

Pinter's Landscape: A Stylistic Treatment

Suleiman Yousif Abid^()*

Harold Pinter's work has the ability to express the inexpressible, to transcend the scope of language itself & in his own Landscape, he is able to show his ability with zest. Although the play seems to refuse to communicate with people, yet its language exposes a unique way of expressing things used by Pinter alone.⁽¹⁾

It is a major difficulty encountered by many critics, as Hayman, Esslin, Quigley and other to solve some enigma with Pinter's work concerning his language. There is also an agreement that Pinter's language is doing "a loss of controlled contact between the details of the language & responses to those details."⁽²⁾ And as Esslin has put that Pinter's "words are of the utmost importance; not through their surface meaning, but through the colour & texture of their sound & their associations of meaning."⁽³⁾

These statements describe what is new in Pinter's language by means of an appeal to some norm in language that he uses or

(*) Department of English - College of Arts / University of Mosul.

(1) Martin Esslin, Pinter: a Study of his Plays (London: Eyre Methuen, 1970), p. 252.

(2) Austen E. Quigley, The Pinter Problem (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1975), p. 33.

(3) Esslin, pp. 229 - 230.

ignores. In dealing with him as one who rejects the boundaries of normal language, assents given to a theoretical position. He has included many assumptions in his language. The implications of the assumption will become clearer if we return for a moment to the notion of style. The use of the word literary criticism leads to a distinction between form & content. This is inescapable when the notion of stylistic variation is indicated by the assumption that something in language is remaining constant. Some meaning, which is frequently "thought of in terms of the referent of a word,"⁽⁴⁾ is investigated. In this context it becomes apparent that the urge perceives what is new in Pinter by contrasting his language with what is felt.

This paper is concerned with the treatment of the deliberate & significant changes in style within the text of Pinter's Landscape.

In its style & approach Landscape constitutes a new departure for Pinter. The difficulty of communication is one of the main themes in the play. The difficulty emerges not from the dialogue between two persons who talk at length without getting through each other, but from two monologues simultaneously delivered & intercut by each conducted on a different level of expression.

(4) David Hurry, "Style, Allusion, and Manipulation of view point" in Critical Quarterly Vol: 23, No. 2 1981 ed., J. R. Banks (et al) (Manchester: Manch. Univ. Press, 1981), p. 61.

Landscape is a short play written for the stage. It lasts only thirty minutes. The scene is the kitchen of a country house, by a long kitchen table sits Beth, a woman in her late forties, in an armchair. At the opposite corner of the long table sits Duff, a man in his early fifties. It is evening. In fact there is no dialogue between the two characters. We only alternate between their two monologues. Duff talks of Beth as “You” but most of the time he seems to be thinking of her rather than addressing her. She talks about her man & an experience with him on a beach when she was naked under her beachrobe and whispered to him about having a child. But we are never certain whether this man was Duff or someone else. The stage directions tell us that neither of them hears the other’s voice & that Beth never looks at Duff.

In outlining the setting we notice the new characteristics indicated by the stage direction showing a new form. The silence that succeeds the irrevocable, Pinter seeks a new form for a new situation. For the next stage of a relationship the characters who must change cannot change and yet must go on. Any person must pay a precise attention to the language to discover what is being done with words. Thus the language used inevitably bears so many clues and interpretations that are to be in a way tackled or touched from a critical analysis.

The play starts with utterances from Beth. More than thirty sentences punctuated by thirteen pauses. Duff on the other hand does not interrupt to comment on such as making confirmation or asking about something. But one thing about Beth is noted that when Duff speaks she stops. Her opening sentences set the focus of her concerns "I would...".

The recurrent "I" as subject and the imprecise identification of others is mentioned to clarify a part of the new form. Others are not important but only on the self. The lover is nameless. She refers to him as "my man". His characteristics are given superior priority over his name. She never uses a proper name at any point in the play.⁽⁵⁾

Another peculiar point is noticed in the opening speech tenses switch rapidly. The wish for future "I would like" changes quickly to "I have" and then to "I'll stand" & finally to "it was". The past moves to future & back to a special point in the past that is developed "women turn, look at me." (p.9)⁽⁶⁾ "Two women looked at me"(p. 10) the result is ambiguous when she comments on herself when Beth concludes, "I am beautiful" (p. 10). This mingling of

(5) Esslin, p. 233.

(6) Harold Pinter, Landscape and Silence (London: Methuen Ltd., 1969), p. 10.

All subsequent page references to this edition of Landscape will appear in the text parenthetically.

tenses adds a dimension to the imprecise specification of people referred to. As names are not given & time is not fixed, people like “my man” accept several people who have filled this role. Beth’s present & future unite in this incomplete creation of life episodes. She does not wait for Duff’s confirmation. Her memories of the past & wishes for the future, she seems independent of the mundane present.

Their relationship functions through a subtle link with what Beth has just said although it seems that each one does not listen to the other.

Beth: I walked back over the sand. He had turned. Toes understand, head buried in his arms.

Duff: The dog’s gone. I didn’t tell you (p. 10)

The position of Beth’s lover is close to that of a dog sleeping in the sand; Duff pulls that resemblance out of that context into a very different one. It is suggestive of a gap between the two, but the link indicates that what she says in some way gets through to him.

Similarly he intends

Duff: Do you remember the weather yesterday that downfall?

Beth: He felt my shadow. He looked upon at me standing above him. (p. 10)

The word “downfall” is referred from Duff’s context to Beth & her shadow falling down on her lover that replaces the weight of

rain falling that Duff had mentioned. The connection is there. At other points we have Beth on other places talking of going to hotel for a drink & Duff recalling a visit to a pub. We have Duff saying "There wasn't a soul in the park" and Beth remarking "There wasn't a soul on the beach." (p. 13)

These connections are of many kinds, but they make it clear that the language of each other is both self sustaining & mutually generated. There is some kind of verbal contact, albeit rather oblique. In fact most of Pinter's dialogue is oblique. The aim of solving this obliquity is not only my concern, but it is the concern of most critics. Esslin has put it "the connection between what one character says & what another says afterwards."⁽⁷⁾

Instead of dialogues so oblique as to look at times monologues juxtaposed, we now have monologues intertwined so subtly that they take on a similar function to dialogue. There is also interpersonal connection leading to private day-dreams, like the old & the new are related to each other by links which demonstrate that although everything is different, everything is the same.

Next point that reflects a new attitude in their relationship is the conflicting individualities of Beth & Duff are evident not only in the topics they discuss but also in other ways in which they manifest their attitudes to each other. Beth "never looks at Duff" at all but

(7) Esslin, p. 13.

Duff “refers normally to Beth.” (p. 8) He directs his questions to her & refers to her directly as “You”. It means he is aware of a need to communicate sufficient data for her to understand.

The disagreement of the two characters reflects two different attitudes. She says something about her own world. Duff rejects her world trying to undermine it trying to break into it. “Both Duff & Beth use words very effectively to create their own personalities defining themselves both by words they choose & by pictures they print with them.”⁽⁸⁾ Beth’s world is one of beautiful sights, gentle loving contact & short intimate conversations. Duff’s world is much more variable than Beth’s, but she does tend to lean toward the opposite. From her memory she could say “my man” referring to a day of love at the beach, moments of intimacy with friends. From their tones & attitudes the conflict is clearly expressed.

It is worthwhile to remind that. Beth & Duff have been employed by a Mr. Sykes in a large house they now occupy alone. Beth is the housekeeper & Duff a chauffeur & a handyman. Her current behaviour is a comment on all of their past. Their

(8) Roland Hayman, Contemporary Playwrights: Harold Pinter (London: Heinmann, 3rd ed. 1975) p. 81.

relationship is a comment on the few events recalled from their past.⁽⁹⁾

Both characters show different vision & understanding on life. Beth wants a child of her own. Their alternating statements are a mixture of responses to the self & responses to the other. It is obvious to notice the reaction to what the other has just said & what is said next. Such a point becomes clear when Beth remarks seem unrelated to her account of the day on the beach or to what Duff has said.

Duff: The dog wouldn't have minded me feeding the birds.

Anyway as soon as we got in the shelter he fell asleep.

But even if he'd been awake...

Pause

Beth: They all held my arm tightly, as I stepped out of the car,

or out of the door, or down the steps. Without exception.

If they touched the back of my neck, or my hand, it was

done so lightly. Without exception. With one exception.

(pp. 11, 12)

The connection between what Duff has just said & Beth's response to it is not immediately apparent. But when we hear Duff's later account of his visit to the park with Beth, the connection is clear:

(9) Quigley, p. 242.

Duff: I was gentle to you. I was kind to you that day. I know you'd had a shock so I was gentle with you. I held your arm on the way back from the pond. You put your hands on my face & kissed me. (p. 22)

However, oblique their conversation appears, it is clear that Duff's account of his visit to the park has sparked his recollection of Beth's. Beth continues to cling to her spiritual world, and in this juxtaposition we can perceive the growth of the pattern of separation that dominates their lives.⁽¹⁰⁾

Beth: I could stand now, I could be the same. I dress differently, but I am beautiful. Silence (p. 12)

Beth is not out of touch with the present. Her response is very much from the vantage point of the present moment & is a clear resort to shoring up a much needed self-image.

A peculiar kind of circularity develops in the conversation. Beth got on to reiterate her concern for light gentle physical contact & the resultant sequence of topics:

Beth: He touched the back of my neck. His fingers, lightly, touching, lightly, touching the back of my neck.

Duff: The funny thing was, when I looked, whom the shower was over, the man & woman under the trees on the other

(10) *Ibid.*, p. 243.

side of the pond had gone. There wasn't a soul in the park.

Beth: I wore a white beach robe. Underneath I was naked
(Pause)

There wasn't a soul on the beach. (p. 13)

This pattern of alternation between Duff's mention of the park episode & Beth's reiteration of the beach episode occurs repeatedly in the first half of the play. It appears on page 10, again on page 13, 17, 19 and finally on page 22. The connection between the episodes in the park & the episode on the beach seems to be based on forms of infidelity to each other. Duff's preoccupation with certain details of the park is clearly based on details that he recalls from the time he & Beth visited the park after he had confessed his unfaithfulness to her.⁽¹¹⁾

Beth's delicate conversation of social decorum contrasts strongly with Duff's account of a barroom argument.

Beth: But then I thought perhaps of the hotel bar will be open.
We'll sit in the bar. He'll buy me a drink. What will I order? But what will he order? What will he drink? I shall hear him say it. I shall hear his voice. He will ask me what I would-like first. Then he'll order the two drinks. I shall hear him do it.

(11) Hayman, pp. 78 –80.

Duff: This beer is piss, he said. Undrinkable. There's nothing wrong with the beer. I said. Yes there is, he said, I just told you what was wrong with it. It is the best beer in the area, I said. No it isn't, this chap said its piss. (p. 15)

Comparing this type of conversation with the following one we notice Duff's alteration between attempts to maneuver into Beth's imaginary world & attempts to destroy it.⁽¹²⁾

Duff's earthy perspective on life reduces Beth to silence. He elaborates at some length on the barroom episode with its mundane arguments.

We notice for the first time there is an echo of the battles over conversation topics & relationships. Duff & Beth interrupt one another as the recurrent pause disappears:

Duff: Anyway...

Beth: my skin...

Duff: I'm sleeping all night these days.

Beth: Was stinging.

Duff: Right through the night, every night.

Beth: I'd been in the sea.

Duff: May be its something to do with the fishing.

Getting to know more about fish. (p. 14)

(12) Quigley, p. 250.

Beth's romanticizing influence on Duff's words is as clear as his earlier earthy undermining of her romanticized recollection. In talking of his capacity for gentleness, Duff is making an indirect attempt to assert his worthiness to enter Beth's world.

The opposition is sharp between the two characters. It is developed from one passive toward one of active conflict. Thus, the tendency of the two characters opposing each other is a process of reaction to interaction.

In reaction to Duff's stress on the mean side of social drinking activity, Beth's romantic recollection switches to an episode in which men were not important. Her thinking of the refined sensual pleasure by showing that it was the sea not men who caressed her:

Suddenly I stood. I walked to the shore & into the water. I didn't swim. I don't swim. I let the water billow me. I rested in the water. The waves were very light, delicate. They touched the back of my neck.

Silence (p. 16)

This reinforcement of the possibility of a delicate sensuality even in a world without men undermines the effectiveness of Duff's rejection of that world.

The opposition between the couple & the old man is, however, strongly suggested by moving from the laughing youngster who has

replaced the couple under the trees, Duff talks of Beth as she was young:

I was thinking ... when you were young ... you didn't laugh much. you were ... grave.

Silence (p. 18)

The conversation here moves from conflict over the terms of the relationship to explore its nature & its growth.

Beth's initial comment seems like a total dislocation from what has gone before as if we had come in halfway through a conversation with someone else:

That's why he'd picked such a desolate place. So that I could draw in peace. (p. 18)

Beth: He laughed.

(Pause)

I laughed with him

Beth responds to Duff's exploration of her past by taking the topic one step further, that would exclude Duff in favour of another episode with her fantasy lover. The episode confirms Duff's belief that she was rather serious when she was young. But it makes very clear the fact that Beth did laugh in the past. The emphasis given by the comma to the second half of the sentence "I laughed, with him" makes the present / past contrast more specifically a Duff contrast. Duff remains silent.

Whatever Beth's response to Duff's unfaithfulness, her reaction reveals a desire to withdraw from an alien reality. Although he confesses, she does not change her mind of Duff but only to confirm her association of him with a world she would rather avoid. She talks of an escape from the terrors of a reality that threatens her ethereal needs:

I buried my face in his side and shut the light out.

Silence (p. 20)

The impasse between the two characters continues. Duff is happy about his importance to her and on the importance of his telling her about his thoughts & activities. But the speech says more about his own needs than those of Beth. He refuses to acknowledge Beth's renewed rejection of him. The thing for which he seeks her affirmation is the thing that most threatens Beth's world:

Duff: Do you like me to talk to you?

Pause

Do you like me to tell you about all the things I've been doing?

About all the things I've been thinking?

Pause

Mumm?

Pause

I think you do

Beth: And cuddled me

Silence (p. 21)

Beth's continuation of her previous sentence, as if Duff had not spoken at all, provides an emphatic counter-conclusion to Duff's self-convincing "I think you do".

Again the verbal contact between Duff & Beth remains having the gap in their attitudes because Duff cannot respond in the same kind of Beth's attitude when she says:

*All it is, you see .. I said ... is the lightness of your touch,
the lightness of your look, my neck your eyes, the
silence ... (p. 24)*

He confirms & comments the relationship in spite of Beth's fantasies & in spite of his uneasiness about her relationship with Sykes:

*That's what matters, anyway. We're together. That's what
matters.*

Silence (p.24)

In this play it is Beth & Duff who shed light on each other and who define each other as far as definition is possible for them. The tendency toward fantasy was present in Beth even in her recollections of youth. The beach episode itself is partly made up of fantasies about possible children & possible visits to a hotel. The seriousness that underlies Beth's character was also not caused by Duff, though it was extended by him. The shadow which is both the

shape & the problem of her life & his, is linked to all the episodes the play has, but it is not finally explained by them. The play leaves us as Beth leaves herself with the knowledge that final knowledge is never achieved:

Sometimes the cause of the shadow cannot be found

Pause,

But I always bore in mind the basic principles of drawing

Pause,

So that I never lost track. Or heart

Pause (p. 28)

In painting the landscape of the lives of Beth & Duff, the play does not finally explain them.

The contrast that Beth mentions her guide & Duff reverts to another extreme reflects a new type of relationship. Although it says much about their relationship, it fails to do justice to their individual abilities.⁽¹³⁾ Different stages of their relationship are reflected in the play through progressive statements in the form. "There's not a soul in the-" for the first time it moves into the present tense as a culmination of three distinct stages in their relationship. This elusive nature "chases round inside the head"⁽¹⁴⁾

(13) *Ibid.*, p. 269.

(14) J. L. Styan, *Modern Drama in Theory and Practice: Symbolism, Surrealism and the Absurd* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1981), p. 136.

There wasn't a soul on the beach (p. 17)

There wasn't a soul in the park (p. 17)

There's not a soul in the house (p. 28)

The contrast between the unbearable present & the irretrievable past is underlined in the past tense conclusion on a moment of interpersonal union:

Beth: 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 (p. 30)

The relationship lives in desperate movements from past to present, from memory to fantasy from hope to despair. Thus, the basic movement of the play is one of expansion & contraction of vision set against a temporal progress which reminds the audience repeatedly that everything changes, everything remains the same.

Conclusion

Pinter has consistently maintained a power of achievement. He increasingly attracts the attention of scholars, critics and audiences alike. It is common to find in responses to his recent work the same elements of uncertainty that characterized his early criticism. The basic approach to Pinter is that which should be basic to any

approach to language. Even within a certain general function, language is characterized by variety and adaptability as well as by recurring pattern. Most of recent linguistic theory has concentrated on generalizing upon the syntactic patterns that occur within individual sentences. The interaction of sentences in a dialogue is necessary. It seems trivial at first but it presents problems that have not been largely controlled. Language, time and reality show much greater awareness of the problems. If one approaches Landscape with a belief that truth, reality and communication ought to conform to certain norms then the play will remain enigmatic. But it is realized that all of these concepts are the barrier to an understanding of Pinter. His characters are negotiating not only truth and reality, but also their freedom to engage their preferred identities in the environments that surrounded them. The linguistic battles are not the product of arbitrary desire for the dominance but crucial battles for control of the means by which a personality is created in the social system to which they belong.

To treat Landscape from the stylistic point of view, one finds a new approach. The difficulty of communication is one of the themes and approaches in the play. The difficulty appears not from the dialogue between people who talk at length, but from what there are in the two monologues presented by Beth and Duff. What is more important about the play is not only the subtle control of the musical

writing but also from the great job of compression which Pinter has accomplished. The scarcity and fewness of the style, the extreme skill with which minute clues are subtly interwoven. It creates a picture of depth and density with minimum of words. It is out of “the difficulty of communication and the many layers of meaning in silence and the pauses”⁽¹⁵⁾ that the landscape of Beth and Duff appears. A landscape which has a wide horizon.

ملخص

مسرحية "المنظر" لبنتر: معالجة أسلوبية

سليمان يوسف عبد (*)

تعبر أعمال الكاتب المسرحي هارولد بنتر عن أشياء والسمو بمساحة اللغة بفضاءات واسعة بشكل ملحوظ وان مقدرته على عرض هذه الأشياء لا يمكن تجاهلها.

(15) Margaret Drabble ed., The Oxford Companion to English Literature (Oxford: O. U. P. 5th ed., 1985), p. 767.

(*) قسم الإنكليزي – كلية الآداب / جامعة الموصل .

يبقى بنتر المتصدر من بين الذين يعبرون وبشكل ملحوظ باستخدام اللغة والأسلوب بشكل محير وفيه شيء من الألغاز من خلال شخصياته في الكثير من مسرحياته. لقد واجه النقاد صعوبات لحل مثل هذه المعضلة المتمثلة في لغة بنتر ويتفق الكثير منهم بان هناك لغزاً محيراً في لغته وأسلوبه من الحوار والإجابات بين شخصياته وخصوصاً مسرحية (المنظر) التي هي أشبه بمنولوجات وليست على سبيل الحوار العادي. تبقى اللغة وأسلوب المسرحية (المنظر) التي لا يتجاوز تقديمها أكثر من نصف ساعة بينما يدور حديثها أشبه بمنولوج بين شخصيتين امرأة ورجل في مطبخ وينظرون من خلال النافذة إلى المنظر أمامهم.

من خلال الأسلوب نتعامل مع كاتب يرفض الحدود المتعارف عليها في استخدام المفردة والأفكار المعبرة عن الأشياء بشكل عادي. فان الشكل والمحتوى يبينان تبايناً واختلافاً في استخدام المفردة والفكرة التي تجعلك تفكر مرتين لتحليل ماهية هذه الفكرة أو المفردة. لهذا تبقى المعالجة الأسلوبية لغزاً يراد السير في اغواره والمحاولة لإيجاد الفكرة التي تعبر وبشكل توضيحي عن أفكار بنتر وطريقته الخاصة التي تحتاج إلى إمكانية كبيرة لفهم ما يدور في أسلوبها الذي يبدو بسيطاً لكنه محمل بأفكار دسمة.