somewhat surprising to notice that he qualifies it as “indifferent.” In \textit{Pélleas et Mélisande}, for instance, he presents a world in which not only have people been abused by hunger and war, but all nature seems lacerated. There are landscapes of dogs fighting with swans, and of sheep being taken to the slaughterhouse. Such is the landscape of “Allemonde,” or of “All the world.” Perhaps for this reason, Elliot Antokoletz and Juana Canabal associate the psychological traumas of Mélisande and Pélleas to the dehumanization brought about by massive industrialization, or to a process of enforced technological “progress” that overwhelms the individual and forces her to become aware of her non-usefulness, insignificancy, or “nothingness.”\textsuperscript{452}

In effect, “nature” in ecocritical terms might well be what Maeterlinck calls a “third character,”\textsuperscript{453} enigmatic, invisible, unknown but omnipresent, since his works reverberate with the presence of non-human material entities. There is agency in his doors, windows, trees, wells, soundscapes, and in all sorts of objects. In Maeterlinck’s plays what is usually understood by setting, environment, or background is actually foregrounded, no longer inanimate but rather becoming the source of action, \textit{drama} itself. Human characters become witnesses, as if their centrality had been displaced; they are not at the heart of things, and can no longer control the setting. This effect can be observable in some Pinter plays, such as in \textit{The Dumb Waiter}, as I will discuss in Chapter Four.


McGuinness states that by positing the unperformability of Symbolist drama by live actors, and defending the passivity of the marionette, Maeterlinck is in fact arguing for a new kind of acting:\textsuperscript{454}

Although Maeterlinck called his plays “drames pour marionettes,” the effect of his own preference for puppets is rather to enable the actor to aspire to the puppet’s properties, to depersonalize, to formalize, and to conceptualize his movement, vocal tone, and gestural range. (…) Many of Maeterlinck’s alternatives to the actor—shadows, reflections, “symbolic forms,” marionettes—occur less as practical solutions to be applied literally than as possible paradigms from which real actors can learn their art.\textsuperscript{455}

Correspondingly, “shadowiness” and puppet-like behavior are qualities applicable to the characters of his plays. Further, there is in Maeterlinck (as in many other Symbolist dramatists) a fascination for masks, for they are allegedly able “to diminish the human presence and to free the symbol.”\textsuperscript{456} I suggest that Pinter’s theatre similarly calls for static and statuesque bodyscapes, composed by figures that resemble fabricated beings.

16) Bodyscapes

Stage director Peter Hall argues that it is “mandatory to do as few moves in a Pinter play as possible. You don’t want moves up to the drinks cabinet, or across to the table, in order to ‘break it up,’ or to make it seem naturalistic. It isn’t naturalistic.”\textsuperscript{457} This is not to say, as Hall rightly warns, that actors should adopt a so-called “Pinter style,” by speaking in a dry and uninflected way, holding the pauses, and hiding their emotions. What Hall suggests is that since “Pinter has got a terrific selectivity about physical life on the stage,”\textsuperscript{458} the acting in his plays should likewise be extremely precise.

\textsuperscript{454} Maeterlinck specifically argues in favor of masks and puppets in his essay “A Theatre of Androids.”
\textsuperscript{455} Patrick McGuinness, \textit{Maurice Maeterlinck and the Making of Modern Theatre}, 114.
\textsuperscript{457} Peter Hall, “Directing Pinter,” 7.
\textsuperscript{458} Ibid., 8.
Pinter’s drama requires an acting style that cannot indulge in superfluous movements. In effect, his dramatic writing frequently engenders static tableaux, or moments of frozen tension where actors need to keep their bodies still without losing their inner energy, or else maintain a grave and motionless composure, as if they were lifeless creatures. As in Symbolist theatre, there is something hieratic about his characters’ gestures, which need to be carefully selected and performed in a solemn way. Pinter’s theatre achieves moments of maximum intensity through minimal gestures, such as the movement of a glass from one side of a table to another or the simple crossing and uncrossing of a pair of legs.\textsuperscript{459}

The acting style evoked by Pinter’s dramaturgy approaches that of Yeats’s physical theatre, where actors are to avoid the unnecessary motions of naturalism and to focus instead on a symbolic use of gesture and space, so as to realize mental images materially onstage. In Yeats’s own words, “The actors must move, for the most part, slowly and quietly, and not very much, and there should be something in their movements decorative and rhythmical as if they were paintings in a frieze.”\textsuperscript{460} According to Pinter’s stage directions in nearly all of his plays, the performers often stand and pose for long periods of time; their movements are for the most part slow and deliberate, and then suddenly brisk and sharp, creating visual rhythms through the action. Some visual patterns are repetitive and recur through most plays—such as the bodyscape of the static human figure standing by the window. There is distillation of emotion in their characterization; facial expressions are reserved and self-controlled. Like Maeterlinck’s and Yeats’s, it is a theatre of masks.

Hall posits that all of Pinter’s characters wear masks. Since showing emotion is a mercilessly punished weakness in Pinter’s world—as well as in ours, I would add—the

\textsuperscript{459} Michael Billington, \textit{Life and Work of Harold Pinter}, 47.
\textsuperscript{460} W. B. Yeats, “The Play, the Player, and the Scene,” in \textit{Explorations}, 176-77.
characters never facially express what they are actually feeling. They are constantly conscious of being engaged in social intercourse, which is a crafty game that requires wearing and preserving one’s mask. This recalls Rilke’s haunting thoughts when he states that there are multitudes of people, “but there are many more faces, because each person has several of them. There are people who wear the same face for years. ( . . . ) Of course, since they have several faces, you might wonder what they do with the other ones. They keep them in storage. Their children will wear them.”\textsuperscript{461} The most used mask “wears out, gets dirty, splits at the seams, stretches like gloves worn during a long journey.”\textsuperscript{462} In Pinter’s dramas the mask develops into a ghost-like face and becomes part of a homescape, getting passed from generation to generation in different guises—as particularly apparent both in \textit{The Homecoming} and \textit{Moonlight}, which will be discussed in Chapter Five.

According to Hall, in Pinter’s plays, “the mask almost never slips,” there is always “alarm” underneath, but it remains totally masked.\textsuperscript{463} Hall adds that the comic in Pinter arises “because you can’t believe people can maintain these signals, these masks, and it’s so shocking, it makes you laugh.”\textsuperscript{464} This evokes Henri Bergson’s own concept of the comic, that situations become comical when the mechanic is superimposed on the human, when we become aware of rigidity in human beings that should otherwise be flexible and moving along with the flow of life.\textsuperscript{465}

\textsuperscript{461} Rainer Maria Rilke, \textit{Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge}, 6-7.
\textsuperscript{462} Ibid., 7.
\textsuperscript{463} Peter Hall, “Directing Pinter,” 9.
\textsuperscript{464} Ibid., 10.
\textsuperscript{465} Henri Bergson, \textit{Le rire: Essai sur la signification du comique} (Paris: Éditions Alcan, 1924), 13-30. Bergson’s \textit{Le Rire} was first published in \textit{Revue de Paris}, 1900. According to the essay, comedy is not concerned with the individual and does not aim at a deeper understanding of the self or at an experience of the \textit{élán vital}. Comedy deals with the social order, and therefore with types and generalities; its subject is how social man must adapt to the social system so as not to become a misfit (16). The comic appears whenever the human body, its gestures, its actions, or its language become mechanical. See also Marvin Carlson, \textit{Theories of Theatre: A Historical and Critical Survey, from the Greeks to the Present} (New York: Cornell University, 1993), 299-301.
Gay Gibson Cima relates the acting style found in Pinter’s playtexts to the author’s experience with the medium of film. She argues that the characters’ movements “may be evidenced on stage as nothing more than an actor’s shift in focus, as if the character were a camera lens.” This way, movement is tightly controlled but at the same time enlarged and amplified, evoking the effects of slow-motion moments in film. Thus, and in order to accentuate particular but subtle moments in Pinter’s theatre, the actors must rely heavily on the decision not to move. In order to perform a dramatic gesture with a glass, for instance, the actor “cannot allow himself to be surrounded by a flurry of activity, nor can his own movement be just part of a string of explanatory activities. His gestures must be not only precise and controlled, but also infrequent or sometimes half-restrained, so that the pivotal moments will be accented.”

According to Garner, Pinter’s theatre is particularly valuable for phenomenological inquiry, since it is centered on his characters’ sensory perceptions: “for a dramatist who stages the physical body with remarkable restraint and physical concealment, Pinter’s dramatic speech is dense with corporeal predicates, with references to the body, its functions, and its interactions with other bodies.” Elsewhere Garner argues that Pinter’s plays “are among the most spatially-self-conscious in contemporary drama.” His is a theatre in which the characters underscore through specific movements their relation to each other, drawing attention not only to their own bodies, but also to the spatial contours of their environment.

From a phenomenological perspective, Pinter’s bodies are tied to a certain world. Since his characters are often immersed in claustrophobic and confined landscapes, it is not surprising

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467 Ibid., 55. 
470 Ibid., 111.
to find their bodyscapes to be equally restrained. The fact that bodies apparently sealed off from personal emotion, or from external stimuli, talk compulsively about their sensory impressions may indicate, I suggest, that they are either on the verge of bursting with sensory overload (without an outlet), or of collapsing due to the lack of inner sensuous activity. In his book on landscapes of the mind, Porteous observes that human beings have become “increasingly divorced from primary experience, especially the sensuous freedom and the exploration of inner mental landscapes that characterize childhood.” Consequently we tend to mystify this past as lost, while accepting as adults to have become “self-brutalized, banalized, and stultified.” In the same manner, I view many of Pinter’s characters as estranged from one another, and alienated from their own sensual and imaginative possibilities.

As stated before, Pinter’s bodyscapes evoke those of Symbolist paintings. Differently from the humanistic and anthropocentric view of the Renaissance period—which makes a metaphorical use of body imagery, understanding both earth and landscape as structured or modeled on the human body—Symbolism proposes the inverse relation of “body as landscape,” in which bodyscapes echo their surrounding material environments. As in Munch’s paintings, I see in Pinter’s plays isolated and lonely bodies that emanate an inner existential agitation concerning common and keenly felt human experiences: of birth, death, sexual passion, jealousy, despair, anxiety, illness, trauma, and pain.

Recent readings (from the late 1990s on) of “body language” in the theatre of Pinter have helped draw attention to the fact that his plays have been chiefly admired for their verbal qualities, to the detriment of the intensity of their stage images. In an essay on Pinter’s body

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472 Ibid., 69-70.
language, Richard Allen Cave claims that the playwright’s tableaux hold multiple possibilities in a deft poise, without endorsing any one as definitive:

By bringing audiences to focus their attention on body language and its potentials for significance within the larger stage picture [Pinter] opens the play up beyond the performance to the enquiring imagination. A refined use of body language in these instances ensures the plays an after-life for audiences, as subject for debate or what Yeats would term “excited reverie.”

In a Symbolist manner, Pinter’s bodyscapes compose physicalized poetic forms that resist closure. They are “enacted symbols.”

As stated in the introduction to this chapter, there are three further crucial aspects that link Pinter’s dramaturgy to Symbolist theory and aesthetics, namely: a fascination for the circularity of space-time; a denouncement of “humanist” morality and progress through the depiction of apocalyptic landscapes of terror; and a critique of our society’s foundational patriarchal values through an exploration of the undercurrent of horror that lies beneath the “safe” and “clean” appearance of everyday family life. In parallel with the Symbolist characteristics of Pinter’s theatre above mentioned, these aspects will be developed in detail in the chapters that follow.

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Chapter Three

*Time is Cyclically Recurrent: Landscape Becomes All*

“In present never twice the same.”
Inscription found on a forest trail at Wave Hill Park, NYC

In drama and theatre performance whenever time is arrested or slowed down, images, landscapes, and spatial relationships become more perceptible. Perhaps for that reason, Robert Wilson’s performance work has been labeled a “theatre of images,” since the artist plays with slow motion and simultaneity, as he replaces dramatic narrative by an interactive tapestry of space elements, sounds, and light effects. In drama, Pinter has similarly played with extended duration and temporal arrest, most perceptibly in works such as *Landscape, Silence, Night, Old Times, Monologue,* and *No Man's Land,* in which the practically static human figures lyrically recount their inner experiences within an unspecified time and setting. As a result, many critics have labeled these works “memory plays,” attributing them to a “middle period” (from 1967 to 1978) in which the playwright was particularly concerned with the “unverifiability of the past” and the “unreliability of memory.” These so-called “memory plays” have been characterized as brief works, structurally lyrical (instead of dramatic), their action deriving from the evocative performance of an individual, rather than from a conflict generated by interacting characters:

“Gone are the realistic room settings, to be replaced by impressionistic or abstract environments. ( . . . ) The focus of the plays is now transferred from social interaction combined with personal

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474 This passage has been attributed to artist Robert Irwin, who designed the Getty Gardens in Los Angeles, where a similar phrase figures; nonetheless it is thought to be taken from some other text.
475 Robert Wilson’s work has been labeled a “theatre of images” namely by Bonnie Barranca in her book *Robert Wilson: The Theater of Images* (Cincinnati: Contemporary Arts Center, 1980).
476 Futurist aesthetics similarly replaces dramatic narrative with multimedia interaction, but its theatre is one of motion rather than of images. Given its idealization of technology and mechanization, such performances usually race the rhythm, increase the noise, and exaggerate all effects, so as to confront or even antagonize their audiences.
perception to personal perception alone and, more specifically, to personal perception of the past.”

Pinter’s theatre, however, has always dealt with questions of time, starting with the simultaneity of temporal layers in *The Room* in 1957, and ending with his dramatic adaptation of Marcel Proust’s own epic on time (À la recherche du temps perdu), written in 2000 with the traditional English title of *Remembrance of Things Past*. Several of his plays de-emphasize the concept of a linear or “objective” clock time, and offer a non-Euclidean dramatic space where the boundaries between objective and subjective events are either blurred or totally removed. In some of his works, movements, events, and bodyscapes are not only protracted but also repeated in time; due to a discontinuous subjective time, their spatial features are made especially visible, and their sensory scapes become foregrounded. Although critics identify in Pinter’s drama an exploration of time and memory that recalls the “stream-of-consciousness” techniques of some “modernist” English novelists and poets (such as Virginia Woolf, James Joyce, and T. S. Eliot), experiments with distortions of time-space can be found earlier, in Symbolist drama and theatre. Accordingly, in this chapter I examine some of Pinter’s synesthetic landscapes in the light of what may be termed a Symbolist approach to time.

According to Martin Regal, Pinter’s theatre is deeply involved with *time* and *timing* at both a philosophical and dramaturgical level. In his study on the dramatic treatment of time in some of Pinter’s plays, Regal claims that beyond the unreliability of the past and the distortion of memory, the playwright portrays a world in which time itself is unreliable, relative and subjective, in clear opposition to objective time: “Pinter is clearly absorbed with individual subjective time as it is lived. On many occasions, his characters seem to exist in independent

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time frames, individually experiencing the passing of time in a manner different to those around 
them. (. . .) Time, in Pinter’s plays, progresses subjectively and at disturbingly varying rates.”

A striking example of Pinter’s depiction of individual subjective time, I suggest, may be 
found in one of his early plays, *The Dwarfs* (1960). A man in his late twenties, Len, 
experiences lived time—or the passing of time in life, with its inevitable change and 
transformation—in an acute sensory/spatial way, as if he were caught in the vortex of entropy. 
Sensing the world in permanent decay and subject to unending instability, Len perceives little 
slimy creatures—the dwarfs of the play’s title—who are caretakers and timekeepers of the world, 
maintaining its order both spatially and temporally. The dwarfs are “true professionals” who 
“keep an eye on the proceedings;” they wait for a “smoke signal” to unpack their kit, and never 
run out on a job. The dwarfs “collect, they slide down the bridge, they scutter by the shoreside, 
the dwarfs collect, capable, industrious.”

Len lacks the ability to experience life at a distance, to view time-space objectively, to 
distinguish between “reality” (what he is supposed to perceive), and the “imaginary” (what he 
actually perceives, dreams, and feels). He is afflicted by the feeling of unstoppable time and 
distressed over his perception of extreme mobility (as opposed to the permanence of states of 
being the “real world” presumes and is based upon, in relation to objects, spaces, and people). 
Not even his own room seems fixed or ever the same. Since time condemns all things to 
dissolution and can never be stopped, nothing is fixed, true, or knowable.

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479 First written for the radio (broadcast in 1960 by BBC Third Program) and subsequently staged, with Pinter as 
director, at the New Arts Theatre in September 1963. The play is based on an unpublished novel (*The Dwarfs*, 
written sometime between 1952 and 1956) with four characters, namely three men and a woman (Virginia), all in 
their late twenties. In the play only the three men appear: Len (a train station janitor), Pete (an accountant), and 
Mark (an actor). The play lacks a traditional plot in terms of realist conventions. The three boyhood friends meet in 
each other’s homes to discuss various subjects over an undefined period of time, until they break apart at the end.
481 Ibid., 108.
LEN. 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 . . . We depend on these accidents, on these contrived accidents, to continue . . . 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 . . . 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?  

As Regal points out, the image of the “scum” being “broken and sucked back” recurs in the play, pertaining to time itself which is continually “sucked away.” The winding movement of time as a tide—an intrinsic Symbolist trait—reappears in all of Pinter’s plays discussed in this chapter.

Len’s speech conveys not only his dread of impermanency but also the difficulty, perhaps the impossibility, of ever truly knowing anyone, including himself. In effect, Len’s dread of time as a carrier of change and decomposition seems directly tied to the fear of losing intimacy with the two friends of his youth, Mark and Pete. As the play progresses their triangular relationship erodes, coming apart as if they were objects increasingly distanced in space, estranged and unfamiliar. As Len both feared and foresaw at the beginning, time inevitably ruins their proximity, and he is left completely alone at the end. In the closing scene, the dwarfs are no longer seen, since their job has seemingly been accomplished.

LEN. They’ve stopped eating . . . All their belongings are stacked in piles . . . Why is everything packed? Why are they ready for the off? . . . And this change. All about me the change. The yard as I know it is littered with scraps of cat’s meat, pig bollocks, tin cans, bird brains, spare parts of all the little animals, a squelching, squealing carpet, all the dwarfs’ leavings spittled in the muck, worms stuck in the poisoned shit heaps, the alley’s a whirlpool of piss, slime, blood, and fruit juice. Now all is bare. All is clean. All is scrubbed.  

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482 Pinter, The Dwarfs, 112.
483 Regal, Harold Pinter: A Question of Timing, 47.
484 Pinter, The Dwarfs, 116-17.
As his friend Pete remarks, Len has “no idea how to preserve a distance” between what he smells and what he thinks,\textsuperscript{485} as if his senses were undifferentiated and his thought processes had become corporeal. Most importantly in terms of synesthetic landscapes, Len’s perception of lived time is experienced organically, mostly in gustatory, digestive, and defecatory ways. He eats around the clock, “at eleven o’clock, two o’clock, six o’clock, ten o’clock and one o’clock”\textsuperscript{486} and at some point discharges his bowels “in about twenty-eight goes.”\textsuperscript{487} His thoughts are assailed with images of organic interaction and decay, as when he describes the dwarfs’ mischievous recreation time, which strikingly contrasts with their industriousness, cleanliness, and obsession for timely order:

LEN. They’ve got a new game, did I tell you? It’s to do with beetles and twigs. There’s a rockery of red-hot cinder. I like watching them. Their hairs are curled and oily on their necks. Always squatting and bending, dipping their wicks in the custard. Now and again a lick of flame screws up their noses. Do you know what they do? They run wild. They yowl, they pinch, they dribble, they whimper, they gouge, and then they soothe each others’ orifices with a local ointment, and then, all gone, all forgotten, they lark about, each with his buddy, get out the nose spray and the scented syringe, settle down for the night with a bun and a doughnut.\textsuperscript{488}

As Ann Lecercle observes, Pinter here conjures a Hieronymus Bosch type of sensory landscape,\textsuperscript{489} since the dwarfs’ diversions and games in Len’s yard involve all that is monstrous, bloody, and fluid, evoking an odorous atmosphere of smoke, greasy foodstuff, and repugnant perfume. Simultaneously to being “timekeepers,” the dwarfs seem to have become “revolting personifications of ‘devouring time’.”\textsuperscript{490}

\textsuperscript{485} Pinter, \textit{The Dwarfs}, 101. Pete says: “You’ve got no idea how to preserve a distance between what you smell and what you think about it. How can you hope to assess and verify anything if you walk about with your nose stuck in your feet all day long?”
\textsuperscript{486} Ibid., 94.
\textsuperscript{487} Ibid., 108.
\textsuperscript{488} Ibid., 106.
\textsuperscript{489} Ann Lecercle, \textit{Le théâtre d’Harold Pinter; Stratégies de l’indicible: regard, parole, image} (Paris: Klincksieck, 2006), 166.
\textsuperscript{490} This idea is put forward by Leonard Powlick in his fascinating phenomenological analysis of \textit{The Dwarfs}: “Temporality in Pinter’s \textit{The Dwarfs},” \textit{Modern Drama} 20, no.1 (March 1977): 71.
The circuitousness or circumvolution of Len’s thoughts, feelings, and discourse actually approaches that of the digestive system.\textsuperscript{491} He seems intensely aware of the constant flux of intake and discharge of solids and liquids through connecting orifices that sustain all living beings, and of the series of changes undergone by organic matter, such as that of fermented food that does not die but rather “begins to live when you swallow it.”\textsuperscript{492} Tastescapes pervade the play, as food and drink are always about to be tasted in every single scene, but never ingested. In the first scene, Len and Pete are unable to drink their tea when they find the milk to be sour and stiffened; in the next scene there are only red hot burning coals to be put into one’s mouth, instead of honey and bread; in the following scenes Len savors, gargles, and spits rotten wine back into his glass, discards biscuits, tosses a “funny-looking apple” at Mark, drops a toasting fork in panic, and finally falls ill after eating too much stale cheese. At the play’s end, Len is “left in the lurch” with “not even a stale frankfurter, a slice of bacon rind, a leaf of cabbage, not even a mouldy piece of salami.”\textsuperscript{493} Friendship and food have both been eaten away at, as Len had predicted earlier:

LEN. You’re frightened that any moment I’m liable to put a red hot burning coal in your mouth . . . But when the time comes, you see, what I shall do is place the red hot burning coal in my own mouth.\textsuperscript{494}

Through the synesthetic inner scapes of Len in \textit{The Dwarfs}, Pinter reveals how a mind-body may be deeply affected by its macropolitical context. Len states that he can only appreciate and know things when he is “moving,” i.e., experiencing transformation. In contrast, when he is motionless, “nothing follows a natural course of conduct.”\textsuperscript{495} Whenever he feels still and

\textsuperscript{491} In the play, Len goes to the hospital because of “kidney trouble” (113); in the novel, because his “bowels have stopped working” (164). See Harold Pinter, \textit{The Dwarfs: A Novel} (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1990).
\textsuperscript{492} Pinter, \textit{The Dwarfs}, 108.
\textsuperscript{493} Ibid., 117.
\textsuperscript{494} Ibid., 100.
\textsuperscript{495} Ibid., 99.
separated from a deep awareness of the continual flux of time-life, he is left alone in his corner “doing the corner’s will.”

LEN. Everything is from the corner’s point of view. I don’t hold the whip. I’m a labouring man. I do the corner’s will. I slave my guts out. I thought, at one time, that I’d escaped it, but it never dies, it’s never dead, I feed it, it’s well fed. Things that at one time seem to me of value I have no resource but to give it to eat and what was of value turns into pus.496

Unlike Pete and Mark—who never question a still life spent in a laboring corner, and who want to be “wedged,” “bucked up,” “settled down,” and to come up with “efficient ideas” without “wastage of energy to no purpose”497—Len grieves over the end of a dynamic world of youth in which friendship is especially valued beyond any “purpose.”

In micropolitical terms, Len becomes a fixed subject at the end of the play, after returning from the hospital. Early on we see him naming objects in primer language—“There is my table. That is a bowl of fruit. There is my chair. There are my curtains.”498—in an effort of enunciating fixed truths so as to detain the constant flux of change he senses in his room. His final lines in the play return to this fixity: “There is a lawn. There is a shrub. There is a flower.”499

Consequently, in my view, the dwarfs of the play are the correctors of subjective perception; they are an image of human beings that have shrunk or become tiny, living their lives in corners where they are regulated by the sense of a normative objective reality, which has been imposed upon them. As Baker and Tabachnick remark, “The Dwarfs represents perhaps the farthest extreme of Pinter’s exploration of routine.”500

496 Ibid., 107.
497 Ibid., 105.
498 Ibid., 96.
499 Ibid., 117.
500 William Baker & Stephen Ely Tabachnick, Harold Pinter, 43.
Regal observes that Len is disturbed both by space and time, for spatial contiguity is as
difficult to determine as temporal continuity.\(^{501}\)

LEN. When, for example, I look through a train window, at night, and see the yellow
lights, very clearly, I can see what they are, and I see that they’re still. But they’re only
still because I’m moving. I know that they do move along with me, and when we go
round a bend, they bump off. They are, after all, stuck on poles which are rooted to the
earth. So they must be still, in their own right, insofar as the earth is still, which of course
it isn’t. The point is, in a nutshell, that I can only appreciate such facts when I’m moving.
When I’m still, nothing around me follows a natural course of conduct.\(^{502}\)

From his window Len can see lights moving that he knows are still, and which only move
because he moves. However, he is not moving but rather being moved by the train, and nothing
is ever still, neither himself nor the lights, since the earth itself moves. Critics have pointed out
how this and other passages in *The Dwarfs* constitute an elementary illustration of Albert
Einstein’s theories of space-time and relativity,\(^{503}\) according to which neither space nor time
have an objective reality or an independent existence, except as an order or arrangement that we
perceive.\(^{504}\) Accordingly, the movement of the yellow lights is “relative” because it is dependent
on the observer’s point of view, i.e., on his position of mobility or immobility.

More significantly, however, Len’s synesthetic and subjective experience of the
continuous flow of time through the play accords with French philosopher Henri Bergson’s
theories of “inner time,” which are at the core of Symbolist aesthetics.\(^{505}\) One of Bergson’s key

\(^{501}\) Regal, *Harold Pinter: A Question of Timing*, 44.

\(^{502}\) Pinter, *The Dwarfs*, 99.

\(^{503}\) See Regal, *Harold Pinter: A Question of Timing*, 45; and John Fuegi, “The Uncertainty Principle and Pinter’s
Modern Drama,” *Harold Pinter: Critical Approaches*, ed. Steven H. Gale (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson

\(^{504}\) Lincoln Barnet, *The Universe and Dr. Einstein* (New York: Bantam, 1979), 19.

\(^{505}\) According to Emeric Fiser, *Le Symbole Littéraire: Essai sur la signification du symbole chez Wagner,
Baudelaire, Mallarmé, Bergson et Proust* (Paris : J. Corti, 1941), Bergson’s philosophy is intrinsically Symbolist:
“c’est chez Bergson que nous trouvons formulé, avec la plus grande clarté, ce que les symbolistes ont obscurement
senti et la plupart du temps mal exprimé. Comme dans tous les mouvements intellectuels féconds, la doctrine est
venue après l’action” (10). Bergson’s theoretical connection to Symbolism has subsequently been highlighted by:
Gyorgy Vajda, “The Structure of the Symbolist Movement,” in *The Symbolist Movement in the Literature of
European Languages*, ed. Anna Balakian (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1982), 34-41; Charlotte Douglas, “Beyond
Reason: Malevich, Matiushin, and Their Circles,” in *The Spiritual in Art: Abstract Painting 1890-1985*, ed. Maurice
concepts is that of *durée*, which corresponds to inner duration or psychic time (qualitative, non-measurable, made up of intensities), as opposed to external clock time (quantitative, measured in its extension). In the line of Bergson’s concept, what Len provides in the above passage is an *image* of time (or of temporal flow) in spatial terms, through a perception of movement grasped not from without (by placing himself outside the object), but from within (‘I know that [the yellow lights] move along with me’). Len seems to convey that there is a fourth dimension that both connects and separates him from objects and events, which is not measurable in the usual extents of length, width, and breadth. This dimension is time, and it is expressed by Len as a space that flies, as a space that is on the move, perpetually becoming future, present, or past.

According to Bergson, *durée* or inner duration is non-representational, but when we “think it” we create an “image-thought” and thus necessarily spatialize it:

> Inner duration exteriorizes itself as spatialised time. (...) spatialised time is really a fourth dimension of space. Only this fourth dimension allows us to juxtapose what is given as succession. (...) We can always convert the indefinite succession of all events into instantaneous or eternal juxtaposition by the sole act of granting it an additional dimension.

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507 Len’s perception of the yellow lights as moving with him and bumping off in a curve might be termed a “primitive” or phenomenological experience of events. As David Abram explains in *The Spell of the Sensuous* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1996), the *earth does not move* in Husserl’s phenomenological theory of cognition (42-43); the same happens with so-called primitive communities of indigenous/oral peoples, for whom the sun lives in the earth, since it rises from the ground and sinks into it everyday (220-21).

We can go over “from a universe that unfolds to an unfolded universe, provided that we have been accorded an extra dimension”\textsuperscript{509} that allows us to spatialize duration.

The notion of a fourth dimension became a prevalent topic of discussion by the end of the nineteenth century (as the Symbolist movement emerged) among philosophical, mathematical, mystical, and artistic circles.\textsuperscript{510} For the Symbolists the fourth dimension was associated with a consciousness beyond three-dimensional spatial and temporal perception, and to an ever-present invisible substance that permeates all space, connecting and separating matter (perhaps aether).\textsuperscript{511} In the words of Maeterlinck,

> When we say (. . .) that time is the fourth dimension of space, we might just as legitimately assert that space is the fourth dimension of time, which for us has only three: the future, the present, and the past. It would perhaps be simpler to declare (. . .) that eternity, perpetual and universal simultaneity, or the eternal present, is the fourth dimension of space and time—that is, the greater unknown of two terms which comprise only the unknown.\textsuperscript{512}

In Pinter’s \textit{The Dwarfs}, Len demonstrates an intense awareness of a different dimension, expressive of a “becoming-in-and-with-the world;”\textsuperscript{513} his subjectivity is constantly in process,

\textsuperscript{509} Ibid., 214.
\textsuperscript{510} As Linda Dalrymple Henderson indicates in “Mysticism, Romanticism, and the Fourth Dimension,” in \textit{The Spiritual in Art: Abstract Painting 1890-1985}, ed. Maurice Tuchman (New York: Abbeyville Press, 1987), the concern with a fourth dimension of space was an outgrowth of the development of \textit{n}-dimensional geometries during the first half of the nineteenth century (219).
\textsuperscript{511} As Maeterlinck refers in \textit{The Life of Space}, the three dimensions are measures of the extension of matter \textit{in space}—not measures of \textit{space} (62). Scientists from the early years of the twentieth century (e.g., P.D. Ouspensky and N.A. Oumoff) had already observed that in our universe, as we know it, the volume occupied by visible matter compared with the “void” that surrounds it “is comparable to a second in a million years” (9). Hence it seemed possible that four-dimensional space might be an invisible material substance separating and at the same time connecting visible matter, combining everything into some inconceivable whole (64). This unknown substance might be the aether, “that mysterious plane of electromagnetic phenomena, more solid than a block of adamant, since it bears the worlds, and yet more invisible than a vacuum” (92). Maeterlinck, \textit{The Life of Space}, trans. Bernard Miall (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1928).
\textsuperscript{512} Maeterlinck, \textit{The Life of Space}, 91-92.
\textsuperscript{513} See Chapter One of dissertation. According to Félix Guattari, in \textit{Chaosmosis: An Ethico-Aesthetic Paradigm}, subjectivity has no dominant or determinant instance which guides a \textit{fixed subject to being-in-the-world}; subjectivity is always in the making, it is a \textit{becoming-in-and-with-the-world}: “One creates new modalities of subjectivity in the same way that an artist creates new forms from the palette” (7). In phenomenological terms, subjectivity is a differentiated corporeal experience of a concrete lived-body anchored in space.
experienced sensuously and corporeally within space. Due to his over-sensitive perception, however, his feelings of life are dismissed as those of a madman by both of his friends.\textsuperscript{514}

The notion of “becoming-in-and-with-the world” is central to Bergson’s philosophy of time,\textsuperscript{515} as I will elucidate further on. His concept of \textit{durée}, or of time felt/lived in terms of intensities, implies the idea of an enduring present “thick, and furthermore, elastic, which we can stretch indefinitely backward by pushing the screen which masks us from ourselves farther and farther away,” as well as the continuous incidence of the “past crowding upon [the present] and imprinting upon it its impetus.”\textsuperscript{516} That is why the experiencing of “duration,” or of an intuitive perception of inner time, provides access to philosophical and spiritual knowledge:

The world into which our senses and consciousness habitually introduce us is no more than the shadow of itself: and it is as cold as death. Everything in it is arranged for our maximum convenience, but in it, everything is in a present which seems constantly to be starting afresh; and we ourselves, fashioned artificially in the image of a no less artificial universe, see ourselves in the instantaneous, speak of the past as of something done away with, and see in memory a fact strange or in any case foreign to us, an aid given to mind by matter.\textsuperscript{517}

Bergson claims that “for our maximum convenience” we have been led to treat change “as a series of distinct states which form, as it were, a line in time.”\textsuperscript{518} However, all real change is indivisible (i.e., present, past, and future are inseparable) when life is experienced as an unbroken flow. In effect, “the preservation of the past in the present is nothing else than the indivisibility of change. (. . .) Reality is change, that change is indivisible, and in an indivisible

\textsuperscript{514} The exploration of normality versus insanity in \textit{The Dwarfs} associates it with late-Romantic, Symbolist and Decadent landscapes. Significantly, in the play’s first production, directed by Pinter in 1963, Len’s room was reminiscent in both furnishings and decor of Edgar Allan Poe’s interiors in his fantastic tales of individual derangement.

\textsuperscript{515} Bergson asserts that his philosophy of time is in no sense systematic, it does not attempt to provide definite answers, but rather evolves in time, while throwing light on some aspects of time (\textit{Key writings}, 45).

\textsuperscript{516} Bergson, \textit{Creative Mind}, in \textit{Key Writings}, 246-47.

\textsuperscript{517} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{518} Ibid., 258.
change the past is one with the present.” Maeterlinck similarly considers that the transition from the past to the future (or what we call present) escapes us completely: “Before we think of it the present is still the future; as soon as we give it our attention it is already the past. It flies us even more promptly than that which precedes and follows it.”

The concept of time expressed in Pinter’s plays, as well as his rejection of its artificial quantitative separation into three fixed states of past, present, and future, seems remarkably close to the ideas of Bergson and Maeterlinck. In an interview conducted by Mel Gussow, the playwright stated, “I certainly feel more and more that the past is not past, that it never was past. It’s present . . . The future is simply going to be the same thing. It’ll never end. You carry all the states with you until the end.” Past, present, and future are mere conventions since the events of the future are already about to be present, just as the events of the past are yet present. They are not autonomous, mental realms, but rather aspects of a corporeal and sensuous present.

Such a notion of time lends a new dimension to the Symbolist exploration of immobility and silence in theatre. Apparently static in form, the images of Symbolist and post-Symbolist theatre are in reality flowing; even if their appearance is one of (quantitative) spatial stasis, they belong to a world in constant (qualitative) temporal flux. It is a world of bodies caught up in qualitative changes of state, in differentiations (“qualities” cannot be divided without changing in nature; “quantities” change only in degree), the realm of what Bergson calls the intensive. This corresponds to the phenomenological notion of the circularity of the subject, in perpetual motion. As Merleau-Ponty writes, “What enables us to center our existence is also what prevents us from

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519 Ibid., 264.
520 Maeterlinck, The Life of Space, 102.
521 Pinter, cited in Mel Gussow, Conversations with Pinter (New York: Limelight Editions, 1994), 38.
centering it completely.” Although we are materially grounded, we are also incapable of complete self-possession, since we are both subject and object, our body never succeeds in coinciding with itself. Consequently, “Subjectivity becomes both that point from which the world arises into meaning and the seat of non-coincidence, ‘that gap which we ourselves are.’” Such circularity of the body never results in an identity.

Pinter’s Landscape (1967) contains no physical movement: its stage picture is an immobile vista of a woman and a man, in their late forties/early fifties, sitting at either end of a long kitchen table. Although Pinter provides the characters with names—Beth and Duff—these are never pronounced in the play; and only gradually do we understand that they are a married couple and former servants in a house where there are presently residing. The time of the play is never specified, and the characters’ past experiences seem omnipresent.

Both Beth and Duff speak in parallel lines of dialogue that never meet; while Beth’s is a soliloquy (and she never once looks at Duff), Duff’s monologue is addressed to Beth, like part of an unanswered conversation. In any case, Pinter specifies that both characters do not “appear to hear” the other’s voice. As a result, the play unfolds an orchestration of dissonant soundscapes, a landscape of two wedded people that share a concrete environment or stage space, but who are complete strangers to each other’s concepts of love.

DUFF. I took the chain off and the thimble, the keys, the scissors slid off it and clattered down, I booted the gong down the hail. The dog came in. I thought you would come to me, I thought you would come into my arms and kiss me, even . . . offer yourself to me. I would have had you in front of the dog, like a man, in the hail, on the stone, banging the gong, mind you don’t get the scissors up your arse, or the thimble, don’t worry, I’ll throw them for the dog to chase, the thimble will keep the dog happy, he’ll play with it with his

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523 Merleau-Ponty provides an example to illustrate the way our body is both subject and object through the fact that one’s hand is able to touch things but is itself a touchable thing, and thus is entirely a part of the tactile world that it explores. See Stanton Garner, Bodied Spaces, 31; and David Abram, The Spell of the Sensuous, 68.
paws, you’ll plead with me like a woman, I’ll bang the gong on the floor, if the sound is
too flat, lacks resonance, I’ll hang it back on its hook, bang you against it swinging,
gonging, waking the place up, calling them all for dinner, lunch is up, bring out the
bacon, bang your lovely head, mind the dog doesn’t swallow the thimble, slam—

Silence

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

Pause

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

Pause

My hand on his rib.

Pause

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

Pause

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

Pause

Oh my true love I said.525

The musical dissonance produced by these two voices is evident, even if we suspend for a
while the meaning of the words pronounced, and their ensuing narrative content. The obsessive
repetition of words such as “bang,” “gong,” in Duff’s monologue, combined with the recurrence
of similar brisk and heavy sounds, helps create an image of sexual violence. In contrast, the slow
rhythm of Beth’s lines, and the weightlessness of her words, evokes a feeling of erotic
gentleness.526 All through the play, the woman speaks in soft tones; she evokes all that is light,
sunny, delicate, fragile, misty, wet, and silent, through images that constantly bring to my mind
wide spaces and the color blue.527 The man speaks of the damp dark brown interiors of a human
world, of his closeness to other human beings under a shelter on a rainy day, of a dog that has
been lost, of a pub and its pints of beer, of the impeccable service he and his wife provided as
housekeepers, “everything running like clockwork.”528

526 Recurring light sound-words in Beth’s monologue are sea, snoozing, sand, skin, eyelids, feathers, flowers, waves,
whisper.
527 The color is specifically mentioned—the blue of the sky, of the sea, and of her dress—but also evoked
throughout her inner landscapes. Azure/blue happens to be the most favored color of both Symbolists and
Surrealists.
528 Pinter, Landscape, 187.
Pinter’s play presents a landscape of inner life, as we behold the tracks things leave over time on the terrain of each character’s memory. In the case of Beth, the past is ever present, left vague in its contours, but intensely felt. In Duff’s memory, past events are recalled objectively, separate from each other within a linear narrative, and unrelated to any personal transformation from within. Beth’s sensory scapes are mainly tactile—touching and letting herself be touched, not only by the unnamed man but by the sand, the sun, the sea, and the eyes of other women on the beach; conveying feelings of heat, freshness, smoothness, softness, in unison with her non-human surrounding environment. Duff’s past remembrances are recalled as facts, in tune with an objective clock time, like a “catalog of things,” as Knowles remarks.\(^{529}\) His touchscapes are of violent and sweaty physical activity; occasionally he is centered on tastescapes, and excremental images abound in his discourse.\(^{530}\)

The two characters’ lovescapes are so unlike, in fact, that the play might be viewed as dualistic, positing male and female eroticism as essentially antagonistic. In micropolitical terms, however, Pinter’s play gives us access to a woman’s embodied subjectivity, to her inner scapes of erotic love which strikingly contrast with the instantaneous gratification of a typically male imaginary—thus making apparent the patriarchal cultural divide between men’s and women’s sexual desire. In *Landscape* the woman’s erotic imaginary is associated with images of nature, whereas the man’s expresses an oppressive and patriarchal value system. This contrast between genders is already evidenced in Pinter’s *A Slight Ache* (1958), in which Flora is associated with plants, the solstice, the outside, and with actions of moving and standing; whereas Edward is characterized by the inverse. As Ann Lecercle points out, Edward’s statements privilege verbs

\(^{529}\) Knowles, *Understanding Pinter*, 123.

\(^{530}\) “Shit” recurs through Duff’s monologue; for example, his images of a natural landscape (the park) are filled with “dogshit, duckshit…all kinds of shit” (180). Further, Arthur Ganz refers the multiplying implications of the word “bung” (which recurs in Duff’s discourse) as evoking “stopper, anus, bruising force.” Arthur Ganz, “Introduction,” in *Pinter: A Collection of Critical Essays* ed. Ganz (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1972), 9.
such as “to close” or “to cover,” and adverbs of “down” and “inside.” Further, while Flora is associated to the celebration of the sun at its zenith, to the macrocosmic solar globe, Edward is obsessed with his lack of eyesight, with his microcosmic ocular globe, and his first action is to bury alive an aerial insect “yellow like the sun.”

In Landscape, Beth’s inner resistance to a patriarchal ethics and her search for a different hetero-eroticism are evident when she recalls drawing the figures of a man and of a woman in the sand: “I drew a face in the sand, then a body. The body of a woman. Then the body of a man, close to her, not touching. (…) They didn’t look like human figures. The sand kept on slipping, mixing the contours.” Ecocritically, the attainment of a union or bond between differently sexed beings seems to require a reinvention of the human through other-than-human matter. In effect, Landscape dramatizes separation in conception, design, and movement, as Knowles asserts. I add that to “appear not to hear”—as Pinter asks of the two characters in his opening stage directions—is different from “not hearing”; that it is highly likely that both woman and man do physically hear each other, without ever listening. Beth and Duff make up a pungent image of heterosexual estrangement.

Maeterlinck argues that in a world of four dimensions, “before, after and now are superimposed, piled upon one another like photographic films and coexisting from all

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531 Lecercle, Le théâtre d’Harold Pinter; Stratégies de l’indicible: regard, parole, image, 193. My translation.
532 Ibid., 199.
533 Pinter, Landscape, 188.
534 Knowles, Understanding Pinter, 123.
535 As Luce Irigaray writes, “The natural, aside from the diversity of its incarnations or ways of appearing, is at least two: male and female. This division is not secondary nor unique to humankind. It cuts across all realms of the living which, without it, would not exist. Without sexual difference, there would be no life on earth” [I love to you: Sketch of a possible felicity in history, trans. Alison Martin (London: Routledge 1996), 37]. The patriarchal disavowal of nature throughout history is based on a denial of the fact that the sexual dimension of existence is necessarily and at least two. As a figure of “being-two,” the ethical paradigm of the heterosexual couple demands respect for the alterity of the other half. See Alison Stone, “The Sex of Nature: A Reinterpretation of Irigaray’s Metaphysics and Political Thought,” Hypatia 18, no.3 (Fall 2003): 60-84.
Such is the world of Pinter’s *Silence* (1968), a play where it is difficult to ascertain what time frame the characters are occupying, who they are, and what “in fact” the relationship to each other consists of. The play unfolds as a collage of monologues delivered by two men and a woman (Rumsey, Bates, and Ellen), displaying successive inner landscapes that are interwoven. In *Silence* we experience human inability to grasp identity and objective truth, since lived time is in a constant flux. Once again, time seems to be experienced by the characters as a continuum of past and present, in both structure (most of the text is in the present tense, a few sentences in the past), and description (e.g., in his stage directions Pinter describes the character of Ellen as a woman of twenty, but throughout the play we envision her as a child, as a youth, as middle-aged, as elderly, and not necessarily in a chronological order). *Silence* is obviously a non-realistic play, and may be considered a precursor of Martin Crimp’s and Sarah Kane’s experiments with “postdramatic” form. A few critics, however, have interpreted the play in a realistic fashion, arriving at probable plots.

The play develops like a musical score, as noted by some critics. It begins with the alternating voices of Rumsey, Ellen, and Bates punctuated with silences; as it unfolds, the fragments of their monologues become increasingly repetitious, and the silences ever more

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536 Maeterlinck, *The Life of Space*, 177-78.
538 Steven H. Gale, in “Harold Pinter’s *Family Voices* and the Concept of the Family,” holds that “Silence is the remembrance of how a marriage was prevented because of the nature of the individuals involved, individuals whose past relationships preclude the establishment of any new relationships. Rumsey, a man of 40, rejected Ellen, a woman in her twenties, because he felt that he was too old for her. Ellen in turn rejected Bates, a man in his thirties, because she could not marry Rumsey. Now the three remain isolated, alone in their rooms, remembering what they used to do together, imagining that they are still living those happier times. When their needs for a familial relationship were thwarted, the three characters became emotionally paralysed.” In *Harold Pinter: You Never Heard Such Silence* ed. Alan Bold (Totowa, NJ: Vision Press & Barnes and Noble, 1985), 158.
539 Baker and Tabachnick argue that the text “reads like an intricate and lyrical string trio divided into sections delimited by silences” (57). In *Understanding Pinter*, Knowles also notes how the play’s movement is structured around silence (126-7). For Dukore, in *Harold Pinter*, “Silence is a verbal construct with minimal action and character interrelations—a recited piece, more poetic than dramatic” (88).
frequent. Close to the end, their phrases fragment even further, and become separated by longer absences of sound. “The movements then get short and very short and culminate in the eternity of a ‘Long silence’ with the stage direction to ‘Fade lights.’” In filmic terms, I would suggest, it is as though the play started with wide shots alternated with close-up shots, to arrive at a montage of jump-cuts dissociated in an unfamiliar way, before the final fade-out.

The passage of time in the play is perceived through the various images evoked by the three characters, which unfold like a series of landscape shots along a train journey. For each character there are recurring landscape patterns, recurring images of intensity through time. Rumsey’s scapes are mostly pastoral—of walking to the top of the hills, of clouds racing just before dark, of dogs barking, quiet animals, birds resting, solid trees, light and heat. In contrast, Bates’s images unfold at a rapid pace, as he talks of a city’s “bumping lights,” of crowds, black roads, girders, dumps, “cars barking,” pub doors “smacking into the night, rain and stink. For him even “Meadows are walled, and lakes. The sky’s a wall.” But even this dissimilarity between the two men suddenly becomes blurred when the play comes full circle, near the end, and each repeats lines that were initially ascribed to the other. Both men seem to have held Ellen’s hand when she was a little girl, and to have touched her body perhaps later, when she was a young woman. This interchangeability between the two men, as if each were a double of the other, persists in Ellen’s own mind:

ELLEN. There are two. One who is with me sometimes, and another. (201) (. . .) ELLEN. There are two. I turn to them and speak. I look them in their eyes. I kiss them there and say, I look away to smile, and touch them as I turn. (203) (. . .)

540 William Baker & Stephen Ely Tabachnick, Harold Pinter, 57.
ELLEN. There are two. They halt to laugh and bellow in the yard. They dig and punch and cackle where they stand. They turn to move, look round at me to grin. I turn my eyes from one, and from the other to him. (213)

Who are the “two” that Ellen refers to? Two sides of the same man? Two different ages in a man? Two men? Or two animals that play and cackle? Ellen is the sole character in the play that physically moves from her chair, either to approach Rumsey, or to draw near Bates. Nevertheless, she seems absorbed by the inability to make herself seen and heard by both men. Her sensory scapes are of dizziness and self-enclosure; she is even unable to see her own reflection in the window, perceiving nothing but the dark outside.

At different moments in the play, each of the three characters seems to express their loneliness and anguish over the tragic transience of time:

BATES. I’m at my last gasp with this unendurable racket. (…) Someone called me Grandad and told me to button it. It’s they should button it. Were I young . . . (202-3)

RUMSEY. Sometimes I see people. They walk towards me, no, not so, walk in my direction, but never reaching me, turning left, or disappearing, and then reappearing, to disappear into the wood. So many ways to lose sight of them, then to recapture sight of them. They are sharp at first sight . . . then smudged . . . then lost . . . then glimpsed again . . . then gone. (208)

ELLEN. Around me sits the night. Such a silence. I can hear myself. Cup my ear. My heart beats in my ear. Such a silence. Is it me? Am I silent or speaking? How can I know? (…) I seem to be old. Am I old now? No-one will tell me. I must find a person to tell me these things. (211)

In ecocritical terms, it is significant to note that their common feeling of abandonment in old age, and lack of human solace, traverses the play like a refrain within a larger and enveloping natural setting of joyous sounds and carefree movements of sky, clouds, wind, moon, night, light, sun, dogs, birds, and horses. There is mention of music coming from “elsewhere.” There is a feeling that “silence” could be fulfilling, of a different kind. Could the silence be that of sleep? Or that of

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542 Pinter, Silence. Parenthetical numbers indicate pages from the above mentioned edition.
543 Ibid.
tender love?—Bates questions. The silence that the play evokes, however, is that of human loneliness and of the irremediable loss of youth. As William Dohmen insightfully suggests, these three characters “appear to probe the past in a futile search for the origin of that shadow that has fallen between them.”

We are left with a sense that they are no longer able to make contact with the life of the natural world around them, nor with the life of the other next to them, nor with their inner selves.

The lyrical stasis of Landscape, Silence, and Old Times is so manifest that it is easy to argue that they are all post-Symbolist plays. Already in 1961, Martin Esslin put forward that in the former two plays “the drama is entirely in the language, the evocation of moods,” and that in the latter “the ambiguities and the stasis of Landscape and Silence are further developed and used to splendid effect.” Although reviewers and scholars generally notice these plays’ Symbolist style, there is little attention paid to how they are informed by Symbolist theory and aesthetics.

In relation to Landscape, for example, critics tend to wonder whether Beth’s lover is Duff at a younger age, or else her former employer; some emphasize the unreliability of Beth’s memory, noting how she seems “entrapped in herself;” with her “identity frozen in the past.” With respect to Silence, critics hint at Ellen’s implausible recollections; some think she “may have had a psychiatric problem, or her memory may simply be fading with age.” Rather than being focused on the unreliability of human memory and the unverifiability of the past, I suggest that these and other plays by Pinter are concerned with individual subjective time as it is

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545 Martin Esslin, The Theatre of the Absurd, 259.

546 Dukore, Harold Pinter, 85-86.

547 Baker & Tabachnick, Harold Pinter, 127.


549 Peacock, Harold Pinter and the New British Theatre, 105.
lived, with inner duration in the Bergsonian sense, with the way distinct human beings dream, imagine, recall, and construct their own selves through life.

In the single complete play written by Portuguese Symbolist poet and philosopher Fernando Pessoa, *The Mariner* (1913), three female watchers are keeping a vigil through the night beside the coffined body of a young woman. During the long wake that constitutes the play, the “second” watcher gradually recalls her dream of a mariner who was lost on a distant island after a shipwreck:

SECOND. Because he had no way to return to his homeland and suffered whenever he remembered it, he set out to dream a homeland he’d never had, to make it so that it was his, and had always been—a different kind of country with other landscapes, other people, other ways of walking down streets, of leaning out windows . . . Each day he added an imagined stone to his impossible edifice. Soon he had a country already many times traversed. He already remembered thousands of hours he’d passed along its coasts. . . . And thus he built his past . . . One day, after heavy rains, the horizon still a blur, the mariner grew tired of dreaming . . . He wished then to remember his true homeland, but realized that he could remember nothing of it, that it didn’t exist for him . . . The only childhood he remembered was the one in his dream country, the adolescence he remembered was the one he’d created . . . All his life had now been the life he’d dreamed . . . And he saw that it was impossible for any other life to have existed.550

In Pessoa’s static drama, a dreamed homeland chiseled into the substance of one’s soul becomes truer than an “objective” distant one, since for each individual there is no “reality” but that which is subjectively felt, imagined, and construed. Pinter expresses a similar Symbolist idea when he states, “So much is imagined and that imagining is as true as real.”551

In this light, Pinter’s *The Collection* (1961)552 may be viewed as a play concerned with the landscapes of inner lived/embodied time, and with the characters’ dreamed, willed, or imagined pasts. As Dukore argues, *The Collection* is a play about possibility:

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551 Pinter, cited in Mel Gussow, Conversations with Pinter, 17.
552 *The Collection* was first presented on the stage at the Aldwych Theatre, London, in 1962. In *The Collection*, a married fashion model (Stella) has apparently claimed that, when in Leeds for a fashion collection, she was seduced.
the possibility that the apparently adulterous couple never met or spoke to each other, the possibility that the cuckolded husband and the cuckolding lover are attracted to each other, the possibility that the supposedly adulterous couple merely discussed committing adultery, and the possibility that the first possibility really did take place. These endless possibilities of becoming unfold within a circular configuration of time-space—like a “mise-en-abyme”—and are continuously evoked by the recurrent image-symbol that dominates the play: mirrors. Space in the play is symmetrical, as if duplicated; the two couples mirror each other (each with a bisexual component and an adulterous element), and there are scenes that reflect other scenes.

Thus, as Dukore insightfully claims, “The Collection is not about a collection, it is a collection.” Although the title may be justified in realistic terms (the play presents us with a homosexual man who is a fashion designer, and a heterosexual woman who is a model), the whole cast of characters (which includes their respective partners) exhibits throughout the play “variations of a mixing-and-matching outfit.” In other words, all of the four characters seem to be simultaneously “models” and self-fashioned “designers” involved in a game of deceptive mirrors.

In his stage directions, Pinter asks for the stage to be divided into three areas, “two peninsulas and a promontory.” The play’s two main locations (James’s and Stella’s flat;
Harry’s and Bill’s house) are therefore meant to remain visible on a split stage, with a public telephone booth located in-between. This arrangement allows for a simultaneity of actions—while dialogued scenes are taking place alternately in one of main locations, there are silent scenes unfolding in the other setting. These silent scenes are generally performed by the only woman in the play, Stella, who is always seen sitting alone, cuddling her (also female) white Persian kitten. According to Esslin this nearly constant presence of Stella’s body onstage “highlights the tragedy of a woman in a world where the men tend to be more interested in each other than in the other sex.”

Likewise, Christopher Wixson notes that whereas the men in the play argue over heterosexual activity and encounters, the display of Stella’s body sitting passively fosters awareness in the audience of the homoerotic desire that is underneath their rhetorical warfare. Micropolitically, therefore, Stella becomes a “voiceless presence” in the play, an image of the “erasure of the female body” from patriarchal male erotic desire; although bodily present, she is personally and erotically superfluous in the world of “male action” presented in the play. The Collection seems to expose how homosocial/homoerotic desire is implied (although repressed) within the discourse of patriarchal heterosexuality.

The recurrent tasting of, and reference to, foodstuff—such as olives, biscuits, grapes, toast, fruit juice, roasted potatoes vs. chips—reveals the routine and non-reciprocality of both couples, since there is always either a lack or a refusal of the fare offered or mentioned. As Wixson remarks, the relationship between Harry and Bill is as stagnant as Stella’s and James’s, both being marked by distrust, jealousy, hostility, and disloyalty. For Almansi and Henderson, the play “is a study in reciprocal misunderstanding. The young married couple and the

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558 Esslin, The Theatre of the Absurd, 254.
560 Ibid., 64.
561 Ibid., 68.
homosexual pair seem to be able to cohabit without in the least understanding each other."

Through symmetrical tastescapes, The Collection also emphasizes the parallelism between hetero- and homosexuality, since within a common patriarchal system of values both “kinds” of sexuality seem to have been reduced to a question of the type of fare offered:

STELLA. Would you like a biscuit?
JAMES. No, thank you.
(Pause.)
STELLA. I’m going to have one.
JAMES. You’ll get fat.
STELLA. From biscuits?
JAMES. You don’t want to get fat, do you?
STELLA. Why not?
JAMES. Perhaps you do.
STELLA. It’s not one of my aims.
JAMES. What is your aim? (Pause.) I’d like an olive.
STELLA. Olive? We haven’t got any.
JAMES. How do you know?
STELLA. I know.
JAMES. Have you looked?
STELLA. I don’t need to look, do I? I know what I’ve got.
JAMES. You know what you’ve got? (Pause.) Why haven’t we got any olives?
STELLA. I didn’t know you liked them.
JAMES. That must be the reason why we’ve never had them in the house. You’ve simply never been interested enough in olives to ask whether I liked them or not. (139)
( . . .)
BILL. Hungry?
JAMES. No.
BILL. Biscuit?
JAMES. I’m not hungry.
BILL. I’ve got some olives.
JAMES. Really?
BILL. Like one?
JAMES. No, thanks.
BILL. Why not?
JAMES. I don’t like them.
(Pause.)
BILL. Don’t like olives? What on earth have you got against olives?
(Pause.)
JAMES. I detest them.
BILL. Really?

562 Guido Almansi and Simon Henderson, Harold Pinter, 81.
JAMES. It's the smell I hate. (149)

There is spatial and temporal circularity in _The Collection_: the play ends, as it began, in a “half light,” and its closing scene might well be the opening one, since we are all (including the characters themselves) left in a haze of doubt over what “really” happened at the hotel in Leeds. This circularity is even more perceptible in Pinter’s _Old Times_ (1970) and _Betrayal_ (1978).

In _Old Times_ the images of a common past recalled by the play’s three characters (Kate, Deeley, and Anna) remain unverified by facts, as if they were landscapes of a dream. As in dreams, the same actions reappear obsessively through the play, but always in different forms, in the process of being evoked by each individual character. Like some notable Symbolist plays—such as Maeterlinck’s _Pélles et Mélisande_—Pinter’s _Old Times_ displays a musical structure, with recurrent phrases, repeated situations, and resurfacing visual patterns. The play’s cyclical time is punctuated by a recurring soundscape: that of the old love songs intoned by Anna and Deeley, which represent a clichéd idea of both “romantic love” and “the passing of time,” like ready-made memories fossilized into formulaic phrases.

In _Old Times_ past, present, and future actions co-exist, as if experienced by the characters in a constantly recurring circular mode. At the beginning of the play, for instance, Anna is physically present, but perhaps not actually so, since Kate and Deeley take no notice of her as they discuss her imminent arrival. Thus, past and future seem omnipresent, merged, and experienced as coincident. Concurrent with various abrupt shifts of time in the play, there are

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564 As Jean Graham-Jones pointed out to me, the two plays were combined, with Pinter’s permission, into a single four-character performance text by Rafael Sprengelbrud, in 1996. Entitled _Varíos pares de pies sobre un piso de mármol_, Sprengelbrud’s version premiered in 1997 at the British Arts Centre of Buenos Aires, Argentina.
565 Maeterlinck’s _Pélles et Mélisande_ displays a circular structure. In its opening scene we see the servants trying to wash resistant stains on the steps of the castle. By the end of the play we hear that a servant found Mélisande and Pélles lying wounded in front of the castle’s door, and that “there was blood on the stones.” Katharine Worth writes that it is as if “the end was at some deep level known at the start” (“Maeterlinck in the Light of the Absurd,” in Cohn ed. _Around the Absurd_, 26).
also shifts of place, such as when Deeley and Kate’s house becomes the London flat that Anna and Kate shared twenty years ago, without any concrete change in setting. Most strikingly, the very final scene of the play, performed entirely in pantomime, seems an enactment of the following of Anna’s recollections in Act One:

ANNA. This man crying in our room. One night late I returned and found him sobbing, his hand over his face, sitting in the armchair, all crumpled in the armchair and Katey sitting on the bed (. . .) there was nothing but sobbing, suddenly it stopped. (. . .) He stood in the centre of the room. He looked at us both, at our beds. Then he turned towards me. He approached my bed. He bent down over me. But I would have nothing to do with him, absolutely nothing. (. . .) But then sometime later in the night I woke up and looked across the room to her bed and saw two shapes. (. . .) He was lying across her lap on her bed. (. . .) But then in the early morning . . . he had gone. 566

Within a circular depiction of time, the closing scene of the play closely corresponds to Anna’s former account:

Long silence. ANNA stands, walks towards the door, stops, her back to them. Silence. DEELEY starts to sob, very quietly. ANNA stands still. ANNA turns, switches off the lamps, sits on her divan, and lies down. The sobbing stops. Silence. DEELEY stands. He walks a few paces, looks at both divans. He goes to ANNA’S divan, looks down at her. She is still. Silence. DEELEY moves towards the door, stops, his back to them. Silence. DEELEY turns. He goes towards KATE’S divan. He sits on her divan, lies across her lap. Long silence. DEELEY very slowly sits up. He gets off the divan. He walks slowly to the armchair. He sits, slumped. Silence. Lights up full sharply. Very bright. DEELEY in armchair. ANNA lying on divan. KATE sitting on divan. 567

The three characters seem to be back to the moment where they started—or perhaps ended?—their triangular relationship.

In Old Times both past and present seem entirely subjective, or dependent on each individual’s point of view. Accordingly, we are never sure of what exactly took place between

567 Ibid., 69-71.
the three characters, or what was just imagined and willed. As Anna at some point declares,

“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.”

Such a statement might indicate that the play is a monodrama of Anna’s mind, the unfolding of her inner scapes. Alternatively, as Esslin suggests, the entire play might be “a nightmare of Deeley’s.” But on another level, it is also possible for *Old Times* to be Kate’s dream, since she is the one who precipitates the play’s ending. As Jon Erikson puts it,

If one takes this perspectivalism far enough, the argument could even be made that at any moment two of the characters could be seen as split projections of one character’s mind: that what goes on in the play is happening only in the mind of Kate, Anna, or Deeley—although it is indeterminate as to whose mind it is.

The spatial circularity of *Old Times* is emphasized by the symmetry of its setting and lightning. If in the opening scene we see two divans (or beds) and an armchair in a space where three figures may be “discerned” in a “dim light,” in the closing scene the divans and armchair are “disposed in precisely the same relation to each other,” “but in reversed order,” whereas the three figures are now sharply cut by an exceedingly bright light. According to Peter Hall “the play is about those two beds, side by side,” meaning that Anna’s presence has never left the minds of the married couple (Kate and Deeley):

[Anna’s] been there for twenty years, in each of their heads. She’s never left either of their heads, and she never will. She can’t leave the room at the end. She tries to, it is impossible. Actually, the two of them would not stay married, they wouldn’t stay related, they wouldn’t almost exist, without the obsession of that third person in their heads, and the opening image illustrates that. It’s a reaching towards a kind of imagery — an emblem in silence.

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568 Ibid., 27-28.
569 Martin Esslin, *Pinter the Playwright*, 192.
571 Peter Hall, “Directing Pinter,” 8.
572 Ibid.
Based on Hall’s hint, I suggest that the spatial “motif” of the play might be the triangle that these two beds help form with the armchair, within an abstract environment. A triangular configuration dominates the text in at least two main modes of apprehending its landscapes: in the cinematic mode of its montage, and in the three-faceted way the characters desire and reflect one another.

Both past and present images in *Old Times* unfold as in a cinematic montage, but framed and edited by three different directors. Thus, what Gay Cima argues in relation to many of Pinter’s plays—that he approaches the stage as if it were a film screen, treating each dramatic scene as a shot/statement that may be posited in various ways against a competing shot/statement, recalling Alain Resnais’s “direct cuts” —may be primarily applicable to *Old Times*. Remarkably, Katharine Worth also associates *Old Times* to Alain Resnais’s *L’Année Dernière a Marienbad* (with screenplay by Alain Robbe-Grillet), since in both works after several faltering attempts at reconstructing the past, a room suddenly snaps into bright light and full focus at the end. For Worth this finale conveys “an alarming sense of emptiness behind it all, as if these incidents are fragments of film pasted together to make something which really isn’t a whole.”

It is important to note the play’s own filmic context: Deeley himself is a film director and a movie buff who seems fanatically enthusiastic about having been to a screening of *Odd Man*.

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574 Significantly, Robbe-Grillet calls for the abandonment in his film screenplays of “clock time” (*le temps des horloges*), in favor of “human time” (*le temps humain*) or “lived experience” (*l’expérience vécue*). As George Slusser and Danièle Chatelain remark, in *L’Année dernière à Marienbad* “there is no last year, neither past nor future, only a series of now moments,” although it is charged with a “desire for an elsewhen, for a time and place when this floating world was perhaps connected to some real ‘story’ of love and death.” Slusser and Chatelain “Spacetime Geometries: Time Travel and the Modern Geometrical Narrative,” *Science Fiction Studies* 22, no.2 (1995): 171.

"Out" when he first met Kate. At the outset of the play he tells his wife that he plans to use her as a camera lens during Anna’s visit, as if he could frame Anna through Kate: “I’ll be watching you. (...) To see if she’s the same person.” Later, when he depicts his first meeting with Kate at the movie theater, he recalls her (i.e., frames her image) as “very dim, very still, placed more or less at the dead centre of the auditorium.” Describing his own position he states: “I was off centre and have remained so.” However, Deeley is not the only character who frames the action through the play; all three characters edit and review their own versions of the events, as if engaged in an obsessive tracing and retracing of the past. For Sheila Rabillard, the play presents competing “variations” of events “upon a shifting triangular pattern all three [characters] are engaged in shaping.”

Like Resnais’s *L’Année Dernière à Marienbad*, *Old Times* seems haunted by a triangular configuration of psychic mirrors. “The audience sees a world in which Anna is Deeley’s rival for Kate; a world in which Anna is merely a pawn—and perhaps only imaginary—in a marital game between Kate and Deeley; a world in which Kate and Anna compete for Deeley; and so on.” Various critics remark how Anna serves as a double for both Kate and her husband Deeley. For Arthur Ganz, Anna represents a long-suppressed passionate aspect of Kate’s personality, “from which she has retreated in her heterosexual, domestic relationship with Deeley,” and at the same time an independent character, possibly Kate’s “lesbian lover.” This seems to be Katherine

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576 *Odd Man Out* (directed by Carol Reed in 1947) is a film about an IRA man who has escaped from prison and ends up dying in Belfast.

577 Pinter, *Old Times*, 7-8.

578 Ibid., 26.

579 Ibid.


581 Ibid., 48-49.

Burkman’s perspective as well, when she remarks that Anna stands for the “darker, restless, repressed side of Kate,” or for her own “possessive, homosexual self.”

In a final section of the play, Kate recalls having seen Anna’s “dirtied” face, hence pronouncing her “dead.”

KATE. I remember you lying dead. You didn’t know I was watching you. I leaned over you. Your face was dirty. You lay dead, your face scrawled with dirt, all kinds of earnest inscriptions, but unblotted, so that they had run, all over your face, down to your throat. ( . . . ) You tried to do my little trick, one of my tricks you had borrowed, my little slow smile ( . . . ) but it didn’t work, the grin only split the dirt at sides of your mouth and stuck. You stuck in your grin. ( . . . ) Your bones were breaking through your face. But all was serene. There was no suffering. It had all happened elsewhere.

This passage evokes the image of Anna’s face as a dirt mask which cracks under the pressure of a grin, or of a strained smile borrowed from the face of another. Immediately after this sequence, Anna falls back into the silence from which she had emerged at the beginning of the play. For Dohmen, this sudden erasure of Anna’s existence in the “present” calls into question the play’s entire action. In this light, Anna’s existence seems to have been conjured by Kate and Deeley’s initial conversation, and is perhaps an imagined “fantasy” so as to mitigate their marital stagnancy, a fabrication which the couple’s wife dismisses at the end.

However, in the same concluding sequence, Kate also recalls having actually “dirtied” Deeley’s face.

KATE. One night I said let me do something, a little thing, a little trick. He lay there in your bed. He looked up at me with great expectation. He was gratified. He thought I had profited from his teaching. He thought I was going to be sexually forthcoming, that I was about to take a long promised initiative. I dug about in the windowbox, where you had planted our pretty pansies, scooped, filled the bowl, and plastered his face with dirt.

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584 Ibid, 140.
585 Pinter, Old Times, 68.
586 Pinter seems to have a predilection for masked, cracked, and dissolving faces, recalling Surrealist paintings and films—an aspect which I will discuss in Chapter Five.
588 Pinter, Old Times, 68-69.
Following this monologue, Deeley never speaks again, just like Anna, which marks a noticeable parallelism between the two characters. Theirs is the face of the insensitive possessive other, which Kate “dirties” so as to rub it out from her psychic/bodily desire; as Richard Allen Cave suggests, she seems to be enacting symbolic death-rituals over each of their bodies.\textsuperscript{589}

There are indeed several similarities between Anna and Deeley, since during most of the play both seek to impose contesting interpretations of the past, mostly concerning different versions of first meetings in a cinema, of pub parties attended, and of attempts at sexual conquest. Further, they also dispute over Kate’s identity, characterizing her differently so as to assert possession of her. Their very exchange of popular song lyrics also reveals a pattern of increasing tension: at first they cap one another with lines from different songs; then take lines by turns from identical tunes; and end up singing fragments of a single song, “faster on cue, and more perfunctorily.”\textsuperscript{590} MacKean considers that both share “an undercurrent of ‘dirty thoughts’ aimed at Kate,” while “concealing their lecherousness beneath a phoney veneer of sophistication and worldliness.”\textsuperscript{591} David Savran affirms that although Anna and Deeley have a distinctive verbal style, they are rivals who copy the other’s desire for Kate; their desire is imitative, borrowed, clichéd.\textsuperscript{592}

As in the Symbolist dramas of Maeterlinck—such as \textit{Pélleas et Mélisande} and \textit{Aglavaine et Séllysette}—the characters in \textit{Old Times} are like reflecting pools of one another, and there is no objective access to their past experience in order to understand how it contributed to the molding of their personalities, as in a typical realistic characterization. A three-sided-mirror landscape of

\textsuperscript{590} Pinter, \textit{Old Times}, 54.
desire is principally evoked in Maeterlinck’s *Aglavaine et Sélysette*, a nightmarish play that—like *Old Times*—concerns the incapacity to share love, and the mistaking of love for one’s mental and physical possession of the other. In Maeterlinck’s play, the presence/touch/eyesight of a third person (Aglavaine) seems essential for two lovers (Sélysette and Meliandre) to really “see” and love one another. Yet *Aglavaine et Sélysette* is also a tale of the inevitable passing away of time, sexual love, jealousy, and suffering. Yeats, in his review of Maeterlinck’s play, states that we do not always know who the characters are, and what their relationship is to each other, “they go hither and thither,” and are “as unemphatic as a faded tapestry.” This comment might effectively apply to *Old Times*.

In the two acts of *Old Times*, the symmetrically reverse triangles of the setting may be viewed as two superimposed images of the objectification of desire underlying the play, as Savran argues. According to him, the play comprises two active subjects/mediators (Anna and Deeley) and one single passive object of desire (Kate). However, and although both Deeley and Anna desire Kate, their yearning for her is subordinate to another longing to possess or conquer the rival/mediator whose desire serves as a model for that of the other subject. This double mediation produces a reversibility of relationships in Act Two, when Kate is dislodged as object

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593 In Maeterlinck’s play, at some point Selysette confesses that before the arrival of Aglavaine she kissed and embraced Meliandre as if she were blind. As for Aglavaine, she pursues a love that isn’t a “little love”—a love shared by three, rather than just two. Meliandre seems totally absorbed by Aglavaine ever since her arrival, his love for “little Selysette” having been transformed into brotherly affection. In any case, each of the three characters needs the other two in order to really feel love, as if they were caught inside a three-faceted mirrored world.

594 As usual in Maeterlinck, the images are impressive. There is a tower in ruins, where seagulls come to nest; their shrieks can be heard at the end of the day while they are nourishing their young ones’ ravenous beaks, which are far bigger than their fragile bodies. The tower is also inhabited by a “green bird” that grows bigger everyday, but which can never face the light of day, only the dark of night. It is in quest of this bird that Selysette falls from the tower at the end, in an accident/suicide that betrays her pursuit of “a little love” in Aglavaine’s eyes.

595 W. B. Yeats, *Uncollected Prose: 2*, ed. J. P. Frayne and C. Johnson (London: Macmillan, 1975), 52. The section cited on Maeterlinck’s *Aglavaine et Sélysette* is the following: “We do not know in what country they were born, or in what period they were born, or how old they are, or what they look like, and we do not always know whether they are brother and sister, or lover and lover, or husband and wife. They go hither and thither by well-sides, and by crumbling towers, and among woods, that are repeated again and again, and are as unemphatic as a faded tapestry.”

of desire, Anna and Deeley becoming the object of each other’s seduction. The play is therefore a product of the superimposition of these two “imitative triangles” which, by being reversed, provoke an absence of all movement. This triangular configuration condemned to stasis directly relates, I argue, to the game of “odd man out” the characters continually play. As Rabillard writes, “Through the course of the drama, the three speakers play out all the possible variations of a verbal game of ‘odd man out:’ by turns, each of them is excluded from the conversation and made its mere object.”

There are always two characters discussing a third character who is being discussed; two people acting, while the third is beholding; two individuals seducing each other, while the third is left out.

Maurice Valency considers that Old Times is an example of a post-Symbolist play because it is undecipherable. Surprisingly, however, he provides an insightful clue to its reading when he compares it to Jean Paul Sartre’s Huis Clos. Indeed, I find the likeness between the two texts striking—the sofas or divans neatly arranged, the triangle made up of two women and one man, the seduction games between the three, the passing of time in petty games, the suggestion that they are all dead (early on, Kate accuses Anna and Deeley of treating her as if she were “dead;” later, she pronounces them “dead”), and of the materialization of the Sartrian idea that “hell is other people.”

L’enfer c’est les autres a été toujours mal compris. On a cru que je voulais dire par là que nos rapports avec les autres étaient toujours empoisonnés, que c’était toujours des rapports infernaux. Or, c’est tout autre chose que je veux dire. Je veux dire que si les rapports avec autrui sont tordus, viciés, alors l’autre ne peut être que l’enfer. Pourquoi? Parce que les autres sont, au fond, ce qu’il y a de plus important en nous-mêmes, pour notre propre connaissance de nous-mêmes. ( . . ) Ce qui veut dire que, si mes rapports sont mauvais, je me mets dans la totale dépendance d’autrui et alors, en effet, je suis en enfer.

598 Maurice Valency, The End of the World: Introduction to Contemporary Drama, 437.
As Sartre clarifies, he does not mean that relations with other people are “hellish,” but that since our bond with other human beings involves a mutual process of reflection and recognition, in our judgment of ourselves the other’s image of us inevitably counts. Consequently, one’s desire and choice of an intimate other are intrinsically micropolitical. Sartre’s concept of “hell is other people” applies to Pinter’s *Old Times* due to its constant three-faceted play of mirrors, whereby the characters construct images of their own selves and of the others, and permanently destroy the images created by the others. Further, there is also no actual exit from the situation in *Old Times*, which makes the mood of the play “nauseating” in an existentialist Sartrian way. As Erikson suggests, the characters are tragically confronted with the reality of *alienation* due to an overwhelming awareness of the subjective nature of individual memory and perception. There is no shared experience; they are irrevocably separated from one another and thrown into a radical contingent situation of constant self-construction.

Particularly revealing in this respect is the fact that the characters never physically touch each other, although their inner scapes are permanently engaged with images of carnal contact and desire. But these images are mainly voyeuristic, like in a conventional film montage, as if sexual yearning and physical touch could only be realized through one’s “gaze.” One of the few touchscapes of the play is given when Kate wraps a towel around her body, after she has taken a bath. In this scene we see a new Kate who draws sensuality and exuberance from the non-human matter that surrounds her body. She describes her encounter with water in the following terms:

> KATE. I feel fresh. The water’s very soft here. Much softer than London. I always find the water very hard in London. That’s one reason I like living in the country. Everything’s softer. The water, the light, the shapes, the sounds. There aren’t such edges here. And living close to the sea too. You can’t say where it begins or ends. That appeals

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600 As Savran notes, the front door is non-operational (50). The characters try to get out but there seems to be nowhere to go; whenever they move towards the door they stop nearby, and then turn back into the room.

to me. I don’t care for harsh lines. I deplore that kind of urgency. I’d like to go to the East, or somewhere like that, somewhere very hot, where you can lie under a mosquito net and breathe quite slowly . . somewhere where you can look through the flap of a tent and see sand ( . . ) The only nice thing about a big city is that when it rains it blurs everything, and it blurs the lights from the cars, doesn’t it, and blurs your eyes, and you have rain on your lashes.  

A second touchscape emerges near the end, when Deeley lies across Kate’s lap, their two bodies evoking the figure of a pietà. Strikingly, in a play revolving around landscapes of bodily desire, the only two touchscapes are that of a solitary human being who feels the softness and vastness of non-human elements (water, sand, rain), and that of a representation of human love’s death. The final image shows three isolated figures, lying or sitting alone like abandoned puppets.

Significantly, in both Old Times and Betrayal, Pinter has his characters read Yeats, a Symbolist poet/dramatist known for his belief in the wheels and gyres of time. In Old Times, when Anna describes her life together with Kate, twenty years ago in London, she emphasizes how they stayed up “half the night reading Yeats.” In Betrayal, Jerry and Robert have been fond of reading Yeats ever since they were both undergraduate editors of poetry magazines, some twenty years ago. According to Anthony Roche, this is a clear allusion to the play’s “probing examination of sexual and emotional infidelity,” since Yeats is known for being “the poet of sexual betrayal.” Roche further claims that Yeats’s philosophy of time contributes to Pinter’s ethical decision to reverse the chronology of the affair between Jerry and Robert’s wife, Emma. Yeats’s concept of “dreaming back” (exposed in A Vision) envisages people who are forced to relive the details of their life with the moral burden of much greater knowledge than the

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602 Pinter, Old Times, 55.
603 Ibid., 18.
604 According to Roche, “In the sexually more explicit poems Yeats wrote in the second half of his career, the encounter of a man and a woman in the act of love is likely to be troubled by the presence of a third: either a lover from a past life or the projection of an idealised counter-self to the beloved. ( . . ) It is appropriate, then, that the textual ghost of Yeats should be invoked by the three lovers who are caught in a round of mutual self-deception in their adulterous triangle.” Anthony Roche, “Pinter and Ireland,” in Cambridge Companion to Harold Pinter, ed. Peter Raby (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 185.
ignorance they could claim at the time. Accordingly, although the characters in Pinter’s *Betrayal* live through the events in a seemingly detached manner, the audience ends up occupying the role of *revenant*, “witnessing each scene of the ‘unwinding’ of the dramatic event in its intensity, bringing the knowledge of future events to a reading of each scene’s ‘present.’”

In *Betrayal*, not only time is “the ultimate betrayer”—as Dohmen suggests—but the play’s own reverse chronological movement *betrays*, I think, the harsh inescapable death of sexual love. Differently from what Roche suggests, I consider that the death of love is self-consciously experienced by the characters in the play: not only by the “adulterous” couple, Jerry and Emma, but also by Robert (Emma’s husband and Jerry’s best friend). The play starts with a meeting in a pub between the two ex-lovers, during which they impersonally reminisce about their past affair. It ends with their first clumsy youthful embrace, nine years ago, in the room of Emma and Robert’s house, at their wedding anniversary party:

JERRY. You’re lovely. I’m crazy about you. All these words I’m using, don’t you see, they’ve never been said before. Can’t you see? I’m crazy about you. It’s a whirlwind. Have you ever been to the Sahara Desert? Listen to me. It’s true. Listen. You overwhelm me. You’re so lovely.

EMMA. I’m not.

JERRY. You’re so beautiful. Look at the way you look at me.

EMMA. I’m not... looking at you. Please.

JERRY. Look at the way you’re looking at me. I can’t wait for you, I’m bowled over, I’m totally knocked out, you dazzle me, you jewel, my jewel, I can’t ever sleep again, no, listen, it’s the truth, I won’t walk, I’ll be a cripple, I’ll descend, I’ll diminish, into total paralysis, my life is in your hands, that’s what you’re banishing me to, a state of catatonia, do you know the state of catatonia? do you? do you? the state of... where the reigning prince is the prince of emptiness, the prince of absence, the prince of desolation. I love you.

EMMA: My husband is at the other side of that door.

JERRY; Everyone knows. The world knows. It knows. But they’ll never know, they’ll never know, they’re in a different world. I adore you. I’m madly in love with you. I can’t believe that what anyone is at this moment saying has ever happened has ever happened.

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605 Roche, “Pinter and Ireland.” 187.
Nothing has ever happened. Nothing. This is the only thing that has ever happened. Your eyes kill me. I’m lost. You’re wonderful.  

Concerning this final scene of the play, Samuel Beckett remarks in a letter to Pinter how he was struck by its image of love: “That first last look in the shadows after all those in the light to come—wrings the heart.” I would like to add that, in synesthetic terms, Jerry’s passion and desire for Emma seemingly corresponds to a “whirlwind” of the senses that cripples each and every sense, making him experience “paralysis” and “catatonia.” Shown at the play’s end, as it is, this moment of sexual fascination sparked between Emma and Jerry seems charged with promise and expectation, although we already know by then how it matured and eventually decayed with the passing of time. This provides the ending of the play with a paradoxical feeling of nostalgia, with a sense of time’s irreversibility accentuated by the reverse order of the dramatic action shown to us. As Almansi and Henderson remark, the play regresses in time, but progresses from apathy to passion, conveying a feeling of immense desolation. The final note is one of emptiness, strikingly comparable to the image of the flat where the lovers secretly meet, and which already halfway through the play is forebodingly referred to (by Emma) as “Just empty. All day and night. Day after day and night after night.”

The death of both love and friendship is also experienced by Robert in a revelatory manner. During a second honeymoon trip with Emma to Italy, and after she has confessed her five-year affair with his best friend, he decides to travel alone at dawn to the island of Torcello.

ROBERT. I went for a trip to Torcello. (. . .) Incredible day. I got up very early and—whoomp—right across the lagoon—to Torcello. Not a soul stirring. (. . .) I was alone for hours, as a matter of fact, on the island. Highpoint, actually, of the whole trip. (. . .) I sat

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609 Almansi and Henderson, Harold Pinter, 92-94.
610 Pinter, Betrayal, 54.
on the grass and read Yeats. (. . .) I was happy, such a rare thing (. . .) when I walked about Torcello in the early morning, alone, I was happy, I wanted to stay there forever. 611

This is one of the rare moments in the play where Robert reveals some interiority, as if he were only capable of finding insightfulness in remote and isolated places. I find it worthy of notice that Robert finds refuge in Yeats’s writings, since Betrayal particularly evokes the mood of one of his poems, Ephemera:

“Your eyes that once were never weary of mine
Are bowed in sorrow under pendulous lids,
Because our love is waning.”
And then She:
“Although our love is waning, let us stand
By the lone border of the lake once more,
Together in that hour of gentleness
When the poor tired child, passion, falls asleep.
How far away the stars seem, and how far
Is our first kiss, and ah, how old my heart!”
(. . .)
“Ah, do not mourn,” he said,
“That we are tired, for other loves await us;
Hate on and love through unrepining hours.
Before us lies eternity; our souls
Are love, and a continual farewell.” 612

Like Yeats’s poem, Pinter’s play may be seen as a journey into the foreign country of the past, where each of the three characters is confronted with the inevitable evanescence of human love relationships.

Worth notes that—with the exception of Betrayal—Pinter never charts the movement of time or specifies any exact dates for the action of his plays. 613 In effect, the stage directions of Betrayal contain information not only of the exact year and time of day, but also of the seasons during which its nine scenes unfold. This information is hardly expressed through the dialogue, and does not seem to figure in the text for naturalistic purposes. Rather, these indications seem to

611 Pinter, Betrayal, 112-17.
be offering a clue towards an understanding of the cyclical quality of time in the play, and by
extension, of the cyclical nature of human existence. As in Yeats’s *Ephemera* there is in *Betrayal*
a continual movement of loss and renewal, as well as an endless recurrence of patterns and
images. Moreover, if we notice carefully, the play’s scenes do not unfold in an exact reversed
order, but rather take us back in time with occasional steps forward, describing a serpentine.\(^{614}\)
Such a structure “has the strange effect of conveying a relationship that is, at one and the same
time, evolving and declining, with this process being visited at various points over an extended
time span.”\(^{615}\)

As I mentioned earlier, the winding movement of time (as that of a tide, spiral, or
serpentine) recurs in all of Pinter’s plays discussed in this chapter, and particularly links his work
to Symbolist theory. As noted by several authors, the Symbolists were fascinated by the symbol
of the *ouroboros*,\(^{616}\) the tail-devouring serpent whose mouth attracts its tail, and whose body
turns on itself, fleeing from itself as it pursues itself. Because it constantly self-destroys and self-
recreates itself, the *ouroboros* evokes everything that is cyclical, or which eternally recurs; it is a
symbol of the breathing of the cosmos, and of continuity between beginnings and ends. Its form
suggests immobility and at the same time perpetual movement. Implied in the *ouroboros* is a
macropolitical critique of “human progress,” since the symbol suggests that lived/embodied time
is a continual spiraling process of incremental growth, rather than a developmental sequence of
discrete events set along a straight evolutionary line, presupposing a neat separation between

\(^{614}\) Scenes 1 and 2 are set in 1977, and occur in chronological sequence. Scene 3 goes back to 1975, Scene 4 back to
1974. Scenes 5, 6, and 7, set in 1973, occur chronologically. Scenes 8 and 9 go backward in time, to 1971 and 1968
respectively.


\(^{616}\) The ouroboros figure can be traced back to ancient Egypt, around 1600 BCE. It is associated to the circular
movement of time, and to the alchemical process of creating matter. In Symbolist art, there is a frequent use of spiral
or serpentine lines, of the ouroboros image, of the “ur-form,” the thyrsus, and the double ellipse to evoke an idea of
eternal recurrence. See Geurt Imanse, “Occult Literature in France,” in *The Spiritual in Art: Abstract Painting 1890-
past, present, and future (as in a conventional scientific-technological perspective). In micropolitical terms—and as Bergson explains—our experience of life seems to be broken into steps or discontinuous events “due to our attention being fixed on it by a series of separate acts: actually there is only a gentle slope.” Paradoxically, at the same time that in “real” or subjective “duration” time seems to stand still in an eternal present (the past is continuous with the present), there is also perpetual becoming, unceasing change. As with the ouroboros, there is continuity of wholeness in form simultaneously to everlasting transformation, since life “is invention, is unceasing creation.” Ever present but never twice the same.

Describing a serpentine movement in time, Betrayal is “a play in which the beginning is not only the ending, but the ending of the affair is suggested in its beginning at the play’s end,” as Katherine Burkman writes. Through the winding series of scenes, specific patterns and images recur: references to Yeats’s poetry, in contrast to the works of a fictional contemporary writer named Casey (who becomes Emma’s lover after her divorce from Robert and the termination of her affair with Jerry); allusions to the lovers’ flat as opposed to their family home; sexist conversations about playing squash, and over the difference between “boy babies” and “girl babies” who never leave the womb; attachment to objects (Emma), to places (Robert), and to events (Jerry). Of these memory-images there are two that best evoke time as an indivisible

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617 Symbolists generally adhered to a cyclical notion of time, and to a mythological sense of history, defying the normative sense of a progressive human development. In drama, this vision is perhaps most apparent in Tadeusz Miciński’s play The Revolt of the Potemkin (1906). As Daniel Gerould argues, “In Miciński’s iconography the Potemkin becomes a redemptive ship bearing the human soul—the soul of both the tormented individual and the entire Russian nation—through hell and purgatory on a harrowing journey of purification and enlightenment. Rather than view the mutiny from the perspective of the later, ‘inevitable’ triumph of the Revolution (as does Eisenstein), Miciński perceives it sub specie aeternitatis,” i.e., from the perspective of the eternal. Daniel Gerould, “The Apocalyptic Mode and the Terror of History: Turn-of-the-Century Russian and Polish Millenarian Drama,” Yale Theater 29, no.3 (Fall 1999): 59.

618 Bergson, Creative Evolution, in Key Writings, 172

619 Ibid., 183.

620 Katherine Burkman, “Harold Pinter’s Betrayal: Life before Death: And After,” Theatre Journal 34, no.4 (Dec 1982): 510. Burkman claims that the adulterous affair starts with a fantasy on Jerry’s part, of having desired to “blacken” Emma’s “white wedding dress,” although she denies having worn white at her wedding. For Burkman this initial misunderstanding is a sign of their future estrangement.
continuum of past and present, working like “the beats of the drum which break forth here and there in the symphony.”  

Three times through the play, Jerry recalls having thrown Emma and Robert’s child, Charlotte, up in the air in someone’s kitchen—perhaps his own, perhaps Emma’s—and of sensing how the young girl was “so light.”

JERRY: Listen. Do you remember, when was it, a few years ago, we were all in your kitchen, must have been Christmas or something, do you remember, all the kids were running about and suddenly I picked Charlotte up and lifted her high up, high up, and then down and up. Do you remember how she laughed?
EMMA: Everyone laughed.
JERRY: She was so light. And there was your husband and my wife and all the kids, all standing and laughing in your kitchen. I can’t get rid of it.
EMMA: It was your kitchen, actually.

What stands out through the repetition of this image is not the inaccuracy of memory, nor the unverifiable nature of facts, but rather the recurrent vestige of a striking moment of playfulness and light-hearted well-being in which all fellow human beings participate, without any sense of dishonesty or strangeness. Through recurrent memory-images such as this one, the play stresses the cyclical nature of existence, since it structures experience as an endless repetition of familiar plots that threaten infinite regression. Given the intensity of this moment of communion, it does not seem important to know whether it took place in Jerry’s kitchen or in Emma’s, and her correction of the “facts” actually betrays her lack of sensibility towards her lover’s embodied experience.

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621 Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, 172. As Bergson notes, we borrow images from space to describe our experience of time.
622 The image is evoked twice in Scene One, after the affair has ended; and once in Scene Six, after Emma has betrayed Jerry by telling Robert of their affair without his knowledge.
623 Pinter, *Betrayal*, 100.
624 This has been pointed out by Dohmen in “Time after Time: Pinter Plays with Disjunctive Chronologies,” 198-99. Dohmen provides another example of infinite regression through the absent character of the novelist Casey, “the protégé of Robert and Jerry who has left his wife and three children to write a novel about a man who leaves his wife and three children and goes to live alone on the other side of London to write a novel about a man who leaves his wife and three children—” (198-99).
Another salient motif that recurs through the play is that of the “dead city” of Venice. During his wedding anniversary trip to this city, in Scene Five, Robert is suddenly assailed by “the thought that [he] could very easily be a total stranger” to his wife.

JERRY. These Italians . . . so free and easy. I mean, just because my name is Downs and your name is Downs doesn’t mean that we’re the Mr and Mrs Downs that they, in their laughing Mediterranean way, assume we are. We could be, and in fact are vastly more likely to be, total strangers.

Although Robert’s sudden moment of revelation is initially prompted by Jerry’s inopportune letter to his wife Emma, it seems significant that Pinter picks Venice—a “romantic” but “dead city”—for an epiphany concerning the absence of love among a wedded couple. According to Donald Friedman, Symbolist writers and artists endowed dead cities or “actual urban locii of desuetude”—such as Bruges, Ghent, and Venice—with multi-faceted qualities: as monastic places of retreat (standing for solitude rather than community), as substitute underworlds (paradises of artifice, or infernos incarnate), as symbols of inevitable decline, and as places of hallucination, dream, and “uncertain being.” Venice, in particular, is associated with “Atlantide imagery” (a sunken paradise), suggestive of a sensuous but ephemeral beauty, and known for its corrosive action of death due to its own diseased state of decay and decomposition. Since it also evokes how historical greatness has come to an end, there lies in it “a heightened cognizance of the void which encompasses all transitory manifestations of existence.” In this context, the “laughing Mediterranean way” (which occurs twice in Robert’s monologue) acts like a ghostly soundscape, mockingly echoing the contrast between an innocent past and a tainted

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625 Pinter, Betrayal, 80.
626 Ibid.
627 Among the Symbolist writers and artists that have explored dead cities are Georges Rodenbach (Bruges-la-Morte), Gabriele d’Annunzio (La citta morta; La citta del silenzio), and Fernand Khnopff (in several of his drawings and paintings). See Donald Flannell Friedman, The Symbolist Dead City: A Landscape of Poesis (New York & London: Garland Publishing, 1990).
628 Ibid., 11.
present, between the sweeping mystery of an ancient city, and the negligible mundanity and impermanence of personal relationships.

References to Venice recur throughout the play, most often in a casual manner. Notably, Emma brings back from the trip a “Venetian tablecloth,” which she places over the table in the flat that she shares with her lover Jerry. Emma’s efforts at replicating “a home” are further evident when she cooks lunch for Jerry (or duplicates marital rituals of taste) during their short furtive encounters. But “home” in Betrayal only makes sense when there are children in it, as Jerry explains; consequently, once they have matured, it is emptied of meaning. Lovescapes may never coincide with homescapes, as if love implied unfamiliarity. Thus, Robert’s epiphany in Venice ripples through the entire play, since all the characters in Betrayal could very easily be regarded as “total strangers”—whether as friends, as lovers, or as marital partners. Business is what they all seem good at, and this is reinforced by the incessant repetition of phatic dialogue in the form of “how are you,” “how’s everything?” and “how’s it going?” As Peacock writes, in Betrayal “personal psychology is not explored and allocation of guilt is irrelevant, for each of the characters has him- or herself betrayed others.”

It has been noted that death continually stalks the characters in Maeterlinck’s early dramas. Leslie Kane considers that beyond an obvious preoccupation with the daily intrusion of death into life, Maeterlinck seems concerned with death as a “timeless experience connected

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629 Pinter, Betrayal, 54-55.
630 According to Esslin, the relationship between the three characters on “a personal, intellectual, spiritual plane is shown as totally arid, in fact, nonexistent. That, to my mind, is the point the play is making.” Martin Esslin, cited in Arnold Hinchliffe, “After No Man’s Land: A Progress Report,” in Harold Pinter: Critical Approaches, ed. Steven H. Gale (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1986), 156.
631 D. Keith Peacock, Harold Pinter and the New British Theatre, 120.
to and reflecting the continuum of life.” All of the plays by Pinter discussed in this chapter are haunted by ghostscapes and deathscapes, or by the everlasting traces of the past in the present, and a sense of imminent death of the flowering of the present moment. Indeed, within a Symbolist concept time as recurrent in a circular or spiral form, there is no linear movement from birth to death, but instead a presence of death through life. This is what Rilke suggests when he says that each being has death inside, like a fruit has its core, nourished by one’s own experiences, by “the way we loved, the meanings we made,”

For we are only the rind and the leaf.
The great death, that each of us carries inside,
is the fruit.
Everything enwraps it.
( . . .)
Dying is strange and hard
if it is not our death, but a death
that takes us by storm, when we’ve ripened none within us.

For the Symbolists, mortality not only links us to the natural world, making us experience kinship with other embodied things and life forms, but also deepens our awareness of the continuousness of time, of the flow of becoming, since we are constantly passing, in each instant.

A comparable celebration of transience is manifest in Pinter’s two adaptations of Marcel Proust’s seven-volume novel, À la recherche du temps perdu, first for film (in 1972-78, never produced due to the death of Joseph Losey), and afterwards for the stage (directed by Di Trevis, who also co-authored the text, and published in 2000). In both The Proust Screenplay and

633 Kane, The Language of Silence, 29.
634 Rilke, The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge, 10.
636 Premiered December 7, 2000 at the Cottesloe, Royal National Theatre, London. Directed by Di Trevis, designed by Alison Chitty, music by Dominic Muldowney. With Sebastian Harcombe as Marcel.
*Remembrance of Things Past*, the complexity of Proust’s novels is chiefly conveyed by aural and visual landscapes, rather than through dialogue. In the screenplay, before the first spoken scene, there are thirty-five silent or non-verbal shots during which Pinter conveys the inner landscapes of the novel’s narrator, Marcel. The play similarly starts with an alternating sequence of soundscapes and silent images:

- Patch of yellow wall.
- Sound of a garden gate bell.
- A reception.
- A tumult of voices.
- Silence.
- A waiter inadvertently knocks a spoon against a plate.
- Silence.
- Three sharp knocks on a bedroom wall.
- The flickering of candlelight.
- The sound of a hammer being knocked against the wheel of a train.

What follows is a dialogued scene set during Marcel’s childhood that actually corresponds to the initial episode of Proust’s first volume, *Du côté de chez Swann*. Suddenly, however, we are taken to the concluding chapters of the last novel, *Le temps retrouvé*, some thirty years later, when a much older Marcel arrives at the Duchess of Guermantes’s house for a final reception.

The scene is striking for its enactment of a theatre of dead figures. Not only are death, decay, sickness, and old-age persistent themes in the dialogue between guests, but the characters (except for Marcel) are rendered motionless, like waxwork figures frozen in time, occasionally flaring into a brief conversation. Although Pinter and Trevis do not provide scenographic details, the performance space was described by reviewers as a bare stage with little furniture (a

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639 This theatre of static and decayed bodies evokes for me a scene from Luchino Visconti’s *The Leopard (Il Gatopardo)*, 1963), which consists in a long shot of all the members of an aristocratic family inside a chapel, perfectly immobile and covered with sand-colored dust. The staging also evokes Tadeusz Kantor’s “theatre of the dead.”
piano, chairs, and an overturned picture on the floor). In this practically unfilled space, the play’s many scenes unfold rapidly as in a cinematic montage. Its few long scenes are frequently interrupted by sudden images of seemingly unrelated incidents, or else by extremely brief lines taken from episodes that will only be revealed (or performed in their entirety) much later. The text is therefore a collage of fragments, of traces, of invisible connections, of imaginings, and remembrances. Its pace is rapid, making it hard if not impossible to connect the various pieces into a meaningful narrative. What is left is an impression, as if we were inside someone’s mind perceiving images that were somehow mixed up in memory. Since during the play several different characters address Marcel as a “writer,” these images seem like states of arrest in his mind, about to be brought back to life, necessarily transformed through art.

The play’s spiraling journey (which takes us back and forth in time, to end yet once more at the Duchesse of Guermantes’s last reception) is punctuated by patterns and symbols that cyclically recur, most of which were introduced at the beginning: three knocks on a wall, the sound of “the Vinteuil sonata,” the sound of a train wheel being struck, “a tumult of voices at dinner,” the ferruginous and shrill garden gate bell at Combray, the steeple of Martinville

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641 Time is cyclical in historical terms as well, both in Proust’s work and in Pinter’s two adaptations, since we witness what seems like a tidal movement formed by a declining aristocracy and an emergent bourgeoisie, and observe how the latter acquires aristocratic titles at the end.

642 The three knocks are made by Marcel on his bedroom wall in order to call his grandmother in the next room, every time he feels anxious or ill. In Proust, this happens during his vacation stay at Balbec (second volume, Les jeunes filles en fleur).

643 A sonata conceived by a fictional composer, Vinteuil, whose work is only recognized after his death. It is while listening to the sonata that one of Proust’s main characters, Charles Swann, falls “hopelessly in love” with Odette. Later Swann recognizes that he has wasted years of his life and even longed for death because of a love for a woman who was not even his “type.” Most of the characters, both in the novels and in the adaptations, suffer from a sense of their lives being wasted.

644 This refers to the gate bell of a house in Combray belonging to the narrator’s grandparents, in which he spent the summers of his childhood. Years later, when he hears the bell, the distinction between past and present becomes elided.

645 The vision of certain church steeples causes a mysterious impression in the narrator, somewhat inductive of some childhood memory, as he tells us in Du côté de chez Swann (1913), the first part of À la recherche du temps perdu.
a “patch of yellow wall” (from Jan Vermeer’s painting, *View of Delft*), 646 “Grandmother having her photograph taken,” a “little band of girls” dancing, Albertine undressing, the eyes of Odette, the eyes of Mother, the eyes of Marcel. Close to the play’s end, “time lost” becomes materialized in a young girl filled with promise (Gilberte’s daughter), when Marcel becomes aware of the entirety of his life in a sudden instant, by involuntarily recovering an embodied experience of his childhood past in the present. Time is thus regained, and the play closes with him enunciating some of its recurring patterns—the trees, the steeples, Swann’s arrival, a music, the patch of yellow in the Vermeer painting—that are now evidently standing for the intensities of Marcel’s memory.

As Joseph Frank elucidates, “lost time is not, for Proust, as a widely spread misunderstanding would have it, the past, but time in a pure state, that is, in fact, by the fusion of an instant of the present with an instant of the past, the contrary of time that flows: the extra-temporal, eternity.” 647 This “extra-temporal” spatial perspective is brought about by involuntary memory, 648 and may be re-created and evoked through art. Involuntary memory occurs when particular sensuous impressions—some vision, odor, touch, taste, or sound—lead the narrator to re-experience a twin sensation of long ago, and thus relive with intense vividness some moment of the past in the present. In Proust’s novels, the madeleine cake is perhaps the best known instance of such an experience, brought about through a tastescape; in Pinter’s adaptations, involuntary memory is usually prompted by sights and sounds.

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646 In the novel, this tiny patch of yellow wall “painted with so much skill and refinement by an artist destined to be forever unknown and barely identified under the name Vermeer,” is noticed for the first time by the writer Bergotte, just before his death (in *La captive*, sixth part of *À la Recherche*). Its vision gives way to an epiphany on life and art.


648 According to Beckett’s reading of Proust, involuntary memory occurs when we escape from Habit such as “when we escape into the spacious annex of mental alienation, in sleep or the rare dispensation of waking madness” (18). Involuntary memory makes us “remember what has been registered by our extreme inattention and stored in that ultimate and inaccessible dungeon of our being to which Habit does not possess the key” (17). Beckett, *Proust* (New York: Grove Press, 1931), 17-18.
In the introduction to *The Proust Screenplay*, Pinter states “that the architecture of the film should be based on two main and contrasting principles: one a movement, chiefly narrative, towards disillusion, and the other, more intermittent, towards revelation, rising to where time that was lost is found, and fixed forever in art.” The playtext of *Remembrance of Things Past* seems similarly structured into two contrasting but simultaneous movements: if on the one hand its images and dialogues evoke impermanence and mortality, on the other hand, the work gradually evolves towards a celebration of wholeness, of being able to embrace one’s life in full, with childhood and old age as equally present. When both past and future dissolve into the present, the way is opened for their gradual rediscovery—no longer as autonomous separate episodes, but as aspects of a continuous corporeal present, or of a cosmic materiality that enfolds one’s body. Consequently, time in the play seems depicted as a “double-headed monster of damnation and salvation,” to use Beckett’s words.

The Proustian thesis that past experience is omnipresent evokes Bergson’s concept of “durée,” and Symbolist theory’s vision of time as cyclical and eternally recurring. Once there is no absolute past or future but always an eternal present, images or scapes become “fixed” or “set,” and anything that happens once, will happen forever. In ecocritical terms, this means that we are materially bound to extra-human realities, as well as to other animals’ apparent lack of awareness of time, or to their sensuous perception of timelessness. Further, in micropolitical terms, Proust’s spiraling depiction of time implies that life is a process of self-construction, and that it can actually be made into, and become itself, a work of art.

If one’s life may be a work of art, within a constant process of self-construction, artistic creation may equally turn out to be a celebration of life. As Pinter states in a conversation with

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Gussow, writing is for him “an act of freedom and celebration. (. . .) What you’re celebrating is the ability to write . . . It takes you out into another country.”651 Within this appraisal of the “aesthetic” it is interesting to note how in both The Proust Screenplay and Remembrance of Things Past we see the inner world of artistic epiphany win over the elegant crassness of the all-powerful aristocrats, and of the ostentatious bourgeois that succeed them. The normative moral values adopted by the members of the social hierarchy are contrasted with the individual ethics of composers (Vinteuil), writers (Marcel), and lovers (Swann). This is strikingly expressed in the scene where Swann tells of his impending death to their longtime friends, the Duke and Duchess of Guermantes, as they are hastily about to leave for yet another social party. Instead of showing solidarity towards Swann, the Duke becomes extremely horrified with the discovery that the Duchess is wearing black shoes with a red dress to the reception.652

Pinter’s adaptations maintain the relation between art and love that is so central to Proust’s novels. In Axel’s Castle Edmund Wilson remarks that “Proust’s lovers are always suffering . . . And Proust’s artists are unhappy, too.”653 This is not due, as Wilson insinuates, to some psychological morbidity on Proust’s part, but rather to a Symbolist/Decadent equation of art and love as powerful processes of sensory stimulation. In effect, several critics consider that Proust’s aesthetic ideas, as expounded in À La Recherche du Temps Perdu, are noticeably Symbolist.654 Be that as it may, in my view both Proust’s treatment of time and Pinter’s own, in

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651 Pinter, cited in Mel Gussow, Conversations with Pinter, 128.
652 Pinter, Remembrance of Things Past, 79-85.
653 Edmund Wilson, Axel’s Castle (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1959), 165.
654 In Le Symbole Littéraire: Essai sur la signification du symbole chez Wagner, Baudelaire, Mallarmé, Bergson et Proust (1941), Emeric Fiser argues: “Bergson a incorporé le symbolisme dans sa philosophie et Proust l’a introduit dans la prose. C’est dans la prose de Proust que le symbolisme s’est épanoui, bien au delà des frontières que les jeunes de 1890 lui ont primitivement fixées. Nous ne prétendons pas rattacher toute l’œuvre de Proust aux idées du symbolisme. Ce sont surtout ses idées esthétiques qui portent l’empreinte du mouvement” (11). See also Emeric Fiser’s L’Esthétique de Marcel Proust (1933, reprinted 1990). In Axel’s Castle (1959), Wilson holds a similar view when he writes that “Proust is the first important novelist to apply the principles of Symbolism in fiction. (. . .) [In À la Recherche] The shifting images of the Symbolist poet, with their ‘multiplied associations,’ are here characters,
his adaptation of the novels, are in tune with the Bergsonian theories of “durée,” which may be considered Symbolist. Rather than describe the aging of Marcel by focusing on organic destruction phenomena—as in a typically mechanistic explanation of time—they present it as a continual recording of duration, which implies “a persistence of the past in the present,” and the memory of “organic creation,” or of the evolutionary phenomena that actually constitute life.

Like the Symbolists before him, Pinter explores time in the theatre as a subject in itself. By approaching time as a continuous flow that contains past and future in the “now” moment, he is able to render the inner landscapes of his characters’ minds, and to blur the boundaries between imaginary and real worlds. The Symbolist concept of a cyclical spiral time is equally evident when Pinter presents socially catastrophic worlds in plays like The Birthday Party, The Dumb Waiter, Party Time, Ashes to Ashes, and Celebration—which are considered by many critics to have “political” implications. Such works unfold what I term “apocalyptic landscapes” not on account of prophesying any ending or resolution to the ongoing material and spiritual damage, but rather because they reveal an eternally recurrent disaster shaped upon a mistaken path. These synesthetic scapes of terror are the subject of my next chapter.

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situations, places, vivid moments, obsessive emotions, recurrent patterns of behavior” (132). According to René Wellek’s “What is Symbolism,” in The Symbolist Movement in the Literature of European Languages, ed. Anna Balakian (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1982),17-28), “The argument that the theory expounded in Le Temps Retrouvé is a symbolist esthetics seems convincing” (22). More recently, in Mallarmé’s Children: Symbolism and the Renewal of Experience (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), Richard Cándida-Smith refers that Proust’s interpretation of the relation of love and art reiterated ideas prevalent in Symbolist circles. Bergson’s faith in nonrational forms of knowledge, such as intuition, for their capacity to render correspondences between macrocosms (“the whole of the universe”) and microcosms (the perceptual worlds of living beings), his critique of scientism, and his concept of duration and becoming (with its entailing empowerment of subjectivity and personal will), unquestionably connect his philosophy to Symbolist theory and aesthetics.

Bergson, Creative Evolution, in Key Writings, 181-82.
Chapter Four

Apocalyptic Landscapes of Human-Engendered Horror

In 2006, an album of black-and-white photographs was anonymously donated to the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, DC. This album was soon identified as belonging to a Nazi SS officer (Karl Höcker), who was appointed adjutant to the commandant of Auschwitz in April 1944, shortly before Germany’s defeat and final surrender in WWII.\textsuperscript{657}

Taken throughout the last three months of the Third Reich at the Auschwitz complex—in a period during which at least three hundred thousand people were gassed\textsuperscript{658}—the photographs show vivacious and carefree German military and young secretaries in a fairly benign setting, engaged in a variety of daily tasks and amusements. That these humans can look so comfortable and cheerful at the same time that they are at the service of torturing, murdering, and starving other humans elicits both shock and bewilderment. As archivist Rebecca Erbelding expresses,

\begin{quote}
Because of the overwhelming evidence of what we know was going on in Auschwitz, it kind of makes it even more chilling that they were having so much fun doing it. (\ldots) These are specifically the officers who are in charge of the arrival of 437,000 Hungarian Jews in a span of 55 days. The vast majority of them did not survive. These are the men who did it. (\ldots) It makes you think about how people could come to this. That they don’t look like monsters. They look like me. They look like my next door neighbor. Is he capable of that? Am I?\textsuperscript{659}
\end{quote}


\begin{footnotes}
\textsuperscript{657} In 1963 Karl Höcker faced charges at the Frankfurt Auschwitz Trial, where the court found him guilty “of aiding and abetting” the murder of 1,000 people. He was sentenced to seven years in prison, and released in 1970. He regained his job as chief cashier of a bank in Lubbecke, and died in 2000 at age 88.
\textsuperscript{658} Between late April and early July 1944, approximately 426,000 Hungarian Jews were deported to Auschwitz. The SS sent approximately 320,000 of them directly to the gas chambers in Auschwitz-Birkenau, and deployed approximately 110,000 at forced labor in the Auschwitz concentration camp complex. During these last three months of Nazi rule, the gas chambers were operating over capacity.
\end{footnotes}
and *Celebration* (1999)—all partake of a holocaustic atmosphere analogous to that of the Höcker photos, since they combine a sinister mood with casual surroundings, and thus elicit a comparable dual response of distress-bewilderment. These dramatic landscapes remind us that holocausts should not be viewed simply as isolated occurrences of massive destruction, but rather understood as the culmination of particular moral processes developed within the casualness of everyday life, namely of a maturing latent hate towards all forms of “difference,” or of the Other, which is finally unleashed.

Apocalyptic texts usually deal with some “unveiling” or “revelation” of forthcoming endings. They may be religious prophecies, announcing the final destruction of the world accompanied by a divine deliverance of all just human beings (or believers) from sin and death; or else secular proclamations of an imminent end to the present historical age. Although they do not announce the end of an era nor disclose any spiritual redemption, Pinter’s playtexts express “end worlds without ends,” and therefore are *apocalyptic* in the sense that Gabrielle Cody ascribes to the term when she writes about the works of Samuel Beckett and Marguerite Duras. Pinter’s dramatic landscapes evoke the continuing horror of ongoing holocausts, while denouncing the tradition of oppression, or the structures of uncontrolled violence, that repeatedly produces new ones.

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660 The root meaning of the Greek term *apokalypsis* is “unveiling” or “disclosure.” Apocalypse may also relate to a disaster resulting in drastic, irreversible damage to human society or the environment. OED, online edition, 2008.

661 The last book of the Bible, known as *The Revelation of St. John the Divine*, prophesizes the end of the world through a final battle between Good and Evil (the battle of Armageddon), and the ensuing confirmation of Jesus as the creator and re-creator of our world (John 1:1-3). According to Robert Hamerton-Kelly, the book of Revelation “bears the marks of its provenance in crisis and suffering,” since it was written by John when he was confined to a labor camp on the island of Patmos, at a time when Christians were systematically persecuted. See http://www.hamerton-kelly.com/talks/politics_and_apocalypse_intro.html.

662 Gabrielle Cody, “End Worlds without Ends in Beckett and Duras,” *Theater* 29, no.3 (Fall 1999): 85-95. According to Cody, “Beckett’s and Duras’s dramatic landscapes contain the ‘negative eternity’ of permanent disaster” (85). Even as they present catastrophic worlds, they reject endings, or the idea of a dramaturgical resolution. Their interest is not in how disaster comes about, but in the *writing* of disaster (86).
Pinter’s apocalyptic landscapes are not only linked to holocausts (or to extensive
destructions of all living forms of the Other), but to the Holocaust proper, which has generally
been recognized as the most atrocious case of systematic human extermination in recent
history.663 The massive scale of the slaughter carried out by the Nazis, and the scientific means
they invented to render it most effective, make the Holocaust paradigmatic of apocalyptic
occurrences brought about through human agency. Although Pinter’s plays do not explicitly
address the organized murder of Jews, Romani/Gypsies, homosexuals, political dissidents,
physically handicapped and mentally disabled people, Slavs and other unwanted national and
racial groups/individuals that occurred from 1933 to 1945 at the hands of the enforcers of the
Nazi regime, they inescapably allude to it.

Pinter’s plays present broken and catastrophic worlds brought about by uncontrolled
human violence, in the ethical line of Symbolist apocalyptic dramaturgy.664 Most importantly, I
argue, such landscapes of disaster produced by human agency in Pinter’s theatre are suggested
through Symbolist techniques, instead of being realistically depicted or situated. The worlds he
creates suggest the end of individuation and of subjective differentiation, the ultimate destruction
of social diversity and of non-conformity. We are led to experience an impending calamity, or
some sweeping macropolitical disaster that is ceaselessly looming due to recurring micropolitical

663 Although there is an ongoing denial of the Holocaust, both by organized groups and isolated individuals, and
most nations have even lifted their bans on such hate discourse in recent years, there is an undeniable abundance of
documentation that confirms the mass-scale slaughter of Jews and other outcast groups/individuals at the hands of
the Nazis.
664 Notable examples of Symbolist apocalyptic drama include Andrei Bely’s Jaws of Night (1898), Valerii Briusov’s
The Earth (1904), and Tadeusz Miciński’s The Revolt of the Potemkin (1905). See Daniel Gerould, “The
Apocalyptic Mode,” Yale Theater 19.3 (Fall 1999): 47-69. In Jaws of Night, although the sun has been extinguished,
humans take no action and endlessly await a redeemer. According to Gerould, The Earth “depicts the self-
destruction of an advanced technological civilization after humankind has cut itself off from the natural world by
creating a huge enclosed city with a special roof that blocks out the sky and air”(55). The Revolt of the Potemkin “is
a cry of protest against ignorance, hatred, and war,” a “horrifying picture of inhumanity and injustice, capitalist
rapacity and imperialist exploitation, and age-old superstition and barbarity” (58).
choices—owing to an ethics of indifference, of aggression, or of non-reciprocity between self and Other.

Pinter’s *The Birthday Party* (1957) conflates a birthscape with a deathscape. In it, a birthday party becomes an occasion of terror when the man who is being celebrated (Stanley) is deprived of both sight and speech by two enforcers of a mysterious “organization” (Goldberg and McCann), who have just arrived at the lodging house where he lives. By the end of the play, the next morning, Stanley appears “decked out for his own funeral” and is taken away by the two strangers in a big old car with “room in the front, room in the back,” towards “a long convalescence” or “special treatment.”

Pinter provides an image of Stanley’s birth through a series of bodyscapes during the birthday celebration in Act II. As the revelers are playing at blind man’s buff, the blindfolded Stanley punctures a toy drum with his foot (a gift from his motherly lodger Meg), and then drags himself over to Meg, making her choke as a black-out ensues. When McCann finds his torch on the floor and lights the scene, we see Stanley “bent over” another woman (Lulu) who is “lying spread-eagled on the table,” as if she were giving birth to him.

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665 *The Birthday Party* takes place in the living room of a seaside lodging house ran by a middle-aged couple (Meg and Petey Boles), and starts with the two of them having breakfast and reading a newspaper. Their only lodger Stanley, who is perhaps an ex-pianist, displays economic dependency and emotional attachment towards his motherly landlady Meg. Insisting that it is Stan’s birthday, Meg gives him a boy’s drum, which he plays savagely, or as if possessed, by the end of Act I. In Act II Stanley tries to evade the new lodgers, Goldberg and McCann, but is rendered speechless by their insidious cross-examination of him. At the birthday party organized by Meg, the group (which includes the next-door neighbor, a young woman named Lulu) plays at blind man’s buff. When Stan is blindfolded, McCann intentionally breaks his glasses, and places the drum on the floor so that he steps on it and breaks it. Next the blindfolded Stanley begins to strangle Meg, and is seen bent over a “spread-eagled” Lulu. The next morning (Act III) Goldberg and McCann tell Meg and Petey that Stan is suffering from a nervous breakdown. We can guess that Stan was subject to brutal questioning when he appears clean-shaven and dressed for departure but unable to articulate anything but meaningless sounds. At the end of the play, when Goldberg and McCann are about to leave on their big van taking with them the catatonic Stanley (to a man or a place called “Monty”), they threaten Petey when he tries to stop them. The very last scene resembles the play’s first tableau, when we see Meg and Petey once again having breakfast and reading a torn newspaper as if nothing had happened.

666 Richard Schechner, “Puzzling Pinter,” 177.
668 Ibid., 92.
669 Ibid., 95
STANLEY, as soon as the torchlight hits him, begins to giggle. GOLDBERG and MCCANN move towards him. He backs, gigglng, the torch on his face. They follow him upstage, left. He backs against the hatch, giggling. The torch draws closer. His giggle rises and grows as he flattens himself against the wall. Their figures converge upon him.670

So what is the “birthday party” of the play’s title? Surely it does not simply refer to the celebration prompted by McCann and Goldberg, and organized by Meg against Stanley’s own wishes. Noticeably, it seems to correspond to a party given on the day in which he is born into the “real” outside world, or perhaps to a farewell service before he is taken to the sacrificial confinement where he is destined to die. Benedict Nightingale argues that,

Given the nature and abundance of the play’s references to parents and children, one might plausibly argue that the play’s subject is the cruelty of growing up, being forced finally to cut the umbilical cord, and having to face the adult world. Hence the contrast between Stanley as he is at first, untidy, irresponsible, churlishly dependent on the possessive Meg, and the Stanley of the end, scrubbed, shaved, and transformed into a pin-striped, bowler-hatted zombie, ready for the office or the grave.671

As I mentioned in Chapter Three, deathscapes are intimately related to birthscapes in Maeterlinck’s drama. A deathscape is evident in La Mort de Tintagiles when close to the play’s ending the little boy Tintagiles is sucked into the darkness of a door’s threshold, as we hear the sound of his light body falling to the ground. In my view, however, the recurring references to an incredibly tight passage leading towards the Queen’s chambers, the fear generated by her increasingly huge and sinister off-stage body, and the sound of invisible crowds on her side of the wall, suggest that Tintagiles is perhaps being born into the “real” world. If this is so, all through the play the characters have been immersed in a uterine antechamber of birth, in a quiet and sequestered maternal environment created by three protective sisters, whereas on the other side of the wall (off-stage) lies harsh reality.

670 Pinter, The Birthday Party, in Harold Pinter: Complete Works 1, 75-76.
In Pinter’s *The Birthday Party* there is a similar reversibility of birth/death since immediately after his birthday Stanley leaves the uterine guest-house, becomes devoid of individual autonomy, and is absorbed into a large “organization.” However, differently from what Nightingale and other critics imply, this does not mean that Pinter’s play is passing a moral judgment on Stanley’s personality, by condemning his Freudian dependency on his surrogate mother, Meg. Certainly, Stanley is depicted as inept and lazy—or as what could be currently called “a loser”—but he does not differ in this respect from Meg, or from her husband Petey, or from their next-door neighbor Lulu. In effect, the play leaves us with the impression that these three characters may also be taken away someday, since they are all useless elements for the established social order.\(^{672}\)

Regardless of what we may morally think of Stanley, it is the world of Goldberg and McCann that is explicitly shown as sordid and brutal. As Dukore remarks, “The scenes in *The Birthday Party* wherein Goldberg and McCann intimidate Stanley are horrifying.”\(^{673}\) Their senseless and exasperating cross-examination of Stanley recall the interrogatory episodes of “Decadent” Franz Kafka’s fiction,\(^{674}\) namely those of *The Trial (Der Prozeß, 1925)*, in which two strangers also come to knock at the door of a boarding house and begin to harass a lodger

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\(^{672}\) At different instances through the play, all of the three characters are menaced by Goldberg and McCann, threatened to confess their sins, or else be taken away.


\(^{674}\) In contrast to much criticism on Franz Kafka—which views his texts as “essentially isolated in literature” (Walter Benjamin’s comment)—in *Kafka’s Clothes* Mark Anderson contextualizes the author historically and socially, and reconnects him to the legacy of aestheticism, and of the Symbolist/Decadent movements (i.e., influenced by the works of Huysmans, Maeterlinck, Hofmannsthal, and Gabriele D’Annunzio). Mark M. Anderson, *Kafka’s Clothes: Ornament and Aestheticism in the Habsburg Fin-de-Siècle* (Oxford UK: Oxford University Press, 1992), 1-18. In *The Meaning of Contemporary Realism*, Georg Lukács had already placed Kafka within the “unhealthy” Symbolist/Decadent legacy.
(K.) for no apparent reason, reducing him overnight to the condition of an accused and guilty civilian.675

Charles Carpenter considers that The Birthday Party presents “clusters of symbolically charged objects, actions, and words.”

These form minor patterns by themselves and they group together to form a large, general pattern. I will tentatively call this pattern a rebirth into Hell. Often touched upon at one corner or another by critics, but skirted and never examined in a concrete way, it impregnates the play to the extent that almost the entire work is an extended birthday metaphor.676

Birth is more a symbol (in the Symbolist sense) than a metaphor, I think, since the play’s sensory images actually enact a hellish birthscape. Pinter strikingly conveys this birthscape aurally when he makes Stanley lose his speech, which becomes limited to nothing but screams and guttural vocal sounds. Just as Kafka’s Gregor in The Metamorphosis (Die Verwandlung, 1915) slides down the evolutionary ladder when suddenly one day he wakes up in beetle-form, Stanley regresses into the condition of a newborn about to become a corpse.

STANLEY begins to clench and unclench his eyes. (. . .) STANLEY concentrates, his mouth opens, he attempts to speak, fails and emits sounds from his throat.
STANLEY. Uh-gug. . uh-gug. , . eeehbh-gag. . . (On the breath.) Caahh.. . caahh. ...

They watch him. He draws a long breath which shudders down his body. He concentrates.
GOLDBERG. Well, Stanny boy, what do you say, eh?
They watch. He concentrates. His head lowers, his chin draws into his chest, he crouches.
STANLEY. Ug-gughh. . . uh-gughhh.
MCCANN. What’s your opinion, sir?
STANLEY. Caahhh...caahhh....

675 Parallels between Kafka’s The Trial and Pinter’s The Birthday Party have been pointed out by several critics. Simon Lesser refers to the fact that both protagonists (K. and Stanley) are visited by two menacing strangers on the date of their birthday. Lesser, however, fails to explore productively the Symbolist Kafkaesque echoes in Pinter’s work, especially when he looks for causal explanations for the play’s actions, as if it were a realistic work. For example, at some point he asks: “Are [Goldberg and McCann] going to kill Stanley as a way of getting hold of some money he possesses, perhaps without being aware of it?” Simon O. Lesser, “Reflections on Pinter’s The Birthday Party,” Contemporary Literature 13, no.1 (Winter 1972): 35.

MCCANN. Mr Webber! What’s your opinion? ( . . . )

STANLEY’S body shudders, relaxes, his head drops, he becomes still again, stooped.677

Stanley’s eyesight is similarly altered, or perhaps even destroyed. First the lenses of his glasses are smashed, next he is blindfolded, and thereafter becomes practically blind. By the end we learn that “he’s trying to fit the eyeholes [of the empty frames] into his eyes,”678 as Goldberg and McCann talk about giving him “a new pair of glasses.” This is a frightening picture of a man deprived of individuality and finally crushed into a rigid social mold, as Dukore suggests.679 The “rebirth into hell” is a birth into the living death of the existing social order. Accordingly, the figures of Goldberg and McCann recall those of the bowler-hatted men in René Magritte’s paintings, always rigid and replicable, or perhaps the headless male figures in Magdalena Abakanowicz’s sculptures, all alike and positioned as a mass.680 Contrasting with the homogeneity of their dense bodyscapes, Stanley’s physical irregularity seems to stand for individuation, as an image of organic life that has to be tamed, normalized, or kept in check.

GOLDBERG. What a thing to celebrate—birth! Like getting up in the morning. ( . . . ) Your skin’s crabby, you need a shave, your eyes are full of muck, your mouth is like a boghous, the palms of your hands are full of sweat, your nose is clogged up, your feet stink, what are you but a corpse waiting to be washed?681

Pinter’s The Birthday Party is a “rebirth into hell” comparable to Edvard Munch’s The Scream (1893), a mentally-distressed cry of extreme hopelessness, with two sinister bystanders looking on, in the background. As in Munch’s picture, there are also in The Birthday Party silent witnesses of the despair suffered by Stanley, since the characters of Meg, Lulu, and Petey are all

677 Pinter, The Birthday Party, 94-95.
678 Ibid., 84.
680 Pinter’s imagery often evokes that of Belgian surrealist painter René Magritte, as I will explore in Chapter Five. Contemporary Polish artist Magdalena Abakanowicz’s groupings of faceless figures seem an image of how massively uniform outside forces subdue or destroy individuation. They simultaneously evoke the anonymity of victims and of victimizers.
681 Pinter, The Birthday Party, 55. Significantly, Goldberg’s sensory images of birth (or of waking up to the world) equate it with death.
(consciously or not) conniving in the harmful actions committed by Goldberg and McCann throughout the play. As Schechner writes, “they are the ‘home folks’ who stand by and watch Stanley undergo his torment”\(^\text{682}\)—which is analogous, I argue, with what happened during the Holocaust. In *The Birthday Party* not only is there something horrific stalking outside the door of every ordinary home (as in Kafka’s *The Trial*), but the “home folks” seem oblivious of its danger, or indifferent to its effects as long as they are not the suffering victims. This situation recalls the lack of individual (and collective) response in face of the persecution suffered by others during the Holocaust, as described in the well-know text by Martin Niemöller:

First they came for the communists, and I did not speak out—
because I was not a communist;
Then they came for the socialists, and I did not speak out—
because I was not a socialist;
Then they came for the trade unionists, and I did not speak out—
because I was not a trade unionist;
Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out—
because I was not a Jew;
Then they came for me—
and there was no one left to speak out for me.\(^\text{683}\)

Near the play’s end a “broken” Petey cries out to Stanley, “Stan, don’t let them tell you what to do!”\(^\text{684}\) However, the last scene of *The Birthday Party* (between Petey and Meg) reveals an unchanged *homescape* revolving once again around breakfast and the reading of the newspaper. Carpenter insightfully argues that the reading of the daily paper in the play “fosters an illusion of stable order,” and supplies an “escape from the urgent facticity of one’s personal life;” and that, therefore, the third time Petey opens a newspaper, at the end of the play, becomes particularly significant when five strips of an inside sheet from “his most reliable escape hatch”

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\(^\text{682}\) Richard Schechner, “Puzzling Pinter,” 178.

\(^\text{683}\) Martin Niemöller, “First They Came,” in http://hmd.org.uk. Versions of the original text have led to inscriptions in Holocaust memorials, such as the Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington DC, and the New England Holocaust Memorial in Boston.

\(^\text{684}\) Pinter, *The Birthday Party*, 96. According to Pinter, these words have resonated with him ever since he wrote the play: “I’ve lived that line all my damn life” (Gussow, *Conversations with Pinter*, 71).
flutter to the floor.\textsuperscript{685} Notwithstanding, even when the conviction of everyday normality has been destabilized, Petey and Meg proceed with their ritual as if nothing had happened—and the play comes full circle, retaining its initial atmosphere of imminent disaster.

Martin Esslin considers that “there is no definition of the kind of establishment, the kind of tradition” to which Goldberg and McCann belong in \textit{The Birthday Party}, and that “this is wholly in tune with the concept of the ‘image’ as against that of the logical ‘concept’ or the specifically factual element in discursive thought.”\textsuperscript{686} Raymond Williams expresses a similar view when he writes that “the menace” of what these “strange agents” are doing “is tangible but unexplained; it is the irruption of a bizarre and arbitrary violence into an ordinary life.”\textsuperscript{687} In effect there is always abstractedness to Pinter’s apocalyptic plays; not only is their dramatic action enigmatic and their characters’ motivations left hazy and obscure, but their social contexts are never entirely situated. Lesser calls attention to this quality of abstractedness in both Pinter and Kafka, claiming that it creates “an effect of ambiguity” and “provides a mold into which each reader can pour his own expressive content.”\textsuperscript{688} This technique has clear affinities with Symbolist aesthetics, which typically induces the reader to play an active role and fill in the details of the story being told.

Although Symbolist/post-Symbolist texts elicit a variety of readings, the images each text evokes are of a particular kind. Accordingly, I propose that in \textit{The Birthday Party} Goldberg and McCann should not be seen as personifications of some indefinable “universal human evil.” Pinter provides various clues toward the recognition of these “bizarre” characters and of the organization to which they belong—which may be unnamed but is morally characterized by an

\textsuperscript{685} Charles Carpenter, “What Have I Seen, the Scum or the Essence?,” 94.
\textsuperscript{688} Simon Lesser, “Reflections on Pinter’s \textit{The Birthday Party},” 35.
authoritarian stance and oppressive imagery of an explicit sort. In their testimonies before the Nuremberg trials (1945-49) and the Frankfurt Auschwitz trial (1963), most Nazi officials and collaborationists denied their wrong-doing and maintained that they were decent, moral, and god-fearing persons. In his portrayal of Goldberg and McCann—as well as in those of the torturers, executioners, thugs, and authoritarian figures that populate the plays discussed in this chapter—Pinter noticeably makes them the representatives of long-established religious and social structures, and unrelenting in justifying their acts through normative notions of moral purity and self-righteousness.

As Rudy Cohn argues, “The religion and society which have traditionally structured human morality are, in Pinter's plays, the immoral agents that destroy the individual.”

Accordingly, in *The Birthday Party*, Goldberg and McCann are nearer to “types” of a Symbolist dramaturgy than to psychological characters drawn according to a realist/naturalist convention—the former embodying a patriarchal Jewish orthodoxy, and the latter an oppressive and equally patriarchal Catholicism. Together, they stand for “the Judaeo-Christian tradition as it appears in our present civilization.”

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690 Ibid., 63. In a letter about *The Birthday Party* published in 1980, Pinter corroborates Cohn’s argument (written eighteen years earlier) when he states: “the socio-religious monsters arrive to affect censure and alteration upon a member of the club who has discarded responsibility . . . towards himself and others. (. . .) He collapses under the weight of their accusation—an accusation compounded of the shitstained strictures of centuries of ‘tradition.’” This letter was originally written in 1958 to Peter Wood, who directed the first production of *The Birthday Party*. Cited in Martin Esslin, “Creative Process and Meaning: Some Remarks on Pinter’s Letter to Peter Wood,” 8.
the core. If you’re ever in any difficulties Uncle Barney will see you in the clear. I knelt down. (He kneels, facing McCANN.) I swore on the good book. And I knew the word I had to remember—Respect! Because McCann—who came before your father? His father. And who came before him? Before him?691

Differently from what Lesser claims, when he writes that Goldberg’s moral platitudes become menacing “because he has appropriated the decencies on which we thought we could rely for protection and perverted them to his own purposes,”692 I suggest that Pinter shows these very “decencies” to be offensive and harmful. Both Goldberg and McCann are the puppets of an inherited and undisputed morality; they are like grave-diggers who have come to put on the forceps on Stanley, so as to perform a forced birth and “bring him out of himself.”693 As Cohn notes, these two “henchmen [have come] not to bless but to curse, not to redeem but to annihilate.”694 Most appallingly, these corrupt individuals are members of traditionally oppressed groups (Jew and Irish) who have turned into oppressors themselves.695

Authoritarian God-surrogates like Goldberg and McCann recur in Pinter’s apocalyptic landscapes, most noticeably in One for the Road (1984),696 in which the interrogator/torturer from another unspecified organization—whose “business” is “to keep the world clean for God”697—commits aggression in the name of the Supreme Being.

691 Pinter, The Birthday Party, 88.
693 Pinter, The Birthday Party, 43. At some point in the play, Goldberg says: “He’s got a birthday party today, and he’s forgotten all about it. So we’re going to remind him. We’re going to give him a party. (. . .) We’ll bring him out of himself” (43). The idea of a grave-digger effecting a forced birth is suggested by Carpenter in his essay (98).
694 Ruby Cohn, “The World of Harold Pinter,” 68.
695 Instances of members of oppressed groups being turned into oppressive agents during the Holocaust are shockingly manifest in documents pertaining to the Frankfurt War Crime trials. Peter Weiss’s documentary play The Investigation (Die Ermittlung, 1965) offers a dramatization of such testimonies.
696 One for the Road unfolds in a room/office of an unspecified place/country, where an interrogator named Nicolas interviews, in succession, a man, his seven years old son, and his wife—Victor, Nicky, and Gila—and then the man once more. It becomes apparent through dialogue that both the man and the woman have been tortured offstage, and the latter raped several times. We never learn of their supposed offense except that they seem to be non-believers and disrespectful of the authority of the state (of “the man that rules this country”). In the last scene Victor is practically deprived of speech (his tongue has been damaged, perhaps even ripped out); as he awkwardly inquires about his son, Nicolas’s closing answer is: “Your son? Oh, don’t worry about him. He was a little prick.”
697 Pinter, One for the Road (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1984), 77.
NICOLAS. 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 that is the correct stance . . . . If you don’t respect
me you’re unique. Everyone else knows the voice of God speaks through me. You’re not
a religious man, I take it?

Pause.
You don’t believe in a guiding light?

Pause.
What then?

Pause.
So . . . morally . . . you flounder in wet shit. You know . . . like when you’ve eaten a
rancid omelette. 698

As in The Birthday Party, anything betraying the presence of emotional or sensory
organic life in One for the Road is undesired by “civilized” standards, and therefore has to be
controlled, or even eliminated.

NICOLAS. You’re probably just hungry. Or thirsty. Let me tell you something. I hate
despair. I find it intolerable. The stink of it gets up my nose. It’s a blemish. Despair, old
fruit, is a cancer. It should be castrated. Indeed I’ve often found that that works. Chop the
balls off and despair goes out the window. You’re left with a happy man. Or a happy
woman. 699

Differently from the organic sensitivity of dissidents like Victor and Gila, the torturer
Nicolas (another character “type”) takes pride in values like honesty, respect, responsibility,
heritage, and purity. In terms of bodyscapes, it therefore seems both significant and ironic that he
expresses his self-importance through the fingers of his hands alone:

NICOLAS. What do you think this is? It’s my finger. And this is my little finger. I wave
my big finger in front of your eyes. Like this. And now I do the same with my little
finger. I can also use both . . . at the same time. Like this. I can do absolutely anything I
like.

(. . .)
NICOLAS. This is my big finger. And this is my little finger. Look. I wave them in front
of your eyes. Like this. 700

698 Ibid., 36, 40.
699 Ibid., 52-53.
700 Ibid., 33, 71.
Nicolas wags his two fingers in front of his victims’ eyes perhaps as a way of threatening them with blindness; several times he mentions how their “souls” appear to “shine out of” or “through” their eyes, insinuating that by doing away with their sight he might liquidate their spirit. In Symbolist sensory terms, just as Nicolas’s mindscapes seem reduced to codes and platitudes, his body’s expression has been trimmed down to postures of hand and thirst of mouth.

The very title of the play, the recurrent toast of “one for the road” and its main physical action (Nicolas serves himself of whisky and empties his glass at least seven times) suggest a routine of everlasting persecution and infliction of physical suffering upon the Other by a puppet of an authoritarian God.

In *The Hothouse* (1958), the supervisor of a sinister asylum—in which detainees/patients are raped and killed at will, and particular members of the “understaff” are subject to electric shock sessions “in the name of science”—similarly invokes God as his authority, or as the founder of all such institutions of torture and organized violence:

ROOTE. As my predecessor said, on one unforgettable occasion “Order, gentlemen, for God’s sake, order!” I remember the silence, row upon row of electrified faces . . . The gymnasium was packed to suffocation, standing room only . . . “Order, gentlemen,” he said, “for the love of Mike!” As one man we looked out of the window at Mike, and gazed at the statue—covered in snow, it so happened, then as now. Mike! The predecessor of my predecessor, the predecessor of us all, the man who laid the foundation stone, the man who introduced the first patient, the man who, after the incredible hordes of patients, or would-be patients, had followed him through town and country, hills and valleys, waited under hedges, lined the bridges and sat six feet deep in the ditch, opened institution after institution up and down the country, rest homes, nursing homes, convalescent homes, sanatoria. He was sanctioned by the Ministry, revered by the

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701 The asylum is varyingly described as a laboratory, a rest home, a convalescent home, where patients come to get “peace” and “expert attention,” or where they are “obliged to work and play and join in daily communal activity to the greatest possible extent” (55-57).
702 As the head of the asylum states, “it’s in the interests of science. If a member of the staff decides that for the good of a female patient some degree of copulation is necessary then two birds are killed with one stone!” (43).
703 A whole scene of the play depicts an experiment in a “sound-proof room” where electrodes are attached to various parts of a character’s body (again a “character type” by the name of “Lamb”), and then electrically turned on: “LAMB jolts rigid, his hands go to his earphones, he is propelled from the chair, falls to his knees, twisting from side to side, still clutching his earphones, emitting high-pitched cries” (68, 72-73). The last image of the play is that of Lamb still sitting in this sound-proof room, immobile and “staring, as in a catatonic trance” (154).
populace, subsidised by the State. He had set in motion an activity for humanity, of humanity and by humanity. And the keyword was order.  

When I translated *The Hothouse* for the Portuguese stage, I found out that “Mike” stands for “God” in informal British language. Thus, what the above speech seems to suggest is that such torturescapes as those found in the play have been ongoing since the “beginning of time.” More precisely, apocalypse will be permanently looming unless “Mike” is deposed—or unless the idea of a patriarchal, punishing, and authoritarian God is exposed once and for all as ethically corrupt. As Roote further on explains, his predecessors are “the glorious dead” who have “sacrificed themselves” in order to “keep the world clean for the generations to come.” They have instilled such a sense of duty and order that every member of the “staff” is a “delegate” of a delegate, and successive leaders will be serving “sirs” so as to someday eventually become “sirs” themselves. This hierarchy committed to organized violence within a concentrated place clearly recalls both existing and past structures, such as the Nazi extermination system.

According to Rosette C. Lamont, once we pay attention to its “subtext,” *The Hothouse* “becomes a parable of the systematic annihilation of ‘inferior’ races by a nation bent on mass death,” such as the one carried out during the Third Reich. Not only is the building where its action unfolds stifling hot, but the inmates are designated by numbers:

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705 The Portuguese translation of the play was published with the title of *Câmara Ardente* in *Revista Artistas Unidos* 8 (Lisboa: Cotovia, 2002). This version of the play was produced by ArtCom in October 2001 at Teatro Paulo Claro, Lisboa. See http://www.haroldpinter.org/plays/frn_hothouse_po01.shtml.
706 When I sent my translation to Pinter in 2000, through his agent, I was sent back a page with a few notes regarding my version of the play, so as to clarify certain concepts and dramaturgical options. The substitution of the word “God” by “Mike” is probably derived from Saint Michael, the biblical archangel, whose name in Hebrew (Mikha’el) means “one who is like God.” It is especially apparent in the British expression “for the love of Mike,” which is supposed to mean “for the love of God.”
707 Pinter, *The Hothouse*, 98.
708 Ibid., 20-21.
This is a place where fires erupt and burn, where the heat cannot be regulated. Here life is extinguished, and all patients live under the threat of impending death. As to the hospital setting, it is falsely reassuring, a mask or lie, like the so-called showers of Nazi death camps, camouflaged gas chambers. Thus, this hospital is a mockery of the act of healing, as indeed was Nazi medicine. Nothing suggests that “patients” ever leave, except in a coffin or, as Primo Levi writes, “by way of the Chimney.”

Furthermore, as I will discuss below, *The Hothouse* reveals an apocalyptic landscape in ecocritical terms as well, for the “crematorium” it alludes to seems to extend beyond the gates of the institution itself.

A God-surrogate reappears in *Ashes to Ashes* (1996), personified by a character named Devlin, who unceasingly interrogates Rebecca, perhaps his wife, perhaps his victim. Especially indignant before her insinuation about God being “in a quicksand,” Devlin provides a striking image of humanity’s unrelenting veneration for the Supreme Being:

DEVLIN. Be careful how you talk about God. He’s the only God we have. If you let him go he won’t come back. He won’t even look back over his shoulder. And then what will you do? You know what it’ll be like, such a vacuum? It’ll be like England playing Brazil at Wembley and not a soul in the stadium. Can you imagine? Playing both halves to a totally empty house. The game of the century. Absolute silence. Not a soul watching. Absolute silence. Apart from the referee’s whistle and a fair bit of fucking and blinding. If you turn away from God it means that the great and noble game of soccer will fall into permanent oblivion. No score for extra time after extra time after extra time, no score for time everlasting, for time without end. Absence. Stalemate. Paralysis. A world without a winner.

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709 Rosette C. Lamont, “Harold Pinter’s *The Hothouse*: A Parable of the Holocaust,” in *Pinter at Sixty*, ed. Katherine Burkman (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1993), 41. In reference to Lamont’s essay, Marc Silverstein remarks that “to read the play as a meditation on Nazism runs the risk of ignoring how the play both allows us to perceive the totalitarian tendencies present even in nations constituted as democratic republics” [Silverstein, “‘You’ll Never Be without a Police Siren’,” in *The Art of Crime: The Plays and Films of Harold Pinter and David Mamet*, ed. Leslie Kane (New York: Routledge, 2004), 44]. In my view, when Lamont recognizes that the play evokes the Nazi medical establishment during the Holocaust, she does not mean that it is about the Nazi doctors or that it depicts the Holocaust proper; herein lies an example of Pinter’s use of Symbolist techniques, rather than of his alleged dramatic realism.

710 *Ashes to Ashes* (1996) is set in the room of a house in the country, where a woman (Rebecca) casually recollects her past experiences through images reminiscent of the Holocaust, as she is being interrogated by a man (Devlin) who appears to be her husband.


712 Ibid., 39-41.
Devlin’s image of a world with God immediately brings to mind the hysterical howling of crowds at a gigantic stadium, and the ensuing discharge of typically fascistic drives—not only of some contemporary sports competitions, but also of Nazi and other politically extremist rallies of totalitarian regimes. As in *The Hothouse*, this overbearing idea of the Divine justifies the existence of a competitive world of winners and losers, and the equating of life with a game.

The very title of *Ashes to Ashes* invokes funerary rituals, and the Holocaust proper, when we remember how millions of Jews were murdered in gas chambers, their bodies incinerated, and their ashes buried in pits already filled with others’ ashes. The play, however, never uses the words “Nazi” or “Jew.” Further, as Peacock points out, even though Rebecca’s Jewish name suggests involvement in the events of the Holocaust, her age clearly does not—since Pinter asks for a woman in her forties, and defines the time of the play as “now.” In effect, there is in *Ashes to Ashes* a constant interplay between past and present—or between historical events and contemporary reality—suggesting that the horror it invokes is ongoing, like an ever-scoring game between competitive teams at a gigantic stadium. There will never be silence or termination to this apocalyptic landscape of permanent disaster, unless we halt and alter its moral logic.

The central bodyscape in the play is that of a man clenching his fist over a woman’s face, then tightening his other hand around her neck, and afterwards ordering her to kiss his fist. This image opens the play, as recounted by Rebecca when she is apparently recalling her former lover and incarcerator.

REBECCA. His fist . . . grazed my mouth. And he’d say, “Kiss my fist.”
DEVLIN. And did you?
REBECCA. Oh yes. I kissed his fist. The knuckles. And then he’d open his hand and give me the palm of his hand . . . to kiss . . . which I kissed.
(. . .)

DEVLIN. What then? What are you saying?
REBECCA. He put a little . . . pressure . . . on my throat, yes. So that my head started to
go back, gently but truly.
DEVLIN. And your body? Where did your body go?
REBECCA. My body went back, slowly but truly.
DEVLIN. So your legs were opening?
REBECCA. Yes.
Pause.
DEVLIN. Your legs were opening?
REBECCA. Yes.  

The exact same bodyscape is enacted close to the end of the play, this time by Devlin
himself.

Devlin goes to [REBECCA]. He stands over her and looks down at her.
He clenches his fist and holds it in front of her face. He puts his left hand behind her neck
and grips it. He brings her head towards his fist. His fist touches her mouth.

DEVLIN. Kiss my fist.  

Through this gesture, Devlin equates himself with Rebecca’s “ex-lover,” a man whom she
variably describes as the “respected” runner of “a kind of a factory,” a tourist “guide,” her “best
friend,” or as someone who “adored” her, but who was evidently an enforcer of order and
extermination in labor camps. For Ann Hall, besides being an interrogator, “[Devlin] is, in fact,
the abuser, and the events of the play are not a unique occurrence; they are part of the torture.”  
Similarly to Nicolas in One for the Road, Devlin’s flesh displays the workings of an authoritarian
machine; not only does he seem to lack eyes, but his hand gestures are tense and contracted.  

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714 Pinter, Ashes to Ashes, 3, 5-7.
715 Ibid., 73-75.
716 Ann Hall, “You’re Speaking to Someone and You Suddenly Become Another Person:’ Storytelling in Pinter’s
Moonlight and Ashes to Ashes,” in Pinter at 70: A Casebook, ed. Lois Gordon (New York and London: Routledge,
2001), 272.
717 At some point during the play, in reference to Rebecca’s “ex-lover,” Devlin says, “There must be more to him
than hands. What about eyes? Did he have any eyes?” (13) Her answer reveals that she does not seem to remember
the eyes, only the hands.
At the closing of the play, however, Rebecca does not kiss Devlin’s fist but rather begins echoing barbarities committed in some remote past, like a medium speaking for the sufferings of the disappeared and dead.

REBECCA. They were taking the babies away
ECHO. the babies away
Pause.
REBECCA. I took my baby and wrapped it in my shawl
ECHO. my shawl
REBECCA. And I made it into a bundle
ECHO. a bundle
REBECCA. And I held it under my left arm
ECHO. my left arm
Pause.
REBECCA. And I went through with my baby
ECHO. my baby
Pause.
REBECCA. But the baby cried out
ECHO. cried out
REBECCA. And the man called me back
ECHO. called me back
REBECCA. And he said what do you have there
ECHO. have there
REBECCA. He stretched out his hand for the bundle
ECHO. for the bundle
REBECCA. And I gave him the bundle
ECHO. the bundle
REBECCA. And that’s the last time I held the bundle
ECHO. the bundle
Silence.\textsuperscript{718}

As evident in the passage above, Rebecca’s mindscapes through the play allude to the Holocaust by means of recognizable images. In one of them, there is a small boy dragging a suitcase bigger than him and disappearing down a street. In another, there is a cityscape of streets covered with snow of “a funny color,” no longer smooth but bumpy, “as if there were veins” of other fabrics and materials running through it.\textsuperscript{719} Recurrently, there are numerous people at a railway station getting on trains. Even when disguised as bundles, babies are taken away from

\textsuperscript{718} Pinter, \textit{Ashes to Ashes}, 77-81.
\textsuperscript{719} Ibid., 53.
their mothers’ arms, betrayed by their shrieking cries—in yet another instance of organic life being repressed by authoritarian structures in Pinter’s dramaturgy. Further, it is her ex-lover, her “most precious companion” whom she sees walking down the station’s platform tearing all the babies away from their screaming mothers.\footnote{Ibid., 27, 53.}

At other times, however, Rebecca’s mindscapes seem prescient of a forthcoming holocaust, as if she were clairvoyant.

REBECCA. I was looking out of the window and I saw a whole crowd of people walking through the woods, on their way to the sea, in the direction of the sea. They seemed to be very cold, they were wearing coats, although it was such a beautiful day. A beautiful, warm, Dorset day. They were carrying bags. There were . . . guides . . . ushering them, guiding them along. They walked through the woods and I could see them in the distance walking across the cliff and down to the sea. Then I lost sight of them. I was really quite curious so I went upstairs to the highest window in the house and I looked way over the top of the treetops and I could see down to the beach. The guides . . . were ushering all these people across the beach. It was such a lovely day. It was so still and the sun was shining. And I saw all these people walk into the sea. The tide covered them slowly. Their bags bobbed about in the waves.\footnote{Ibid., 47-48.}

In this passage, Rebecca’s mindscapes are analogous to others invoked before, in that she sees a crowd of people carrying bags and led by mysterious “guides” to their own deaths. This time, however, it all takes place in Dorset (England), on a most “beautiful” day, suggesting an ongoing tradition of human oppression, and the likely repetition of past holocausts.

Regarding the mysterious “guides” in Dorset, it seems significant that Rebecca often describes her ex-lover as a “guide” or “travel agent.” In a recent article on 84-year-old Holocaust survivor Philip Bialowitz, the latter provides a comparable description of a Nazi officer that greeted the trains of prisoners at Auschwitz:

I helped them out of the trains with all their baggage. My heart was bleeding knowing that in half an hour they would be reduced to ashes. I couldn’t tell them. I wasn’t allowed to speak. Even if I told them, they would not believe they were going to die. \textit{The Gestapo man welcomed them and apologized for the inconvenience of travel}. He said that because
of typhus they had to take a disinfection. They must undress. “But before you undress,” he said, “I would strongly recommend you send home postcards to your dear ones that you are here in a nice place.” So people were clapping. Some even cheered “Bravo!”

Such a disturbing combination of horror and civility is particularly noticeable in Pinter’s apocalyptic plays, as I will discuss below.

In his Nobel Prize lecture, Pinter declares how Ashes to Ashes seems to be “taking place under water,” and actually employs landscape imagery to describe Rebecca’s condition:

A drowning woman, her hand reaching up through the waves, dropping down out of sight, reaching for others, but finding nobody there, either above or under the water, finding only shadows, reflections, floating; the woman a lost figure in a drowning landscape, a woman unable to escape the doom that seemed to belong only to others. But as they died, she must die too.

With this drowning landscape Pinter seems to indicate that Rebecca is fated to be at Dorset, and bound to drown with all the others. Further, he seems to convey that we are inevitably connected to the former lives and deaths of “others,” and that there is a necessity of acknowledging their testimonies, or of reaching out to their “ghostly” presences. Rebecca’s awareness of their floating shadows and reflections strikingly contrasts with the space in which the play is set. As Silverstein observes, “the apparently serene interior of a country house with a large window through which we can see a well-kept garden, while sparsely furnished, creates an aura of bourgeois comfort and security,” a domestic haven impenetrable to “the ravages of the public, historical, and political realms.”

By making past historical trauma invade the domestic sphere, Pinter shows us that there is no clear-cut division between the personal and the social spheres, or

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725 Marc Silverstein, “‘Talking about Some Kind of Atrocity’: Ashes to Ashes in Barcelona,” in The Pinter Review 1997-8, ed. Francis Gillen & Steven Gale (Tampa, FL: University of Tampa Press, 1999), 75.
between our micropolitical and macropolitical consciousness/agency. As Silverstein argues, a personal indifference to past historical atrocities serves to authorize their re-emergence.726

In my view, Ashes to Ashes is haunted by apocalyptic events of a collective human past that seem doomed to be repeated in a near future. Strangely, a woman in contemporary times muses over images that evoke the Holocaust as she is being interrogated by a man, who in turn resembles a Nazi agent, her former lover. Significantly, she fails to integrate these mindscapes into her present life, due to the man’s coercion.

DEVLIN. You were talking about some kind of atrocity. Now let me ask you this. What authority do you think you yourself possess which would give you the right to discuss such an atrocity?
REBECCA. I have no such authority. Nothing has ever happened to me. Nothing has ever happened to any of my friends. I have never suffered. Nor have my friends.727

The play thus becomes an apocalyptic landscape prophetically recalled, where a catastrophic historical past permeates contemporary life—suggesting a likely recurrence of horrific events within similar circumstances—but in which the woman’s “epiphany”728 is disowned. As Pinter remarks, it is essential for the maintenance of oppressive political power that “people remain in ignorance,” that they live in ignorance of the past, and even of their own present lives.729 In this sense, throughout the play Devlin performs an act of manipulative hypnosis upon Rebecca, so that the experience of the past is erased: “It never happened. Nothing ever happened. Even while it was happening it wasn’t happening. It didn’t matter. It was of no interest.” 730

726 Ibid., 81.
727 Pinter, Ashes to Ashes, 41.
728 I am using “epiphany” in James Joyce’s understanding of the word, as a sudden moment of spiritual realization that may be illuminating in psychic/symbolic terms. This secular notion of epiphany was first outlined in Stephen Hero (the early version of A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man). See http://theliterarylink.com/joyce.html, accessed 2009/11/27.
729 Pinter, “Art, Truth & Politics.”
730 Ibid.
The looming presence of an authoritarian entity that rules over human destiny, but can never be glimpsed upon, is strikingly evident in *The Dumb Waiter* (1957). In this play Pinter offers us the image of two men in a derelict basement becoming increasingly obsessed with a mechanism (a dumb-waiter) that gives them abstruse orders, and eventually dispossesses them of their entire nourishment. An object to be feared, the dumb waiter takes on the role of a mysterious force ordering increasingly complicated dishes, and depriving the two humans of their sustenance. This central image of the play also corresponds to the way of life (or production mode) of the two characters, since Ben and Gus are professional assassins who lead a mechanical dull existence, never see the light of the sun, and routinely perform a weekly round of murders without any individual consciousness, or exercise of will.

There is a loud clatter and racket in the bulge of wall between the beds, of something descending. They grab their revolvers, jump up and face the wall. The noise comes to a stop. Silence. They look at each other. BEN gestures sharply towards the wall. GUS approaches the wall slowly. He bangs it with his revolver. It is hollow. BEN moves to the head of his bed, his revolver cocked. GUS puts his revolver on his bed and pats along the bottom of the centre panel. He finds a rim. He lifts the panel. Disclosed is a serving-hatch, a ‘dumb waiter’. A wide box is held by pulleys, GUS peers into the box. He brings out a piece of paper.

BEN. What is it?
GUS. You have a look at it.
BEN. Read it.
GUS (Reading.) Two braised steak and chips. Two sago puddings. Two teas without sugar.
BEN. Let me see that. (He takes the paper.)
GUS (To himself.) Two teas without sugar.

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731 In “A Poetics for Thugs,” Varun Begley provides the following synopsis for *The Dumb Waiter*: “The plot concerns a pair of ostensible assassins, Gus and Ben, who bide time in the basement of what once may have been a restaurant, waiting for instructions on their next hit. After much desultory and occasionally malevolent conversation on a variety of topics, the disused dumbwaiter in the back wall springs to life, issuing written demands for increasingly bizarre and exotic meals. Finally, Gus leaves to get a glass of water. Ben receives instructions from the heretofore silent speaking tube, indicating the target is on the way. Gus reenters, disheveled. Ben, his pistol drawn, stares at Gus in a final tableau” (22).
The dumb-waiter becomes an apocalyptic image of the economy of their employment as living beings, of a governing mechanism that not only drains away their vitality, but also destroys others’ lives in order to satisfy the demands of some unspecified organization.

As in other plays by Pinter, objects, food, and mechanisms figure markedly throughout *The Dumb Waiter.* In the play’s opening sequences, Ben and Gus talk about two violent incidents reported in the daily newspaper: the first concerning an old man who crawled under a stationary van in order to cross the street during a traffic jam, but who eventually got run over by the van under which he sought protection; the second about a girl child who killed a cat while her teenage brother was looking on. The newspaper, typically an “emblem of healthy populism and good citizenship, a triumphant ratification of the social contract,” introduces the play’s prevalent mood of aggression, and foregrounds the spectacle of cruelty and suffering that has become both customary and trivial in our contemporary society.

Within the play’s brutal atmosphere, Begley calls attention to “the symbolic civility of English tea,” which is all the two men are left with at the end—after having been deprived throughout the action of crisps, biscuits, cake, a bar of chocolate, and a half-pint of milk; and ordered by the dumb-waiter to send up two “braised steak and chips,” two “sago puddings,” two “teas without sugar,” “Macaroni Pastitsio,” “Ormitha Macarounada,” one “Bamboo Shoots, Water Chestnuts and Chicken,” one “Char Siu and Beansprouts,” and at last “Scampi.” Whereas Gus feels neglected, suspecting that *upstairs* there might be cold meat, radishes, cucumbers, watercress, rollmops, hardboiled eggs, a crate of beer, and “the lot,” Ben reminds him that “eating” makes one “lazy,” and that “You don’t want to get slack on your job.”

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733 Ibid., 23-24.
735 Ibid., 152.
In addition to the dumb-waiter, there are other dysfunctional mechanical appliances in the play, such as a toilet that flushes erratically, and a malfunctioning gas stove (even though the men are provided with matches to light it, through an envelope mysteriously slid under the door). Yet another chilling instance of machines ruling over organic life is disclosed at the end, when one of the two hired assassins draws a gun to kill his partner, after having being ordered to do so through an obsolete speaking-tube hanging on the wall. Once again, Pinter summons mechanical devices to conspire against humans, turning his characters into targets of human-made tools. The hunter (Gus) becomes the hunted, reminding us that within a world of cold-blooded arbitrary cruelty the victimizers are equally liable to become victims themselves.

Elsewhere in Pinter’s theatre, a whole range of technological gadgets, invented by humans to make organic life run efficiently and regularly like a clock-mechanism, bear witness to a world gone awry. In *Victoria Station* (1982), a taxi driver rebels against his solitary job, ruled by radio transceivers and a controller who directs him to scheduled destinations. He has decided to halt the engine of his car, stopping “by a little dark park underneath Crystal Palace,” with a female passenger on board, “asleep on the back seat.”

DRIVER. I think I’m going to keep her for the rest of my life. I’m going to stay in this car with her for the rest of my life. I’m going to marry her in this car. We’ll die together in this car. (. . .) I’m very happy. I’ve never known such happiness.

Condemned to a programmed dreary life, the driver seems to have run amok and decided to linger in a ghostscape; not only has he forgotten where the well-known Victoria Station is located, but he has parked his vehicle next to a building (the Crystal Palace) that was “burnt

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736 Pinter, *Victoria Station*, in *Other Places: Three Plays* (London: Methuen, 1982), 55.
737 Ibid., 59. Almandi and Henderson remark that since the audience cannot see her, “she might be a figment of his imagination, or perhaps he has killed her and kept the body on the back seat” (99-100).
738 Ibid., 60.
down years ago . . . in the Great Fire of London,” and is carrying an imaginary woman passenger in his car. The controller promises to set him straight again:

CONTROLLER. I’m just talking into this machine, trying to make some sense out of our lives. That’s my function. God gave me this job. He asked me to do this job, personally. I’m your local monk, 247. (. . .) I haven’t got a cooling system and four wheels. I’m not sitting here with wing mirrors and a jack in the boot. And if I did have a jack in the boot I’d stick it right up your arse. (. . .) I’ll destroy you bone by bone. I’ll suck you in and blow you out in little bubbles. I’ll chew your stomach out with my own teeth. I’ll eat all the hair off your body. You’ll end up looking like a pipe cleaner. Get me?740

In her essay on The Hothouse, Lamont observes how oppressive regimes (such as the Nazi) tend to imbue the new modes of efficiency of technological society—namely the bureaucratic and the scientific—with a divine quality.741 In The Hothouse, in effect, there are multiple devices of “communication”—such as speaking-tubes, microphones, earphones, loudspeakers, and intercom systems—in order to better control both patients and staff, “for the love of Mike.” There is also a “sound-proof room” where humans are subject to electric shock interrogations, and inside which a man (Lamb) is left abandoned at the end. In The Dumb Waiter, Gus suspects that the rooms where he and Ben perform their murders are equally “soundproof,” since no one ever complains or hears a thing.742 Ben remarks that “these places change hands very quickly,” they “go into liquidation,” and that the “people who run them” constantly “move

739 Ibid., 57. The Crystal Palace was destroyed by fire in 1936.
741 Rosette Lamont, “Harold Pinter’s The Hothouse: A Parable of the Holocaust,” 44.
742 GUS: You go to this address, there’s a key there, there’s a teapot, there’s never a soul in sight— (He pauses.) Eh, nobody ever hears a thing, have you ever thought of that? We never get any complaints, do we, too much noise or anything like that? You never see a soul, do you?—except the bloke who comes. You ever noticed that? I wonder if the walls are sound-proof.” The Dumb Waiter, 145.
out.” When Gus shows concern over who cleans up their “mess,” Ben reassures him that the “organization” has “got departments for everything.”

This mechanized atmosphere in Pinter’s plays is always associated to a sealed interior architecture, to existence in a virtual coffin, or to life in a cell without a view. Referring to their life and work routine, Gus complains that he never sees the light of day: “you come into a place when it’s still dark, you come into a room you’ve never seen before, you sleep all day, you do your job, and then you go away in the night again.” In One for the Road there is similarly no connection to the world outside. Further, the room where the action takes place is located inside a building efficiently assigned to political torture and execution: downstairs, on the second floor, children are kept and eventually murdered; upstairs, on the sixth, there is “a first-class brothel” with “chandeliers” where dissident women are systematically raped.

In The Hothouse the outside claustrophobically mirrors the inside, as if its environment were equally damaged. When Roote complains of the stifling heat inside the building and desperately wants to open the window to get some fresh air, he is repeatedly warned that in the exterior “the snow has turned to slush.”

ROOTE. God, the heat of this place. It’s damn hot, isn’t it? It’s like a crematorium in here. Why is it suddenly so hot?
LUSH. The snow has turned to slush, sir.
ROOTE. Has it?
LUSH. Very dangerous.
ROOTE. It’s a heatwave, that’s what it is.

In The Birthday Party there is similarly no variation between exterior and interior, and therefore no escape from an oppressive reality:

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743 Pinter, The Dumb Waiter, 148.
744 Ibid., 147. My emphasis.
745 Pinter, The Dumb Waiter, 134.
746 Pinter, One for the Road, 43.
747 Ibid., 77.
748 Pinter, The Hothouse, 90.
STANLEY. (Abruptly.) How would you like to go away with me?
LULU. Where?
STANLEY. Nowhere. Still, we could go.
LULU. But where could we go?
STANLEY. Nowhere. There’s nowhere to go. So we could just go. It wouldn’t matter.
LULU. We might as well stay here.
STANLEY. No. It’s no good here.
LULU. Well, where else is there?
STANLEY. Nowhere.749

In Pinter’s apocalyptic landscapes the surrounding natural world is blocked from view, or else is shown as wholly humanized and environmentally damaged. Human bodies seem partitioned and mechanized (rather than holistic and organic), and there is no longer any sense of connection between the living body and the non-human environment. Dilek Inan finds that the environment outside these rooms is a “no-man’s land” hostile to all those, male or female, who will not integrate themselves into the “regime.” It is a depersonalized and strictly hierarchical space, patriarchal, one-dimensional, and global.750 This is particularly felt in Mountain Language (1988),751 which presents a nightmarish urban landscape of military uniforms and hooded hostages, where the latter have lost control of their territory or living space. For the sake of national unity, the countryside has been colonized and “masculinized” by military decree—demanding the repression of minorities, rural people, intellectuals, women, and feminized “others.”752 As a result, Inan claims that Mountain Language is “a political anti-pastoral, a

749 Pinter, The Birthday Party, 36.
751 Mountain Language (1988) takes us through various locales of a prison camp, starting with “a prison wall” along which women have been waiting in line for eight hours so as to visit their husbands, sons, and fathers, who have been jailed as “enemies of the state.” In the next scenes we see these women visiting the prisoners, but without being allowed to communicate with them. In one of the scenes an elderly peasant woman sits with her son, is ordered to speak with him in the “language of the capital,” but is unable to do so. When we return to this cell, in the final scene, the guard informs the woman that she can now speak her “mountain language” but she seems unable to respond to her son when he repeatedly urges her to talk. As the prisoner collapses to the floor, gasping and shaking violently, a sergeant walks in the room and mocks his agony: “Look at this. You go out of your way to give them a helping hand and they fuck it up” (47).
752 Dilek Inan, “Public Consciousness Beyond Theatrical Space,” 54.
pastoral subjugated and colonised by the metropolis,” in which “a brutally corrupt society is matched by its landscapes.”

The oppressors that figure in *Mountain Language* are unrestrained bureaucrats, to the point of absurdity. They designate prison cells through colors; offer to take down any “complaints” from incarcerated individuals; and jokingly grumble about minor “administrative problems” such as “a computer with a double hernia.” A woman whose hand has been seriously bitten by a Doberman pinscher at the service of the military, her thumb almost dangling off, is purportedly required to report the dog’s name.

OFFICER. Who did this?
YOUNG WOMAN. A big dog.
OFFICER. What was his name?
*Pause.*
OFFICER. What was his name?
*Pause.*
OFFICER. Every dog has a name! They answer to their name. They are given a name by their parents and that is their name, that is their name! Before they bite, they state their name. It’s a formal procedure. They state their name and then they bite. What was his name? If you tell me one of our dogs bit this woman without giving his name I will have that dog shot!

This atmosphere of frenzied excitement and arbitrary cruelty brings to mind that of the Nazi military and bureaucrats in Holocaust prison camps. The prevailing landscape is populated by a mass of mechanized humans monomaniacally engaged in the suppression of the Other by any

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753 Ibid., 39.
755 Ibid., 39.
756 Ibid., 41.
757 Ibid., 17.
758 Violence is so arbitrary in *Mountain Language* that at first the enforcers of the new regime are busy with forbidding the use of “mountain language,” even though they are jailing individuals who do not speak it; close to the play’s end, the rules have changed and the prisoners are allowed to speak in their own language “until further notice.” Charles Grimes insightfully observes that this arbitrariness is “deeply wounding” for the prisoners, and serves to create a “state of disorientation.” Contrary to the belief that authority is ordered and systematic within a commonly accepted “just-world theory,” the oppressors in Pinter seek not to use words responsibly but to intimidate and disconcert, since they delight in acting in bad faith. Charles Grimes, *Harold Pinter’s Politics: A Silence Beyond Echo* (Madison NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2005), 92-94.
available means, eager to forbid the use of “mountain language” so as to erase ethnic diversity, cultural memory, and individual difference from their world.

As in other works by Pinter discussed in this chapter, the oppressors in Mountain Language combine sadistic behavior with religious morality, and concentrate on repressing the emotional, subjective, and sensory systems that sustain the life of the mountain people. It is therefore significant that the silenced bodies of the victims are able to communicate without being heard by the guards, as if they could be in touch through their imagination and spiritual inner beings. This kind of contact occurs in two distinct scenes, marked in the script as “voices over” or “voices in the darkness”—the first between an old woman and her son, the second involving an amorous couple. As Ann Hall remarks, by the end of the play “even these disembodied voices are absent” when the elderly woman is finally permitted to speak in her own language, but “cannot or will not.” Although the old woman’s silence may be considered an act of defiance and resistance, I concur with Charles Grimes who understands it as evidence of her incapacity to alter, endure, or even describe her own state of suffering. Real suffering is truly ineffable; consequently, it is never mimetically represented in Pinter’s theatre, but rather suggested through Symbolist techniques.

In agreement with Symbolist theory and aesthetics, Pinter’s dramatic landscapes attest to the increasing mechanization of society and its toll on the human spirit. Proto-Symbolist artist William Morris, whose writings helped lay the foundations of much current ecological thinking, wrote that “the beauty of life is endangered in our time when we allow machines to be our

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759 Pinter, Mountain Language, 23. Although Sara does not speak the mountain language, she is similarly an outcast since, by the mere fact of being a woman, she “bounces” and “wobbles” with sin.
760 Ibid., 33.
761 Ibid., 39. This scene is quoted in Chapter Two of this dissertation.
763 Charles Grimes, Harold Pinter’s Politics, 97.
masters, rather than our servants.” Symbolist poet Rainer Maria Rilke expresses a similar view in one of his “Sonnets to Orpheus:”

Orpheus, do you hear
the new sound,
droning and roaring?
Many now exult in it.

Though the Machine
insists on our praise,
who can listen
with all this noise?

See, it rolls over everything,
weakening us
and taking our place.

Since its strength is of our making,
why can’t it serve
and not possess us?765

In Rilke’s vision “the Machine” assaults us with its noise and speed; it takes over too much of our lives, robbing us of our strength, making us “no longer meander on curving paths, but race straight ahead.” The Machine requires and produces gigantic concentrations of capital for “the brokers of violence,” making “the ore feel trapped in coins and gears,” “homesick for earth.” The Machine deprives us of time, imagination, and the experience of community, while providing us with an illusion of control.

I suggest that Pinter’s theatre partakes of a Symbolist critique of technological progress, since it reveals how mechanized modes of efficiency have gravely affected our existential and spiritual values. At the service of terrorizing atypical, “disorganized” or unmethodical others,

765 Rainer Maria Rilke, “Sonnets to Orpheus” in In Praise of Mortality: Selections from Rainer Maria Rilke’s Duino Elegies and Sonnets to Orpheus, translated and edited by Anita Barrows and Joana Macy (New York: Riverhead Books, 2005), Part One, Sonnet XVIII.
766 Ibid., Sonnet XXIV.
Pinter’s oppressors are prisoners of a bureaucratic frame of mind. As I maintained in Chapter Two, there is something lifeless about their mechanized bodies and faces; they might well be puppets or automatons made with chunks of flesh. Unlike organic self-generating systems, or lively sensuous bodies, the mechanized bodies in Pinter’s œuvre—of characters such as Goldberg, McCann, Nicholas, Devlin, Roote, among many others—act according to a set of predictable fixed rules and parameters that they did not themselves generate. Theirs is a world where individuals are reduced to the status of files or numbers, to nominal or numeric value, to figures without essence.

A number of critics have pointed out affinities between Pinter’s drama and Kafka’s fiction, due to their depiction of the human-made condition as gloomy, and the mechanical mindset of their characters. In both Pinter and Kafka, the bureaucratic executioners are accorded the status of respectable citizens entrusted with transforming “living, changing human beings into dead code numbers, incapable of any change.” Further, in terms of style, the two authors are able to “distil” such a “politicized horror” into symbol, as Richard Allen Cave notes.

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768 Pinter acknowledged his indebtedness to Kafka very early on, when he was interviewed by John Sherwood for the BBC European Service, 3 March 1960 (see Martin Esslin, Pinter: The Playwright, 40). Raymond Armstrong’s Kafka and Pinter Shadow-Boxing: The Struggle between Father and Son (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1999), is the most recent full-length critical study on the similarities between Kafka’s and Pinter’s writings. Works by other critics associating Pinter’s plays to Kafka’s fiction include Ruby Cohn (“The World of Harold Pinter,” 1962), Raymond Williams in Drama from Ibsen to Brecht (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969), Randall Stevenson (“Harold Pinter- Innovator?” 1985), and Leonard Powlick (“What the Hell is That All About?: A Peak at Pinter’s Dramaturgy,” 1986). The influence of Kafka on Pinter’s work attracted greater critical attention ever since Pinter wrote the screenplay of The Trial (produced by BBC in 1993). Essays dealing with Pinter’s adaptation of Kafka’s novel include Francis Gillen’s “From Novel to Film,” in Pinter at Sixty, ed. Katherine Burkman (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1993), and two insightful articles by Ann Hall: “Harold Pinter’s Prison House: The Screenplay of Kafka’s The Trial” in Captive Audience: Prison and Captivity in Contemporary Theatre, ed. by Thomas Fahy & Kimball King (New York: Routledge, 2003); and “Lost in the Funhouse: Spectacle and Crime in Pinter’s Screenplay of Kafka’s The Trial” in The Art of Crime: The Plays and Films of Harold Pinter and David Mamet, ed. Leslie Kane (New York: Routledge, 2004).


In a similar but hitherto unexplored way, the nightmarish bureaucratic landscapes of Pinter’s plays seem closely related to the dehumanizing fictional images suggested by one of his contemporaries, Portuguese author José Saramago, whose works have also been considered “Kafkaesque.” In Saramago’s All the Names, a self-effacing clerk has worked diligently for many years at the “Central Registry of Births, Marriages, and Deaths” of an unnamed country, filing in the names of the living and of the ever-dying. In order to record the factual details of all the citizenry with accuracy, the administrative procedures of the central registry are strict and hierarchical: the simple clerks work in teams supervised by a head clerk; the head clerks report to the deputy clerks, who in turn deal with the central registry, or with the establishment’s faceless god. All clerks live in small homes built along the side wall of the central registry building. Since the files of the dead are always increasing, the city must keep demolishing and extending the rear wall of the central registrar’s building, in an ever-pressing need for more space and more labor. The city cemetery is organized according to the same design as the central registry; likewise, it has long since overflowed its walls, and is now invading the land of the living that surrounds it. Within this deadly setting of files, stones, and ashes, the clerk becomes obsessed with finding a particular unknown woman, when he comes across her name, one night, by chance. In the process of seeking her amidst an urban landscape of abundant but insignificant names, he suddenly becomes aware of his existential hollowness and utter isolation.

Humans are designated by numbers as if they were raffle items in Pinter’s The Hothouse, and are treated like numeric records in One for the Road, Ashes to Ashes, and

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772 José Saramago, All the Names (Todos os Nomes), trans. Margaret Jull Costa (New York: Harcourt Inc, 1997).
773 In The Hothouse the raffle items are literally compared to the patients. Number 84 is a duck “ready for the oven,” which is “as dead as patient 6457.” Pinter, The Hothouse, 104, 112.
Mountain Language. In Precisely (1983), two men casually talk over drinks about numbers, and only gradually do we understand that they are discussing the murderous power of nuclear warfare, without being in the least concerned with the shocking prospect of an extensive extermination of organic life, as if it were just one more game to be won.

ROGER. Give me another two, Stephen.
STEPHEN stares at him.
STEPHEN. Another two?
ROGER. Another two million. And I’ll buy you another drink. Another two for another drink.
STEPHEN. (Slowly.) No, no, Roger. It’s twenty million. Dead.
ROGER. You mean precisely?
STEPHEN. I mean dead. Precisely.

In a period marked by a general appraisal of scientistic knowledge and quantitative accounts of social reality, Pinter’s apocalyptic landscapes suggest that the dream of infinite technological progress may well be turned into a nightmare. Our civilization seems obsessed with progress in terms of technological leaps, but has not made significant improvements in human understanding, nor has it cultivated its esteem for the very earth that nurtures its multiple life forms.

At the turn of the twentieth century, Symbolists expressed an apocalyptic sense of impending destruction threatening the future of human civilization, at a time of unprecedented faith in unlimited industrial progress. What this suggests is that for Symbolists and post-Symbolists alike, apocalypse is the outcome of human development rather than the work of some deity. Their apocalyptic landscapes of terror are indicative of an underlying catastrophe in micropolitical terms, of an emotional and spiritual atrophy of human beings, both collectively and individually.

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774 In Life and Work of Harold Pinter, Michael Billington insightfully suggests that these men could be officials of a Ministry of Defense, or perhaps members of a government think-tank (292).
775 Pinter, Precisely, in Harold Pinter: Plays Four (London: Faber & Faber, 1998), 219.
Pinter conveys this idea through images when he states, “What surrounds us is a vast tapestry of lies, upon which we feed,” a “blanket of lies which unfortunately we are either too indifferent or too frightened to question.” Saramago utilizes metaphor to express a similar thought, when he affirms that “we are blind” because we fail to acknowledge that “we humiliate life, that human dignity is insulted every day by the powerful of our world, that the universal lie has replaced the plural truths, that man stopped respecting himself when he lost the respect due to his fellow-creatures.”

In *Les Aveugles* (1890), Maeterlinck offers us an image of human beings sensorially buffered and spiritually armored, and therefore unable to see. From the beginning of the play, Maeterlinck’s blind characters have trouble in exercising their many sensory faculties, as actual blind people do. They stumble on rocks and branches, are afraid to touch one another, unable to feel if the sun is still warm and shining, and reluctant to hear the calm murmur of the sea. Most of them regret having left the asylum, since “there is nothing to see” outdoors. They complain of their guide being old, failing to perceive that he is dead and sitting next to them. Most of these blind characters fear any signs of life (e.g., sounds of the flight of birds and of trees in the wind; the arrival of a dog), as if they were at odds with earthly nature. Unable to move because of their inner fear, they seem resigned to wait indefinitely for an external deliverer.

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776 Pinter, “Art, Truth, and Politics.”
779 Maeterlinck’s blind characters rely more on verbal information rather than on their senses. All of them (even if young) seem kinesthetically debilitated, hard of hearing or not attuned to natural earthly sounds, and armored in their sense of touch. Some even complain to have lost their sense of smell.
In a novel entitled *Blindness* (1995), Saramago depicts an apocalyptic picture of the collective fate of human beings, when an epidemic of sightlessness strikes a city, then a nation, and afterward perhaps the whole world beyond. The first to suffer from blindness are put in quarantine within the wards of a disused mental hospital, kept by armed guards. Soon the place becomes overcrowded with practically naked and starving human beings who wander through corridors littered with filth; some kill themselves, others prostitute themselves in order to get scraps of the scanty food supplies. Shortly thereafter, when their captors (including the nation’s leaders) are also struck blind, the inmates are let loose and compelled to face the world outside: a dangerous and devastated city, where everyone ferociously fights for food, clothing, and shelter. God-fearing sightless crowds anxiously gather in churches, blindfold the statues of their deities, or else paint their eyes white, so as to fashion them in their own image. In contrast, throughout their horrific journey together, a few people regain their *inner sight* by relearning how to think, touch, listen, love and help one another. They are guided by their vibrant animal senses, as well as by the discerning eyes of a dog that licks their tears.

Stanton Garner argues that “post-Brechtian” political theatre expresses an “almost obsessive interest in the body as a political unit, its function within the play of political forces, and its role within the contest of subjectivity and subjection.” Although Garner does not cite Pinter’s work as an example, many of his plays expose “the body in pain” (“a body tortured, disciplined, confined, penetrated, maimed, extinguished”) to suggest how political power

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781 In the novel, the canine is referred to as “the dog of tears” (“o cão das lágrimas”).
783 Ibid., 147.
viscerally registers in human tissue. In effect, as I have been arguing, Symbolist/post-Symbolist aesthetics often expresses the political through corporeal sensory landscapes.

Moreover, Symbolist/post-Symbolist bodyscapes are striking in ecocritical terms. In Kafka’s *Metamorphosis* an oversize roach (a man turned insect) becomes enthralled by the rhythms and vibrations of a music being played on a piano, but is brutally chased away, mortally wounded, and abandoned to die in a filthy corner (i.e., annihilated for being different). In Pinter’s *Party Time* (1991) fashionably-dressed women and men party, and discuss the thrilling sensations that savoring food, engaging in sex, and terrorizing others may provide; while outside the streets are “dead” or set on fire by military forces. The outside world that sustains the fashionable celebration inside has turned into a garden of ashes where living beings are used up, persecuted, tortured, and killed.

In *Party Time*, Pinter depicts a claustrophobic space where an insidious host is holding a leisure-time meeting for a chosen few. A light glowing through a “half-open” door in the setting indicates the *outside*. This door, however, is never used by any of the characters in the party, and therefore becomes emblematic of a concealed reality.\(^{784}\) The light starts by being “dim,” but shines with increasing intensity throughout the play, to the point of “burning into the room;”\(^{785}\) at its peak all the partying characters are frozen “in silhouette.”\(^{786}\) Gradually, we learn that this fiery outside resembles a “Black-Death”\(^{787}\) setting: there are roadblocks everywhere, people are being “rounded-up” in the streets, and “the town’s dead.” Little by little we also discover that all the men at the party are actively involved in a “mission” to purge society of dissidents, and that the women are either active collaborators in this scheme, or else silenced spouses of the

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\(^{785}\) Ibid., 20.
\(^{786}\) Ibid., 37.
\(^{787}\) Ibid., 7.
repressive agents. Through the blazing symbolic doorway enters a “thinly dressed” man at the end of the play:

JIMMY. Sometimes I hear things. Then it’s quiet.
I had a name. It was Jimmy. People called me Jimmy. That was my name.
Sometimes I hear things. Then everything is quiet. When everything is quiet I hear my heart.
When the terrible noises come I don’t hear anything. Don’t hear don’t breathe am blind.
Then everything is quiet. I hear a heartbeat. It is probably not my heartbeat. It is probably someone else’s heartbeat.
What am I?
Sometimes a door bangs, I hear voices, then it stops. Everything stops. It all stops. It all closes, it closes down. It shuts. It all shuts. It shuts down. It shuts. I see nothing at any time any more. I sit sucking the dark.
It’s what I have. The dark is in my mouth and
I suck it. It’s the only thing I have. It’s mine.
It’s my own. I suck it.  

The words uttered by Jimmy express a gradual closing down of his live senses, as if he were progressively being deprived of the faculty of seeing, of hearing, of feeling his own heartbeat, and finally of breathing. As in other plays by Pinter discussed in this chapter, the oppressors in Party Time specialize in repressing the emotional, subjective, and sensory systems that sustain the life of the non-normative Other. In One for the Road and Mountain Language, victims are deprived of their vocality; in The Birthday Party, the outcast is dispossessed of both speech and eyesight; in The New World Order (1991) the dissident seems to have turned into an object. In Party Time, Jimmy is left with but one sensory experience of being alive: his own breath. Significantly, breathing is an organic process that we share with all the non-human living creatures of the earth, and constitutes our first sign of life. The ghostscape evoked by Jimmy’s figure is that of a man already buried under ground, who is left “sucking the dark” of the earth. This ghostscape is an image of the ostracized Other, of the politically assassinated, of the

788 Ibid., 37-38.
countless holocaust victims, of the anonymous people imprisoned and tortured everyday in the world because they have expressed dissent. As I have argued elsewhere, \(^ {789}\) his emergence not only authenticates the existence of torture and murder offstage, but also confirms that there is individual resistance against the regime, that there are people “out there,” who think and feel differently, actively fighting against oppression.

As in all other plays by Pinter discussed in this chapter, a sense of moral and physical cleanliness, combined with outright viciousness, pervades the atmosphere of *Party Time*. Right at the outset, the party’s host, Gavin White, prattles about how he “burnt out” “blackheads” in his past, “thousands of times.” \(^ {790}\) One of the invited women, Liz, feels proud of belonging to “the society of beautifully dressed people,” of endorsing such “incredibly important” “concepts” as “elegance, style, grace, taste.” \(^ {791}\) Her husband, Douglas, announces that he leads “an incredibly clean life;” so does his friend Fred, who looks “so trim, so fit,” and “so handsome” apparently “because he leads a clean life.” \(^ {792}\) Both men, we learn, are enforcers of “peace” and “security” in the streets:

Fred. We’ve got to make it work.
Douglas. What?
Fred. The country.
( . . .)
Fred. How’s it going tonight?
Douglas. Like clockwork. Look. Let me tell you something. We want peace. We want peace and we’re going to get it.
Fred. Quite right.
Douglas. We want peace and we’re going to get it. But we want that peace to be cast iron. No leaks. No draughts. Cast iron. Tight as a drum. That’s the kind of peace we want and that’s the kind of peace we’re going to get. A cast iron peace.
(He clenches his fist.) Like this. \(^ {793}\)


\(^ {790}\) Pinter, *Party Time*, 3.

\(^ {791}\) Ibid., 21-22.

\(^ {792}\) Ibid., 30-31.

\(^ {793}\) Ibid., 12-14.
While outside there is generalized destruction, inside the partying members discuss the lavish advantages of belonging to a recently formed club. As the most distinguished guest (Dame Melissa) explains, the new club “is inspired” by a “set of moral values” that is “unshakeable, rigorous, fundamental, constant.”

In a place that “has got real class,” one can play tennis, have a “beautiful swim,” drink a fruit juice at the bar by the pool, taste specialties like “cannelloni” and “chopped liver,” sit in “glass alcoves” and look out to “lovely girls” and men bathing underwater. As another prominent guest, and major enforcer of the repressive order, declares:

TERRY. The thing is, it is actually real value for money. Now this is a very, very unusual thing. It is an extremely unusual thing these days to find that you are getting real value for money. (...) And what you’re getting is absolutely gold-plated service. Gold-plated service in all departments. You’ve got real catering. You’ve got catering on all levels. You’ve not only got very good catering in itself—you know, food, that kind of thing—and napkins—you know, all that, wonderful, first rate—but you’ve also got artistic catering—you actually have an atmosphere—in this club—which is catering artistically for its clientele. I’m referring to the kind of light, the kind of paint, the kind of music, the club offers. I’m talking about a truly warm and harmonious environment. You won’t find voices raised in our club.

Most conspicuously, Terry describes such exquisite sensory comforts of the new club at the same time that he threatens to “spank” and “suffocate” his wife; and as he declares his intention to repress dissidents by shoving “a broomstick up each individual arse,” and by poisoning “all the mother’s milk in the world so that every baby would drop dead before it opened its perverted bloody mouth.”

Through Jimmy’s ghostly appearance at the end of the party, Pinter brings into the space of this plutocratic class gathering all the violence and terror that is taking place outside, reminding us of the underlying correspondence between both worlds. Rather than being “cut-

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794 Ibid., 35.
795 Ibid., 1-6.
796 Ibid., 33.
797 Ibid., 5, 18, 24.
off,” “indifferent,” “complacent” or “cynic”—as Drew Milne and Michael Billington propose—798—the rich and beautifully dressed people of the play’s party are self-consciously involved in the production of domestic terror, and profiting from an economy based on warfare (in the name of “national security” and “peace-keeping”), so as to gain exclusive membership to a top private “club.” Indeed, the maintenance of their fit, prestigious, and luxury lifestyles—because it requires an extraordinary accumulation of economic capital with minimum effort and maximum profit (Gavin, for instance, “only plays golf;”799 and Douglas owns an island “with a few local people”800)—demands an extreme exploitation of human and natural resources, and the consequential stifling of oppositional moral stances or alternative ways of living.

Varun Begley argues that Pinter’s drama is characterized by the incidence of thugs, or authoritarian-criminal figures, such as “proletarian assassins,” “paranoid pimps,” “neurotic inquisitors,” “plutocrats,” and “socialites.”801 According to Begley, the dramatist’s late plays in particular explore a powerful convergence of horror and civility, or the paradoxical short distance between “etiquette and barbarism, glib urbanity and abject terror.”802 For example, in Party Time, “the highest rung on the thug’s ladder,” Pinter’s thugs appear sanitized and cloaked in respectability, because they have delegated the dirty work to adjutants. “Insulated and invisible, the true metteurs en scene carouse while their militias cleanse the streets.”803

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798 In his review of Party Time for The Guardian, November 7, 1991, Billington considers that the play presented “an image of a style-conscious, narcissistic, bourgeois society cut off and culpably indifferent to the intolerance and squalor of the outside world.” Drew Milne similarly suggests that the play confronts “audiences and readers with the politics of complacency and cynicism that co-exist with the global realities of torture and oppression.” Milne, “Pinter’s Sexual Politics,” in The Cambridge Companion to Harold Pinter, ed. Peter Raby (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 200.

799 Pinter, Party Time, 16.

800 Ibid., 22.


802 Varun Begley, Harold Pinter and the Twilight of Modernism, 164.

803 Ibid., 185.
Begley’s perceptive remarks might equally apply to Pinter’s *Celebration* (1999), a play taking place in the apparently benign setting of an upscale restaurant, but where its dining guests are shown to be involved (directly or indirectly) in global offstage violence. Two of the men are “peaceful strategy consultants”—meaning that they are successful arms dealers “at the receiving end of some of the best tea in China,” and “enforcers of worldwide peace.” The third man is a financier, recently promoted “to a more substantial bank,” eager to invest in the thriving peace-keeping “business.” Two of their happy wives “run charities,” a very “demanding work” since “there are so many worthy causes.” The third one teaches “infants.”

Most prominent in sensory terms, however, is this group of diners’ obsessive focus on their appetites for sex and food, which are equated in the coarsest and most aggressive way, as if they were both a mouth-watering but degrading matter. Whether they boast about their past and present sexual exploits, or appraise the dishes served, there is a constant summoning up of blood, urine, and shit; of pissing, dripping, bubbly, plumpy, wobbly, and fucking imagery. As one of the women customers puts it, while addressing the restaurant owner:

PRUE. [My sister] wasn’t impressed with her food. It’s true. She said so. She thought it was dry as dust. She said—what did you say, darling?—she’s my sister—she said she could cook better than that with one hand stuffed between her legs; she said—no, honestly—she said she could make a better sauce than the one on that plate if she pissed into it. Don’t think she was joking—she’s my sister, I’ve known her all my life, all my life, since we were little innocent girls, all our lives, when we were babies, when we used to lie in the nursery and hear Mummy beating the shit out of Daddy. We saw the blood on the sheets the next day—when Nanny was in the pantry—my sister and me—and Nanny was in the pantry—and the pantry maid was in the larder and the parlor maid was in the laundry room washing the blood out of the sheets. That’s how my little sister and I were brought up and she could make a better sauce than yours if she pissed into it.

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804 Pinter, *Celebration*, 56-58.
805 Ibid., 57-58.
806 Ibid., 54-55.
807 Sex and food are often conflated throughout *Celebration*. In a most hilarious episode combining celebratory globalization with patronizing xenophobia, the headwaitress marvels at the idea that “you don’t have to be English to enjoy food. (. . .) It’s like sex, isn’t it? You don’t have to speak English to enjoy sex” (44).
808 Pinter, *Celebration*, 22.
Through this boisterous group of diners we learn that what mothers really want is to fuck their sons, or perhaps to fuck their own mothers, or even possibly to fuck themselves; that fathers are jealous of boys, and mothers are jealous of girls that want to fuck their boys. While engaging in sex women become silly, dizzy, naughty, saucy, flirty, giggly things. Sexual interaction is warped and cramped, like “being twisted round one’s little finger,” or “knowing what the back of a filing cabinet looks like.” Affection is but another business deal, as one of the women conveys to her husband: “I want you to be rich so that you can buy me houses and panties and I’ll know that you really love me.” Newly born infants look like “alcoholics,” and children have no memory: “It’s all a hole in the wall for them. They don’t remember their own life.” Nevertheless, and in spite of the corrupted atmosphere of such a “piss-up dinner,” one of the couples is energetically celebrating their wedding anniversary, toasting to loyalty, and to standing by each other “through thick and thin.”

Among the staff, both the restaurant owner and the maîtresse d’hôtel (or headwaitress) respectfully indulge and flatter these wealthy and powerful guests. In return, the women customers seem eager to kiss the owner “on the mouth,” and the men to inquire about the upbringing and sexual past of the maîtresse. The restaurant (“the best and most expensive” in the whole of Europe) functions like a paradisiacal retreat for its customers. Concerning the banker, for instance, it works like a confessional and therapeutic facility:

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809 Ibid., 17-18, 29.
810 Ibid., 10.
811 Ibid., 9.
812 Ibid., 10.
813 Ibid., 8.
814 Ibid., 34. Throughout the play we learn that at least two of the couples have children.
815 Ibid., 41-42.
816 Ibid., 16.
817 Ibid., 11.
818 Ibid., 23.
RUSSELL. But when I’m sitting in this restaurant I suddenly find I have no psychopathic tendencies at all. I don’t feel like killing everyone in sight, I don’t feel like putting a bomb under everyone’s arse. I feel something quite different, I have a sense of equilibrium, of harmony, I love my fellow diners. Now this is very unusual for me. Normally I feel—as I’ve just said—absolute malice and hatred towards everyone within spitting distance—but here I feel love. How do you explain it?

SUKI. It’s the ambience.

RICHARD. Yes, I think ambience is that intangible thing that cannot be defined.\(^{819}\)

The ambience of Celebration’s restaurant may be extraordinarily soothing, but its dramatic landscapes are unquestionably nightmarish—and this contradiction between surface and depth is what makes the play so powerfully distressing, along the same line as the Höckner photos of criminal Nazis at leisure. As Grimes notes, this stylish restaurant setting may seem far removed from the torture sites of One for the Road and Mountain Language, but is nevertheless linked to the brutal realities of worldwide torture.\(^{820}\) Further, as Billington remarks, Celebration suggests that there is “an umbilical connection between male chauvinism and political brutality,” or that sexual coarseness is an expression of fascistic instincts.\(^{821}\) In other words, the sexcapes and lovescapes expressed by the characters are manifestations of their oppressive and authoritarian frames of mind.

Ecocritically, Celebration offers images of sexual contact that are anything but aesthetically and sensorially beautiful, as if bodily materials were necessarily repugnant, and intercourse constituted a mechanical progression towards self-gratification, rather than a sensory and psychic source of joyful pleasure. As in other apocalyptic landscapes of Pinter—the kissing of the fist in Ashes to Ashes, the finger as penis and boot in One for the Road\(^{822}\)—in Celebration the human body is partitioned (into tits, boobs, bollocks, mouth, arse, and so on), or transformed into a set of flesh-parts and organs to be switched on or off at one’s own convenience. This

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\(^{819}\) Ibid., 37.

\(^{820}\) Charles Grimes, Harold Pinter’s Politics, 133.


\(^{822}\) Pinter, One for the Road, 33.
relates to the concept of the world as a mechanism (see Chapter One), or to a pervading mechanical philosophy that understands the human body as divided into parts endowed with distinct functions, rather than as a holistic entity.

In Symbolist terms, there is in *Celebration* a correspondence between the characters’ microcosms and macrocosm, between their micropolitical desires and their macropolitical investments. Pinter depicts individuals with vested moral and material interests in the continuous development of weaponry and warfare, so as to keep up their profitable businesses and upscale lifestyles. Likewise, what should be joyous and graceful bodily appetites and sensations, have become associated to images of filth, brutality, and humiliation. Their “celebration” is anything but an experience of rejoicing.

Within the nightmarish landscape of *Celebration* there is, however, an outsider who summons haunting ghostscapes from a distinct past. This intruder is an eccentric “young waiter” who frequently interrupts the guests’ conversations with long monologues—what he calls “interjections”—depicting implausible stories about his deceased grandfather. Pretending that he overheard the customers talk about T.S. Eliot (on his first interjection), or about the Austro-Hungarian Empire (on his second), or about the Hollywood studio system (on his third)—all of which are unlikely themes of conversation for such an ignorant lot—the waiter starts enumerating long lists of his grandfather’s acquaintances, describing the old man as an intimate of well-known Modernist writers, artists, and movie stars; as well as of major figures of twentieth-century political history.

WAITER. And he was gregarious. He loved the society of his fellows, W. B. Yeats, T. S. Eliot, Igor Stravinsky, Picasso, Ezra Pound, Bertolt Brecht, Don Bradman, the Beverley Sisters, the Inkspots, Franz Kafka, and the Three Stooges. He knew these people where they were isolated, where they were alone, where they fought against savage and pitiless
odds, where they suffered vast wounds to their bodies, their bellies, their legs, their trunks, their eyes, their throats, their breasts, their balls—

By citing long lists of dead artists, the waiter summons a ghostscape, a past atmosphere of bohemian and intellectual conviviality that strikingly contrasts with that of the restaurant’s guests. By merging these artists with unidentified victims of torture in his speech, he seems to denounce the customers’ contemptible indifference to the suffering and pain being inflicted in the outside world.

When the diners depart, and after “a fading chorus of ‘see you soons’ and ‘lovely to see yous’,” the waiter is left alone onstage for a prolonged silence. Peter Raby considers that the waiter’s last speech, alone onstage, is structurally reminiscent of Jimmy’s at the close of *Party Time*, since it offers a critique “on the whole satirical, edgy, entertaining ritual of state-of-the-art urban civilisation.”

WAITER. When I was a boy my grandfather used to take me to the edge of the cliffs and we’d look out to sea. He bought me a telescope. I don’t think they have telescopes anymore. I used to look through this telescope and sometimes I’d see a boat. The boat would grow bigger through the telescopic lens. Sometimes I’d see people on the boat. (. . .) The sea glistened. My grandfather introduced me to the mystery of life and I’m still in the middle of it. I can’t find the door to get out.

As Raby remarks, the images of this speech give rise to a violent change in tone in the play’s final seconds, reaching us “as though in a poem, translucent, self-contained, like a series of

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823 Pinter, *Celebration*, 61.
826 The image of this abandoned pathetic figure—who clings to a vanishing grandiose past as all others go out into the real world—strangely evokes that of the abandoned old serf Firs at the end of Chekhov’s *The Cherry Orchard*. Although Chekhov’s Firs is totally cut off from everything that surrounds him, and Pinter’s waiter is connected to both a cultural past and the natural world of his inner scapes, both leave us with a poignant feeling of the emotional human hollowness that has gone before in the play.
827 Peter Raby, “Tales of the city: some places and voices in Pinter’s plays,” 60.
828 Pinter, *Celebration*, 67.
pebbles dropped into the silence.” In my view, all of the Waiter’s interjections make him stand out among the homogeneity of the play’s remaining characters. In contrast to human beings who are unable to think of anything beyond themselves, and for whom anything transcending their current self-important worlds is ultimately useless, the Waiter inhabits a time in which present, past, and future are inseparable, and fosters an imaginative inner realm connected to the surrounding natural world.

As I have argued throughout this chapter, Pinter’s apocalyptic landscapes seem to be an outcome of human agency, at both micro- and macro-political levels. Katharine Worth observes that the architecture of Pinter’s spaces describes “an iconography of hell,” and I would like to add that his dramatic landscapes convey a human-made hell on earth. In this sense, Pinter’s apocalyptic landscapes seem provoked by the horrific imagery and experiences of the Holocaust. However, as Grimes observes, “Pinter is interested not only in the historical particularities of Nazi oppression but also in the repetition of persecution throughout all history.” Countering the normative notion of a progressive historical time, Pinter’s works adhere to a Symbolist concept of history, or to the idea of a cyclical historical time, such as the one expressed in Tadeusz Mięciński’s The Revolt of the Potemkin. This cyclical notion does not imply, by any means, a canceling out of human agency, or the impossibility of variation; rather, it draws attention to our individual responsibility in the making of history—since we owe to ourselves, and to those that have died in past holocausts, to recognize the repetition of oppressive patterns so as to avoid an occurrence of similar catastrophes.

Some critics consider that Pinter practices an extremely pessimistic or dystopian theatre, which prevents it from being politically effective; that his plays paradoxically support political

829 Peter Raby, “Tales of the city: some places and voices in Pinter’s plays,” 60.
831 Charles Grimes, Harold Pinter’s Politics, 39.
resistance but simultaneously demonstrate its futility; that he never entirely specifies his historical settings and epochs; and that even when his topics are explicitly political, his language remains poetic and ambiguous, and his dramatic strategy “as befuddling as ever.” I suggest that all of the above mentioned traits help confirm the Symbolist legacy of Pinter’s dramaturgy.

As Grimes states, “Pinter delineates his political issues as recurrent, even continuous throughout history.” Accordingly, _The Birthday Party_ not only evokes the daily persecution of people by the Gestapo during the Nazi regime (or by political police forces in other totalitarian regimes), but also past and contemporary restraint of individual liberties. _Mountain Language_ evidently protests against the infringement of freedom of expression, but also recalls past and contemporary “ethnic” persecution. As Pinter clarifies, it is not “a play about the Turks and the Kurds,” since in order to write such a drama he would “need a great deal of historical research.” As in Symbolist dramaturgy, space is deliberately unlocalized, and time is intentionally unspecified in Pinter’s theatre.

A Symbolist emphasis on the subjective inner realm is equally evident in Pinter’s apocalyptic landscapes, since they conflate social catastrophes with individual spiritual atrophy. Similarly to the Höckner photos, his plays show that there is a dangerous proximity between

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833 Charles Grimes, _Harold Pinter’s Politics_, 91.

834 In 2008, when _The Birthday Party_ was produced at the Lyric Hammersmith in London, 50 years after its opening, Pinter made the following comments: “two people knocking at the door of someone’s residence and terrorising them and taking them away has become more and more actual in our lives. It happens all the time. It’s happening more today than it did yesterday, and that may be a reason for the play’s long life. It’s not fantasy. It just becomes more and more real.” Cited in Michael Billington, “Fighting Talk,” _The Guardian_, May 3, 2008.

835 Pinter, cited in Mel Gussow, _Conversations with Pinter_, 68.
vicious cruelty and shallow “niceties;” or a short distance between horror and civility, to use Begley’s terms.

Like the Symbolists before him, Pinter is skeptical of “progress,” especially since the relentless technological development that our society has been experiencing is far from being ecologically sustainable and ethically answerable, in terms of animal, human, and earth rights. Accordingly, Pinter’s apocalyptic landscapes (like Kafka’s and Saramago’s) often suggest the presence of a machine-like surround that converts all figures and events into components or instances of its all-inclusive mechanism. Correspondingly, the space their imaginary characters inhabit is closed, airless, and human-saturated; there is no opening toward the vast outside, no longer any view of an extra-human natural world.836

Significantly, these catastrophic mechanistic traits of Pinter’s oeuvre are directly related to the Holocaust paradigm. Sanford Kwinter observes how the rise of the Nazi regime in Germany capitalized on the modern establishment of a massive juridical and administrative apparatus, or upon an unprecedented bureaucratic mechanism: “What emerged was the specific mode of atrocity made possible by the abstract regulation of individuals reduced to the status of “files.”837 Such a bureaucratic apparatus ensured the success of other mass factories of death, such as the Soviet Gulags.838 In Kafka’s early-twentieth-century fiction, we perceive this emerging megamachine through the way it structures objects, relations, and spaces. Pinter’s

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836 The spaces in Kafka’s fiction are usually asphyxiating. In The Trial, for instance, when K. asks if it is possible to open the window, he is informed that “It’s just a pane of glass set in the wall; it can’t be opened” (155). Windows seldom open, and when they do, they only let in dust, soot, smoke, or a dense fog. Franz Kafka, The Trial, translated by Breon Mitchell (New York: Schocken Books, 1998).


838 I suggest that Pinter’s plays also allude to communist totalitarian oppression, i.e., that in a Symbolist manner they likely hint at factories of torture and death other than the Nazi. Critics generally consider that Pinter’s “political plays” do not refer to Communist (secular) totalitarianism because his torturers are typically portrayed as religious fanatics. A few, however, argue that The Hothouse (1958) alludes to how dissidents were dealt with in Soviet mental hospitals. See Michael Billington, The Life and Work of Harold Pinter, 105; and Rosette C. Lamont, “Harold Pinter’s The Hothouse: A Parable of the Holocaust,” 41.
apocalyptic dramas of the mid- and late twentieth-century depict a world in which the individual has finally been reduced to a thing.

The mechanical mindset of Pinter’s oppressive and oppressed bodies is particularly manifest in their sensory experience of sexual relations and emotional bonds, an aspect that I will explore at length in Chapter Five. In Symbolist sensory terms, Pinter’s plays reveal that there are deep correspondences between microcosms and macrocosms, that private and political oppression are inevitably combined.
Chapter Five

Unsustainable Homescapes

I’m afraid society is a pattern which does kill and crab and confine, and that at the same time the individuals who make the society do the same for themselves by conforming to their own habits continually day after day and year after year.  

Harold Pinter

Etymologically, “ecology” stems from the Greek word *oikos*, which stands for household or dwelling. Such a linkage, between a living being’s intimate domestic space and a branch of study generally associated to the earthly environment on a vast scale, may provide important insights towards an ecocentric ethics. In Symbolist ecocritical terms, it suggests that sustainable, diverse, and well-balanced systems of relationships between living beings and their environments must be sought not only at the macrocosmic level (e.g., between humans and their enveloping earth or *Gaia*), but also at the microcosmic level of interaction between related individuals within their dwelling space or *home*.

Gaston Bachelard considers that one’s dwelling or *home* is a space that protects, connects, and is invested with imagination; it is a *felicitous* environment, where relationships among living beings and things are reciprocal and affective, not merely functional or useful.  

Geographer Yi-Fu Tuan similarly describes home as an *affectionate* space when he writes that “it is that special place to which one withdraws and from which one ventures forth.” Feminist critic Kerstin Shands argues that home is a created world that mirrors the human body, or our

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most inner dwelling space, and may be a place/territory of individual empowerment and liberation.842

Homecoming is a recurrent trope in Pinter’s theatre, but home is neither a haven nor a felicitous space in his plays. It is a strained space, as anxious as the outside environment which it seemingly reflects. Instead of being protective, family homes in Pinter are hostile spaces, haunted by ghosts, and smacking of aggression, secrecy, and control.

According to Una Chaudhuri, the privileged setting of modern drama is “the family home,” as manifest in the works of Henrik Ibsen, Anton Chekhov, Arthur Miller, Harold Pinter, Caryl Churchill, Sam Shepard, and David Mamet, among others.843 Already with Poe’s story, “The Fall of the House of Usher,” home is a site of identity but also of compulsion, involving a denial of difference.844 In Ibsen, home is “both the condition for and the obstacle to” a psychological coherence of the characters.845 In Chekhov, there is a permanent sense of displacement, since the characters feel homesick while at home.846 Around the mid-twentieth-century, Chaudhuri argues, home becomes a bizarre, confined, and menacing territory: “The junkyards of Pinter and Mamet, as well as the denuded stages and ash cans of Beckett, participate in a negative theater ecology that pervades the theater of this century.”847 If Chekhov is writing at the brink of a shift in man’s attitude towards nature, in Pinter this shift seems finally complete, given that his homes are “hermatically sealed off from nature.”848 In his dramas, as well as in those of Shepard and Maria Irene Fornes, there is no possible recuperation either of

844 Ibid., 7-8.
845 Ibid., 8.
846 Ibid., 11.
847 Ibid., 81. My emphasis.
848 Ibid., 94.
home or of nature. While I agree with Chaudhuri’s account of modern theatre’s geopathology, I suggest that Pinter’s dystopian treatment of home strikingly resembles that of proto-Symbolist and Symbolist artworks, in both micropolitical and aesthetic terms, and is therefore different from the one expressed by his contemporaries (e.g., Mamet, Shepard, and Fornes).

Elin Diamond observes how Western drama has thrived on the family ever since ancient Greek tragedy, but that in twentieth-century English drama before 1956, the family was, with remarkably few exceptions, conventional and well-behaved. Significantly, one such exception is *Family Reunion* by T. S. Eliot (1939), a verse drama where home is haunted by ghosts of past familial crimes, by an author who happened to be a proponent of Symbolist poetry. Outside of England, likewise, negative dramatic homescapes became particularly noticeable at the end of the nineteenth century, in the proto-Symbolist dramas of Anton Chekhov, Henrik Ibsen, and August Strindberg, as well as in Symbolist plays by writers such as Madame Rachilde.

For the Symbolists, as chiefly apparent in their poetry and paintings, “The world of the home, of domesticity and the hearth, is first and foremost the world of the interior, of the

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849 Ibid., 119.
850 As I mentioned in Chapter One, Chaudhuri coined the term geopathology to refer to the “sense of ill-placement” that defines every character and relationship in modern drama.
852 Inspired by the myth of Orestes, *Family Reunion* (1939) depicts the homecoming, after seven years of absence, of Harry (Orestes) to his family estate, suggestively named “Wishwood.” Through a profusion of genres and techniques—shifting from metatheatrical to dramatic, from tragic to comic, from solemn to ironic—the play makes us experience juxtaposing currents of feeling of various individuals within a large family gathering. Gradually we realize that beneath the apparently harmless social chatter at Wishwood there is a family past filled with guilty relations and probable crimes, and a sordid conspiracy of the adult world against the wilderness of childhood, or free life. By refusing to be master of Wishwood, Harry abruptly ends the family cycle of human violence and spiritual emptiness. At the end of the play, the walls of the Wishwood house are finally “let to crumble,” and the clock in the dark finally stops. The play is a striking example of Eliot’s theatre of ideas on human existence, which were partly inspired by the concepts of English philosopher Francis Herbert Bradley (1846-1924). According to Bradley/Eliot, individuals have a double existence, experiencing at a surface level the “reality” of concrete events, and at another hidden level inexplicable emotions and perceptions, of which they are normally unaware. At this hidden level of the self, there are moments of “knowledge” through “immediate experience” of ideas and feelings that may be introspectively observed. These moments of deep perception direct the self toward knowledge and the absolute, and are thus far more valuable than the “factual” experience of events in ordinary time. See T. S. Eliot, *Knowledge and Experience in the philosophy of F.H. Bradley* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989).
Innenwelt, of quiet repose and inwardness.” Consequently, whenever a family or conjugal home is not committed to an ethics of care, the inner life of its inhabitants becomes severely threatened; interior space ceases to be a refuge, to become instead a site of confinement and entrapment. A Symbolist treatment of home, therefore, seems concerned not only with the ethical dimension of individuals, but also with the ecology of their relationships within a commonly shared space. It presupposes a combined ecology, both existential and environmental.

In this chapter I explore how Pinter’s homescapes—in plays such as A Night Out (1959), The Lover (1962), Tea Party (1964), The Homecoming (1964), Family Voices (1980), and Moonlight (1993)—partake of similar ethical and ecological concerns. Not only is there in Pinter’s homescapes a Symbolist revelation of the negative effects of a patriarchal system of moral values upon family and conjugal life, but the playwright utilizes devices or techniques of defamiliarization that are related to the Symbolists’ own.

I suggest that homes in Pinter are suffocating environments above all because there is no ecological diversity. The dwelling’s dynamics is patriarchal, or subject to the morality of the male norm, and therefore prevents sustainability in its male-female interactions, as well as in its relationships between parents and children. In This Sex which is not One (1977), Luce Irigaray argues that our sexual economy is deeply rooted in a monosexual culture in which the masculine is the norm. This economy constructs femininity as something invisible, mysterious, and unknowable. Within it, women do no exist as women but only as mothers. Woman is a “natural” other, and even when she is culturally assimilated as (hu)man, attaining equal rights in parity with men within a patriarchal system, she is assimilated as the same through castration.

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becoming “a man minus the possibility of (re)presenting oneself as a man.”

Irigaray argues that women’s emancipation should not entail a struggle for sameness (in which women speak as lesser men), but rather affirm an ethics of sexual difference, within an acknowledgment of the male and female principles in nature so as to make them coexist instead of subsuming one under the other.

The natural, aside from the diversity of its incarnations or ways of appearing, is at least two: male and female. This division is not secondary nor unique to humankind. It cuts across all realms of the living which, without it, would not exist. Without sexual difference, there would be no life on earth. It is the manifestation of and the condition for the production and reproduction of life.

If we consider nature as something other than (or opposed to) human culture, Pinter’s plays may seem substantially “sealed off” from nature, as Chaudhuri claims. Within a non-dualistic concept of culture/nature, however, Pinter’s homescapes unfold a utilitarian/serviceable world where not only animals but also feminine human beings are manipulated and put to use as commodities. Home is a suffocating and non-affectionate space in Pinter’s plays, but how could it be otherwise? As Irigaray argues, any social structure built on the negation of nature, or upon a denial of sexual difference, is thereby devoid of alterity to the masculine norm, and inevitably becomes monological and authoritarian.

The most notable example of Pinter’s treatment of home is evident in The Homecoming (1964), a play that depicts the interior of an all-male family household as an extremely

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855 As Ann Hall states, “For both Freud and Lacan, the female subject is different from the male, but as history has demonstrated (…) this difference is often the means by which patriarchy justifies its oppression of women” (7). Ann Hall, introduction to “A Kind of Alaska:” *Women in the plays of O’Neill, Pinter, and Shepard* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1993). In Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalytical theory, female difference is measured with reference to the male norm, starting with the postulate that woman is “castrated” because she physiologically lacks a penis.  
857 *The Homecoming* (1964) begins in a family living room with a man, Lenny, checking the horse-racing pages of a newspaper, when his father Max enters and asks: “What have you done with the scissors?” As critics have pointed
troubled place. In both his stage directions and dialogue, Pinter lets us know that the “rear wall” of the living room was knocked down years ago, after the mother (or sole woman in the family) died. The resulting large open area of the living room resembles a boxing ring where five men—three brothers, a father, and an uncle—dispute their virility. Additionally, in Symbolist sensory terms, this *homescape* is that of a sinister and ambivalent butcher shop, where five male domestic animals lust after a female one, and five butchers routinely slash one another using “the chopper and the slab.”

*The Homecoming* is infused with sensory images of butchery. Max, the patriarch, is a former butcher, and heir to a family of “number one butchers,” with “continental connections” to other “top-class groups of butchers.” He was trained by his father in the trade while still a child: “I learned to carve a carcass at his knee. I commemorated his name in blood. I gave birth to three young men! All on my own bat.”

Although his three sons have not followed their father into the family business, their occupations (as Raymond Armstrong observes) are linked to carnage in a sublimated way. Joey is a part-time demolition man training to be a boxer, who

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As Max expresses in Act Two: “I worked as a butcher all my life, using the chopper and the slab, the slab, you know what I mean, the chopper and the slab!” (47). Harold Pinter, *The Homecoming* (London & Boston: Faber & Faber, 1991).


Ibid., 46.

Ibid., 40.

Raymond Armstrong, *Kafka and Pinter Shadow-Boxing: The Struggle Between Father and Son* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1999), 44. Armstrong’s thesis associates the incidence of butchery in both Pinter’s and Kafka’s works to their common Jewish origin. Butchery is associated to the Old Testament God: “For what indeed was the Aaronic priesthood, but a patrilineal order of butchers consecrated to serve in the Tabernacle of the Lord?” (49). As a result, both Pinter and Kafka portray violent father-son relationships within a critique of Judaic law and religion. According to Armstrong, the Jewishness of Pinter’s *The Homecoming* is underscored by the fact that the names of the characters either derive from the Hebrew Bible (Joey, Ruth, Sam), or are traditionally popular among Western Jews (Max, Lenny, Teddy) (46). Baker and Tabachnick seemingly agree with Armstrong when they view the play as a “reaction to the claustrophobic closeness of the Jewish family in particular” (119). Peter Hall, on the other hand, counters such reading of the play: “to say that *The Homecoming* is about a Jewish family is already wrong. It isn’t. And we went out of our way [in the play’s first production] to make sure that they were not ‘Jewish’ actors” (15).
carries the lust for blood into the square ring; Teddy, the scholar, instead of cutting up the bodies of dead animals, dissect human existence in his critical works; and Lenny runs a network of prostitution, setting up his stalls of women both in “a number of flats” in Soho, and in the most seedy streets of London.863

Within the butcherly landscape of The Homecoming, there is (as Armstrong notes) an “incessant, emphatic, almost incantatory use of the word ‘blood’ and of its derivatives—‘bloody’ and ‘bleeding.’”864 Further, all the humans in the play are likened to animals. Max is a predator, who made his “way into the world” by “going all over the country to find meat.”865 He “gave birth” to three bastard sons, and is presently the family cook: “a dog cook . . . cooking for a lot of dogs.”866 His sons and brother (Sam) are “bloody animals” who walk in the house every time of the day and night, expecting to be fed and watered.867 Lenny and Joey, similar to their dead mother, are “bitches;” Teddy is a “lousy stinkpig;” the older and decaying Sam is a “grub,” a “maggot.”868 Early in the play, Max boasts of having “an instinctive understanding of animals,” particularly of racing horses and fillies:

MAX. I always had the smell of a good horse. I could smell him. And not only the colts but the fillies. Because the fillies are more highly strung than the colts, they’re more unreliable, did you know that? . . . But I was always able to tell a good filly by one particular trick. I’d look her in the eye. You see? I’d stand in front of her and look her straight in the eye, it was a kind of hypnotism, and by the look deep down in her eye I could tell whether she was a stayer or not.869

863 See Pinter, The Homecoming, 72-78.
865 Pinter, The Homecoming, 46.
866 Ibid., 11.
867 Ibid., 16.
868 Ibid., 18-19.
869 Ibid., 10.
As Dukore remarks, by the end of the play Max decides that his daughter-in-law Ruth is a “stayer” filly, through a similar process.\textsuperscript{870}

There are numerous references in \textit{The Homecoming} to foul smells, dirtiness, as well as to diseased and festering matter. Feeling the “bile” come up to his mouth, Max describes the family’s successive generations as “One mess after the other. (…) One cast-iron bunch of crap after another. One flow of stinking pus after another.”\textsuperscript{871} Contrary to the redemptive image of familial “love” offered in conventional family dramas, Pinter exposes patri-filial corporeal relations as perverse and abusive. Lenny calls his father “sexless,” and perhaps for reasons of sexual impotency the latter always carries a stick with him. A sign of authority, the stick serves to beat up his sons, although they are fully grown-up men in their mid-twenties and thirties. Far from being developed human beings, however, Lenny and Joey display infantile ignorant minds grotesquely trapped inside mature bodies.

\textbf{LENNY.} Oh, Daddy, you’re not going to use your stick on me, are you? Eh? Don’t use your stick on me Daddy. . . . Don’t clout me with that stick, Dad.\textsuperscript{872}

While uncle Sam is considered a “bugger” who “doesn’t know his gearbox from his arse,”\textsuperscript{873} father Max is a “sod”\textsuperscript{874} who tenderly remembers “what fun” he had when he gave his “boys” a bath,\textsuperscript{875} or when he tucked them tightly in their beds at night.

\textbf{MAX:} Stop calling me Dad. Just stop all that calling me Dad, do you understand? \textbf{LENNY:} But I’m your son. You used to tuck me up in bed every night. He tucked you up, too, didn’t he, Joey? \textit{(Pause.)} He used to like tucking up his sons. (…) \textbf{MAX:} I’ll give you a proper tuck up one of these nights, son. You mark my word.\textsuperscript{876}

\textsuperscript{871}Pinter, \textit{The Homecoming}, 19, 47.
\textsuperscript{872}Ibid., 11.
\textsuperscript{873}Ibid., 47.
\textsuperscript{874}Ibid., 9.
\textsuperscript{875}Ibid., 46.
\textsuperscript{876}Ibid., 17.
The central idea-image of family that Pinter conveys in *The Homecoming* is one of butchery. Images of flesh are particularly foregrounded, as if all human bodies were usable and disposable like carcasses. At some point in the play, the patriarch Max threatens to “chop” his son’s “spine off,” making him “drown in [his] own blood.” Thus, what seems to unite this human unit of blood-relatives are but bloody actions and thoughts. *Home* is exposed as a site of violence, abuse, and bestialization. This negative image of familial relationships is not unlike the one found in proto-Symbolist dramas by Ibsen, Chekhov, and Strindberg. In Chekhov’s *The Seagull* (1898), the interactions between progenitors and their offspring is essentially destructive, and the older generation (Arkadina, Trigorin, Shamrayev) thwarts the youngest one (Nina, Treplev, and Masha) both artistically and emotionally. Strindberg’s critique of the family institution is more corrosive, especially in his post-*Inferno* plays. In the short mystery drama *Coram Populo!* (1898), the good hero, Lucifer, brings about a flood to deliver humans from the misery of procreation. In *The Pelican* (1907), a play set in a domestic interior, a final incendiary blaze consumes the whole household, together with all the members of the family. Unlike the pelican of the play’s title (who is said to peck its own breast so as to nourish its offspring) the widowed mother of the family is a vampiric creature who consistently starves her own children, by eating “all the meat and sauce” and only feeding them “watered milk.”

In Pinter, home as a site of confinement and bestiality is evoked in strikingly sensory terms. By bestiality, I do not mean that the men in the play are portrayed or behave “like animals,” as in standard anthropocentric criticism. In this respect it should be noted that the

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877 Ibid., 9.
878 Ibid., 36.
humans in *The Homecoming* are likened to exploited and brutalized animals, that the play’s animal imagery typically refers to livestock, or to tamed and imprisoned living beings. Through this “domestic animal” imagery, the play brings to light the anthropocentric cultural context and patriarchal worldview of its characters. Such an anthropocentric perspective envisions the inhuman free world as brutish so as to justify its own dehumanizing treatment of it; when in effect it is its ethos of enslavement, confinement, and deprivation that brings about bestial belligerence among its own species. As playwright Edward Bond reasons, there is a great contrast between the aggressiveness of the free animal and the unnatural violence of the caged one; the latter’s vicious and panicky brutality resembles that of the socialized human race.  

The insinuation that fathers and uncles sodomize children in *The Homecoming* is strikingly indicative of the patriarchal system of values that pervades the play’s landscape. For the men in the family, the two sole women of their world—their deceased mother/spouse (Bessie), and Teddy’s wife (Ruth)—are routinely described as dangerous whores or syphilitic seductresses. More precisely, the imagery ascribed by men to these two women oscillates between one of utmost pureness (when they are respected as mothers), and one of utter slovenliness (when they are viewed as sexually active beings, hence whores).

MAX. Who’s this?  
TEDDY. I was just going to introduce you.  
MAX. Who asked you to bring tarts in here?  
TEDDY. Tarts?  
MAX. Who asked you to bring dirty tarts into this house?  
TEDDY. Listen, don’t be silly—  
MAX. You been here all night?  
TEDDY. Yes, we arrived from Venice—  
MAX. We’ve had a smelly scrubber in my house all night. We’ve had a stinking pox-ridden slut in my house all night.  
TEDDY. Stop it! What are you talking about?  
MAX. I haven’t seen the bitch for six years, he comes home without a word, he brings a filthy scrubber off the street, he shacks up in my house!

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TEDDY. She’s my wife! We’re married!

Pause.

MAX. I’ve never had a whore under this roof before. Ever since your mother died. My word of honour. (To JOEY.) Have you ever had a whore here? Has Lenny ever had a whore here? They come back from America, they bring the slopbucket with them. They bring the bedpan with them. (To TEDDY.) Take that disease away from me. Get her away from me.  

Elsewhere in the play, when she is remembered as a *mother*, Bessie is described as the family’s “backbone,” a woman “with a will of iron, a heart of gold and a mind.” Likewise, Ruth the *mother* is viewed as “an intelligent and sympathetic woman.”

As in Pinter’s *Celebration*, vicious images of food, blood, and sex are conjoined in *The Homecoming*. All the members of this household, bonded by blood, seem constantly hungry for, or else overfed with, meat—in its obvious connotations with the sexual act. Like meat, women are a common good, to be shared among the family males. In Act I, Max suggests that Sam find “the right girl” and bring his bride to live in the house, so as to serve the entire family: “she can keep us all happy. We’d take it in turns to give her a walk round the park.” As both father and sons express at different times in the play, a nice “feminine girl” should not be a “tease,” but rather be “wide open” and “go the whole hog” so as to deliver the “gravy.”

Halfway through Act Two, referring to Ruth, Max finds that “it’s not a bad idea to have a woman in the house . . . Maybe we should keep her.” When he first meets Ruth, Lenny tells her two stories that operate like “plays within the play,” as Dukore remarks. The first account refers to a “lady” who approached Lenny in the docks, making him “a certain proposal.” Seeing that “she was falling apart with pox,” becoming “insistent,” and “taking liberties” with him, he

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882 Pinter, *The Homecoming*, 41-42.
883 Ibid., 46.
884 Ibid., 51.
885 Ibid., 15.
886 Ibid., 66-69.
887 Ibid., 69.
“clumped her one,” then “another belt in the nose and a couple of turns of the boot.”889 The second story is of an old lady who asked Lenny to help her remove an iron mangle which “must have weighed half a ton;” suddenly irate with the prospect of “risking a rupture,” he decided “to give her a workover there and then.”890 There is yet a third story, told by Lenny and Joey late in the play, of two girls they accost in a parked car:

JOEY. We took them over a bombed site.
LENNY. Rubble. In the rubble.
JOEY. Yes, plenty of rubble. (Pause.) Well . . . you know . . . then we had them.
LENNY. You’ve missed out the best bit. He’s missed out the best bit!
JOEY. What bit?
LENNY. (To TEDDY) His bird says to him, I don’t mind, she says, but I’ve got to have some protection. I’ve got to have some contraceptive protection. I haven’t got any contraceptive protection, old Joey says to her. In that case I won’t do it, she says. Yes you will, says Joey, never mind about the contraceptive protection. (LENNY laughs.) Even my bird laughed when she heard that. Yes, even she gave out a bit of a laugh.891

Men’s mindscapes in *The Homecoming* are unequivocally misogynous. They express a fixated desire to sexually dominate and viciously destroy the woman figure, while envisaging female natural functions (and organic bodily interiors) as filthy and repulsive. Affection is something brotherly, patri-filial, homosocial; women are a natural enemy, a hated (even if useful) other. This portrayal of women evidently relates to a Cartesian mechanical worldview (already mentioned in previous chapters) that regards women as physiologically closer to chaotic nature and therefore less perfect than godlike men. In the renowned words of Sigmund Freud—whose theories on female sexuality are even now widely accepted—“the sexual life of adult women is a dark continent.”892 As a dark continent, the woman’s body becomes a source of both wonder and distress. Patriarchal morality—which is reproduced and “naturalized” by the family

890 Ibid., 33.
891 Ibid., 67-68.
892 Sigmund Freud, *The Question of Lay Analysis, Standard Edition* (1926), trans. James Stratchey (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1990), 38. Freud’s passage continues as follows: “But we have learnt that girls feel deeply their lack of a sexual organ that is equal in value to the male one; they regard themselves on that account as inferior, and this envy for the penis is the origin of a whole number of characteristic feminine reactions” (38).
institution—envisages sexual desire/agency in women either as something dirty and offensive (whore), or else as a necessary consequence of her reproductive nature (wife-mother); while for men it is always a vital and empowering pursuit. Consequently, women are represented either as hideously sexed (lovers, whores, *femmes fatales*), or as immaculately sexless (virgin brides, mothers).

This dualistic image of women—as pure, passive, asexual; or else dangerously active sexual beings—is especially apparent in many fin-de-siècle Symbolist paintings. Two remarkable examples of the *femme fatale* trope are Jean Delville’s *Idol of Perversity* (1891), which emphasizes the dangerous seduction of the woman’s nude body through a languorous serpent clasped to her forehead, neck, and breast; and Franz von Stuck’s *The Sin* (1893), in which the attractive paleness of a naked female is surrounded by such darkness that it almost (but not quite) obscures her conniving facial expression. Depictions of active sexual desire in a woman (such as in the *femme fatale* trope) are often viewed as misogynist, since they apparently re-inscribe the typical prejudices and apprehensions of a sexist patriarchal morality. Conversely, they may be viewed as liberating, since they depict female sexual desire as a creative force, and disrupting power of the patriarchal moral norm. Within an ecocentric ethics, for example, the association of woman with nature—which is usually considered misogynist— may not only be revealing of how patriarchal culture has been disrespectful of both femininity and earthly nature, but can also become strategically empowering. For the Symbolists, as Patricia Mathews notes, earthly nature allied to femininity enjoyed a privileged position, as opposed to the heroic, objective, and rationalist masculinity that dominated fin-de-siècle bourgeois culture. In effect, Symbolists exalted all the talents deemed by Darwin as “inferior”—i.e., characteristic of women and of the lower races, and “therefore of a past and lower state of civilisation” (*The Descent of
—such as intuition, perception, hypersensitivity, and emotionalism. Whether the image of woman as a “innate” *femme fatale* may be seen as misogynist depends, therefore, on the sexual ethics evoked by the artwork, and as well as on that of its beholders.

Similarly to the oversexed women of the Symbolist imaginary, Ruth intimidates and threatens all her male in-laws by exhibiting her disturbing sexual attributes. Claiming to have been “a model for the body,” Ruth abruptly interrupts an all-male conversation where the men are discussing the implications of what “a table” really is, “philosophically speaking:"

RUTH. Don’t be too sure though. You’ve forgotten something. Look at me. I . . . move my leg. That’s all it is. But I wear . . . underwear . . . which moves with me . . . it captures your attention. Perhaps you misinterpret. The action is simple. It’s a leg . . . moving. My lips move. Why don’t you restrict . . . your observations to that? Perhaps the fact that they move is more significant . . . than the words which come through them. You must bear that . . . possibility . . . in mind.

Ruth disrupts a “didactic” conversation between men, which comically calls to mind Plato’s debate of ideal vs. real forms, to draw attention to her dangerous and “actually existing” sexual body; from this moment on (and after the prolonged silence that ensues) she completely alters the development of the play’s action.

Near the end of *The Homecoming*, just after Teddy has packed the couple’s luggage and expects to leave with his wife Ruth to return to America, the latter starts dancing with, and kissing, one of her brothers-in-law (Lenny); then she embraces and kisses the other (Joey). After the ensuing blackout we learn that Ruth and Joey went to a room upstairs, and were involved in a pleasurable “love play” for “two bleeding hours.” When Ruth finally comes down, she is invited to stay in the “bosom” of the family home for “a little while longer,” as “a kind of guest.”

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894 Pinter, *The Homecoming*, 57.
895 Ibid., 52-53.
896 Ibid., 58-62.
The family’s proposal is to keep her at home for (sexual and motherly) services, while putting her on Lenny’s prostitution “game” so that “she can earn the money herself - on her back.” Pinter considers that Ruth “is the nearest to a free woman that [he has] ever written—a free and independent mind.” How can this be? How can a woman who agrees to serve as a prostitute in an apartment in London, while granting “services” at home, as lover and mother, be considered a “free” or “independent” being?

“She’ll make us all animals,” cries Max halfway through the play. And indeed, Ruth manages to conquer the men in the house by making them adopt submissive psychic roles and physical postures. Upstairs in bed with Joey she refuses sexual penetration. In her first battle for dominance with Lenny, she treats him condescendingly, refusing to give him a glass of water unless he sits on her lap or else lies on the floor with his mouth open. By the end of the play, after Teddy leaves for the airport, she has all the men in the house dependent on her. This is highlighted by the final image of the play, which shows Ruth enthroned in the patriarch’s (Max) chair, with all the men grouped around her: Sam lying comatose on the floor, Joey on his knees with his head on her lap, and Max crawling towards her, stammering and groaning, while Lenny stands at a distance, watching. Not surprisingly, Max expresses anxiety over Ruth’s sinister female power in the play’s final lines: “she’ll do the dirty on us . . . She’ll use us, she’ll make use of us, I can tell you! I can smell it!”

Paradoxically, even though Ruth has made a deal to sell

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897 Ibid., 72.
898 Ibid., 77.
900 Pinter, *The Homecoming*, 68.
901 Ibid., 81.
her body, once she terminates her marital contract with Teddy she gains not only unprecedented power within the patriarchal family unit, but also autonomy of the self.

Pinter’s portrayal of Ruth’s empowerment through an affirmation of her feminine sexual attributes—after all, she cunningly takes on the role of the whore, the patriarchal impersonation of desire—strikingly relates to the strategy of “mimicry” advocated by philosopher Luce Irigaray. In order to destroy the patriarchal mechanism that constitutes women as objects and commodities, Irigaray proposes that women, in an initial phase, assume the feminine roles of the masculine logic deliberately and visibly, so as to convert a form of subordination into an affirmation, and thereby to transform such roles. In order to undermine the patriarchal apparatus that produces these roles, however, a woman must be able to recognize them as representations and subject positions.902

Guy Cogeval claims that “few movements approached sexual themes as freely as Symbolism,” and that Symbolist artworks dealing with sexual themes were often masochistic and “imbued with an imagination of conflict.”903 Cogeval explicitly refers to a masochism directly based on Leopold von Sacher-Masoch’s feminine-revenge scenarios—expressed in such novels as The Black Czarina (1866) and Venus in Furs (1870)904—where tempting women become the cause of men’s psycho-sexual suffering, eventually bringing about their destruction.905 Such masochism is evident not only in Decadent/Symbolist drama (e.g., Oscar

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902 Luce Irigaray, This Sex which is not One, trans. Catherine Porter and Carolyn Burke (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985), 76.
904 Leopold von Sacher-Masoch, Die schwarze Zarin, 1866. A French translation is available as La Czarine noire et autres contes sur la flagellation, trans. D. Dolorès (Paris: Charles Carrington, 1907). To my knowledge, Die schwarze Zarin has not yet been translated in English; I consider it a finer example of a Masochian heroine than the better known Venus in Furs (Venus im Pelz).
905 As Gilles Deleuze explains in his essay “Coldness and Cruelty” (“Le Froid et le Cruel”), Masochian masochism, as exposed in Masoch’s fiction, strikingly differs from the sexual pathology coined with his surname by Dr. Richard von Krafft-Ebing in Psychopathia Sexualis (1926). Ebing defines “masochism” as a perversion affecting individuals
Wilde’s *Salome*), but especially in paintings. One example is Munch’s *Vampire* (1893-4), which was to be called “Love and Pain”; but Stanisław PrzyBSDewski, the artist’s friend, suggested its definitive title. According to Cogeval, “‘Vampire’ was more attuned to the two men’s masochistic pessimism. What at first was ‘simply a woman kissing a man on the nape of the neck’ became the witnessing of a man’s destruction, a sign of ‘an immeasurable fatality of resignation.’” The feminine as a symbol of energy and danger is also evident in Franz von Stuck’s *The Kiss of the Sphinx* (1895), in which the female statue seems to be literally consuming her willing male victim through a kiss. In Masoch’s, Stuck’s, and Munch’s artworks, the man seems resigned to the satanic power of the woman—perhaps due to a newly emerged consciousness of his complicity in a long-established misogyny?

In my view, Pinter’s images of Ruth’s sexual domination through *The Homecoming*, especially manifest in its arresting finale, markedly call to mind those of the women in Masoch’s Decadent tales. With his fictional works (which he wanted to assemble in a large volume under the general title of *The Heritage of Cain*), Masoch intended to recuperate the primeval matriarchal forces in human civilization through a violent symmetrical inversion of the long-established sexual roles. Consequently, his typical heroines seek to destroy father figures, incapable of a “normal” sexual life, and who as a result seek to be unconditionally subject to the will of a person of the opposite sex. Ebbing found such anomalies of sexual feeling not only in Sacher-Masoch’s novels, but also in the works of Baudelaire, in Zola’s *Nana* and *Eugène Rougon*, in Thomas Otway’s *Venice Preserved*, in Russian novels and folklore, and in old-Indian literature. See Gilles Deleuze & Leopold von Sacher-Masoch, *Masochism: Coldness and Cruelty & Venus in Furs* (New York: Zone Books, 1991).

906 Oscar Wilde’s *Salome* (1894) depicts a rebellious virgin’s physical desire for an inaccessible virile man (Iokanaan) who constantly repels her in the name of a higher authority: that of his “Lord God.” In response to her barbaric but sweet pledges for contact, he repeatedly repels her “harlot” desire; subsequently, Salome transforms her erotic love into deadly hate. Salome’s dance pleases the Tetrarch but overturns the rules of his game. Her request of Iokanaan’s body is highly disruptive of Herod’s patriarchal order in political terms. Perhaps for this reason she is condemned to death.


908 As Deleuze explains in “Coldness and Cruelty,” Masoch’s *The Heritage of Cain* was conceived as “a ‘universal’ work, the natural history of humanity in a cycle of stories with six main themes: love, property, money, the State, war and death. Each of these forces was to be restored to its cruel physical immediacy; under the sign of Cain, in the mirror of Cain, he was to show how monarchs, generals and diplomats deserved to be thrown in jail and executed along with murderers” (33).
annihilate their own motherly instincts, and coldly inflict pain on men who passionately obey and suffer. Similarly to Ruth, the women in Masoch’s fiction accomplish this retribution against patriarchal morality by emphasizing their feminine physical qualities, and using their disturbing sexual power; further, they also coldly negotiate their “professional” positions and services in the male world. Anticipating Irigaray’s micropolitical strategies, Masoch attempted a productive essentialism of the “feminine,” one that also served feminist ends. In ecocritical terms, the feminine empowerment proposed by both Masoch and Irigaray appropriates the patriarchal association of women with dangerous and disorderly nature, in order to affirm it in a radically different and more fruitful way.

The symbolic sexual implications of Pinter’s *The Homecoming* have been differently explored by critics. Martin Esslin considers that Max and Teddy are aspects of the father figure (Max representing the ridiculous aspects of senile old-age, and Teddy “the superior intellectual claims of the father”); and that Ruth is a duplicate of the mother. Consequently, “On the level of fantasy and wish-fulfillment, *The Homecoming* seems . . . to represent the sons’ dream of the sexual conquest of the mother and the discomfiture of the father.”  

Alice Rayner also interprets the play *symbolically*, but from the female character’s perspective: “In a mythic interpretation, Ruth, often seen as the archetypal wife-whore-mother, returns ‘home.’ The action of the play traces her transition between her married life with Teddy to her ‘essential’ life as she restores the original condition of the family and asserts her power as female.” According to Rayner, Ruth brings into the household “the female body” which “is not only the object of male desire but the

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source of the men themselves, the site of the womb/room that refuses signification but is the home of all potential signs.”

A potentially Symbolist (rather than symbolic) interpretation of the play emerges upon reading its entire action as a monodrama taking place in Ruth’s mind. Ruth seems estranged from her husband from the very start of the play, reluctant to stay or even sit down in his family’s living room. However, he insists that she should meet his family, as if anxious to reveal an obscured past, or disclose his most inner soul: “I was born here, do you realize that?” She resists this idea, wishing to return to her own family in the States (i.e., receding to a state of innocence and ignorance) or else take a “breath of fresh air.” Teddy is strangely excited to find that his “room’s still there,” that his “bed’s still there,” and that “they’re all still” there, “all snoring up there” —his father, uncle, and brothers, who appear to be his male doubles. When she finally understands Teddy’s “soul,” by the end of the play, Ruth decides to leave him. The play could be seen as Ruth’s homeward journey into her husband’s inner scapes.

A “civilized” and highly learned man, Teddy seems to stand out among the ignorant and brutish male members of his family; ethically, however, he is probably the worst of them all, “the biggest bastard in a house full of bastards.” Postlewait provides an insightful analysis of Teddy when he compares him to Torvald (Nora’s husband in Ibsen’s A Doll’s House) and states that he is prepared to sacrifice anything—including his wife—in order to avoid the appearance or the acknowledgment of defeat: “His identity is maintained by distancing himself not only from

911 Ibid., 493.
912 Pinter, The Homecoming, 20-21.
913 Ibid., 22.
914 Ibid., 21.
915 These are the words Peter Hall uses to describe Teddy upon directing the first production of the play in England. Peter Hall, “Directing Pinter: Interview by Catherine Itzin & Simon Trussler,” Theatre Quarterly 4 (1974-75): 19.
others but also from his own emotions.”

Committed to a philosophical perspective that “operates on things and not in things,” Teddy has become the embodiment of his objectivizing theory, an enemy of inner being, of subjective feelings, of the dark life of the self. He lives in (and longs to return to) “clean” America. He is an “object” but above all an “observer,” he will not be caught “being.”

TEDDY. To see, to be able to see! I’m the one who can see. That’s why I can write my critical works. Might do you good . . . have a look at them . . . see how certain people can view . . . things . . . how certain people maintain . . . intellectual equilibrium. Intellectual equilibrium. You’re just objects. You just . . . move about. I can observe it. I can see what you do. It’s the same as I do. But you’re lost in it. You won’t get me being. . . I won’t be lost in it.

What stands out above all in *The Homecoming*, is Pinter’s sharp critique of patriarchal morality, and the way he makes use of Symbolist techniques to convey a debunking view of normative family relationships. As Ronald Knowles observes, words denoting family relationships—such as family, dad, father, mother, mum, son, brother, wife, uncle, sister-in-law, brother-in-law, daughter-in-law, nephews, grandchildren, and grandfather—occur 130 times in the play: “The locus here is on the need for the mutuality of familial identity, each individual subsumed by the compound identity of the family, represented by Max, its vituperative patriarch. Yet in speech and action every family relationship is mocked or scorned.” I would add that it is not only through “speech and action” that Pinter demystifies the family institution, but also through multi-sensory non-verbal landscapes, as I have shown above. By exploring the image of a wife-mother who develops into the whore of an all-male family, Pinter thwarts the expectations

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916 Thomas Postlewait, “Pinter’s *The Homecoming*: Displacing and Repeating Ibsen,” *Comparative Drama* 15, no.3 (Fall 1981): 207.
917 Pinter, *The Homecoming*, 61.
918 Referring to America, Teddy states, “It’s so clean there” (54); whereas he associates London to “a filthy urinal” (55). According to Ruth, America is “all rock. And sand. ( . . .) And there’s lots of insects there” (53).
919 Ibid., 62, emphasis in the original.
that a familial subject usually raises, and destroys the ideal façade of the normative family—which is typically associated to notions of dignity, love, care, and mutual respect.

As I mentioned in previous chapters, the symbol (within a Symbolist understanding of the term) does not stand for something else, but rather evokes an idea of that which it constitutes a part. If we read *The Homecoming* within the conventions of realism, it seems to be about a “dysfunctional family”: a professor’s wife and mother of three starts behaving like an oversexed female, and agrees to work as a prostitute, complying with her own husband’s and his family’s proposal. The play, however, resists being read within a realistic framework, frustrating questions of plausibility, and psychological determinacy. As Paul Lawley expresses, “Helpful points of reference for a more positive evaluation of the play might be the drama of Strindberg or the films of Buñuel.”

Pinter’s aesthetics has occasionally been linked to Surrealism, especially via Spanish film director Luis Buñuel, and Belgian painter René Magritte. Michael Billington, in his biography of Pinter, refers how, as a teenager, he repeatedly watched Buñuel’s Surrealist classics, *Un Chien Andalou* (1929) and *L’Âge d’or* (1930). Accordingly, the critic considers that Buñuel is one of the most visible influences on Pinter’s work: “What both men share is an ability to make dreams concrete, a distrust of authority, a gift for recording low life without passing overt moral judgement, and a blackly sardonic humour. Bunuel is more obviously an anarchist than Pinter, but both possess a deep-rooted concern with dramatic construction.”

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922 Varun Begley has briefly alluded to the “surrealistic” imagery of Pinter’s *Ashes to Ashes* in his book *Harold Pinter and the Twilight of Modernism*, 163-64, 182-85. Martin Esslin (*The Theatre of the Absurd*, 1961) and Ruby Cohn (*Around the Absurd*, 1990) consider that the playwrights of the absurd “assimilated” Surrealism, but do not elucidate what aspects of Surrealist theory and aesthetics were taken in.

923 Michael Billington, *The Life and Work of Harold Pinter* (London: Faber & Faber, 1996), 40. My emphasis. Other references to Buñuel in this biography of Pinter can be read on pages 12, 35, 44, 65, and 350. Billington fittingly
considers that Pinter’s theatre visually connects to the paintings of Magritte, or to the latter’s “hard-edged, very elegant, very precise style.”

More significantly, a few critics have argued that Pinter’s plays produce surreal effects within a concept of surrealité akin to that of the Surrealists, whereby artworks express the disconnected processes of non-rational thought, as well as the unsettling subconscious workings of dreams. Prior to Surrealism, however, techniques of disclosing the non-rational hidden aspects of conventional reality, of approximating subjective perception, and of presenting the flowing images of dream, were deeply explored in Symbolist artworks. For the Surrealists as for Symbolists the image is “not an equation but a symbol, an ideogramme.” As Mary Ann Caws conveys, the Symbolist view is the “predecessor” of the Surrealist view.

In Pinter’s Comic Play Elin Diamond argues that Pinter’s family dramas are non-naturalistic surreal representations of “family pathology”: “The Homecoming reflects life in a cracked mirror; in one fragment we recognize the familiar actions of family drama, in another fragment the same image is grotesquely distorted, parodied.” Almansi and Henderson express a similar idea, this time through the image of a “slanted” mirror: “With Pinter, expression is no longer the faithful reflection of an emotion nor the word of a thing: the mirror is slanted, and the

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925 As I mentioned in Chapter Two, the blurring of boundaries between imaginary and real worlds (and subsequent exploration of the dark underside of normative reality) was accomplished by Symbolists artists and thinkers, among them Valerii Briusov.
927 Mary Ann Caws, The Eye in the Text: Essays on Perception, Mannerist to Modern (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1981), 100. Both the Symbolist and the Surrealist view seek to suppress “the distance between the seeing and the seen”; “the object and the observer, the experimenter and the experiment are made to merge in one shared view” (100).
928 Elin Diamond, Pinter’s Comic Play, 140.
expression therefore does not reflect the emotion that stands in front but an adjacent one, so that each sound and image is systematically distorted.  

The notion that Pinter’s dramatic images may be reflections, either in a cracked mirror (allowing for multiple partial views of the object) or in a slanted mirror (leading to an unusual doubling of the object, in an oblique way), seems particularly suggestive when applied to the playwright’s homescapes. Given their detail and “hard edges,” Pinter’s family figures seem realistic at first sight; almost immediately, however, we become aware of a displacement, at the moment when these apparently verisimilar bodies are either presented in improbable situations, or become distorted types. As Knowles expresses, “The world is real enough, the characters are solid, concrete, and yet there is a kind of dislocation between the two.” A Symbolist surrealist effect is manifest in the black and white etchings of German artist Max Klinger (1857-1920), which capture dream states, fantasies, and ghastly nightmares with realistic detail. A similar dislocation is perhaps more pronounced in Magritte’s Surrealist pictures. According to the painter himself, he represents objects “with the appearance they have in reality,” but then shows these objects “situated where we never find them.” This “natural transposition” provokes an “upsetting effect,” and “put[s] the real world on trial,” by making visible the realization of subconscious and/or unconscious thoughts and desires.

Such spatial disjunctions, brought about through the use of realistic surface details in the depiction of implausible imaginary views, are also apparent in Symbolist drama, namely in the works of Madame Rachilde. In La Voix du Sang (1890), a wife and a husband are serenely

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930 Ronald Knowles, “Names and Naming in the Plays of Harold Pinter,” 126.
932 Madame Rachilde (pseudonym of Marguerite Eymery Valette, 1860-1953) was the authoress of controversial novels, such as *Monsieur Venus* (1884), *La Marquise de Sade* (1887), *Madame Adonis* (1888), and *La Jongleuse* (1900), which were notable for unsettling or reversing gender codes. She also wrote several important Symbolist
sitting in their “middle class living room” after dinner, the former knitting, and the latter reading a newspaper. The husband’s chronic digestive problems, however, become a hindrance to the stereotypical peacefulness of this initial tableau. As the couple kills time, waiting for the maid to prepare some digestive tea, they discuss the number of helpings they had of the dinner’s “quail stew” and complain about their two servants’ idleness and ailments. They also chat about their eighteen-year-old son, who has already retired to bed. His “good behavior” and devotion to his mother’s skirts (“like a little Jesus”934) assures the parents that, sexually speaking, “he will act like a gentleman,” and “never fall madly in love.”935 Furthermore, they are glad that he is not wasting his time and money “in cafés and other dreadful places.”936 Outside it is “cold as the devil,”937 and although it is carnival time, the couple becomes surprised when they hear sounds of fighting in the streets so strident that they reach their fourth floor home. When the voice of a man, who is being severely beaten up, starts crying for help, the woman wants to open the window just “to see” but the man forbids her, since this is “a matter for the police” and the newspapers.938 As the sounds of “murder” finally cease, the couple seems satisfied that it’s almost midnight, that they have “really lived it up tonight” “without even leaving the house.”939 Just as they are about to go to sleep, their son stumbles in and falls dead at their feet. The final words are solemnly proffered by the “indolent” maid:

plays, many of which were staged at Paul Fort’s Théâtre d’Art, and at Lugné-Poe’s Théâtre d’Œuvre, such as La Voix du Sang (1890), Madame la Mort (1891), L’Araignée de cristal (1894), Le Fils d’Adam (1894), Le Vendeur de soleil (1894), and Volupté (1896). Together with her husband Alfred Valette, in 1890, she launched the Mercure de France, which became a major periodical for the discussion of Symbolist theory and aesthetics through the 1890s. 933 Madame Rachilde, Voice of Blood (La Voix du sang), trans. Kiki Gounaridou and Frazer Lively, in Madame La Mort and Other Plays by Rachilde (Baltimore, ML: The John Hopkins University Press, 1998), 67-80. 934 Madame Rachilde, Voice of Blood, 76. 935 Ibid., 74. 936 Ibid., 75. 937 Ibid., 76. 938 Ibid., 77-78. 939 Ibid., 79.
THE MAID. (Kneeling next to the corpse) Oh, Madame! What a disaster! . . . The poor boy! . . . He went out every night, and I never dared to tell you! . . .

Unlike Frazer Lively, who views La Voix du Sang as a “thoroughly naturalist” “slice of life,” considering it an “odd” choice for the opening of the Théâtre d’Art, \(^{941}\) I see Rachilde’s play as a Symbolist landscape of the heteronormative patriarchal family. Although the characters seem psychologically motivated, due to the realistic quality of their dialogue, they are in effect flat “types.” Husband and wife are so focused on their belongings (the china, the silverware, the servants, the son), so obsessed with their digestive processes, so afraid of the “dangerous” or “unsafe” outside, so preoccupied with their son’s sexual cleanliness—that it is hard not to see the play as a sharp critique of the (still current) bourgeois morality and way of living. Not only is Rachilde’s homescape suffocating—warm and cozy for the stomach, but deadly for the son’s psychic and erotic maturity—but it is also revealing of how members of a normative family are inherently strangers to one another. There is something comic and at the same time tragic in the play’s denouement—or in the fact that the couple refuses to help a stranger in the street, who turns out to be their own son. Such displacement reveals the parents’ spiritual hollowness.

In Rachilde’s La Voix du Sang the clock is one of the many symbols of bourgeois morality and life. In Pinter’s A Night Out (1959)\(^{942}\) the bourgeois clock becomes a deadly weapon. As in Rachilde’s play, the male protagonist of A Night Out—twenty-eight-year-old Albert—is advised by his mother against leaving home at night, since the world outside is sexually alluring and dangerous. One night, however, he leaves home, almost against his will, in order to go to a party organized by his reputable firm. After having been falsely accused of

\(^{940}\) Ibid., 80.
\(^{941}\) Frazer Lively, introduction to Madame La Mort and Other Plays by Rachilde, 13. Founded in 1890 by Paul Fort, the Théâtre d’Art was the first theatre dedicated to the staging of Symbolist texts.
\(^{942}\) A Night Out (1959) was originally written for radio (BBC Third Programme, March 1960); then for television (ABC Armchair Theatre, April 1960); subsequently staged in the theatre.
touching a young typist at the office gathering, he returns home, is nagged by his mother, and apparently smashes her head with an alarm clock. In the play’s final act, he is picked up by a young prostitute and taken to her apartment; there he almost kills her with another alarm clock. At the end we see him returning home to find his mother waiting for him. This time, however, among her typical reproaches, she shows some unusual reverence toward her son: “You’re good, you’re not bad, you’re a good boy . . . I know you are . . . you are, aren’t you?”

* A Night Out * is more realistic in tone than all other plays by Pinter, but nevertheless offers several Symbolist surreal “displacements.” The most central one evidently involves clocks. In each of the homes shown (Albert’s family household, and The Girl’s apartment) there is a large alarm clock over the mantelpiece that predictably evokes the tyranny of time, of routine, and of sameness, and which literally becomes a lethal weapon. The two female protagonists of the play—The Mother and The Girl—seem replicas of one another, not only in their nagging behavior towards Albert, but above all in their sexual morality. While the mother constantly equates sexual contact with “muck,” the prostitute insists that she is a “respectable” middle-class mother. Both women exercise power to control and emasculate the man. *A Night Out* could be summed up as a night’s journey, across which a “mother’s boy” (as Albert is called at the office) or “almost retarded child” (as The Girl sees him), finally becomes a mannish being. This “masculine coming of age” happens when at last he recognizes that mother and whore are the same, and dares to threaten the “female body” of both with physical violence. Displacing sensual touch, Albert’s orgasmic release comes about when he makes the girl crouch in front of

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944 Ibid., 207, 231, 233.
945 In *A Night Out*, the prostitute pretends that the photo on the mantelpiece is that of her daughter, who is “at a very select boarding-school at the moment” (235), when in fact it is a portrait of herself as a child.
946 Pinter, *A Night Out*, 230.
947 Ibid., 241.
him while he is standing, to lace his shoes. After this pathetic substitutive action, he shivers, lets the clock drop to the floor, and flips her some coins.\textsuperscript{948}

The portraits of the mother and the whore in \textit{A Night Out} may be considered misogynous,\textsuperscript{949} but Pinter does not naturalize gender; rather, he shows that both female characters not only operate within, but also endorse, a patriarchal sexual morality. Although Albert’s father has died some years ago, the mother echoes the judgments that the patriarch pronounced on his son, as if he were still living. Albert’s father is not dead, as the mother vehemently conveys: “He’s living! (Touching her breast) In here! And this is his house!”\textsuperscript{950}

Family in \textit{A Night Out} consists in a perpetuation of ghosts—of Albert’s dead father, of his dead grandmother; apparently it is more important to honor these specters, than to care for the living members. Accordingly, all the “light” bulbs are kept in the “cellar.”

\begin{quote}
MOTHER. You’ve got five minutes. Go down to the cellar, Albert, get a bulb and put it in Grandma’s room, go on.

ALBERT. (irritably) I don’t know why you keep calling that room Grandma’s room, she’s been dead ten years.

( . . . )

ALBERT. I’ve told you I’m not going down to the cellar in my white shirt. There’s no light in the cellar either. I’ll be pitch black in five minutes, looking for those bulbs.

( . . . )

MOTHER. I hope you’re satisfied, anyway. The house in darkness, I wasn’t going to break my neck going down to that cellar to look for a bulb. . \textsuperscript{951}

In \textit{A Night Out} the patriarch speaks through the mother; in \textit{Family Voices} (1980), even though already dead and buried, the father has a voice of his own. Structurally, the play’s dialogue consists of a (perhaps epistolary) exchange between a son (Voice 1) and his mother (Voice 2); halfway through the play, the dead father (Voice 3) occasionally intervenes. Read in

\textsuperscript{948} Ibid., 245-46.
\textsuperscript{949} According to Katherine Burkman, in \textit{The Dramatic World of Harold Pinter: Its Basis in Ritual}, “The play is an overstatement of Pinter's recurrent identification of woman as mother and whore” (96); it is “almost a documented case history—rare for Pinter's drama—of an Oedipus complex” (97).
\textsuperscript{950} Pinter, \textit{A Night Out}, 207.
\textsuperscript{951} Ibid., 204, 206, 232.
realistic terms, the play concerns an underage son (“under twenty-one”) who has left his home and is staying for unknown reasons at a family boarding house; he writes to his mother, and she writes him back, but none of the two ever receives the other’s letters. “Where are you?” asks the mother, “Nobody knows your whereabouts. Nobody knows if you are alive or dead. Nobody can find you. Have you changed your name?” Family estrangement seems central to the play. As Steven H. Gale remarks, “One interpretation of Family Voices would be that the concept of family itself is dead.”

The play presents a series of disembodied voices who, because they are disembodied, cannot connect. The image that we are left with is one of separateness. Essentially, family has become a hollow concept. Everyone, even family members (whether related by blood, marriage, or emotional dependence), is isolated and lives speaking to others who cannot hear them, and hearing no one’s voice but their own.

Family Voices is clearly a non-naturalistic play; Knowles even sees it as “an epitome of postmodernism.” Its soundscapes are poetic and incantatory, and the images they unfold evoke the sensation of mental torpor, of half-awake languor, of unsettling dreams. The playtext is particularly evocative of sensory landscapes and it might well be considered a Symbolist monodrama located inside the son’s mind, in which he recreates a double of his own family. Elin Diamond suggests that the son “invents a surreal family of grotesques who not only parody his “real” family but also permit him to play out his sexual fantasies and fears.” In my view the homescape he invents is based on a bodily and emotional experience of his own family; it is not a mimetic or fantasized image of the “real” family, but rather a slanted and shattered reflection of

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953 Ibid., 287.
955 Ronald Knowles, *Understanding Pinter* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1995), 148. According to Knowles, “Postmodernism is something of a theoretical ragbag, drawing on very diverse materials, and, if some of the leading characteristics that arise in discussion are named, it is immediately possible to discern their relevance to Pinter’s writing: the mixture of popular and high art forms, subversion of convention, absurdist parody, indeterminacy and excess, disorientation of the reader-auditor” (148).
it; perhaps, even, a view from inside the mirror, revealing of a subterranean world of forbidden desires and repressed memories.

Within this reading, it is interesting to note the kind of interior discernible in the son’s imaginary homescape. According to his impressions, the bizarre dwelling where he is presently lodging is highly compartmentalized, with the men on one side, the women on the other, and a common bathroom in-between, shared by both genders.

VOICE 1. I have some very pleasant baths indeed in the bathroom. So does everybody else in the house. They all lie quite naked in the bath and have very pleasant baths indeed. All the people in the house go about saying what a superb bath and bathroom the one we share is, they go about telling literally everyone they meet what lovely baths you can get in this place, more or less unparalleled, to put it bluntly.957

The dwelling seems totally isolated from the exterior and “no-one seems to leave the house”958 except for occasional drinks at the “Fishmongers Arms.” It is “a family house, no strangers admitted,”959 and its inhabitants are extremely hostile to outside visitors. Their existence is entirely bounded by the walls of their residence.

At some point the son decides (as if he were the designer of the homescape) that the women in the house represent three consecutive generations—daughter, mother, and grandmother. The grandmother, a Mrs Withers, is probably the landlady, she takes him out to drinks, gives him “a cuddle,” and calls him “her little pet.”960 The mother, a Lady Withers, is “the woman who wears red dresses,” and “a necklace around her alabaster neck, a neck amazingly young;” she plays Schumann.961 On second thought, she doesn’t wear red; but rather

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957 Harold Pinter, *Family Voices*, 281. My emphasis. The obsessive repetition of the word-sound “bath” suggests that something uncanny is going on in this “middle territory” of the bathroom. The Surrealist quality of the sensory scapes in Pinter’s *Family Voices* might be productively compared to that of David Lynch’s films, especially those that deal with “home” or “family” settings—namely *Eraserhead* (1977), *Twin Peaks* (pilot and episodes 1 to 7, 1990), *Lost Highway* (1997), *Mulholland Drive* (2001), and *Inland Empire* (2006).
958 Harold Pinter, *Family Voices*, 288.
959 Ibid., 228.
960 Ibid., 285, 286.
961 Ibid., 290.
pink, the son decides.\textsuperscript{962} He also decides that Jane is her daughter, all “in green, apart from her toes, which are clad in black.”\textsuperscript{963} Lady Withers is the only household member who lets the son into her room, a big space “with sofas and curtains and veils and shrouds and rugs and soft material all over the walls, dark blue.”\textsuperscript{964}

VOICE 1. Jane gave me a bun. I think it was a bun. Lady Withers bit into her bun. Jane bit into her bun, her toes now resting on my lap. Lady Withers seemed to be enjoying her bun, on her sofa. She finished it and picked up another. I had never seen so many buns. One quick glance told me they were perched on cakestands, all over the room. . . . My bun turned out to be rock solid. I bit into it, it jumped out of my mouth and bounced into my lap. Jane’s feet caught it. It calmed her toes down. She juggled the bun, with some expertise, along them. I recalled that, in an early exchange between us, she had told me she wanted to be an acrobat.\textsuperscript{965}

The successive images that Pinter creates here, of buns being endlessly eaten by Lady Withers, of buns filling the room’s walls, of the son’s bun turning into a rock-hard ball which is then juggled around by a young girl’s toes, evoke Surrealist aesthetics.\textsuperscript{966} By associating people to solid colors and textures, Voice 1 seems to be assembling the mindscapes of a childlike universe. In the duplicate mother’s room the son is nourished, protected, spoiled, and drawn to ecstatic moods: “I have found my home, my family. Little did I ever dream I could know such happiness.”\textsuperscript{967}

Late at night, the son hears “whispering from the other rooms” and does not understand it; he hears “steps on the stairs” but does not dare go out to investigate. There are two men in the family household: “One is an old man. The one who is an old man retires early. He is bald. . . .

\textsuperscript{962} Ibid., 286.
\textsuperscript{963} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{964} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{965} Ibid., 286-87.
\textsuperscript{966} In Surrealist visual arts and films objects are often transformed, through a change in texture and weight (e.g. Meret Oppenheim’s fur-lined teacup, saucer, and spoon); through bizarre but evident associations (e.g., Magritte’s painting of a “nose-pipe” profile); when they are taken out of their usual contexts (e.g., the cow on the bed in Buñuel’s \textit{L’Age d’Or}), or through a multi-functional (or even non-functional) handling (e.g., the apron in Buñuel’s \textit{Un Chien Andalou}).
\textsuperscript{967} Harold Pinter, \textit{Family Voices}, 290.
The other one is another man. He is big. He is much bigger than the other man.\textsuperscript{968} Whereas the old man, “Baldy” or Mr Withers, seems totally deranged (“He lives in another area, best known to himself”\textsuperscript{969}), the big man, “Riley,” abhors all the women in the house, complaining that they treat him “like a leper” even though he is “a sort” of close relation.\textsuperscript{970}

The “big man” likes to surprise the son while he is lying naked in the bathtub, since he enjoys the “well-knit” yet “slender” frame of the boy’s body.

\textit{VOICE 1.} I like slender lads, Riley said. Slender but strong. I’ve never made any secret of it. But I’ve had to restrain myself. . . . My lust is unimaginably violent but it goes against my best interests, which are to keep on the right side of God. I’m a big man, as you see, I could crush a slip of a lad such as you to death, I mean \textit{the death that is love, the death I understand love to be.} But meet it is that I keep those desires shackled in handcuffs and leg-irons. I’m good at that sort of thing because I’m a policeman by trade. And I’m highly respected. I’m highly respected both in the force and in church.\textsuperscript{971}

There is here an unequivocal connection between Pinter’s macropolitical authoritarian bodies (discussed in Chapter Four), and sexual violence at the micropolitical scale. However, the apparently harmless and demented “old man” seems to be no less lustful than “the big man” toward the son, which suggests a homescape of masculine bullying.

\textit{VOICE 1.} Mother, mother, I’ve had the most unpleasant, the most mystifying encounter, with the man who calls himself Mr Withers. Will you give me your advice? Come in here, son, he called. Look sharp. Don’t mess about. . . . Mind how you go. Look sharp. Get my drift? Don’t let it get too mouldy. Watch the mould. Get the feel of it, sonny, get the density. Look at me. And I did. . . . It was like looking into a pit of molten lava, mother. One look was enough for me.\textsuperscript{972}

\textit{Family Voices} evokes a landscape of sexual abuse within the patriarchal family, hinting perhaps at child rape by a male agent, or in any case at pederastic intimidation. Its homescape indicates an extreme separateness between feminine and masculine quarters and principles.

\textsuperscript{968} Ibid., 284-85.
\textsuperscript{969} Ibid., 293.
\textsuperscript{970} Ibid., 292.
\textsuperscript{971} Ibid. My emphasis.
\textsuperscript{972} Ibid., 290-91.
Although the play’s Symbolist homescape is shadowy and uncertain in its contours, it nevertheless leaves us with a definite sense of the underlying destructiveness of a family’s hidden soul. The suggested existence of a cesspit of horror under the respectable family household is corroborated by the young man’s “real” parents. Both mother (Voices 2) and father (Voice 3) oscillate between an asphyxiating affection toward their son, and intimidating him with curses. The mother tenderly recalls the instances when she washed her child’s hair “with the most delicate shampoo, and rinsing, and then drying [it] so gently with my soft towel,” “knowing that [he] wanted no-one else, no-one at all, knowing that [he was] entirely happy in [her] arms.”

Now that she can no longer “possess” him as when he was an infant, she threatens him with retribution.

VOICE 2. The police are looking for you. . . . I have stated my belief that you are in the hands of underworld figures who are using you as a male prostitute. . . . You will be found, my boy, and no mercy will be shown to you.

On his deathbed, the father apparently spoke of his child “with tenderness and bewilderment.”

However, as Pinter shows, the patriarch (or what he stands for) is not dead; he smiles maliciously from his grave, emanating an everlasting family curse. As Raymond Armstrong notes, paternal love in Pinter often wears the face of violence.

VOICE 3. I am not dead. I am very far from being dead, although lots of people have wished me dead, from time immemorial, you especially. It is you who have prayed for my death, from time immemorial. I have heard your prayers. They ring in my ears.

Prayers yearning for my death. But I am not dead. . . . I’m smiling, as I lie in this glassy grave. Do you know why I use the word glassy? Because I can see out of it. Lots of love, son. Keep up the good work.
Pinter’s *Tea Party* (1964) equally unfolds images and sensory landscapes that seemingly belong to a dream sequence, or have a dream feel. The play shows normalcy in a bizarre light by fracturing its main character, Disson, into (at least two) different identities. Disson is a self-assured and highly successful business man, who holds a procedural and technical perspective regarding not only his job, but also life itself.

DISSON. I don’t like dithering. I don’t like indulgence. I don’t like self-doubt. I don’t like fuzziness. I like clarity. Clear intention. Precise execution. . . . A man’s job is to assess his powers coolly and correctly and equally the powers of others. Having done this, he can proceed to establish a balanced and reasonable relationship with his fellows. In my view, living is a matter of active and willing participation. So is work. . . . I believe life can be conducted efficiently. . . . Everything has a function. 978

Disson is extremely proud of running a firm that manufactures sanitary ware and “more bidets than anyone in England;” in fact, he regards it as “a mission.” 979 This enthusiastic and rather divine pursuit is manifest in the very setting of Disson’s office, which shows “a selection of individually designed wash basins, water closets, and bidets” set in alcoves along the walls, “all lit by hooded spotlights.” 980 Disson’s technical interest in genital and anal hygiene is significant, given that he gradually starts losing all his business abilities and “normal” sensory feelings as soon as his sensuality becomes awakened.

In the initial three scenes of *Tea Party*, Disson hires and acquires three assets: a new “very private” secretary, or “personal assistant;” a new wife (his first spouse died sometime ago); and a new brother-in-law. This triad awakens Disson’s sensual self, or his own double, which was formerly dormant and repressed. At the play’s start, when Disson interviews Wendy (the secretary), Pinter has her cross and uncross her legs, or straightening her skirt—making her physical attributes quite noticeable, in a stereotypical way. Wendy confesses having left her

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979 Ibid., 104.
980 Ibid., 103.
previous job because her “chief” couldn’t stop “touching” her “all the time.” Disson considers such behavior monstrous and unthinkable for a firm “of repute;” he thought that such “tampering” only took place in “paperback books.” Later in the play, Disson will be fixated on touching Wendy, remarkably duplicating her former boss’s desire and conduct.

When he next meets his brother-in-law, Willy, the latter seems a bizarre and incestuous character, extremely obsessed by the “inner beauty” and “lovely exterior” of his sister Diana (Disson’s wife). This fascination is particularly noticeable throughout Willy’s speech at the wedding reception, in which—apparently following a family tradition—he appears fixated on his sister’s able and graceful hands.

WILLY. I remember the days my sister and I used to swim together in the lake at Sunderley. The grace of her crawl, even then, as a young girl. I can remember those long summer evenings at Sunderley, my mother and I crossing the lawn towards the terrace and through the great windows hearing my sister play Brahms. The delicacy of her touch. My mother and I would, upon entering the music room, gazed in silence at Diana’s long fingers moving in exquisite motion on the keys. As for our father, our father knew no pleasure keener than watching his daughter at her needlework. A man whose business was the State’s, a man eternally active, his one great solace from the busy world would be to sit for hours on end at a time watching his beloved daughter ply her needle.

Close to the end of the play, at the office “tea party” Disson sets up to celebrate his first wedding anniversary, he sees Willy making love to both Wendy and Diana, who are lying on a desk, “head to toe.” By that time, however, Disson is already deaf, blind, and unable to move, reduced to a stupor. By that time, as well, Willy has become the firm’s major partner, a real companion to his sister Diana (who serves as his secretary), and a surrogate father to Disson’s twin boys from a former marriage.

981 Ibid., 105.
982 Ibid.
983 Ibid., 108.
984 Ibid., 145.
Pinter introduces “The Twins” in the play’s sixth scene quite unexpectedly, since there is no previous mention of Disson having children. The two boys (Tom and John) act like insolent perverse doubles, absurdly unable to function independently from one another, recalling Kafka’s twin identities. Further, they seem insulated from any affection either towards their father, or concerning their grandparents and in-laws. Through “The Twins,” Pinter reveals the real aridity of *Tea Party*’s homescape:

DIANA. You mean a great deal to [your father].  
JOHN. Children seem to mean a great deal to their parents, I’ve noticed. Though I’ve often wondered what “a great deal” means.  
TOM. I’ve often wondered what “mean” means.986

“The Twins” make perceptible the recurrent pattern of the *double*, or of psychic duality, in the play. There are *two* grandparents (Disson’s father and mother), *two* sons (twins), *two* adult siblings, *two* friends (“the Disleys,” an ophthalmologist and wife), *two* secretaries (Wendy and Diana), *two* bosses (Disson and Willy), *two* offices, and *two* desks. At the tea party there are even *two* elderly ladies at the buffet table that never speak; and there is also a married couple, called “The Tidys,” which is mentioned but not seen. Additionally, Disson’s lack of eyesight is first triggered when he sees *two* bouncing ping-pong balls, during a competitive game with his brother-in-law.

These doublings seem to indicate two symmetric *familyscapes*, one of surface, and one of depth. On the surface, Disson’s marriage is a solid one; his wife Diana loves him because he is “strong,”987 “admirable” in his “clarity of mind,” in his “achievements” and “surety of

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985 Twin identities recur in Kafka’s fiction: the two bearded men in *Metamorphosis*, who are hostile towards the giant insect, and end up controlling the family household; the two vigilant officers and executioners in *The Trial*; and the repulsive Artur and Jeremias in *The Castle*, who act like infants trapped in grown-up bodies, but are ever watchful of K’s actions, since they are spies hired by the castle authority. Because they are so undistinguishable, K. decides to address the latter duo of individuals through a single name, “Artur.”


987 Ibid., 111.
Like a good bourgeois spouse, Diana wants to be not only Disson’s wife but also his employee, so as to help further the couple’s “interests.” Further, she is “marvelous” with his children, who were “very well brought up and looked after.” On the surface, therefore, Disson’s home replicates the office, in that it provides an orderly, tidy, and “positive” atmosphere.

However—just as Disson’s backhand is “in form,” but not his forehand, at the ping-pong game—there is a dark underside to this normative and oversimplified image of happiness. As he grows increasingly sightless and sensorily impaired, Disson starts perceiving a family conspiracy, together with an office conspiracy, surrounding him. Gradually, he starts suspecting that the concept of family only holds together because of role-playing:

DISSON. Tell me about Sunderley.
WILLY. Sunderley?
DISSON. Tell me about the place where you two were born. Where you played at being brother and sister.
WILLY. We didn’t have to play at being brother and sister. We were brother and sister. . . Sunderley was beautiful.
DISSON. The lake.
WILLY. The lake.
DISSON. The long windows.
WILLY. From the withdrawing-room.
DISSON. On to the terrace.
WILLY. Music playing.
DISSON. On the piano.
WILLY. The summer nights. The wild swans.
DISSON. What swans? What bloody swans?
WILLY. The owls.
DISSON. Negroes at the gate, under the trees.
WILLY. No Negroes.
DISSON. Why not?
WILLY. We had no Negroes.
DISSON. Why in God’s name not?
WILLY. Just one of those family quirks.

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988 Ibid., 135.
989 Ibid., 131.
990 Ibid., 133-34. My emphasis.
Disson introduces dark, wild, and bloody brush strokes in Willy’s nostalgic homescape at “Sunderley.” The family emerges a site of repressed material, of hidden exploitation, a withdrawn and predatory cradle of incest.

In Tea Party Pinter associates normative family life to the bureaucratic functioning of a firm. In the firm, we learn from Disson, the two head offices are “completely cut off from the rest of the staff. They’re all on the lower floor.” Further, any “fraternization” between the two head offices is forbidden; they make contact by “intercom,” and “meet only by strict arrangement.” When Disson’s perception channels start to deteriorate or become altered, this fanatical separateness, both at work and at home, comes to an end. As he confesses to the ophthalmologist,

DISSON. Listen . . . I never said I couldn’t see. You don’t understand. Most of the time . . . my eyesight is excellent. It always has been. But . . . it’s become unreliable. It’s become . . . erratic. Sometimes, quite suddenly, very occasionally, something happens . . . something . . . goes wrong . . . with my eyes.992

Gradually, as his former view of the world crumbles, and his vision becomes blurry, Disson’s behavior becomes brutal; he threatens to knock her wife’s teeth, and almost saws a finger off one of his sons’ hands. As a manager he becomes dysfunctional: suggesting that his secretary sit on top of his desk, because it may be “softer;” and engaging with her in foolish games, such as playing ball with a lighter.

As “The Twins” grow up and become “big lads,” Disson recedes further and further into child-like behavior, such as squatting by the door of his office, and peeping through the keyhole to see if Wendy and Willy are engaging in sex in the adjoining room. At the height of his deterioration, all Disson apparently desires is to touch, but he can only do so when he

991 Ibid., 112.
992 Ibid., 120.
993 Ibid., 116-17.
994 Ibid., 142-43.
becomes blind, when his secretary Wendy ties her “lovely” chiffon over his eyes; likewise, she only feels like kissing him when he is “all in the dark.” At the end of the play there is no “fraternization” or sexual contact possible; he is cut off from everyone, left untouched, and forever disconnected. He remains lying on the floor still sitting in his office chair, as if “he was chained to it.” He finally reaches a state of inert bureaucratic matter.

Pinter’s homescapes bring to the surface, or make visible, an undercurrent of subconscious energies that flows underneath the apparently sturdy conjugal or familial home. In *The Lover* (1962), Pinter holds a perverse and skewed mirror to the normative ideas of marriage and adultery. The play presents a heterosexual married couple, Richard and Sarah, who not only perform their roles of husband and wife, but also play the parts of adulterous lovers (in which case the man’s name is Max, although the woman’s is variable, possibly Dolores, sometimes Mary). Pinter provides a visual image of the separateness between marital and sexual relationships when he divides the stage into two distinct areas, with a living-room at stage-right, and a bedroom at stage left. As Quigley remarks, “The stage set registers, in its central division, two major components of the couple’s relationship and the difficulties of fusing them into a seamless whole.” Other visual signs convey a stereotypical quality to both the marital and the adulterous couples: while the husband is dressed in suit with tie, the male lover uses a comfortable suede jacket; whereas the wife’s clothes are usually plain and “demure,” and her shoes are always flat, the female lover wears “very high-heeled shoes” and “very tight” low-cut dresses, displaying a heavily made-up face. Throughout the play, husband and wife mostly talk

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995 Ibid., 139.
996 Ibid., 147.
997 *The Lover* (1962) was first written for television (broadcast in March 1963). Subsequently staged, with Pinter as director, at the Arts Theatre in September 1963.
over drinks before supper or in the bedroom before sleep; while the lovers predictably play hide-and-seek and “bongo drums.”

The title of the play seems to refer to the figure of the “lover,” whether male or female. However, although both man and woman are involved in playing at adultery, the game is not the same for each of them, since they appear to hold two very distinct views of sexual love. For the woman, sexual attraction seems irreconcilable with marital routine, and she tends to get involved with her lover in more ways than a strictly physical one. Accordingly, she describes her lover as a “sweet” man with “a wonderful sense of humor.”

SARAH. But I must say he’s very loving. His whole body emanates love.
RICHARD. How nauseating.
SARAH. No.
RICHARD. Manly with it, I hope?
SARAH. Entirely.
RICHARD. Sounds tedious.

For the man sex with his lover is a routine activity; he does not respect her as a woman, but rather regards her as a “whore.”

RICHARD. Just a common or garden slut. Not worth talking about. Handy between trains, nothing more. . . . A quick cup of while cocoa they’re checking the oil and water. . . . She’s simply a whore, a functionary who either pleases or displeases. (. . .)
SARAH. I must say I find your attitude to women rather alarming.
RICHARD. Why? I wasn’t looking for your double, was I? I wasn’t looking for a woman I could respect, as you, whom I could admire and love, as I do you.

Richard’s denigrating description of his sexual mistress corresponds to his similarly belittling view, I argue, of his wife. What he calls “love” is visually equated to owning some

property or object.

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999 Although I agree with Dukore when he affirms that “The most notable characteristic of the title is that it is singular,” I do not consider, as he does, that it solely refers to Max (the male lover), or to the husband’s alter ego, just because at the play’s end “his role of lover invades and dominates his marital world.” See Bernard Dukore, Harold Pinter (New York: Grove Press, 1982), 67-69.
1000 Pinter, The Lover, in Harold Pinter Plays: Two (London: Methuen, 1988), 172.
1001 Ibid., 167, 169.
RICHARD. I find you very beautiful. I have great pride in being seen with you. When we’re out to dinner, or at the theatre. . . . Or at the Hunt Ball. . . . Great pride, to walk with you as my wife on my arm. To see you smile, laugh, walk, talk, bend, be still. . . . To feel the envy of others . . . And to know you are my wife. It’s a source of a profound satisfaction to me.\textsuperscript{1002}

As lover/husband, the man (Richard/Max) similarly ends up dismissing the services of his lover, because as sexual \textit{object} she no longer corresponds to his taste.


SARAH. You mean cows.

MAX. I don’t mean cows. I mean voluminous great uddered feminine bullocks. Once, years ago, you vaguely resembled one.\textsuperscript{1003}

Both as wife and lover, the woman is an animal, either for sport (at the Hunt Ball), or for sexual food. In the latter case, she is an animal that has been “castrated” in order to please.

Early in the play, we find that the husband not only owns the wife but also the conjugal home, and that she unquestioningly accepts his entitlement. Allegedly, this is one of the reasons why he wants his wife to quit her adulterous affair.

RICHARD. The fact is this is my house. From today, I forbid you to entertain your lover on these premises. This applies to any time of the day. . . . Take him out into the fields. Find a ditch. Or a slag heap. Find a rubbish dump. Mmmn? What about that? (\textit{She stands still.}) Buy a canoe and find a stagnant pond. Anything. Anywhere. But not my living-room.\textsuperscript{1004}

Extra-marital sex is a dirty and shameful activity, it belongs in a “dumpscape” rather than in a homescape. Above all, however, Richard wants to forbid his wife’s \textit{extra-marital} relationship with himself because through it she has “debauched” herself, pursued a “life of depravity,” a “path of illegitimate lust.”\textsuperscript{1005} Within a patriarchal sexual reasoning the woman may only be a

\textsuperscript{1002} Ibid., 187.
\textsuperscript{1003} Ibid., 184.
\textsuperscript{1004} Ibid., 189, 191. My emphasis.
\textsuperscript{1005} Ibid., 189.
slut within marriage; and so Sarah becomes, at the end of the play, her husband’s “lovely whore.”

Steven Gale states that “The basic idea upon which Pinter built *The Lover* is graphically developed by casting Sarah in the role of both wife and whore.” This image of a woman performing the roles of either wife or whore to her husband seems in my view to be the central symbol of Pinter’s play. A common critical view of *The Lover* tends to consider that the play is “about the struggle to unify love and desire, sex and marriage, social and sexual identity.”

Differing from this interpretation, Knowles claims that “Far from unifying love and desire, Richard’s strategy brings the situation balanced by parity of exchange in roles to one of polarity, Sarah becoming respectable wife and disrespectable whore.” Concurring with Knowles, I consider *The Lover*’s conjugal *homescape* extremely oppressive in ecocritical sensory terms, and suggest that the image-symbol of a woman as wife-whore to the same man reveals the play’s acerbic critique of patriarchal sexual morality.

The patriarchal institution of heterosexual marriage is a property contract that not only ensures the satisfaction of male sexual desire but also guarantees a patrilineal progeny by demanding sexual fidelity from the female spouse, as Irigaray affirms. Anticipating Irigaray’s view of marriage, some Symbolist artists and thinkers held that it functioned as a substitute for love, preventing the external movement and inner growth of both individuals.

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1006 Ibid. 196.
1008 Ronald Knowles, *Understanding Pinter*, 83.
1009 Ibid., 84.
1010 Luce Irigaray describes patriarchal marriage as an order in which women function as commodities and are obligated to make themselves available for intercourse, and to mother both their children and their husbands (*I Love to You*, 26). In *Speculum de l’autre femme*, she writes that the patriarchal marriage contract disguises “a purchase agreement for the body and sex of the wife” (151). Differently, “there was a time when mother and daughter were the figure of a natural and social model,” “when the two sexes loved each other, without needing the institution of marriage, without being required to have children,” “without taboos on sex or the body. ( . . ) Those who lived in these so-called archaic times were perhaps more cultivated than we are” (*Sexes et parentés*, 206). See *Luce Irigaray: Philosophy in the Feminine*, ed. Margaret Whitford (London & New York: Routledge, 1991).
involved. Every human being needed to be the sovereign of her body, if she were to be the master of her thoughts. In the United States, Floyd Dell and Max Eastman compared the institution of marriage to a God that punishes the “writhing spider-soul” from continuing his or her own sexual growth. Fin-de-siècle South-African Decadent artist Olive Schreiner believed “that the full expression of female sexuality was essential for the development of women, for ‘something sexual’ lay at the ‘root of all intellectual and artistic achievement,’” but also “that men were alienated from their own sexual and human development by stereotypes of masculinity.”

Such Symbolist concerns with human sexuality, both male and female, seem evident in Pinter’s plays, especially in the way he depicts both family and conjugal homescapes.

The liberation of the individual advocated by Symbolism strongly relates to Félix Guattari’s concept of a mental ecology, which demands the disruption of the mind/body dualism that contributes to our separation from nature, so that an ensuing ethics of personal and mutual care may thrive. Environmental destruction is not separated from sexist oppression, and other aspects of patriarchal domination at the micropolitical level. In this sense, our home should be an intimate and generative place of belonging for its individual dwellers. It should be, as


1012 Richard Candida Smith includes within the legacy of Mallarmé the editors of *The Masses* (a monthly magazine published in New York), Floyd Dell (1887-1969) and Max Eastman (1883-1969). According to Smith, these writers provided metaphysical reflections on subjects such as gender equality, women’s liberation, sexual revolution, and free love, against the patriarchal institution of marriage (126).

1013 Elaine Showalter, *Sexual Anarchy: Gender and Culture at the Fin de Siècle*, (London: Viking, 1990), 55. Although Schreiner’s writings are often assimilated within a “feminine-writers” tradition, her works (like those of W. B. Yeats, and Arthur Symons) make ample use of symbol, dream, vision, and allegory. See Elizabeth Jay, introduction to *Dreams: Three works by Olive Schreiner* (Birmingham, UK: University of Birmingham Press, 2003), ix-xxviii.

1014 Irigaray argues that “Our body itself carries those measures which lead to a respect for each person and for the relationship between.” Luce Irigaray, *To Be Two*, translated by Monique Rhodes and Marco F. Cocito-Monroe (New York: Routledge, 2001), 90.
ecofeminist Carol Bigwood proposes, a cultivating and constructing place where we touch and are touched, with *touch* being understood as “empathetic, tender, and questioning.”

Pinter’s familyscapes and homescapes are suffocating also in the sense that they prevent the individual growth of their young and most sensitive members (i.e., the flourishing of their bodies and minds), and may even precipitate their premature deaths. A case in point is Pinter’s *Moonlight* (1993), where the ghost of a deceased sixteen-year-old daughter—Bridget—haunts and guards the family house. For Christopher Innes, *Moonlight* is the “coda” to Pinter’s dramatic “dismantling of the façade of ‘Happy Families.’”

Caught at the moment of final dissolution, the family is irretrievably shattered, its members isolated in their various limbos. The father on a lingering deathbed is alienated from his wife . . . Haunted by the ghost of his long-dead daughter in the garden eternally bathed in the moonlight of the title, he has been abandoned by his sons—unemployed and stuck in the bedroom of an unlocated flat . . . The close proximity of the three areas on a stage emphasizes their isolation, and makes each seem claustrophobic. The fey image of the daughter is poetically evocative, the dying father is angry and despairing, while the overall tone is elegiac.

Raymond Armstrong considers that *Moonlight* is “a nightmarish evocation of paternalistic domination,” in the same line as the plays that precede it in the Pinter canon (*Victoria Station, Precisely, One for the Road, Mountain Language, and Party Time*). Similarly

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1015 Carol Bigwood, “Logos of Our Eco in the Feminine: Approach Through Heidegger, Irigaray, and Merleau-Ponty,” in *Merleau-Ponty and Environmental Philosophy: Dwelling on the Landscapes of Thought*, ed. Suzanne L. Cataldi and William S. Hamrick (New York: State University of New York Press, 2007), 93, 97, 110. As Bigwood explains, Merleau-Ponty claims that the flesh of our world is empathetic (110); he also states that “we exist in the interrogative mode” (104), and therefore that ours is a “questioning touch.”

1016 In *Moonlight* (1993), the stage is divided into three distinct sections. In one area, Andy (a despotic ex-civil servant) lays in his deathbed, attended by his dutiful wife, Bel, with whom he discusses their past life together, their relationship to their children, and his former occupation as a “first class civil servant.” In a second area, also a bedroom but disconnected from their parents’ house, the youngest of the couple’s living sons, Fred, is also confined to bed and attended by his brother Jake. According to their father, Fred and Jake are “a sponging parasitical pair” that “suck the tit of the state” (36). Both brothers pass their time improvising word games, and parodying their father’s authoritarian morality and speech. A dead daughter, Bridget, delivers her monologues and wanders in a third area of the set, a zone that also serves for the staging of a flashback sequence between the couple’s three children, and through which the father moves, but only “at night.”


1018 Raymond Armstrong, *Kafka and Pinter Shadow-Boxing*, 127.
to the authoritarian male characters of the former plays, the father in Moonlight spits out obscenities so as to torment and humiliate his wife, and has “a demonstrably deleterious impact on the conversation of his sons,” to the extent that “in order to survive they must speak in the tongue of the tyrant.” Nonetheless, according to Armstrong, Pinter dares to impugn the godhead of the father in Moonlight.

The two boys, having grown up under the shadow of a man who persisted in portraying himself as the infallible embodiment of temporal and spiritual authority, conspire to . . . explode the mythical basis of [their father’s] supremacy. This iconoclastic revolt is prosecuted through a highly elaborate game of charades, in which the young men alternately assume the personae of biblical and bureaucratic protagonists.

The two brothers’ talk is of “permanent secretaries and placements, off-the-record briefings and confidential meetings,” “motions being tabled and votes being taken.” They offer a satirical perspective on the nature of bureaucratic systems, and thereby on the oppressive character of the patriarchal family institution. Armstrong actually sees “a passion play” within the play, in which the sons end up immolating the father figure.

In Symbolist sensory terms, I want to focus my reading of Moonlight on the figure of Bridget, who is “the crux of the play” in Pinter’s own words. From the moment we first see her, a young and lonely figure “in faint light,” she could well step out of a Symbolist play.

BRIDGET. I can’t sleep. There’s no moon. It’s so dark. I think I’ll go downstairs and walk about. I won’t make a noise. I’ll be very quiet. Nobody will hear me. It’s so dark and I know everything is more silent when it’s dark. But I don’t want anyone to know I’m moving about in the night. I don’t want to wake my father and mother. They’re so tired. They

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1019 Ibid., 128.
1020 Ibid., 141.
1021 Ibid., 143.
1022 Ibid., 155.
1023 Pinter considers that Bridget is “the crux of the play, because she ‘informs everything.’” For the playwright she is “the embodiment” of the “idea of the dead being present.” See Mel Gussow, Conversations with Pinter (New York: Limelight Editions, 1994), 99.
have given so much of their life for me and for my brothers. All their life, in fact. All their energies and all their love. They need to sleep in peace and wake up rested. I must see that this happens. It is my task. Because I know that when they look at me they see that I am all they have left of their life.\footnote{Harold Pinter, \textit{Moonlight} (New York: Grove Press, 1993), 1.}

Bridget initially seems a troubled insomniac; then perhaps a sleepwalker in the middle of an anxious dream. As the play progresses without her agency, however, she strikes us as being lifeless, a ghost or guardian angel of the family home who is tragically unaware of being dead (and therefore does not want “anyone to know” that she’s “moving about in the night”), an agitated and restless presence who wanders through the house of the living, because her spirit is not appeased.

In her first monologue, Bridget introduces the play’s normative principle of family: that of an unstoppable cycle of parental \textit{sacrifice}, on behalf of their offspring, \textit{in the name of love}. For her father, however, “Love is an attribute no civil servant worth his salt would give house room to. It’s redundant. An \textit{excrescence}.”\footnote{Ibid., 17.} He is proud of having forsaken it, and of having instead inspired in others “envy and fear.”\footnote{Ibid.} Although the father remembers how he used to sing to Bridget and cuddle her, when she was an infant, babies for him are but “little buggers,” “poor tots, tiny totlets, poor little tiny totlets.”\footnote{Ibid., 45.} For her brothers Fred and Jake, “love has a \textit{price},” which “is death.”\footnote{Ibid., 57.}

As the title indicates, \textit{Moonlight} is a lunar play; it is a play of reflections, of psychic mirrors. Light and Darkness are recurring elements in the play. Except for Bridget, the characters seem to live in darkness (that of a punishing God and authoritarian father), inhabiting the same
dark house that appears in the young girl’s monologue at the play’s end. A house where “there’s a party going on,” to which Bridget must not go in her “new” clothes, but rather in her “old” clothes, and only “when the moon is down.” That is, only when there is no moonlight, as soon as it is totally dark. But she sets for the house with the moon “bright and quite still” and finds out that inside it is all dark and there is “no sound.”

It is the house of death. To which her mother and father have invited her in.

Moonlight displays a deathward drift: a man is dying and being fetched by the ghost of his young daughter. The man who is dying, Andy, keeps requesting Bridget’s presence (“Where is she?”), as well as that of her unborn children (“Where are they?”). For Andy, death is “Like screaming with fright at the sight of a stranger only to find that you are looking into a mirror,” an image that strikingly recalls Symbolist Max Klinger’s etching “On Death.” Andy is afraid of his own reflection, and therefore avoids the moonlight. In the only unspoken scene of the play, Bridget remains motionless in the background as both her parents walk into a moonlighted area: “They stand still, listening,” in complete silence.

As Ann Hall remarks, “Bridget clearly illustrates the partnership between the living and the dead.” As a spirit, she waits upon and watches over the beings she left behind in the land of the living. She is a little helper of Death.

The circumstances of Bridget’s death remain a complete mystery, although we are led to feel that something frightful happened to her.

BRIDGET. Once someone said to me — I think it was my mother or my father — anyway, they said to

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1029 Ibid., 79.
1030 Ibid., 45, 35.
1031 Ibid., 46.
1032 Ibid., 48-49.
me—We’ve been invited to a party. You’ve been invited too. But you’ll have to come by
yourself, alone. ( . . .)
They told me where the party was. It was in
a house at the end of a lane. ( . . .)
When I got to the house it was bathed in
moonlight. ( . . .) But the inside of
the house was dark and all the windows were
dark. There was no sound.\textsuperscript{1034}

In my first reading of the play, I felt Bridget had died the moment she stepped alone into the
deserted dark house. The director who first staged \textit{Moonlight} in England, David Leveaux,
expressed a similar interpretation regarding Bridget’s closing monologue: “I think it’s a speech
about dying alone . . . I think [Pinter is] trying to put on stage something that is almost
unspeakable which is \textit{the experience of death}.”\textsuperscript{1035} Like Ann Hall, I sense that “Bridget has been
lied to,” since in the monologue she describes a story “someone said” to her, attributing it to one
of her parents. As Hall remarks, “Given the self-absorption of her parents throughout the play
( . . .) it is not improbable to read this final scene as an indictment regarding the myths our culture
tells us about death and other life questions.”\textsuperscript{1036} In other words, the parents told Bridget she
would be going to a party, when in fact she was entering the house of death.

Bridget’s final monologue may also be viewed as a landscape of the deep harm done to
her tender flesh, perhaps even abuse. Early in the play her father states: “The past is a mist.
(Pause.) Once . . . I remember this . . . once . . . a woman walked towards me across a darkening
room.”\textsuperscript{1037} As Knowles notes, throughout \textit{Moonlight}, Bridget often seems to be a “ghostlike
projection of Andy’s grief and guilt,”\textsuperscript{1038} which leads us to suspect that she was probably harmed

\textsuperscript{1034} Pinter, \textit{Moonlight}, 79.
\textsuperscript{1035} Michael Billington, \textit{The Life and Work of Harold Pinter} (London, UK: Faber & Faber 1996), 344.
\textsuperscript{1036} Ann Hall, “‘You’re Speaking to Someone and You Suddenly Become Another Person:’ Storytelling in Pinter’s
\textit{Moonlight} and \textit{Ashes to Ashes},” 269-70.
\textsuperscript{1037} Pinter, \textit{Moonlight}, 20-21.
\textsuperscript{1038} Ronald Knowles, \textit{Understanding Pinter}, 202.
by her father. She is like the wounded angel in Hugo Simberg’s painting of the same title.\textsuperscript{1039}

The atmosphere in the painting is sad; what happened to the angel is not, and will never be, clear.

In his biography of Pinter, Billington argues that Moonlight represents a homecoming for the playwright, since it picks up on many of the themes that have haunted him for years.\textsuperscript{1040} It also seems to be the most suitable play to end this chapter on Pinter’s homescapes, and to conclude the last section of a study devoted to the synesthetic dramatic landscapes of his theatre. Moonlight is a fine illustration of Pinter’s lyrical soundscapes, of his use of ghostscapes associated to a claustrophobic sense of family, and of the recurrence of deathscapes in his oeuvre, which signals the presence of death in life (as explored in Chapter Two). An example of the Symbolist temporal and spatial circularity manifest in Pinter’s theatre (the subject of Chapter Three), Moonlight can be seen as “a paean” to both stasis and entropy, since it “juxtaposes a world of mutability with the uncompromising and constant nature of death.”\textsuperscript{1041} In the course of Bridget’s journey to the mysterious unknown, she has apparently crossed “many fierce landscapes” or apocalyptic settings (filled with “barbed wire, skeletons of men and women in ditches”\textsuperscript{1042}), and is therefore aware of the suffering inflicted by destructive human-invented machinery (the topic of Chapter Four). As I have explained in the present section (Chapter Five), the play enacts a critique of patriarchal morality by showing that the oikos it fosters is a tremendously bleak and oppressive shelter. Ultimately, in Symbolist ecocentric terms (Chapter

\textsuperscript{1039} "The Wounded Angel" (1903) is a Symbolist painting that depicts two boys carrying a wounded angel (with blood on her wings and bandaged eyes) on a sort of wooden stretcher. The boys look sad and somber; the angel is sitting on the stretcher with her back curved and her head down, denoting fragility and defeat.

\textsuperscript{1040} According to Michael Billington (The Life and Work of Harold Pinter), Pinter’s recurrent themes are “the subjectivity of memory, the unknowability of one’s lifelong partner, the hunger for an ascertainable past, the idea of family life as a brutal battleground” (339).


\textsuperscript{1042} Pinter, Moonlight, 20-21.
One), Bridget finds her true *home* through an intimate bodily contact with earthly nature. As she beautifully expresses it,

BRIDGET. I am walking slowly in a dense jungle. But I’m not suffocating. I can breathe. That is because I can see the sky through the leaves.

*Pause.*

I’m surrounded by flowers. Hibiscus, oleander, bougainvillea, jacaranda. The turf under my feet is soft.

*Pause.*

I crossed so many fierce landscapes to get here. Thorns, stones, stinging nettles, barbed wire, skeletons of men and women in ditches. There was no hiding there. There was no yielding. There was no solace, no shelter.

*Pause.*

But here there is shelter. I can hide. I am hidden. The flowers surround me but they don’t imprison me. I am free. Hidden but free. I’m a captive no longer. I’m lost no longer. No one can find me or see me. I can be seen only by eyes of the jungle, eyes in the leaves. But they don’t want to harm me.1043

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**Conclusion**

From an aesthetic and theoretical perspective, Pinter’s theatre may be viewed as belonging to the Symbolist legacy. Aesthetically, the playwright makes use of devices and achieves effects that are like those of the Symbolists. The dramatic language of his dialogues is not descriptive and propositional (as in realism), but rather musical and pictorial, explorative of silence, vibration, and rhythm. In visual/kinesthetic terms it is a theatre of statuesque-like bodies, of masked faces, of isolated human figures that move minimally and often solemnly, even if intensely. Time in Pinter’s drama is usually static, cyclically repetitive, and conducive to a cinematic kind of pictorial sequence. Space is expressive and prominent, rather than a contextual background for the development of a plot between human figures. It is activated by inert objects and inanimate energies, haunted by images of death and ghosts of the past, often constituting a monodramatic setting reflective of its inhabitants’ psyches. As in Symbolist drama, the boundaries between imaginary and real worlds are frequently blurred in Pinter’s plays, revealing mysterious and repressed undersides of normative reality.

Ascertaining Pinter’s aesthetic connection to Symbolism enables us to look at his work in novel ways, since the Symbolist aesthetic view is also a theoretical perspective.\(^{1044}\) As I have used the term throughout this study, Symbolism does not designate a style, or an epoch, but rather introduces a set of concepts and perspectives on *writing* and *beholding*, a nexus of specific ideas on the role of art that cyclically return and become recombined. One of the central tenets of Symbolist theory is the expression of inner life through images, and a *poesis* (or process of artistic creation) which is synthetic, i.e., which renders perceptible processes of thought, the workings of dream, and embodied experiences, through a play of associations. Instead of

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subordinating the aesthetic to the message (as in realist drama, which uses words in an
informative and communicative way), Symbolist artworks privilege an interactive process of
image-production between the beholder and the object that does not culminate in a final
image/message but rather in an open-ended one.

From a Symbolist sensory perspective, I have found that Pinter’s oeuvre displays a
striking consistency all through his playwriting years (from 1957 to 2002) that contrasts to the
customary critical division of his dramaturgy into three separate thematic phases, of early
“comedies of menace,” middle “memory plays,” and late “political plays.” A Symbolist view of
the landscapes in his playtexts allows us to perceive Pinter’s persistent concern with the
oppression of the individual or of all forms of the Other—not only of non-normative human
beings, but also of extra-human realities (objects, spaces, and environments). By synthetic
means of association, Pinter’s drama draws attention to how a mechanical world view crushes
difference and otherness, reducing both human beings and earthly matter to things and numbers,
and threatening a naturally differentiated individual subjectivity with the imposition of a
homogeneous, utilitarian, and “objective” vision of the living earth. This coercion is evident all
across Pinter’s oeuvre, and at every level of lived experience of his characters: from the sphere
of the patriarchal family home, to the sphere of military and governmental bureaucracy; from the
microcosmic scale of a living being’s intimate dwelling space (her body), to the vaster scale of
her social world. Apart from views of a natural earthly environment—grasped in brief pastoral
lovescapes, or else in pantheistic deathscapes—all human-engendered landscapes in Pinter have
an oppressive feeling, at times apocalyptic.

Although Pinter’s theatre reveals intense synesthetic views, or multi-sensory landscapes,
it has been primarily examined in terms of the narrative linguistic exchanges between its
characters, as if it aesthetically conformed to the conventions of realism. Accordingly, critics have looked at his representations of nature, and of power, and associated them to a *negative* theatre ecology, and to a *negative* political vision. Drew Milne, for example, considers that Pinter’s work expresses a “negative dialectics” similar to that of German philosopher Theodor Adorno, and argues that his plays are not politically effective or suggestive of potential social change, but rather reify the existing bourgeois patriarchal order that the playwright purportedly wants to critique.\(^{1045}\)

In effect, a politically committed realism usually claims an unavoidable connection to “empirical” reality, and uses art as a means to bring about social change from without. A different type of art—such as the Symbolist—does not disclose oppositional practices to the dominant order, nor propose ameliorative measures, but rather works at the level of inner emotional and ethical attitudes.\(^{1046}\) By aesthetically throwing new light on the familiar, such art asks for a change in individual consciousness that may ultimately lead to a change of reality. As Daniel Gerould observes,

> What the symbolists bequeathed to present-day theatre is a belief in the power of the creative imagination to transform first the individual, then society. They believed in the wholeness of experience, in the links between the exterior and interior, the microcosm and macrocosm, and in humankind’s relation to the earth, thus anticipating present-day ecological concerns. Rejecting the official doctrines and dogmas of institutional religions and politics, the symbolists saw social change as effected through transformations of consciousness.\(^{1047}\)


\(^{1046}\) Charles Grimes aptly argues that, however dark, Pinter’s plays have at least an implicit ethical appeal, which is “to shock audiences into an altered awareness of their true moral condition by exposing the violence done ‘in their name’” (*Harold Pinter’s Politics*, 28). He adds that “ethics must exist without any assumption of its efficacy” (49), and that “There is no hope for dissent or subversion, only the need for it” (128). In a similar manner, Theodor Adorno posits the works of Franz Kafka and Samuel Beckett as examples of an art that is not politically “committed,” or motivated to expose oppositional practices to the dominant order, but which nevertheless produces actual effects of “resistance” and “revolt.” See Theodor Adorno, “Commitment,” in *The Essential Frankfurt Reader*, edited by Andrew Arato and Eike Gebhardt (New York: The Continuum Publishing Company, 1982), 314. See also Adorno’s essay on “The Autonomy of Art,” in *The Adorno Reader*, edited by Brian O’Connor (Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishers, 2000), 256.

Through Symbolist techniques, Pinter’s theatre asks for a change of attitude (at the micropolitical or psychic ecological level) so as to be able to reinvent sustainable and diverse conjugal, familial, and social practices, as well as balanced relationships with our own bodies and environments. An investigation of Symbolist and post-Symbolist theatre, therefore, may lead to an identification of a contemporary political theatre drawn along different guidelines than that of both realism and epic realism, as well as to a reevaluation of the supposedly apolitical works of the autonomous avant-garde.

In this dissertation I have read the synesthetic landscapes of Harold Pinter’s theatre in the light of phenomenology, sensory analysis, and landscape theory. With this study I hope to have demonstrated the validity of these theories and methods in the dramaturgical analysis of playtexts, so as to bring out their extra-linguistic resonances. Phenomenological techniques of analysis are not novel to the theatre, and have been applied to both drama and performance by authors such as Leonard Powlick, Bert O. States, Les Essif, Christopher Wixson, and Stanton Garner. Inspired by the philosophies of Merleau-Ponty and Bachelard, these critics have foregrounded the non-linguistic but material aspects of theatre, calling attention to such features as stage properties, empty space, embodiment, kinesthetic experience, silence, and temporality in drama/performance. Such phenomenological explorations seem extremely valuable for theatre studies, since—like Symbolist theory—they emphasize the role of our intuitive apprehension in imagining, perceiving, and reading drama/performance. As Bert O. States writes, phenomenology is an attitude, “it is probably the most personal form of critical commentary and hence is a useful counterbalance to the increasingly impersonal methodology in so much of today’s criticism.”

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Sensory theory is very new to the field of theatre studies since, as Sally Banes and André Lepecki argue, “Within the history of theatre and performance, historians, theorists, and critics have either totally ignored certain senses and certain sensorial experiences or, at best, relegated them to the periphery of critical attention and of theoretical investigation.”

Theatre criticism has primarily focused on particular sights and sounds (sets, costumes, lighting, speech, music), discarding other sensorial information. Sensory analysis may help correct the excesses of “textualism,” as well as the idea that everything is structured like a language, and/or attached to linguistic referents. Further, it provides a means of going beyond a text’s visual aspects (be it a performance-text or a play-text), and of experiencing its many overlapping and interconnected sensory/aesthetic impressions.

Landscape theory can activate new areas for the critical imagination in the field of theatre and performance studies. As the collection of essays edited by Una Chaudhuri and Elinor Fuchs attests, there are many ways of exploring the concept of landscape in drama and performance, such as culturally, aesthetically, historically, and ideologically. The many facets of the concept of landscape, therefore, allow us to reflect upon the implications of the recent spatial turn in the field of theatre studies, to explore the role of spatial experience in constructing cultural meaning (and vice-versa), and to focus on the presence of the non-human order in both drama and performance.

Since they are all tied to an embodied experience of environment/s, the above mentioned theories and methods may be particularly relevant to the investigation of drama/performance from a non-anthropocentric ecocritical perspective. An ecocritical approach that emphasizes ecocentric values has been referred to as ecophilosophy. Differently from an anthropocentric

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“shallow ecology” concerned with the economic valorization (or devaluation) of natural resources and animals so as to justify their “conservation” and habitat protection, ecophiliosophy condemns the harmful environmental impacts of modern industrial technology, deplores an ideology of progress seeking unsustainable and increasingly higher standards of living for the human species, sees nature as the context of culture, and respects the inherent worth of earthly matter and of non-human beings. Consequently, ecophiliosophy is a comprehensive view that encompasses ecological aspects other than the environmental. As Félix Guattari explains, it concerns at least three interrelated ecologies: a mental ecology, involving micropolitical/ethical choices made at the smallest scale; a social ecology, or change in practices at a macropolitical scale; and an environmental ecology, respectful of the agency and inherent value of other-than-human corporeal and incorporeal species.

An ecophiliosophical approach, therefore, also focuses on the psychic ecology of individual human beings, bringing back to our current critical discourse the notion of subjective/micropolitical agency and of its impact on the microcosm of the family, on the larger structure of society, and on the macrocosm of the earthly environment. In reading the landscapes of a playtext, such an approach does not merely investigate its representation of green spaces and/or natural landscapes, since this would imply that nature in a play is just another text rather than its own context. Rather, an ecophiliosophical way of sensing considers playtexts focused on the human individual as immanently environmental and therefore susceptible to ecologically informed readings.

My dissertation argues for an embodied perceptual experience of playtexts, and for a reading of their landscapes not just in terms of their actual spatial and sensory features, but also by examining their aesthetic interactions with other authors’ drama, fiction, philosophy, poetry,
and paintings. Since my analysis is focused on playtexts, I wish to acknowledge the controversy between performance and drama, the latter of which has declined from critical favor in recent years as an object of study. There is a current sense in theatre studies that criticism should approach drama only when it has been (or is being) endowed with liveness through performance, and otherwise leave the exploration of playtexts for literary critics. Besides investigating theatrical performances, theatre criticism has also approached diverse cultural phenomena as performance, often adopting the anthropological and sociological theoretical framework put forward by performance studies.

However productive these current explorations focusing almost exclusively on performance may be, I suggest that the disparagement of drama as an object of study may be jeopardizing one of the specificities of theatre as a space where multiple texts conflate, including that of the playtext. As Erika Fischer-Lichte affirms, theatre studies is an interdisciplinary subject within which many other fields of study merge, such as art history, cultural studies, communication and media sciences, anthropology, sociology, and literature studies. Consequently, “our problem today is not whether to widen or to narrow down our field, to claim more territory or to cede territory,” but rather to play with these intersecting fields of study, including that of the aesthetic experience and dramaturgical analysis of playtexts.

Within this line of reasoning, this study has sought to contribute toward an understanding of what landscape theory and sensory analysis may bring to the field of theatre studies, namely in the area of dramaturgical research. Rather than engaging with the narrative aspects of the plays by focusing on their referential “content,” I have interacted with the texts’ suggestive power, in terms of images, for the theatre medium, thinking of them as potential scripts for performance.

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1051 Ibid., 69.
This accords with Mallarmé’s notion of a *theatre of the mind*, in which the dramatist is a *spirituel histrion*, or actor suggesting a drama performed by the reader’s own imagination. Such theatre, suggested by an imaginative playtext, and played by the imagination of its beholder, “does not displace or substitute for the physical theatre, but enlarges and spiritualizes its resources.”

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Appendix: List of Works (Fiction and Drama) by Harold Pinter

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year of Composition</th>
<th>Year of first performance</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1954-5</td>
<td>The Black and White –story</td>
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<tr>
<td>1955</td>
<td>The Examination –story</td>
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<td>1957</td>
<td>The Room</td>
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<td>1957</td>
<td>The Birthday Party</td>
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<td>1957</td>
<td>The Dumb Waiter</td>
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<td>1958</td>
<td>A Slight Ache</td>
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<td>1958</td>
<td>The Hothouse</td>
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<td>1959</td>
<td>Revue sketches(^{1053})</td>
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<td>1959</td>
<td>A Night Out</td>
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<td>1959</td>
<td>The Caretaker</td>
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<td>1960</td>
<td>Night School</td>
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<td>1960</td>
<td>The Dwarfs</td>
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<td>1961</td>
<td>The Collection</td>
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<td>1962</td>
<td>The Lover</td>
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<td>1963</td>
<td>Tea Party –story</td>
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<td>1964</td>
<td>Tea Party</td>
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<td>1964</td>
<td>The Homecoming</td>
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<td>1966</td>
<td>The Basement</td>
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<td>1967</td>
<td>Landscape</td>
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<td>1968</td>
<td>Silence</td>
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<td>1969</td>
<td>Night</td>
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<td>1970</td>
<td>Old Times</td>
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<td>1972</td>
<td>Monologue</td>
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<td>1974</td>
<td>No Man’s Land</td>
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<td>1978</td>
<td>Betrayal</td>
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<td>1980</td>
<td>Family Voices</td>
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<td>Victoria Station</td>
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<td>A Kind of Alaska</td>
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<td>1983</td>
<td>Precisely</td>
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<td>One for the Road</td>
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<td>1988</td>
<td>Mountain Language</td>
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<td>1991</td>
<td>The New World Order</td>
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<td>Party Time</td>
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<td>1993</td>
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<td>1996</td>
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<td>1999</td>
<td>Celebration</td>
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<td>2000</td>
<td>Remembrance of Things Past</td>
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<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>Press Conference</td>
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\(^{1053}\) Trouble in the Works; The Black and White; Request Stop; Last to Go; Special Offer; That’s Your Trouble; That’s All; Applicant; Interview; Dialogue for Three
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