

Landscape: Pinter-ish Characters

Ansam Riyadh A. Almaarouf - Yousif Omer Babiker

¹. lecturer-English Department College of Education- Tikrit University-Iraq ².English Department College of Languages- Sudan University of Science and Technology

ABSTRACT :

This paper handles Pinter's characters' construction in the first one-act play that denotes Pinter's second phase of writing, *Landscape* (1968). The paper hypothesizes that Pinter throughout his second stage of writing has tried to give the impression that the conflict which has been appearing throughout his first stage writing is vital to get full-life characters, and without such conflict, there will be neither protagonist nor antagonist. Character analysis will be adopted as a method of discussion.

The discussion concludes that Pinter has used inactive characterization to indicate the idea that conflict is an essential part for life continuation and character's construction.

Key words: *Landscape, Memory, Characterization*

المستخلص :

تتناول هذه الورقة بناء الشخصيات في مسرحية الفصل الواحد , " المنظر " (1968) لهارولد بنتر والتي تمثل المرحلة الثانية في كتاباته. تفترض الورقة ان بنتر خلال اعماله حاول ان يعطي انطباعا ان الصراع الذي يظهر في المرحلة الاولى من كتاباته كان اساسا من اجل بناء شخصيات ذوي حياة متكاملة وبدون ذلك الصراع لا يمكن ان يكون هناك ابطال او نقيضهم.

الورقة تبنت تحليل الشخصيات لتكون وسيلة النقاش.

انتهت الورقة الى ان بنتر من خلال ابرازه لشخصيات بدون صراع اوضح فكرة ان الصراع مهم لاستمرار الحياة ولبناء الشخصية.

INTRODUCTION :

Harold Pinter, the winner of the Nobel Award for Literature (2005), is known world-wide as one of the greatest writers of a body of literary work that includes thirty-two plays, twenty-one film scripts, one novel, and numerous poems. Besides being a prolific writer, he has been a director, an actor, and a political activist in the second half of the twentieth century. Pinter's contribution is of such a distinctive quality that he was described by Brigitte Gauthier, in her preface to *Viva Pinter*, as 'Harold Pinter was the Shakespeare of our

century'(2007,N.P.) Her opinion is definitely correct as Gussow (1994, 123) rightly observed, 'is essentially exploratory. [...] theatre has always been a critical act'. *Landscape*(1968) is chronologically located in the middle period between the early and late plays. This one-act play is the first play Pinter has written in this period. It shows a distinguished form and content different from that of preceding plays. Though it is different in the way Pinter manipulates things and characters, it is geared to the same central idea that Pinter has

previously exposed, though this time in a reversed and revised form.

The second phase of Pinter's work begins with two plays so radically different from anything Pinter had written previously in the first stage of his writing. The limited→ controlled/controlled → controlling conflict which dominates his first stage writing almost disappears here, but with startling consequences. The overall arch of the play's conflict which this play shows is mirrored in each detail but different from the previous works: this time with public consequences. Never, throughout the whole of Pinter's work, the conflict has never become repetitive or assumed a merely mechanical form. For each play its function and form are specific to the nature of the limited→ controlled/controlled→ controlling conflict.

Methodology

The paper adopts the character analysis to be the method of discussion. Character analysis is the most suitable method for approaching the selected play "Landscape" since the target of the paper is to evaluate the characters' construction with relation to conflict.

Discussion

Landscape presents the other face of the life that differs from what Pinter used to register in previous works to show by contrast the essence of life that is derived by ethics. In portraying characters as neither controlled nor controlling and neither modernist nor postmodernist, Pinter insists that their existence will be felt and valued only if it occurs at the same time. He predicts postmodernism before its time by giving

the audiences postmodernist characters while he is talking about modernist ones.

In *Landscape* there is experimentation with both form and memory which begin now to give voice to some public consequences of the private conflict at the heart of all Pinter's plays. Pinter seems to have broken away from his reliable power-play source of tension.

Setting is used in a different form; Pinter is inclined to show that the period of the closed rooms has ended, and he is fully aware of the important role of setting in understanding his plays. The focus is shifted from the closed rooms to un-walled space that can be anywhere. Pinter underlined this new landscape setting trend by saying, "Certainly they are not in a room. So the characters can't open a door and come in, but I think they're there". (Tynan, 1967, 8)

In this one-act play, Pinter gives his audiences a different form of relation, if one can say it is a relation at all. The conflict is not there for power and dominance or for anything else. Mel Gussow (1996, 18) in an interview with Harold Pinter states that "*Landscape* and *Silence* [the two short poetic memory plays that were written between *The Homecoming* and *The Old Times*] are in a very different form. There is not any menace at all". Beside lacking the menace in *Landscape*, in a very formalistic way the character can be described neither as protagonist nor antagonist for there is nothing to be gained. The quest-line for each character is not portrayed throughout the play. At the end of the play, the audience realize the core of the idea which Pinter is trying to explain: without the differences between the characters and their

stimulus there will be no conflict, no relation and thus, no life. Also, without any consideration for others there will be no continuation of life.

In *Landscape* a middle-aged couple (Beth and Duff) speak at, rather than to, each other in a counterpoint that consigns speech to an extension of private memory. The characters communicate their thoughts, memories, and daydreams of past loves aloud to the audience but not to each other. Thus, Pinter describes the genesis: I've started a couple pages of something quite different. A new form and I'm diving. It's simply, as it stands, about a woman around fifty. She's talking. That's all I bloody well know. I don't know where she is. (Ibid.)

Only in the most subtle sense does this play dramatize the characters' occupation for power; more obviously it portrays Pinter's concern with time, space, and the mystery of identity as choice continues to connect with self-knowledge. But the absence of power occupation here develops with unexpected ramifications: not as a good but it's opposite. In *Landscape* the implication is that the absence of the conflict may be as destructive as its presence.

In the introduction to the first volume of his *Complete Plays*, Pinter wrote: There are two silences. One when no word is spoken. The other when perhaps a torrent of language is being employed. This speech is speaking of a language locked beneath it. That is its continual reference. The speech we hear is an indication of that which we don't hear. It is a necessary avoidance, a violent, sly, anguished or mocking smoke screen

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 that it is a constant stratagem to cover nakedness. (Pinter, Harold. *Plays: Three*. London: Eyre Methuen, 1978) This nakedness which is associated with silence is very essential in Pinter's writing. The speech the people hear is an indication of that which they don't hear. Pinter once said: "It is a necessary avoidance, a violent, sly, and anguished or mocking smoke screen which keeps the other in its true place. When true silence falls we are left with echo but are nearer nakedness." (Doods, 2008, N.P.) Pinter tries to show this nakedness through silence as well as through speech. Conflict, characterization and plot can be developed through strong dialogue. Each line is meant to cause a reaction in the other character or it is wasted. Dialogue mustn't be expositional i.e. explain what is happening. The playwright should reveal little by little as the audience gradually begins to detect the context and background of what is being said. Characters should reveal themselves as the stakes get higher. Of course, all that the audiences have is an inertial monologue and not a dialogue. There is no progress for the action because of the lack of the dialogue.

In *Landscape*, the setting is the two sides, right and left, of a kitchen table. The setting in the script is followed by a note:

Duff refers normally to Beth, but does not appear to hear her voice.

Beth never looks at Duff, and does not appear to hear his voice.

Both characters are relaxed, in no sense rigid.(175) The setting shows that the characters are not linked to each other. the table is not but a stage-setting rather than a common thing they are using. The important note here is to illustrates that these characters are not indulging in a conversation, for each of them appears to be indulged in his own monologue. The audience are faced by Beth and Duff who are engulfed by silence. Stage directions imply that they do not “appear to hear” each other’s voices. Duffs patter about trivia in the present, his recollections of the past, and Beth’s internal monologue is solely about the past. There is hardly any hint at their relationship as husband and wife, nor are their present identities contained in their separate illusions about one another.

From the first page of the script, the list of the characters, the reader can notice that these characters are of no specific identities. There is no relation between them that can be identified, and they have no special features that can be distinguish them from any other characters. They could be any one. No facial or bodily features are mentioned.

The subjects of their separate monologues converge at times, most noticeably at the end when Beth and Duff describe sexual encounters. But even in their separate recollections of a shared intimate experience there is no close association. Where Duff recalls “banging the gong,” claiming:

“I would have had you in front of the dog like a man,”

Hoping,

“You’ll plead with me like a woman,”

Beth recalls a time past on the beach when,

He lay above me.” (196)

She then brings down the final curtain with

“Oh my true love I said.” (197)

The anguish is there in their talk. In neither case does the love recalled absolutely reference one another nor is it clearly fulfilled. Duff switches from the conditional past to the future tense, describing what he wishes would have happened or will occur, while Beth recalls a long-past, almost girlhood, memory detached from the living, aging woman of the present. In the fragmenting and telescoping of time, the identities of the characters, cloaked in mystery, remain in flux. Is Beth really different from the young girl whom she recalls as herself? She knows she will be different in the future:

Of course when I’m older I won’t be the same as I am, I won’t be what I am, my skirts, my long legs, I’ll be older, I won’t be the same. (192) Nor is it clear that her man, as she refers to him, is Duff. He may be their former employer Sykes, gone—presumably dead. Pinter, in a letter to the director of a German production, maintains that the man in Beth’s memory is Duff, infused with recollections of Sykes whom Duff jealously detests:

[T]he man on the beach is Duff. I think there are elements of Mr. Sykes in her memory of this Duff, which she might be attributing to Duff, but the man remains Duff. I think that Duff detests and is jealous of Mr. Sykes, although I do not believe that Mr. Sykes and Beth were ever lovers. I formed these

conclusions after I had written the plays [letter refers also to *Silence*] and after learning about them through rehearsals. (Esslin, *The Peopled Wound*, 187) Elsewhere in the play the two monologues contrapuntally echo one another. Immediately following Duff's description of stopping off at a pub for a pint, Beth speaks of stopping off at a hotel for a drink. (183) A dog wanders in and out of both their narratives, but even in these tenuous connections, Pinter dramatizes the separateness of these two people who have presumably lived together for many years but whose lives no longer touch. Duff's explicit statement about what really matters only further emphasizes their separateness: That's what matters, anyway. We're together. That's what matters.

Silence (192) In what sense are Beth and Duff together, or does it possibly matter aside from their proximity and the fact that they share a breathing space? The silence that follows the statement shows that Pinter here evokes the horror of the shared/ unshared existence between two people without intimacy or even relationship. Except for their advancing ages, which limit other more attractive choices, would they be better apart? Although the landscape of each of their narratives takes the audience beyond the walls that are traditionally associated with Pinter's rooms, Beth and Duff seem more obviously walled into the isolation of their separate recollections of their shared romance. Yet romance remains paramount to both. Hints of the limited→ controlled/controlled→ controlling conflict, subtly retained in Duff's relation to Sykes, to Beth, and in Beth's relation to the man of her

memory, continue to portray the destructive qualities of hierarchy from the vantage point of those forced to assume the yoke of service in a hierarchal society—the servants. Duff, first speaks quite respectfully of his former employer, Sykes: “That’s where we’re lucky in my opinion. To live in Mr. Sykes’ house in peace, no-one to bother us. I've thought of inviting one or two people I knew from the village in here for a bit of a drink once or twice but I decided against it. It's not necessary.”

Pause (185) Duff's speech which is followed by a pause, reflects his reluctance and his disbelief that his opinion is right. And he soon discloses hostility:

“Mind you, he was a gloomy bugger,”(188)

He says with unintended irony that equally comments on his own life, adding:

“I was never sorry for him at any time, for his lonely life.”

Pause (188) He admits his relief now that Sykes is gone:

At least now...at least now, I can walk down to the pub in peace and up to the pond in peace, with no-one to nag the shit out of me.

Silence (192) Duff resents his subservient position but salvages some dignity by recalling his one area of mastery, his position as a trained cellerman: “ this fellow knew bugger all about beer. He didn't know I'd been

trained as a cellarman. That's why I could speak with authority." (193) In his relationship with Beth, he is gentle at times, as when he recalls her among the flowers or when he describes his confession of infidelity to her. But though he confesses his desire to take Beth by force, expressed in commanding, raucous terms, he seems oddly unsure of his ability to have her "like a man" and describes only how he "would" have liked to behave with her and have her respond to him. (193) Sadly, he does not seem to achieve "what matters" to him. Beth's relation to her man is quaintly passive, played to a courtly but sensuous love, imagined as much as remembered, who spends much time asleep on the beach. The man she describes seems so different from the Duff the audience see that it is easy to suppose Beth is speaking of another man altogether. It hardly matters. Duff is becoming the sleepy dormouse Sykes may have become in old age, and this Duff of her memories and dreams is not the real living, here-and-now man anyway. That seems to be the point as Pinter explores how, in even a single instant of memory, an image can displace reality, the living moment. It is not necessary to suppose these two people never speak to one another. The dramatic device of the internal monologue simply allows Pinter to dramatize what is occasionally common to any conversation—one person's being on his or her own track while the other is privately shut off or engaged elsewhere. Here he also dramatizes what is most important to each character: not each other, not even themselves as they presently exist, but how each conceives

the self and imagines the other, generally in the past. Beth may or may not have been unfaithful to Duff as he confesses he was to her, yet her ongoing infidelity with her imaginary man of her youth is a far more palpable and salient part of her life now than Duff's real infidelity is to him. In a sense then, these characters that are out of touch with each other are beyond any quest for power. Power requires relationship. But though they have escaped the confinement of the walls of a room, they are also beyond exerting any power even in their own isolated private lives, which seem to drift on chance remembrance rather than be driven by any volition. The absence of power occupation reduces these characters to a static landscape blending with the background and generating only a lyrically recalled past. What is best in their lives is already over except for what is savored in memory and imagination. The assertion of power in this play, so subtle it seems almost absent, occurs primarily at junctures to underscore the failures in the relationships, and junctures. In this regard, Penelope Prentice (2000, 174) argues that this *Landscape* forms: *A momenta mori* portraying those who not only sit out their lives (rarely a posture to be admired in Pinter's work) but who sleep through life. Like those fence-sitters in Dante's *Inferno*, these characters suffer from un-lived lives; failure to choose, inability to act, however lyrically recalled, consigns them to a living purgatory they choose to interpret as contentment. The characters remain without influence in the public sphere, and hardly exert impact on the private. The characters remain as out of

touch with one another as with themselves. But their loss momentarily illumines the audience's. In *Landscape* the critic, Dilek Inan (2011, N.P.) states that in *Landscape* the characters retreat into their own realms of memory, perhaps to reflect a sense of loss, regret or a desire to live in a fantasy world because the reality of present time is unbearably oppressive. In order to survive in a setting where the character is faced with the naked truth, Pinter's characters usually withdraw into the realm of memory instead of responding to the immediate question as a tactic. This in itself creates a drama of distress and desperation which is part of everyday life. Lambert and Julie immerse into different memories which reflects their lack of connection. It is not surprisingly the near absence of the limited→ controlled/ controlled→ controlling conflict does not produce a paradise but a life devoid of that vitality that seems a concomitant of the desire for love and power. These characters, which may seem to represent an ethical advancement toward peace in Pinter's work, have simply retreated from the conflict rather than confront their own desires. Jean Baker Miller (1971, 767-775) in her work *Toward a New Psychology of Women*, written almost four decades ago, noted that women "as a subservient group and as nurturers and keepers of peace in a society which does not value those virtues must not only confront conflict but initiate it. Her conclusion aptly addresses the seemed peace these characters gain at the expense of all else. The failure to confront any conflict here results only in perpetuating illusion. Confronting

conflict is very essential in keeping progress of life. The existence of different kinds of characters: the modernist and postmodernist is a demand to give value for the motivations that derive their actions and reactions. Conflict helps in appreciating the ethics that generate certain behavior. In juxtaposing the two kinds of characters in the same play, Pinter shows the importance of their existence together. In *Landscape* Pinter presents the other face of the life that differs from what he used to register in previous works to show by contrast the essence of life that is derived by ethics. In portraying characters as neither controlled nor controlling and neither modernist nor postmodernist, Pinter insists that their existence will be felt and valued only if it occurs at the same time. He predicts postmodernism before its time by giving the audience postmodernist characters while he is talking about modernist ones. *Landscape* is an important work, because it clearly exposes Pinter's opinion regarding the inevitability of the existence of the modernist\postmodernist characters in the same context. By presenting one-act play that lacks the conflict which reflects the features of modernist controlled\postmodernist controlling characters, Pinter has exposed inactive characters who are unable to have a full life. Moreover, Pinter's characters in *Landscape*, are lacking the relation with the other, so that they cannot progress or even live. In this sense, Pinter has conveyed the idea that postmodernism is not but a complement of modernism by presenting the characters as completion for each other.. In *Landscape*, acceptance in a form of love is

increasingly portrayed as failing to connect the lives of the characters whose separateness is further emphasized in past, often failed, attempts to love. Acceptance in a form of love here is not linked with accepting the other and with the ethics of alterity and otherness, thus it fails to form a connection link among characters. Love, in *this play* is connected only with the emotional erotic state rather than with the psychological-behavioral as well as rational states. Even when considered among those who loved and married, Beth and Duff are in no way close. *Landscape*, portrays characters past youth without the hopeful springtime and summer of love, seasons which are nevertheless suggested in the lush rain wet landscapes of Duffs' narrative. The almost total absence of the power occupation in this one-act plays poses an interesting question: Does the absence of the struggle for dominance reflect an absence of a quality essential not only to drama but to life? an outstanding question that is raised during this period of time, the middle period, to show Pinter's deep concern with exhibiting the conflict as a necessity for progress, life-continuation, as well as self-knowledge. The three things which Pinter has been greatly interested in throughout his early plays. The thematic implications of the controlled/controlling conflict in Pinter's early work suggest that the struggle grows out of feelings of inadequacy and results generally in destruction rather than creation or growth of human relationships from the modernist controlled character's point of view. Nevertheless, the postmodernist controlling character is believed to

benefit greatly from that struggle by achieving self-knowledge. In this regard, it might be supposed that the absence of the struggle for dominance would signal a positive turn in Pinter's work. Without the struggle and without the correlative desire to attain a position or role, however artificial or arbitrary, these characters seem only half alive. Without attempts to fulfill desires, they remain isolated into an almost death-in-life existence. Having a relation with the other in Pinter's plays seems both integrally connected and opposed to blood lust and violence. The only peace in Pinter's work, purchased in *Landscape* at the expense of powerlessness, is portrayed as self-delusion. In this sense, Prentice (2000, 178) states that Pinter's portrayal of love and violence mirrors:

the most fundamental physical structure in the human brain governing love and violence to convey a force resembling fate. Deep within what some term the primitive brain resides the core of strongest emotions, the amygdale, center of love and rage. Where Pinter's early plays show how the quest for love and respect, when thwarted, can so easily trigger anger and violence, the reverse applies here—without a quest neither love nor anger is fully activated in the present living moment, and action thus dead ends. These characters claim to be complete within themselves, as is typical in Pinter's work, only to call that completeness into question. *Landscape*, directly confronting the power conflict by suspending it, signals a shift in attitude toward that conflict. Even more disturbing than the battle for power is the dramatization of how quickly one can

inhabit one's routine and assume habits not consciously chosen, but simply fallen into. The characters remain blithely innocent of the choices they made in their lives which gained them their current identities. The audience see that at some level they all desire acceptance from the other, yet each in the end is left touting a happy isolation which evinces the opposite: an unresolved loss. *Landscape*, written by a master of dramatic conflict, takes the audience further to the edge of life lived in the absence of conflict than any of his work written after. Implicit in such wholly solipsistic, inner-directed identities is some recognition that the healthy woman and man exist in a larger society, requiring some balance between the inward- with the outward-directed self, some vital engagement with the world, what Bertrand Russell simply calls "zest." Thus the near absence of Pinter's concern with modernist controlled/postmodernist controlling relationships in these plays calls for a person possessing an honest self-knowledge, a consciousness of choices, and an ability to confront conflicts in the larger community in order to act and gain what is desired for the self and others.

Conclusion

In *Landscape* the characters retreat into their own realm of memory, perhaps to reflect a sense of loss, regret, or a desire to live in fantasy world because the reality of present time is unbearably oppressive. In order to survive in a setting where no great values and ethics dominate, Pinter's characters usually withdraw into the realm of memory

instead of responding to the immediate question as a tactic. This in itself creates a drama of suffering and anxiety which is part of every day- life.

Works Cited

- 1- Esslin. Martin, *The Peopled Wound: The Work of Harold Pinter.* (1970). New York: Doubleday.
- 2- Gussow, Mel. *Conversations with Pinter.* (1994) London: Nick Hern Books.
- 3- Gauthier, Brigitte. 'Preface to Viva Pinter'. *The International Symposium*, 22-24 March 2007.
- 4- Inan . Dilek, *Harold Pinter the Wordsmith: Celebration.* Nebula8.1, December 2011.
- 5- Miller. Jean Baker, *Toward a New Psychology of Women.* In *The American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 41(1971) 767-775.
- 6- Pinter. Harold, *Landscape in Complete Works: 3.*(1990) New York: Grove Press.
- 7- ----- . *Plays: Three.*(1978) London: Eyre Methuen.
- 8- Prentice, Penelope. *The Pinter Ethics.*(2000) New York: Garland.
- 9- Dodds, Baisley. *Nobel Laureate Harold Pinter dies at 78.* Thursday, December 25, 2008. In http://www.foxnews.com/printer_friendly_wires/2008Dec25/0,4675,EUBritainObitPinter,00.html On 3\7\2013
- 10- Russell. Bertrand, *Positive Atheism's Big List of Bertrand Russell Quotations.* In <http://www.positiveatheism.org/hist/quotes/russell.htm>. on 29\7\2013.
- 11- Tynan, Kathleen. "In Search of Harold Pinter: Part Two." *Evening Standard* 29 Apr. 1967:9.