



Epilogue: Beyond Menace

*"I felt that after The Homecoming, . . . I couldn't any longer stay in the room with this bunch of people who opened doors and came in and went out. Landscape and Silence are in a very different form. There isn't any menace at all."*¹

Pinter's one-act plays, *Landscape* (1968) and *Silence* (1969), and his short dramatic sketch *Night* (presented in *Mixed Doubles* in 1969), indicate a somewhat new direction for the playwright. He himself puts his finger on the major change when he mentions their lack of menace.² In production as a double bill at the Aldwych Theater in 1969, *Landscape* and *Silence* lacked physical action as well. In *Landscape*, originally performed on radio, a middle-aged couple, Beth and Duff, sit and speak at a kitchen table. In *Silence* Ellen, Rumsey, and Bates sit in three even less clearly defined areas and speak.

Gone is the sacrifice of a scapegoat at the center of so many of Pinter's dramas. No exchange of power, no outer conflict or exterior confrontation shapes the drama. To say

that the characters converse is even inexact; in *Landscape* the man addresses the woman, but he does not appear to hear her, and the woman neither addresses the man nor appears to hear him. Direct exchanges take place in *Silence*, but they are brief; and the technique of *Landscape*, that of interweaving of streams of consciousness, predominates. As the action moves inward (nothing happens, but much is explored), one is reminded of the dramatic experiments of O'Neill's *Strange Interlude* or of the sometimes half-conscious exchanges in Maeterlinck's *Pelléas et Mélisande*. The revelation of private thoughts, experiences, dreams, rejections—often only partly conscious—reveals the strong influence too of Joyce, Proust, Woolf, and the more recent Robbe-Grillet, as Pinter borrows and transmutes the novelists' techniques for his own experiments with forms of poetic drama.

The dramas retain from the playwright's previous work, however, not only a concern with the same themes and kinds of relationships but also the rhythms of ritual. The absence of physically active dramatic confrontation and sacrifice precludes the full cyclic rhythms of his other work, but the poetic counterpoint of these more recent plays gains much of its dramatic impetus not only from the balanced opposition of the interior dreams and private personalities of the characters but also from a ritualistic treatment of time (see pp. 38-39).

In *Landscape*, Beth's lines are an incantation to a past experience of love fulfilled. For her the kitchen in which she sits does not seem to exist as her wish to capture past experience brings its setting into the present and extends it into the future. Once in her life she had experienced a complete fulfillment. Is it forever lost in her life with her dull husband Duff?

BETH: I would like to stand by the sea. It is there.

Pause.

I have. Many times. It's something I cared for. I've done it.

Pause.

I'll stand on the beach. On the beach. Well . . . it was very fresh. But it was hot, in the dunes. But it was so fresh, on the shore. I loved it very much. (P. 9)

The three tenses used at the play's opening define time as it exists for Beth. Because she cared about her experience of love on the beach, it has become the only reality which exists for her. The sea is there for her, it was there, she wishes it to be there, and in her private world she will still stand by it.

Beth re-creates the archetypal reality of her past as a bulwark against the present reality of her husband, whom she neither sees nor hears. Against the yearningly domestic picture of her which her husband paints—that of a good housekeeper and servant and a good wife, who can forgive him his infidelities with a kiss—is her picture of herself as a beautiful, childbearing, flower-watering, adored woman—in fact, a goddess. Her removal from the daily reality that concerns her husband reinforces Beth's role as the familiar fertility goddess figure from Pinter's dramatic world (especially the heroine of *A Slight Ache*), the wife-whore-mother, but one who differs from his earlier heroines in her lack of inner conflict over the roles. Beth has come to accept the inevitability of her present frustrations (not even a matchseller hovers at the back gate), but she does so only by lingering on the archetypal reality of her past experience by the water. Aphrodite, a goddess born of the sea, is a significant mythical reference for Ruth in *The Homecoming* as well as for Beth in this play.

The conflict emerges, rather, and is enriched in the attempts of Duff to make contact with Beth, attempts which fail but grow in intensity as she relives her past experience. Beth is so enthralled with the remembered light touch of her lover that the heavy-handed crudeness of Duff is unable to reach her at all. His concentration on daily existence, his walk to the pond, his discourses on the proper manufacture of beer to display his expertise and superiority, and his pride in his domestic abilities, take on some-

thing of the ridiculous in the light of her indifference and preoccupation. Duff's efforts to reach Beth, however, reveal a wistful intuition of the greater validity of her experience compared with his own. He dwells on his domestic abilities—"I could drive well, I could polish his shoes well, I earned my keep" (p. 20)—and likes to think they have been a good domestic "team"; but he also paints a picture of himself as isolated—unable, for example, to enter the joke of children he met or to share his wife's vision, a vision which includes children.

BETH: The dog sat down by me. I stroked him. Through the window I could see down into the valley. I saw children in the valley. They were running through the grass. They ran up the hill.

Long Silence.

DUFF: I never saw your face. You were standing by the windows. One of those black nights. A downfall. All I could hear was the rain on the glass, smacking on the glass. You knew I'd come in but you didn't move. I stood close to you. What were you looking at? (P. 27)

Tension subtly increases as Duff's inability to make contact does. That tension finally erupts into Duff's fantasy of violence and rape, a fantasy ironically juxtaposed with Beth's gentle memory of fulfillment.

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 hall. 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 hall, 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 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—

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. (P. 29)

Duff's confessed infidelity working in counterpoint with Beth's unconfessed, but re-created, infidelity is the central irony of the piece, while Duff's attempts to make contact in his own crude, dull, unimaginative way with the deeper reality which he senses Beth embodies is its central dramatic focus. The final counterpoint of fantasy in rape (Duff) and love fulfilled (Beth) remains dramatic as Duff's anger reflects his failure to make contact, and Beth's sense of transcendent, mythical time makes her isolation, paradoxically, a connection. Rather than an archetypal reality emerging into the daily lives of the people (*The Homecoming*, *A Slight Ache*), all remains muted, essentially unexpressed, contained only in the fantasies of the characters. For Duff, frustration passionately felt, for Beth reality only in a dream.

Silence is perhaps even more complex than *Landscape* in its musical counterpoint and is touched with a more vibrant affirmation. Movement is both the topic and effect of this seemingly static play as the thoughts of the three characters intertwine in a veritable dance. Even while the difficulties of connection are discussed, the problems of seeing and hearing, at least two of the characters transcend those difficulties while the discordant notes of the third are essential to the drama's musical harmony.

Again the themes are of love and time. The triangle of earlier Pinter plays makes up the plot as Ellen and her two men, Rumsey and Bates, reflect on life and Ellen has a brief interchange with each. Replacing the earlier dramas' com-

petition over women (the cyclic interchange of *The Basement*, *A Slight Ache*, or *The Homecoming*), in which the insurance of life involves change of partner, and, going beyond *Landscape*, in which cyclic interchange is alive as a memory and a bulwark against the present, *Silence* reveals the triangle in equipoise. The play might be a sequel to *The Homecoming* in which we see Ruth in a variety of roles giving life to various men and finding her life through them.

In many ways *Silence* is as still as the tableau at the end of that play, and yet as filled with life, movement, and questions. Will Ruth kiss the aging father? How will she deal with the brutalities of the men, find sustenance of love or power? *Silence* gives a glimmering insight into the archetypal stasis to which *The Homecoming* moves.

Late in the brief play, Ellen reflects on the unreality of the people about her.

After my work each day I walk back through people but I don't notice them. I'm not in a dream or anything of that sort. On the contrary. I'm quite wide awake to the world around me. But not to the people. There must be something in them to notice, to pay attention to, something of interest in them. In fact I know there is . . . I'm certain of it. But I pass through them noticing nothing. It is only later, in my room, that I remember. Yes, I remember. But I'm never sure that what I remember is of to-day or of yesterday or of a long time ago.

And then often it is only half things I remember, half things, beginnings of things. (P. 46)

The first part of the play develops some of the memories of the three characters and some interchanges between Ellen and each of the men, while the last few pages which follow the remark are echoes, fragments, "half things" from what has gone before. The reality of time, of mythical sacred time, no longer lies in the past remembered as opposed to the present (*Landscape*) or in the past made present (the rebirth of Ruth as Jessie in *The Homecom-*

ing.) It lies, rather, in a counterpoint of memories, a juxtaposition of insights, a flow of experience which is ever illusory, but ever significant.

Rumsey is a walker in the country, sensitive to the landscape, the animals, the textures of life and light. He can love and listen, and therefore he can also let go.

I tell her my life's thoughts, clouds racing. She looks up at me or listens looking down. She stops in midsentence, my sentence, to look up at me. Sometimes her hand has slipped from mine, her arm loosened, she walks slightly apart, dog barks. (P. 33)

Bates, on the other hand, is a rider of buses to the city, restless, unsatisfied and grasping in his relationships, like Duff desperate for a love he cannot achieve.

Caught a bus to the town. Crowds, lights round the market, rain and stinking. Showed her the bumping lights. Took her down around the dumps. Black roads and girders. She clutching me. This way the way I bring you. Pubs throw the doors smack into the night. Cars barking and the lights. She with me, clutching. (P. 34)

The peace of Rumsey, "pleasant alone and watch the folding light" (p. 35), is juxtaposed with the frenzy of Bates, "I'm at my last gasp with this unendurable racket" (p. 35).

All three characters speak of their great age, though they are in their twenties (Ellen), thirties (Bates), and forties (Rumsey), respectively. The two men are each old enough to know—or begin to know—what and who they are. Ellen clearly is not—indeed, she is just beginning to speculate about such problems. Rumsey tells Ellen to seek a young man but she refuses. Bates speaks of having experienced all things in the somewhat world-weary tones of Eliot's Prufrock, though he is for more resentful; and Ellen wonders about aging even as she wonders about whether she thinks or what she is. Though young, all three suffer from a sense

that secular time is passing them by, leaving them behind, undefined.

Sacred time, however, does not completely elude the three and is worked out in terms of vision. Bates remembers walking with a child (Ellen perhaps) who saw a shape or shadow in a tree which he identified for her as a resting bird. Later in the play he assumes the child's vision. "I see something in a tree, a shape, a shadow" (p. 48). Beset by city lights, Bates wonders if he could change his life and live by night. "What can be meant by living in the dark?" (p. 36). He feels imprisoned by his environment, by himself: "I walk in my mind. But can't get out of the walls, into a wind. Meadows are walled, and lakes. The sky's a wall" (pp. 39-40). His later child's vision of a shape, a shadow, is suggestive of some small breakthrough into the darkness, though his final rejection of love, "Sleep? Tender Love? It's of no importance" (p. 51), seems to rob him of any sustained breakthrough into the light.

Light is constantly associated with vision but tends to take place in darkness. Ellen wonders if it is darker as one goes up higher. It is in the night and the silence that she reflects on her age and her existence. Ellen, however, walks in the wind that excludes Bates. "I go up with the milk. The sky hits me. I walk in the wind to collide with them waiting" (p. 45). She also sees lights in the distance of the black landscape and has an overcertain memory of her wedding which makes it as illusive as the lights.

Rumsey, more at peace than either Ellen or Bates, cares for his horses, cares for his women, but he wonders if contact can be made.

I shall walk down to my horse and see how my horse is.
He'll come towards me. Perhaps he doesn't need me, my
visit, my care, will be like any other visit, any other care.
I can't believe it. (P. 39)

A juxtaposition of lines which suggest sexual union between Rumsey and Ellen and transcendent insight for

Ellen is followed by a statement on the illusiveness of vision and life by Rumsey.

ELLEN: When I run when I run when I run
over the grass

RUMSEY: She floats under me. Floating under me.

ELLEN: I turn. I turn. I wheel. I glide. I wheel. In stunning light. The horizon moves from the sun. I am crushed by the light.

Silence.

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.

BATES: Funny. Sometimes I press my hand on my forehead, calmly, feel all the dust drain out, let it go, feel the grit slip away. Funny moment. That calm moment. (Pp. 40-41)

The statement of calm from Bates becomes a comment on Rumsey's experience, almost as if Bates and Rumsey are different aspects of one man. Despite the illusiveness of life, the calm moment exists.

The participation of the senses in the movement of time is what tends to define it. Ellen is crushed by lightness, or it evades her. Sight and sound interweave as the three seek connection.

RUMSEY: She was looking down. I couldn't hear what she said.

BATES: I can't hear you. Yes you can, I said.

RUMSEY: What are you saying? Look at me, she said.

BATES: I didn't. I didn't hear you, she said. I didn't hear what you said.

RUMSEY: But I am looking at you. It's your head that's bent.

Silence (Pp. 43-44)

If contact is made only briefly, intermittently, tenuously—if the memory of marriage or union is itself uncertain for

Ellen, the effort of living an ordeal for Bates with “not even any damn inconstant solace” (p. 36), the uncertainty of response a constant awareness for Rumsey, “But I am looking at you. It’s your head that’s bent” (p. 44)—still the thoughts and actions do suggest an interaction. Despite its stasis, the drama contains a tremendous sense of life: the three characters move in their uncertain relationships, their thoughts and desires unresolved, but present; if not a veritable hymn to life, there is at least the suggestion of possibilities. Ellen and Rumsey have some degree of mutual understanding, and even Bates may grow in comprehension.

The hymn is fully sung in the slight dramatic sketch, *Night*, in which husband and wife reminisce amusingly over their meeting—each remembering it differently—and then reminisce over their reminiscences as if they too are in the past.

WOMAN: And then we had children and we sat and talked
and you remembered women on bridges and towpaths and
rubbish dumps.

MAN: And you remembered your bottom against railings
and men holding your hands and men looking into your
eyes.

WOMAN: And talking to me softly.

MAN: And your soft voice. Talking to them softly at night.

WOMAN: And they said I will adore you always.

MAN: Saying I will adore you always. (P. 61)

As the past is carried into the present and memories merge, they include other men and other women in a flow of love. The present—the need to get up early the next morning—becomes part of a general flow of life and love in which the couple merge, ironically, but still with fullness, with understanding, and with delight.

The order of publication of the three plays, all on the subject of love, would appear to be significant. In *Land-*

scape the affirmation of love remembered is qualified by the couple's lack of communication as Duff is left wistfully and angrily forever outside of contact with his wife and her reality. Although in *Silence* Bates would seem to be rejected by Ellen in favor of Rumsey, he is no longer seen as the outsider in the fashion of Duff so much as he is considered in opposition to Rumsey. The triangle is alive with life on stage; the past is still alive in the present and is open to the flow of the future. The physicality of Bates is seen in balance with the gentler and wiser understanding of Rumsey through whom, by way of Ellen, Bates can somehow share in a moment of calm. And as comic as the interchange is in *Night*, the triangle has become a couple; Bates has merged with Rumsey to become a Man whom a Woman can love and accept. The wedding, so uncertain to Ellen, is present in the darkness of *Night*.

In *Landscape*, *Silence*, and *Night*, Pinter's earlier celebration of life's renewal, at whatever cost, is replaced by an evocation of life's flow through the mind and through time. The ironies remain, the questions vibrate, but the celebration persists and grows.

