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From Room to Tomb: *Moonlight*

Summary

In 1993, a decade of directly political plays was followed by *Moonlight*, which in the *Guardian's* words would “come as a shock to those who have lately pigeonholed Harold Pinter as a writer of bruising polemic” (Billington 1993, 1). Although *Moonlight* made history as Pinter's first full length work for the theatre since *Betrayal*, it should rather be seen as an interval from politics where the playwright re-explores the interior landscapes of his early work, where he returns to the pastoral as a landscape of retreat and fantasy. Indeed, the play's title suggests a pastoral realm. The heroine retreats into Nature through linguistic idealisation. *Moonlight* can best be comprehended as Pinter briefly leaving politics to explore new horizons – “his own private griefs and anguish in the most nakedly and unashamedly emotional of all his plays” (Billington 1996, 338). This paper evaluates *Moonlight* as a reworking of Pinter's own roots thematically, stylistically and spatially.

Key words: Harold Pinter, *Moonlight*, space, room, tomb, death, separation

Od sobe do grobnice: *Mesečina*

Povzetek

Leta 1993 je desetletju odkrito političnih iger sledila *Mesečina* (*Moonlight*), ki je bila v *Guardianu* opisana kot »šok za tiste, ki so Harolda Pinterja v zadnjem času opisovali kot pisca neizprosnihih polemik« (Billington 1993, 1). Čeprav je *Mesečina* postala znana kot prva celovečerna drama po *Prevari* (*Betrayal*), bi jo bilo namesto tega primerneje videti kot umik od politike, med katerim dramatik ponovno raziskuje notranjost svojih zgodnjih del in se v njem vrne k pastoralu kot pokrajini umika in fantazije. Že naslov drame navaja na pastoralno okolje. Junakinja se v Naravo umakne s pomočjo lingvističnega idealiziranja. *Mesečino* je mogoče najlažje razumeti kot Pinterjev kratkotrajen umik iz politike, namenjen raziskovanju novih obzorij – »njegove intimne bolečine in trpljenja v najbolj odkrito in brezsravno čustveni izmed vseh njegovih iger« (Billington 1996, 338). Prispevek ovrednoti *Mesečino* kot tematsko, slogovno in prostorsko ponovno obravnavo Pinterjevih lastnih korenin.

Ključne besede: Harold Pinter, *Mesečina*, prostor, soba, grobnica, smrt, ločitev

From Room to Tomb: *Moonlight*

1. Introduction

Nobel Prize-winning playwright Harold Pinter has presented himself in Britain in the role of a writer who engages very publicly in discussion on international affairs. After 1970, he became engaged in cultural and millennial crises: he stopped being a man of leisure and became an activist, a fighter and an investigator. Just after he wrote his first major openly political play, *One for the Road*, he said that he did not know what he was going to write next. He told Bryan Appleyard that he felt “there will be no writing, no entertainment /.../ in a very short time unless we recognise the realities of the world in which we live” (Appleyard 1984, 13). Therefore, his plays and film scripts at the time focused on the atrocities in the world¹ and showed that no easy optimism was possible. He suggested a revolutionist strain and resisted the instrumentalism and abstraction exercised by governments.

For almost half a century, critics have been puzzled by Pinter’s Pinteresque language. Although *Moonlight* was greeted as a historically positive event – Pinter’s first full-length play since *Betrayal* – most critics seem unable to accept the play on its own terms, “preferring to see it as a self-parody, and its author as trapped inside the Pinteresque” (Ghilardi-Santacatterina 1997, 114). According to Benedict Nightingale, “For all its oddities and obscurities, *Moonlight* marks a genuine return to form” (Nightingale 1993, 3). Nicolas De Jongh was one of the critics who missed the play’s point; he believed *Moonlight* was simply a “laboured imitation of his old great self” (De Jongh 1993). Similarly, Martin Hoyle reminded his readers of Pinter’s writer’s block, arguing that here was “a blocked talent going through the motions producing a collection of Pinterisms: evasive gentility, shock four-letter words, mysterious codified exchanges” (Hoyle 1993). The list carries on, as Claire Armistead wrote: “At 62 Pinter is coming back into his own and confounding the theatrical obituarists who have for years been mourning his passing as a playwright able, or inclined to write at any length” (Armistead 1993, 3). And Michael Coveney regarded the play as having “the potent evanescence of his earlier disjointed reveries, *Landscape* and *Silence* (1969), and the purgatorial, between life-and-death bedroom bleakness of *A Kind of Alaska* (1973)” (Coveney 1993, 49).

There is a shadow of truth here, but we should instead read *Moonlight* as an extremely serious and sophisticated recycling of themes and images. Critics are right to stress the echoes from previous plays. His earlier work becomes a major theme in *Moonlight* as his earlier characters and milieu reappear: “the sculptured iciness of *No Man’s Land*, the cockney swagger of *The Homecoming*, the ribaldry of *The Caretaker*” (Grant 1993, 13). *Moonlight* represents a dialectic between spirituality and materialism. It is a homecoming in that he re-explores the poetics of terror, the subjectivity of memory, the unknowability of one’s partner, the need for a tangible past and the idea of family life as a brutal battleground. *Moonlight* systematises and combines the theme of the family (from the early plays) with the theme of death (from the political plays).

¹ *Precisely* (1983) presented an apocalyptic picture of the world, and *Handmaid’s Tale* (1990) suggested a futuristic dystopia in North America.

In his 1993 play *Moonlight*, Pinter revisits the idea of becoming family exiles, a theme he had already explored in *Family Voices*. Thus, *Moonlight* returns to a more personal family setting where there are three separate playing areas on stage, and as in *Silence*, the characters' narrations weave themselves in and out of the others' past and present lives. Pinter said that "most of the areas one writes about are finally pretty mysterious to the writer. If they're not, there's no discovery, there's no path, no journey at all" (Pinter, 1999). He has used mystery and image as a source of revelation and meaning. *Moonlight* comes as a new journey where he discovers death as a new horizon. The play introduces a new note, which Pinter has explored joyously. Following the political plays' conflict and anger, *Moonlight* is instead an interval of light, hope and regeneration.

Pinter's earliest major work, *The Dwarfs*, which he wrote in 1950, established moonlight as one of his basic preoccupations:

Isn't that the moon up there? It must be late, Len said. Can you see the lights there, on the roads? All that. They're bells. They have that sound. I can see the moon where I stand. It's all right. The globe's turning. This is not night. This isn't night. Can you hear the moon? Eh? And these lights? There's a bell here. We're making this bell. We're making the light. Can you hear the moon, through the sound? It is in us (Pinter 1990, 115).

2. Human Landscape Between Death and Separation

In *Moonlight* Pinter explores the spiritual conquering of physical space and the relationship between physical and spiritual space. Thus, the play starts in the territory where *Party Time* ended: in a ghostly moonlit space. Like Jimmy in *Party Time*, the heroine in *Moonlight* is trapped in a dark spiritual space whose existence is only possible through human mortality. Pinter's earlier characters fought for rooms to satisfy their primitive need to be protected. Rooms, as safe as wombs, have protected his people from external menace. Alternately, *Moonlight* articulates death as a new horizon where the characters find themselves in tombs instead of rooms. On the other hand, womb and tomb are compatible terms here: Andy yearns to return to the womb, to seek death, which is the final stasis. The correlation between womb and tomb is clear in Bel's claim that babies know more about death than adults do:

We've forgotten death but they haven't forgotten it. They remember it. Because some of them, those who are really very young, remember the moment before their life began – it's not such a long time ago for them, you see – and the moment before their life began they were of course dead. (Pinter 1998, 358).

This yearning for death was central for Pete in *The Dwarfs*. In a sense the later plays restore a philosophical breadth and intellectual overtones that Pinter partly conceded since that early novel:

I'm of a mind to abdicate. [...] Because I'm the axiom I will not escape. In the act of proof, after all, is the proof. The gaschamber, I won't deny it, is a ripe and purposive unit. I look into my garden and see walking blasphemies. A blasphemy is a terrible thing. They cut the throat of a child over the body of a naked woman. The blood runs down her back, the blood runs between the cheeks of her arse. In my sight the world commits sacrilege. I shall walk to

my own coffin, when I have chosen to make time. Soon I shall place a tombstone upon that world. [...] The world is vanity. The world is impertinent. (Pinter 1990, 111-2).

The world of Pinter's plays has been one of vanity and impertinence. In *Moonlight*, as Pinter promises through Pete, he places a tombstone on the world of atrocities that he presented in his political plays and retreats into more private landscapes to explore human isolation and suffering through death's barrenness. Here the absent/dead daughter Bridget exists in a spiritual location, which may be her tomb. She hovers over the mortal worlds of her parents and brothers: her father Andy is on his deathbed, and her brother Fred is confined to his bed with a mortal disease. Pinter explains the play's central idea to Gussow, as "a very simple question of an image of a man in bed, dying, and his wife was in the room. I knew he was a man of considerable vigour, and I am pretty sure that the line 'Where are they?' was central to the whole" (Gussow 1993, 98). The play depicts the themes of dying and separation in complex ways, including their presence within marriage, and between a father and his sons.

Moonlight explores the relationship between physical proximity and emotional distance. It involves three separate playing areas: Andy's bedroom, Fred's bedroom and Bridget's intangible space. The mode of the setting is reminiscent of the memory plays of the late 1960s and 1970s where characters are also physically close yet emotionally remote, and specifically the play recalls *Silence* in its articulation of three separated playing areas disengaged from each other. The action is formulated by fragmentary juxtapositions of each separate area – one space interrupting the other. It is important that, while space in Pinter's political work refers to a definable, global socio-historical world, in *Moonlight* he suggests that it is not geography but emotional reality that determines human landscape.

The play portrays a kind of wasteland of human isolation and suffering. It starts and finishes with Bridget in faint light talking lyrically about light, darkness and the moon. Her location is not specified; she appears in an area and is moving about in the night. Since there is no moon, she is sleepless in her tomb. Her task is to ensure that her parents "sleep in peace and wake up rested. [...] Because I know that when they look at me they see that I am all they have left of their life" (Pinter 1998, 319). She is the only character who can commute between mortality and the eternal; thus, she can build a blurred bridge between solitude and association, youth and age.

The play oscillates between corporeal and incorporeal landscapes. Bridget watches the tangible in her ghostly moonlit space. Her unlimited indistinct space is succeeded by her parents' bedroom, where her father, Andy, is on his deathbed. He is in his fifties and accompanied by his wife, Bel, at this alarming moment. Bel's failure to find their two sons makes her a target for Andy's mockery and bad jokes. But there is a relationship here that tames the humour and makes it indicate a bond, and a shared history, rather than just – as in so many of the earlier plays – aggression. Andy and Bel make fun of each other. Their teasing creates genuinely amusing dialogues, and Bel's feelings for her apparently ill husband are expressed as a mockery of concern:

Do you feel anything? What do you feel? Do you feel hot? Or cold? Or both? What do you feel? Do you feel cold in your legs? Or hot? What about your fingers? What are they? Are they cold? Or hot? Or neither cold nor hot? (Pinter 1998, 321)

Such exchanges illustrate a resistance to the conventional sentimentality of death. Andy himself displaces the sentimental as he watches Bel embroidering: “Oh. I’ve been meaning to ask you. What are you making there? A winding sheet? Are you going to wrap me up in it when I conk out? You’d better get a move on. I’m going fast” (Pinter 1998, 324). When Andy complains that his own wife is taking the piss out of him, she claims that, because of her convent school education, the term leaves her mystified, and Andy contrasts her convent school pretensions with the suggestion that she has always been over-sexed: “You’ve never been nonplussed in the whole of your voracious, lascivious, libidinous life” (Pinter 1998, 321). He pedantically explains the term taking the piss as mockery, that it means to mock; however, Bel demands a rational explanation, and Andy replies, “Rationality went down the drain donkey’s years ago” (Pinter 1998, 320). Logical explanations have gone out of use and have been absent for a long time. Logic/rationality has no place in today’s world and her logical mind is isolated now – “swimming about in waste disposal turdology” (Pinter 1998, 320). Such comic routines keep Andy alive. As John Lahr puts it, “Mockery is their oxygen and their substitute for passion” (Lahr 1993, 110). Directing *The Homecoming*, Peter Hall said, “The phrase always on our lips when we were doing this play was ‘taking the piss’. It’s a cockney phrase meaning getting the better of your opponent by mockery” (Hall 1971, 14). Similarly, Peter Hall said, “a good deal of Harold’s tone has to do with that very veiled kind of mockery” (Hall 1971, 14). Now, however, this language denotes a struggle for life as well as the old urge to conquer.

Ironically, Andy could have been a character in the political plays: he is a civil servant; his life was built on order: “I was admired and respected. I do not say I was loved. Love is an attribute no civil servant worth his salt would give house room to” (Pinter 1998, 210). He is a loudmouth who never swears in the office but keeps his obscene language for the home – personal excesses remain in the private sphere. In his room, he talks to Bel about his exemplary existence at work and how he has inspired the young men and women, “to put their shoulders to the wheel and their noses to the grindstone and to keep faith at all costs with the structure which after all ensured the ordered government of all our lives, which took perfect care of us, which held us to its bosom, as it were” (Pinter 1998, 333).

Andy yearns for Bridget. He wants to see his imaginary grandchildren to give them his blessing. Bel sits frozen as Andy talks of his poor grandchildren, about “to lose their granddad [...] when the door was about to open on new ever-widening and ever-lengthening horizons” (Pinter 1998, 327). Bel tries to comfort him with the thought that death is his new horizon, but Andy plays anxiously with her image: will he cross the horizon as he dies or after he is dead, or will he perhaps stay stuck in the middle of it? He pictures the weather in the horizon, “If it’s pitch black for ever what would have been the point of going through all these enervating charades in the first place?” (Pinter 1998, 358). He hopes there is a loophole through which he would crawl and meet himself coming back: Like screaming on the brink of death, Pinter’s people have nothing to cling to but words, their ambiguities and associations.

Andy holds on to memory strongly. At the same time it is a play “about departure, about barely holding on, about letting go” (Peter 1993, 15). Pinter claims that Andy “seems to deny the existence of more or less anybody else. He says at one point, ‘Nothing ever happened’. He denies

the existence of his own life, except he's so contradictory that he's also asserting it all the time" (Gussow 1993, 107). Like Max in *The Homecoming*, Andy is in discord with his sons and sees them as "lazy idle layabouts, a sponging parasitical pair of ponces. Sucking the tit of the state" (Pinter 1998, 349). Pinter verified that Max and Andy "have a language in common, a mode of using language" (Gussow 1993, 107). Jake and Fred, the estranged sons, appear in Fred's bedroom. They also communicate through bizarrely elaborate jokes, but unlike their parents they never quite take issues seriously. Most of their exchanges consist of word-games that come about as a result of what the other has previously said; their conversations have their own logic but often are circular or impotent. Jake is in the position of the big brother keeping his little brother's spirits up. He is a born artist/poet described by Fred as – like John Lewis's department store – never knowingly undersold.

Fred, on the other hand, withdraws himself into a melancholic world and stays in bed through much of the play, as though they have inherited two sides of their dying father's existence. He tells Jake that he is much happier in bed: "I'd be very unhappy to get out of bed and go out and meet strangers and all that kind of thing" (Pinter 1998, 364). He is out of work and bedridden like Aston in *The Caretaker* and Len in *The Dwarfs*:

There's a dryrot in me. [...] I could stay in this armchair for ever. Or in bed. Yes. Do you know, I can't step out of bed? I'm unable to step out of the bed. I can't put my foot on the floor. I could stay there, always. [...] A sack of old bones. [...] I can't even commit suicide. It's got to be a decision. That's an action. I can't act. (Pinter 1990, 71-2).

Fred feels he has been left in darkness and that his "equilibrium is in tatters" (Pinter 1998, 364). Pinter explains Fred's position as a kind of nervous breakdown, which is "a common condition for a lot of young men; perhaps even more young men than women" (Gussow 1993, 99-100).

In this household only Jake can adapt to society. He talks about scientific light meters, which can find and locate the light in the dark and "place it in a little box. They wrap it up and tie a ribbon round it and you get it tax free, as a reward for all your labour and faith and all the concern and care for others you have demonstrated so eloquently for so long" (Pinter 1998, 365). This symbolic light will serve Fred as his own personal light eternal. Jake imagines a messianic role through which he saves society. Pinter's focus in *Moonlight* is to mock the traditional mockery, the dominant social attitudes, which Pinter has been dramatising in his political plays and particularly in *Party Time*. Indeed, there are autobiographical elements here; Jake mocks the very same society that has rewarded Pinter's labour and faith and all the concern and care for others, – which he has demonstrated so eloquently for so long – with such hostile criticism. However, Pinter's artistic output was to be crowned by the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2005.

The exchanges between Fred and Jake are also a mockery of Andy's businesslike manner of organising his personal life, which refers to the whole system of bureaucracy (that Pinter has explored in *The Trial*). Talking about his father, Jake makes fun of patriarchy: "He was not in it for pleasure or glory. Let me make that quite clear. Applause came not his way. Nor did he seek it. Gratitude came not his way. Nor did he seek it. Masturbation came not his way. Nor did he seek it. I'm sorry – I meant approbation came not his way" (Pinter 1998, 327).

Jake describes his confusion of the words masturbation/approbation as a lapse in concentration, a slip, perhaps a Freudian slip.

According to Jake, his father adhered strictly to the rule of law. Althusser conceptualises the father in Lacanian terms: the father in its symbolic (rather than biological) dimension as the most powerful signifier “of the Law, the fantasy image of all Right” (Althusser 1971, 212). For Lacan and Althusser, the Father, “who is Law [...] represents the Order of the human signifier [...] the Law of Culture, [the] discourse of the Other” (Althusser 1971, 212). Pinter offers his own comic rewriting of Lacanian and Althusserian analysis: Andy’s rule of law links with the rule of his penis/phallic order. The rule of law is equal to the rule of thumb, which may also have an anatomical reference as the thumb is not far from the penis: “Not as the crow flies” (Pinter 1998, 328). Fred and Jake have estranged themselves from their father because of his anatomical/symbolic power.

Fred’s bedroom becomes literally a playing area (as the stage direction emphasises – ‘THREE MAIN PLAYING AREAS’) where the overgrown boys constantly play name games:

- JAKE What did you say your name was? I’ve made a note of it somewhere.
- FRED Macpherson.
- JAKE That’s funny. I thought it was Gonzales.
- [...]
- FRED Yours was the name they gave me.
- JAKE What name was that?
- FRED Saunders (Pinter 1998, 338-9).

This game resembles some long-past military-unit scenario; these names could refer to unseen people in the play or to anyone, or they could be nonsensical. As Katherine H. Burkman suggests, “All in this play are strangers, yet all finally are the same, bear the same name” (Burkman 1994, 55). The name games are a metaphor, showing their struggle for identity and power. Similarly, Francis Gillen notes, “Fred and Jake presumably would have been suffocated by Andy’s civil service mentality; they had to establish their own identity” (Gillen 1993, 37). At one point, their dialogue echoes Hirst and Spooner’s in *No Man’s Land*, as they, too, remember each other by other names. Their dialogue also returns to *The Dwarfs*:

- Listen here, Pete, Len said. Why do you always call me Weinblatt? My name is Weinstein. Always has been. (Pinter 1990, 17)

The logic of the word-games works according to the rhythm that has always been central in Pinter’s plays: “Rhythm is extremely crucial to me. I find it very difficult to accept a line which is somehow inharmonious” (Pinter 1999)². Thus, Jake and Fred discuss the life of Riley in a rhythmic way:

² As Pinter read out scenes from his plays, his fascination with language, in all respects and in all of its nuances, were so apparent that the interrogation scene in *The Birthday Party* seemed to work largely by rhythm.

FRED A marvellous people.
 JAKE A proud people too.
 FRED Watchful.
 JAKE Wary.
 FRED Touchy.
 JAKE Bristly.
 FRED Vengeful.
 JAKE Absolutely ferocious, to be quite frank.
 FRED Kick you in the balls as soon as look at you. (Pinter 1998, 361-2).

The rhythm is imperative in all their dialogues. Reducing death to a logical/rational conclusion, Jake talks about his father's love; he tells Fred, "I shall love him and be happy to pay the full price of that love" (Pinter 1998, 367), but the emotion dissolves into rhythm and wordplay:

FRED Which is the price of death.
 JAKE The price of death, yes.
 FRED Than which there's no greater price.
 JAKE Than which?
 FRED Than which.
Pause
 Death –
 JAKE Which is the price of love.
 FRED A great great price.
 JAKE A great and deadly price.
 FRED But strictly in accordance with the will of God.
 JAKE And the laws of nature.
 FRED And common or garden astrological logic.
 JAKE It's the first axiom.
 FRED And the last.
 JAKE It may well be both tautologous and contradictory (Pinter 1998, 367-8).

The verbal game-playing centres on their father, who is also a dream-dad who has left his fortune to his new-born son Jake. The audience is told that his father has called a meeting with the trustees (who were allowed to go to the lavatory just one and a half times a session) and "The motion was carried, nine votes to four, Jorrock's abstaining" (Pinter 1998, 362) (the motion here

may also suggest bowel motion). Unfortunately, there is no fortune and it is, therefore, Jake's conclusion that his father is a mountebank, a child, a shyster, a fool, a villain, or adds Fred, a saint. They parody patriarchal power through the idea that Andy has blown all his money on a gambling party. His being "a feared force in the temples of the just" (Pinter 1998, 362) may have distanced his sons from him. And as Gillen argues, "As a civil servant, Andy would have had neither the means nor the inclination to provide Jake with the freedom to write nor the sensitivity nor patience to deal with Fred's rebellion against what Andy regards as 'the structure which after all ensured the ordered government of all our lives'" (Gillen 1993, 33).

They verbalise true or false memories of their father, tinged with sympathy/pity and/or bitterness. They are obsessed with him – "Spiritually furtive, politically bankrupt, morally scabrous and intellectually abject, spasmodically rampant, poetically downtrodden" (Pinter 1998, 370), yet they love their father and believe he remains proud and fiery. Nevertheless, the sons and the father never occupy the same territory. They perform a scene of denial in which two sons reject their father, their past, their familial bondage. Pinter has stated that he was excited by "the image of one family dislocated but very much part of each other" (Gussow 1993, 105). In this context, the play echoes *Betrayal*, in which Robert verbally tortures Emma via the thought that he could easily be a total stranger.

As for their mother, there is a sexual overtone: when Fred asks about her, Jake replies, "Don't talk dirty to me" (Pinter 1998, 372). Their mother's fond recollections of them are dispelled by Andy, first through mockery then through memories of their challenge to his authority. Bel insists that they were good boys who helped with the washing-up, the drying. Andy insists that they were bastards and Jake refused even to clean out the bloody broom cupboard. In a later telephone conversation, which is also the climax of the play, Bel tells the boys that their father is at death's door; the boys claim to be a Chinese laundry. Hearing their refusal to recognise her, Bel plays along with their game and asks if they are dry cleaners as well.³ Again the line between being a family and total strangers is blurred.

In *Moonlight*, "Space is not defended as an extension of personality, but is merely a location occupied by characters who are isolated from their fellows" (Peacock 1997, 56). On three occasions, Maria and her husband Ralph simply emerge from the darkness into various stage locations. They appear with the stories from the past. Maria, Bel's best friend, enters the boys' territory. Her monologue includes memories of the time when Fred and Jake were little boys, and when she had a great affection for their father. Her portrait of the young Andy is a contrast to Andy's present ill-tempered personality:

How he danced. One of the great waltzers. An elegance and grace long gone. A firmness and authority so seldom encountered. [...] Your mother was marvellously young and quickening every moment. I – I must say – particularly when I saw your mother being swirled across the floor by your father – felt buds breaking out all over the place. I thought I'd go mad (Pinter 1998, 333).

³ Burkman asks, 'If they are good sons who do help with the cleaning, why do they seem to be washing or cleaning their parents away? Has the potentiality and fertility of water and washing been replaced by an arid, dry cleaning. Burkman, 'Echo[es] in *Moonlight*, 56.

Later in the play, Maria's husband Ralph makes a similar entry into the boys' territory to give his monologue. Ralph, a former referee with an impotent whistle, talks to them about the past and their father; "The man was a thinker. [...] The trouble with so much thinking, though, or with that which calls itself thinking, is that it's like farting Annie Laurie down a keyhole. A waste of your time and mine" (Pinter 1998, 342). Ralph mocks "thinking": "it's confusing you, it's blinding you [...] it's making you so dizzy that by the end of the day you don't know whether you're on your arse or your elbow, you don't know whether you're coming or going" (Pinter 1998, 342).

Pinter recycles the theme of betrayal through the appearances of Maria and Ralph. Andy recalls the day Maria invited him to her flat for a slice of plumduff, which has a sexual connotation, as with the plumduff incident in *Family Voices*. Andy betrayed Bel with Maria: "But think of our past. [...] Think of the months I betrayed you with her. [...] she betrayed you with your husband and she betrayed her own husband – and me – with you!" (Pinter 1998, 351). Bel neither denies nor confirms her relationship with Maria. The triangular relationship echoes *Old Times* and indeed *Betrayal* where all the characters betray and are betrayed. Andy says, "I had her in our bedroom, by the way, once or twice, on our bed. I was a man at the time. *Pause*. You probably had her in the same place, of course. In our bedroom, on our bed" (Pinter 1998, 352). Nevertheless, what was once the subject that haunted Pinter's plays is now treated with half-comic detachment. Having dealt with repression, torture and violent death in his recent work, Pinter has a derisive approach to his recurrent theme of betrayal in *Moonlight*. It is a mockery of betrayal, a mockery of the relationships in so many of Pinter's plays.

Just as Maria and Ralph drift in and out of Jake and Fred's room, they also arrive and depart from Andy and Bel's room. Obsessed with their own superficial life, they fail to see that Andy is unwell. They talk about their cottage and boast about their children's success. Ralph recalls a shared past, but it is denied by Andy. In contrast to the characters in the memory plays (*Old Times*, *No Man's Land*), Andy does not create an imaginary past; he denies the existence of any past: "I was a civil servant. I had no past. I remember no past. Nothing ever happened" (Pinter 1998, 378).

However, one of the few things Andy does claim to remember is that a woman walked towards him across a darkening room. At this moment a faint light appears on Bridget's area, which suggests that the woman who walked towards Andy was Bridget. She says, "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" (Pinter 1998, 336). Bridget describes death in pastoral terms in order to comfort her father who is so worried about death. She describes the flowers that surround her and the soft turf under her feet. Her pastoral language is associated with a celebratory attitude, even though she "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" (Pinter 1998, 337). Her landscape is desired but formless, mysterious, and impenetrable. Her description of the landscape recalls the pastoral space in *Mountain Language*, which also had a protective function for the female character:

But here there is shelter. I can hide. I am hidden. The flowers surround me but they do not 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 (Pinter 1998, 337).

She inhabits a dream world of velvet odour, which is filled by an echo like a bell: a remnant of the pastoral tradition links nature with human emotion – a realm of woman and country.

In a sense, Bridget is a more confident reworking of Deborah in *A Kind of Alaska*. Bridget, too, is the teenage girl who is estranged from the family and inhabits a kind of Alaska. She explains that she has been to barren dead spaces. Like Bridget, Pinter was 15 when the war ended. Thus her descriptions may suggest images of the Second World War; she admits discovering “skeletons of men and women in ditches” (Pinter 1998, 337).

Pinter said, that in writing *Moonlight*, he “found a sense of how the dead were present”:

Andy says at one point that he doesn't know what death is. It's a question of the horizon. He doesn't know how light it is, how dark it is, anything. He doesn't know what the attributes of death are. But all this time Bridget is walking around in his life. As a ghost, she is present in his life. But he can't define her. He can't hold her (Gussow 1993, 124).

It is as if Andy's dying and Bridget's unite and they protect each other from fear. His final words are “Tell Bridget not to be frightened. Tell Bridget I don't want her to be frightened” (Pinter 1998, 384). For once in all of Pinter's plays, the division between human being's personal spaces is bridged.

The play finishes with Bridget's description of a family invitation to a party and her own solitary arrival at a dark, deserted house bathed in moonlight. She stands there in the moonlight and waits for the moon to go down. John Peter suggests that Bridget's waiting for the moon to set is “a human question mark facing the unknown” (Peter 1993, 15). Alternatively, the play's director, David Leveaux, stated that Bridget's monologue reflects her total separation from her parents. In a way her sense of exile describes the moment of her death. Leveaux felt that Pinter was trying to put on stage “something that is almost unspeakable which is the experience of death” (Billington 1996, 344). Nevertheless, *Moonlight's* finishing on an expectation gives the play an optimistic relish and reminds us that there has always been more hope in Pinter's work than critics have generally appreciated. In *The Dwarfs*, Len trusted the light, which is always present even in the darkest night:

there's always a point of light in the centre of the lens, in the centre of your sight. [...] There's always, even in the darkest night, a pinch, a fragment of light, poised in front of you. [...] What this point of light does, it indicates the angle of your orbit. [...] It gives a sense of direction, even if you never move from the spot. (Pinter 1990, 7).

All Pinter's plays are about their titles. And moonlight is a pinch of light that illumines the darkness of the universe. Almost literally, the play itself is a fragment of light and hope showing direction.

Moonlight shows Pinter resisting his own grief and confirming, with great sincerity, the irresistible cycles of birth and decay, life and decomposition in an age where there are no value-systems or

beliefs, and there is no salvation. The play leaves the audience with fear; indeed, it echoes the finale of *Party Time*. Jimmy describes how he is trapped and filled with the suffocating darkness. Bridget, too, is trapped in a dark place. As Regal points out, “Both Jimmy and Bridget are steeped in light and yet, at the same time, trapped in perpetual darkness, ultimately cut off from the world around them” (Regal 1995, 126), but the crucial difference is that in *Moonlight* Bridget’s experience is confronted, not deferred and shirked.

3. Conclusion

There is a studied image of the past, a feeling of familiarity and the power of habit and repetition. As Roland Barthes calls every text “a new tissue of past citations” (Barthes 1981, 39), so *Moonlight* shows a great deal of similarity to Pinter’s earlier work. With *Moonlight*, Pinter re-imagines and reshapes his mostly dramatised patterns such as the working of memory, male-female perceptions of space, alienation, old age and finally, of course, the end in death. Thus, Bridget symbolises an anti-spatial environment, a conceptual rather than an embodied, filled, physical space. Although *Moonlight* appeared to draw a different picture to Pinter’s political plays, the similarity is striking in the sense that *Moonlight*, like his political plays, reflects Pinter’s private passions – passions that are restored with an awareness of human suffering and the human capacity to endure. His 1974 poem draws a relationship between moonlight, death, and the blackness of our age – a poem, demonstrating Pinter’s pessimism as an intellectual investigator, and his will’s optimism as a dissident humanitarian.

LATER

Later. I look out at the moon.

I lived here once.

I remember the song.

Later. No sound here.

Moon on linoleum.

A child frowning.

Later. A voice singing.

I open the back door.

I lived here once.

Later. I open the back door.

Light gone. Dead trees.

Dead linoleum. Later.

Later. Blackness moving very fast.

Blackness fatly.

I live here now. (1974)

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