MEMORY AS DISCOURSE IN HAROLD PINTER'S *OLD TIMES*, *BETRAYAL* AND *A KIND OF ALASKA*

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Abstract

This paper aims at developing the topic of identity and the narration of the self through the other in Harold Pinter's plays *Old Times*, *Betrayal* and *A Kind of Alaska*. In these plays Pinter deploys strategies to convey multiple implications which are based on the power of memory in which the structure of the plays is concocted.

Key words: Pinter, Language, Silence, Memory, Time

"Every genuinely important step forward is accompanied by a return to the beginning...more precisely to a renewal of the beginning. Only memory can go forward."
M. Bakhtin

This study will address the issues of memory in a selection of plays by Harold Pinter (b:10/10/1930; d: 24/12/2008) and his usage of language, or the absence of a coherent speech as means of narration of the self, using an empirical discursive approach, and focusing in particular on the concept of time and memory.

Starting from the accepted premises that memory is at the core of identity, politics and, ultimately, past, present and future history, one can state that it is

memory, both collective and individual, determines meaning and influences the course of events. Writers, some more inadvertently than others, are nearer to the power of memories since they translate memories into discourse.

In Harold Pinter's dramatic universe, words were always regarded by its author as elusive and he is permanently aware that the *more acute the experience the less articulate the expression* (Pinter: 1991: ix). All his statements on his writing process consider language and its struggle to overpower meaning through the developing of the correct word, the perfect articulation to express the moment. As it is also known to everyone more or less familiar with Pinter's writing, most of the times the correct meaning to interpret the moment is solely obtained through silence. When in lack of the perfect word, Pinter uses silence as discourse. Silence has been typified by Pinter in order to convey different meanings in three moments, corresponding to a gradation which intensifies the duration of the absence of speech: three dots, pause and silence. With different degrees of intensity this absence of spoken language by the fictional characters of his plays, introduces a new sense – that of the unsaid. According to the author (Pinter: 1991):

> *So often, below the word spoken, is the thing known and unspoken. (…) You and I, the characters that grow on a page, most of the time we're inexpressive, giving little away, unreliable, evasive, obstructive, unwilling. But it's out of these attributes that a language arises. A language, I repeat, where under what is said, another thing is being said. (xii)*

Peter Hall, commenting on his experience as director of some of Pinter's plays has also contributed to a better definition of the silent language and its meaning. In Hall's words (Hall: 2001):

> *There are three different kinds of pauses in Pinter: Three dots is a sign of a pressure point, a search for the word, a momentary incoherence. A Pause is a longer interruption to the action, where the lack of speech becomes a form of speech itself. The Pause is a threat, a moment of non-verbal tension. A Silence – the third category – is longer still. It is an extreme crisis point. (...) Pinter actually writes silence and he appropriates it as part of his dialogue. (p.144)*

Whenever in lack of the exact word to convey the adequate meaning, Pinter ties his characters' memories to a language made of silence that initiates a discourse where what is left unsaid can be more important since it contains all the subtext that mere words are unable to transmit. James R. Hollis, in 1970, in the first essay which presents the poetics of silence in Pinter's work, would consider the spaces left unspoken by Pinter's characters as pure silent metaphors, introducing a Jungian matrix, where metaphor becomes a synonym of symbol. In Hollis' assumption (Hollis: 1970):

> *Pinter employs language to describe the failure of language; he details in forms abundant the poverty of man's communication; he assembles words to remind us that we live in the space between the words. (p.13)*

Later, Martin Esslin (Esslin: 1970) would coin the expression Pinteresque[1] referring to the language used, reminding that the major innovation of the playwright consists in the manner that his characters tend to avoid explaining themselves, when on stage, and most of the times conceal their motivations and their past from the audience:

[1] Nowadays present in many dictionaries. (e.g. the Reverso Online Dictionary as an adjective from the noun Pinter. See http://dictionary.reverso.net/english-definition/Pinteresque)

> *Pinter far from wants to say that language is incapable of establishing true communication between human beings; he merely draws our attention to the fact that in life human beings rarely make use of language for that purpose. (p.212)*

The topic of language and silence as discourse has also been the subject of other contributions, such as from Marc Silverstein[2] that applies the theoretical assumptions of Wittgenstein, Adorno, Bakhtin, Focault, Barthes, Kristeva, Derrida, Lacan, Marcuse and Althusser in linguistics, language and socializing processes and ideologies to put forward the theory that Pinter's plays are mostly about power and that the political angle of his texts has been neglected in favour of a more Jungian model of analysing the unsaid that can be perceived in the characters' silences.

However, it is precisely this Jungian model that will act as the subtext of this analysis, more specifically the topic of collective memory and archetypes, the individuation process and the notion of synchronicity since, in Pinter's plays, memory is also preserved in the silences of the characters in order to protect and maintain intact their identity. Carl Jung was said to be keen on the quotation from Lewis Caroll's *Through the Looking-Glass* (Caroll: 1970) when, at a given moment, the White Queen turns to Alice and observes the following:

> *That's the effect of living backwards,' the Queen said kindly: 'it always makes one a little giddy at first--'*
> *'Living backwards!' Alice repeated in great astonishment. 'I never heard of such a thing!'*
> *'--but there's one great advantage in it, that one's memory works both ways.'*
> *'I'm sure MINE only works one way,' Alice remarked. 'I can't remember things before they happen.'*

[2] Marc Silverstein. (1993) *Harold Pinter and the Language of Cultural Power*. London and Toronto: Bucknell University Press.

> *'It's a poor sort of memory that only works backwards,' the Queen remarked. (Pp.247-248)*

This quotation could be mentioned in the writing process of *Betrayal*, for example, when memories are unfolded backwards in the time flux. It could also serve to recover Bakhtin's words in the epigraph of this paper (*Only memory can go forward*). In order to shed some light into the debate of memory as discourse in Pinter's referred plays one has to summon different aspects of the notions of memory and time since, when we further analyse memory and apprehend its different levels, we conclude that it is intimately related to time. One has to take into account that memory is more than a single process, is a dynamic one that enables each individual to acquire, retain and recall a certain episode, via encoding, storage and retrieval of information. Thus we must consider three different stages:

- The Sensory Stage, which registers the immediate sensations and can last about 0.25 to 3 seconds;
- The Working Stage, which processes input from sensory memory and retrieves long-term memories lasting about 30 seconds;
- The Long-Term stage, which stores lasting memories that can potentially last a lifetime.[3]

In the plays selected – *Old Times*, *Betrayal* and *A Kind of Alaska*, memories create the speech, lead the discourse of the characters in different aspects and memory is juggled with time. In *Old Times* the dialogue of the three intervenients dwells on the topic of the collective memory and individuation, *Betrayal* is built, in the Caroll sense of the White Queen, backwards, and *A Kind of Alaska*, being based on the novel by Oliver Sacks, *Awakenings,* goes a step further in analysing a psychological disturbance: Amnesia with a more perceptive impact in the field of

[3] For more information on this topic see: Anthony G Benoit in:http://environmentalet.hypermart.net/psy111/memory.htm#bio

memory and time. These three plays have at their core the topic of silence and instead of dialogues we listen to voices of thoughts being interwoven. The protagonists refer to past moments in time, occupied with absences and unanswered questions. In this context silence finds its ally in memory, in the different stages of recreating the past and leading the present into oblivion.

Pinter, looking back at his memories of the years when these three plays were written, in an interview given in October 1989, would corroborate these notions of time and memory (Gussow: 1994):

> *I wrote a lot of plays between 1970 and 1985 which can't be said to be political plays – things like Old Times and Betrayal and Landscape and Silence, which were concerned with memory and youth and loss and certain other things (p. 82).*

Though this article focuses on three plays, others could be included in this topic of past memories, namely: *Landscape, Silence, Revue Sketches II* (*Night* and *Dialogue for Three*), *Monologue*, *Family Voices*, *Moonlight* and *Ashes to Ashes*. In all these plays we can observe a recreation of the past events, notwithstanding their chronological accuracy, or even their factual occurrence. Another play which is entirely dependent on the language games is *No Man's Land* – where Davies, Spooner and Hirst are entirely dependent on their voices remembering the past to confer meaning to *the no man's land* that they have reached.

Old Times **(1970)**

Old Times, a play that Pinter admitted to Mel Gussow (Gussow: 1994) to have been penned in three days, marks a turning point in Pinter's quest for the thematic of how the past invades the present and determines the course of

relationships and events. This quest for the *foreign country*[4] of the past will lead him to spend the entire following years of 1972, working on a screenplay, *Remembrance of Things Past,* which would condense the 3200 pages of Marcel Proust's masterpiece.

Old Times depicts a triangle: Two women and one man are in a room discussing their last meeting, twenty years ago. The apparent non-threatening initial perspective is soon altered when the dialogue of the three characters, in search of a common past, takes a different turn: It is not about sharing memories, recalling past days spent together, but a struggle for power, a dangerous arena where, apparently, there is only room for two contestants and Kate has her position secured from the outset. Kate is always at the core of multiple conflicts: On the one hand, there is the battle of Deeley and Anna for the appropriation of the past and, consequently, Kate, and, on the other, the private dispute between Deeley and Kate for supremacy in their relation. The first example of this verbal confrontation is given at the beginning (Pinter: 1996) when Deeley tries to lead the dialogue and ends up being silenced by Kate. The emphasis is put on the words *think*, *one* and *only*:

> *Deeley: Did you think of her as your best friend?*
> *Kate: She was my only friend.*
> *Deeley: Your best and only.*
> *Kate: My one and only. Pause. If you have only one of something you can't say it's the best of anything. (p. 247)*

While Anna and Deeley stage their past lives, using their long last memories to throw old songs lyrics at each other, Kate remains silent and appears to be controlled by the others' memories. She affirms that they talk about her as if she was dead. However, Kate's force rests in her silence since by refraining to engage in the conversation about her life she reduces her husband

[4] A reference to L. P. Hartley's quotation – The past is a foreign country, they do things differently there – in The Go-Between also adapted by Pinter to the screen.

and her friend to the condition of mere followers of her existence and, at the end, Kate takes full control of the stage and the lives of the characters because she realises that Anna and Deeley's greatest weakness is their love for her. From the three characters on stage, Kate is the only one that is able to survive the loneliness since her encoding memories of the past include having seen, though metaphorically speaking, the image of Anna lying dead, and due to having smeared Deeley – this accounts for the importance of the baths she takes, since they acquire a regenerative function. (It is not by coincidence that Kate manages to silence Anna and Deeley after having a long bath.)

In *Old Times* memory is a form of discourse associated with silence because the depth of Kate's solitude transforms the text in exultation for the unsaid and her power of remembrance absorbs the others' emotions and recollections. The play begins and ends in absolute silence and quietness. Even the light is dim to accentuate what Pinter would refer to as *the mistiness of the past*[5]. Anna is *standing at the window*, Deeley is *slumped in an armchair*, and Kate is *curled up on the sofa*. At the end of the play though the power has changed and Kate has managed to vanquish her husband and friend at their own *game* of forging and recovering lost memories of things that have happened twenty years before, the characters are static: Deeley *in the armchair,* Anna *lying on the divan* and Kate *sitting in the divan*. The only relevant change concerns the lights which *light up full sharply. Very bright.*

Kate, despite the various similarities that can be established with other female characters in Pinter's dramatic world, is ultimately entirely different and innovative since, in twenty years time, she has managed to metamorphose her past weaknesses in power, and her silence in strength and persuasiveness. Her triumph rests in way she interacts with Anna and Deeley, using her absence of dialogue to hush them, creating uncomfortable silences. Unlike her, Deeley and

[5] Fragment of an interview on 5th December 1971 compiled by Mel Gussow (1994): *Conversations with Pinter*. In this same interview Gussow asks whether Pinter has seen the film *The Odd Man Out*, referred in the play and Pinter admits he has and replies: *What interests me is the mistiness of the past. There's a section in the play, where Deeley says so to… the friend, that they met in this pub 20 years before. Well the fact is they have and they might not. If you were asked to remember, you really cannot be sure of whom you met 20 years before. And in what circusntances. (pp.16-17)*

Anna have dedicated their thoughts and memories to Kate and they need to recover the reminiscences of that lost past, when they were both responsible for making Kate happy and to confer meaning to their present lives. That is why Anna affirms, echoing so many other voices in Pinter's plays, (Pinter: 1996):

> *Anna: There are some things one remembers even though they may never have happened. There are things I remember which may never have happened but as I recall them so they take place. (pp. 269-279)*

In terms of our topic, Anna is implying that memory is entirely, subjective and, most important, flexible and mutable. She is aware that truth when one unfolds the past can be pure fiction, according to the speaker. In the final scene, Kate will use this weapon to beat Deeley and Anna at their memory game, recovering her private, special memory of Anna lying dead:

> *Kate (To Anna.): But I remember you. I remember you dead.*
> *Pause*
> *I remember you lying dead. You didn't know I was watching you. I leaned over you. Your face was dirty. (...) Your pupils weren't in your eyes. Your bones were breaking through your face. But all was serene. There was no suffering. It had all happened elsewhere. Last rites I did not feel necessary. Or any celebration. I*
> *felt the time and season appropriate and that by dying alone and dirty you had acted with proper decorum. (Pinter: 1996, pp. 309- 310)*

After this long speech, that was staged by Peter Hall for the first time in London, by the Royal Shakespeare Company, at the Aldwych Theatre, on 1st June 1971, and was filmed for the BBC on 22nd October 1975, directed by Christopher Morahan the characters remain silent until the fall of the curtain. In the BBC filmed version Kate's speech lasts five minutes and sixteen seconds, after which the last four minutes and fifty seconds of the production are spent in silence. As Martin Regal (Regal: 1995) has pointed out:

> *Metaphorically speaking, Kate 'kills' her relationship with Anna by 'remembering' her as a corpse, an image which Anna is allowed neither to contradict nor explain since Kate has the last words in the play. (p.81)*

Regal also points out the parallelisms between this play and James Joyce's *Exiles*, which was directed by Pinter, in 1970, about the time he was writing *Old Times*. Regal is one of the authors who puts the issues of time and memory in the centre of this particular play when he states:

> *Old Times is the first of Pinter's plays to make time its central subject, but it also refocuses on attitudes to time and memory displayed in the plays that immediately precede it. (...) Time becomes a territory in its own right, and Deeley, Kate and Anna make the twenty-year gap between the present and their last meeting their battleground. But the action is also circular. The last scene, acted without speech, visually repeats Anna's account of a man crying in the room she shared with Kate, suggesting perhaps that they are locked in a timeloop from which they will never emerge. (p 86)*

Victor Cahn (1994) in a chapter dedicated to *Old Times* considers the play as:

> *(...) the dramatization of a labyrinthine system of memory images, some of which we understand to be factual, but many others of which may be created or purposefully distorted so that the speaker can assert his or her authority over the present. (p. 103)*

On the same subject Batty (2005) has more recently remarked:

> *With* Old Times*, Pinter demonstrated how the past and memory are exploitable as tools for gaining advantage, and added them to the arsenal of*

> *verbal equipment that his catalogue of characters had at their disposal when confronting one another. The past is presented as possessing fluid, amorphous qualities that ultimately belie any attempt to construct present certainty for them. (pp. 52-53)*

In Pinter's theatrical world, for Kate, Deeley and Anna, along with so many other characters, language functions as a weapon which is thrown relentlessly at others; it is not a vehicle that renders communication easier, rather the contrary,to speak is to cover up meaning, is to add doubt, to dispossess other characters of their memories, knowledge and ultimately, their identities. In the end of the play Kate is in control mostly because she has stripped Anna and Deeley from their images of the past and created an alternative version that kills the friend and belittles the husband. Her narrative dominates theirs and her identity prevails unscathed.

If in *Old Times* the action takes places in the present, *Betrayal* goes backwards in time, act after act, to unfold the past of another triangle.

Betrayal **(1978)**

Betrayal was written in three months, in 1978, and, according to Michael Billington, Pinter's official biographer, it is almost an autobiographical play – since his marriage to Vivian Merchant ended before writing the play, and his relationship with Lady Antonia Fraser started at about the same time – though Pinter was not keen in discussing the issue and, when directly confronted, in December 1979 by Mel Gussow, considered that assumption *irrelevant*[6].

In common with *Old Times*, and as well as with *No Man's Land*, in *Betrayal* memory is, once again, portrayed as frail and extremely fallible. The play depicts a domestic situation, an affair between Emma and Jerry, and revolves around the notion of what is said, what is known, and what the others know. It begins in 1977 when Emma and Jerry meet, two years after their illicit affair, which lasted

[6] See Gussow (1994) p. 53.

for seven years, has ended. During seven scenes (out of nine) we are taken back in time until the last scene, which takes the reader to 1968, to the house of Emma and Robert (Emma's husband and Jerry's best friend) at the moment when the affair started. Later, in 1982, Pinter would write the screenplay, one year after having written the screenplay of John Fowles's *The French Lieutenant's Woman,* which shares with *Betrayal* the common element of the succession of the flashbacks on the screen. The first two scenes are the only ones which progress in time, as first Emma and Jerry and then Jerry and Robert, discuss the end of the affair. It is only from scene three (1975) on that time begins to regress.

In *Betrayal* time functions as a puzzle: the reader or spectator is defied to try to understand what has happened, before the events that already took place are unveiled. Scene after scene, the angle of vision is altered to offer another perspective, another cut in the dissection of the relationship. In terms of memory, the first scene is quite revealing since, for the first time, it is possible to listen to Jerry and Emma discussing the past. The affair has ended; they meet in a pub, after Emma called Jerry, and start a simple dialogue, exchanging what is supposed to be social formulas, avoiding the awkwardness of not knowing what to talk about, since they have not encountered one another since the end of the affair. At the beginning they exchange circumstantial sentences, trying to avoid the past and the memories of their relationship. However, the burden of the past times is still present and that contributes to the unfolding of revelations: Emma has a new lover; Robert knew about the adulterous relation between his friend and wife and pretended not to, as far as Jerry was concerned, and, in addition, he has admitted to having betrayed his wife for years. From the outset, we understand there are multiple levels of betrayal:

> *Love, trust and friendship: Emma betrayed Robert and Jerry betrayed his wife and friend; Robert betrayed Jerry (by withholding the truth of his knowledge) and his wife.*

Comparing with *Old Times,* it is a different triangle, much more concrete, in terms of remembrances, since we are taken on a chronological regressive tour of the relationship. The play ends when the affair begins, in Emma and Robert's house. It is a text that deserves to be mentioned, mostly due to its innovation in the dramatic territory of Pinter, first on account of its reverting structure and also for the fact, which is a novelty in Pinter's texts, that there are no mysteries left to disclose, just a former situation which leads to the anguish of the characters, particularly Jerry who feels betrayed by Emma and Robert.

In terms of language, the dialogues are quite straightforward, with a brief question and answer pattern, until a given topic is dealt with and concluded. What this particular play shares in common with the topic of time, memory and identity is the fact that the three characters share a common past and have to recollect their impressions of it, in the two initial scenes: Using the memories of a common past, Emma tries to impress Jerry with her new lover, since she has not been successful in triggering jealous emotions from her husband. On the other hand, Jerry manifests more concern with Robert's concealment from him of the omniscience he had of the affair than with the fact that he knew his best friend was having an extramarital relation with his wife, and Robert appears to give a greater value to friendship than his relation with Emma. As far as memory is concerned and using the stages introduced at the beginning of this text, the two first scenes take place at the level of the working stage, and Jerry is the one responsible for doing the encoding of the information that was revealed and left him feeling betrayed to the point of needing to confront Robert, later that day. After these first two chapters, memory is only summoned when characters are in the past referring to previous events, as it is the case of scene 4, when we witness the year previous to end of the affair (1974) and Emma observes, recalling the beginning of the relationship (Pinter: 1998):

> *Emma: You see, in the past...we were inventive, we were determined, it was... it seemed impossible to meet...impossible... and yet we did. (IV, p.41)*

In *Betrayal* memory is not a foreign country, it can be verified and confronted with the previous dialogues that Emma, Jerry and Robert have had. Thus, the remembrances and, consequently, the time flux are constantly scrutinised scene after scene, as time moves backwards and we witness the verbal exchanges. It is not a question of going back to deduce the root of the problem, it is simply a matter of experiencing a pointless voyeurism of something that is over but, once, nine years before, was relevant and helped shape the identity of the characters of the first two scenes. In terms of the long-term memory stage, there's a persistent image shared by Jerry and Emma and linked on three different occasions with their affair: a memory of Jerry in Robert's kitchen (recalled by Emma as Jerry's kitchen) throwing Charlotte (Emma and Robert's daughter) up in the air and catching her. What is left, in terms of long-term images, is one of pure intimacy among friends.

Furthermore, the language use is quite restraint; there is a parallel between the economy of words and the economy of emotions: The play is made of short sentences, clichés and daily verbal exchanges (*How are* you, for instance is used as a refrain).

As Ruby Cohen (Gordon: 2001) corroborates:

> *In* Betrayal *Pinter is so abstemious of the language techniques he has burnished over two decades that it would be only a slight exaggeration to state that he betrays them, but he is all the truer — all the more brutally honest – to "the shape of things"(...) (p.28)*

In sum, *Betrayal* is a difficult text to position in Pinter's canon, due to the lack of the recurrent topics that are mustered in a typical Pinteresque play, mystery, menace and absurd situations. However the element of memory and time as factors which help shaping the identity of the characters are there. Jerry in the first scenes appears tainted, damaged by the death of the affair, and mostly due to the Robert's friendship. His loss is aggravated when he becomes

acquainted with the fact that Robert knew about the adultery, long time before they affair was over:

> *Jerry: And she told you... last night... about her and me. Did she not?*
> *Robert: No, she didn't. She didn't tell me about you and her last night. She told me about you and her four years ago. Pause. (...)*
> *Jerry: But we've seen each other... a great deal... over the last four years. We've had lunch.*
> *Robert: Never played squash though.*
> *Jerry: I was your best friend.*
> *Robert: Well, yes, sure. (...) Oh, don't get upset there's no point. (pp. 28; 19)*

Inverting the aphorism that the husband is always the last to become aware of the betrayal, Jerry feels deceived every step of the way, especially due to the time factor. The fact that Robert was familiar with the adultery for so many years alters Jerry's perception of his own identity and Robert's, since he engaged in a social and sexual intercourse not knowing all the premises of the infidelity equation. He is, recovering an image from *Old Times* and the film Deeley has taken Kate to watch and becomes a leitmotiv of the play, the odd manout! Time is a key factor and the characters who know more feel more reassured more reassured of their identity. As Steven Gale notes (Gale: 2003) discussing the conversion of the play into film[7]:

> *In the play, Pinter explores and demonstrates the workings of the human mind and interpersonal relationships by manipulating time. The drama is related to his later memory plays* – Landscape, No Man's Land, Silence, Night – *but the film is as effective as the play because of the*

[7] Released in London, in 1982, and in New York, also in 1982, and nominated for 1983 Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences Awards (Best Picture, Writing – Best Screenplay Based on Material from Another Medium), directed by David Jones with Ben Kinsley (Robert), Jeremy Irons (Jerry), and Patricia Hodge (Emma).

> *greater manipulation of time allowed by the cinematic medium – which becomes a prime feature in the movie. (p. 261)*

A Kind of Alaska

A Kind of Alaska is a one-act play written in 1982, based on the book *Awakenings* written in 1973 by the neurologist Oliver Sacks. In the book he retells a number of case studies of survivors of the *encephalitis lethargica* and their return to the world after decades of "sleep", fully describing not only the medical and psychological consequences, but also paying extraordinary attention to the ontological and philosophical implication of the experiments he submitted their patients in order to treat them and wake them up to reality. According to the editor (Vintage Book):

> Awakenings *is the remarkable account of a group of patients who contracted sleeping-sickness during the great epidemic just after World War I. Frozen in a*
> *decades-long sleep, these men and women were given up as hopeless until 1969*,
> *when Dr. Sacks gave them the then-new drug L-DOPA, which had an astonishing, explosive, "awakening" effect. Dr. Sacks recounts the moving case histories of these individuals, the stories of their lives, and the extraordinary transformations they underwent with treatment*[8].

The foreword to the play, something unusual in Pinter's universe, gives full context to the initial situation that is behind Sacks' account (Pinter: 1998):

> *In the winter of 1916-17, there spread over Europe, and subsequently over the rest of the world, an extraordinary epidemic illness which presented itself in innumerable forms – as delirium, mania, trances,*

[8] http://www.oliversacks.com/books/awakenings/

> *coma, sleep insomnia, restlessness, and states of Parkinsonism. It was eventually identified by the great physician Constanti von Economo and named by him encephalitis lethargic, or sleeping sickness.*
>
> *Over the next ten years almost five million people fell victim to the disease of whom more than a third died. Of the survivors some escaped almost unscathed, but the majority moved into states of deepening illness. The worst affected sank into singular states of 'sleep' – conscious of their surroundings but motionless, speechless, and without hope or will, confined to asylums and other institutions.*
>
> *Fifty years later, with the development of the remarkable drug L-DOPA, they erupted into life once more. (p.151)*

In Sacks text, what drew Pinter's attention was the case of Rose R. In Sacks' description of her, later included in a compilation of his most compelling study cases, Rose is a *63-year-old woman who had had progressive postencephalitic Parkinsonism since the age of 18 and had been institutionalised, in a state of almost oculogyric 'trance' for 24 years* (Sacks: 1990, p.151). Rose becomes Deborah, in Pinter's play and it is Sacks who unveils part of the motivation that drew the playwright to her story:

> *Later, when I came to write the story of this patient (Rose R.) in* Awakenings*, I thought less in terms of 'reminiscence' and more in terms of 'stoppage' ('Has she never moved on from 1926?' I write) – and these are the terms in which Harold Pinter portrays 'Deborah' in A Kind of Alaska (Sacks: 1990, p.150).*

In Pinter's play Deborah is in her mid-forties and she wakes up, suddenly at the beginning of the play, without recognising Hornby, the doctor who has taken care of her. When he finally manages to get her to listen to him, she is informed of her present status:

Deborah: Well, how long have I been asleep?

Pause.

Hornby: You have been asleep for twenty-nine years.

Silence.

Deborah: You mean I'm dead?

Hornby: No. (p. 163)

(...)

Deborah: How did you wake me up? (...)

Hornby: I woke you with an injection.

Deborah: Lovely injection. Oh I love it. And am I beautiful?

Hornby: Certainly.

Deborah: And you are my Prince Charming. Aren't you? (p. 168)

Deborah is a Sleeping Beauty without a prince charming, just her sister Pauline, who was 12 years old at the time she lost contact with reality and becomes the mirror of Deborah's own ageing process. Deborah thinks of herself as an adolescent of sixteen years old, and looking at Pauline, starts to realize that her long term memories are the ones she considers to have just occurred, which means that her brain restarts functioning in the working stage, still processing and encoding images as if they were short-term ones. The images have to do with her childhood and adolescence and if Pauline tries to postpone the revelation of the truth, elaborating a fairy-tale where the absent parents and sister are on a cruise, Hornby does not hesitate in explaining all that has happened. In the end of the play, Deborah has a fast forward image of her, absent to the world for years, and manages to created a new version of the past, editing the information that she has grasped, from Hornby and Pauline's words, which includes both facts and fantasies, concluding:

You say I have been asleep. You say I am now awake. You say I have not awoken from the dead. You say I was not dreaming and am not dreaming now. You say I am a woman.

She looks at Pauline, then back at Hornby.
She is a widow. She doesn't go to her ballet classes any more. Mummy and Daddy and Estelle are on a world cruise. They've stopped off in Bangkok. It'll be my birthday soon. I think I have the matter in proportion. (p.190)

The truth is Deborah only accepts as evidence a selection of events concerning her family and her birthday, the immediate memories of what she has been told. She distances herself from her current state by refusing to talk of herself in the first person, using the reported speech to describe her past 29 years, which is by no means an acknowledgement. At the same time, she appears to have forgotten Hornby's explanation about her father's blindness, the fact that her sister Stella is taking care of him, and that her mother has passed away. She opts for Pauline's brighter version of the cruise and uses it as a statement/fact. She edits her memories and encodes them in her speech.

This is a text where the topic of memory, time and the self are profoundly linked since Deborah's notion of identity when she wakes is linked to the long term memories she had immediately before entering into her trance. To find her new identity she needs to accept her present condition and that implies realising that she cannot have memories of the past twenty-nine years, thus breaking the continuum in time. As far as Hornby and Pauline's memories are concerned their identities are profoundly linked to the sleep of Deborah, and they disclose their remembrances only to fill in the puzzle of the gap of twenty-nine years with the missing information. In the case of Pauline her perspective is a closer one since she witness the beginning of the disease and the process of ageing while she was asleep. If Hornby is the one who summons the image that she has been in a kind of Alaska, Deborah's version is also poetic and accurate when she considers herself similar to Alice in Wonderland.

Deborah's language is made of the memories she recovers that is why she talks like a sixteen year old girl, with traces of childhood words, referring to 'mummy', 'daddy' and verbally bullying her sister. As Ewald Mengel (Gordon: 2001) puts it:

> *Pauline's [sic] and Hornby's memories basically have expositional functions. They elucidate Deborah's fate and the history of her family, forming a narrative context that gives meaning to the past and to the present of both Deborah and the audience. Deborah's memories are lyrical in character. Her childhood memories serve to define her self, her identity in a subjective way. The memories connected with her illness conjure up the phantasmagoric "no man's land" Alaska, in which her consciousness has travelled in the meantime. (p. 165)*

Her refusal to looking at herself in a mirror is a rejection of her present self and her final words prove that, though she is ready to start coping with the immensity of what has happened to her, she is not apt to accept the full truth (namely, her mother's death, and her father's blindness).

Conclusion

In this analysis I have considered three plays that reflect the subjects of memory, time and discourse. Other plays could have been presented, as referred earlier. However, these three are paradigmatic since they use memory to create different types of discourse.

In *Old Times* the past is the only engine that drives the conversation, and the characters are, in terms of identity, made out of memories and act according to them. It is the most enigmatic play of the three, since the discourse engendered in that close room, is a fight for supremacy won by Kate, in terms of attention and control of the others' lives and identities. According to Pinter, the play is one of his best achievements and it started from one word 'Dark'.

In *Betrayal*, the reader is simply confronted with the characters' memories at the beginning of the first two scenes. After scene three, time moves backwards and one can witness and verify all that the characters declare to have done. Their identities are only revealed, in terms of anxieties and frustrations, in the

commencement, afterwards memory is not at the core of the play, time is. The notion of the self in this text is directly related to the adultery: being adulterous, dishonest, being able to betray or to be betrayed, thus the characteristic of domesticity that labels the play, in terms of literary criticism.

Finally, *A Kind of Alaska* is an entirely different play in Pinter's canon; nonetheless it still dwells in the thematic of time, memory and identity, Deborah's *awakening* is based on a true event and though the three medical stages of the recovery, referred in Sacks account, were compress by Pinter, the text sheds a new light into the topic. It is, as referred previously, a modern diseased version of Sleeping Beauty - without prince charming and without time standing still, waiting for the princess to come alive from her spell – and Alice in Wonderland – without the chance of returning home. Deborah's past is stuck in her present and nothing can alter the fact that her lack of memory of the past 29 years defines her identity. Her *Self* as identity disappears at 16 and restarts at 45 and she has to deal with almost two thirds of her life without memories but experiencing in her body the normal physical changes (from adolescence into middle-age) of the time that has elapsed.

In Pinter, as far as memory is concerned *the past* really *is a foreign country* and things are done differently. However, in terms of identity, there is always the unsettling feeling that *the past is never past*. Characters, shape, lose or rediscover their identity, according to the plays, and memory either determines the time flux, or is controlled by it. On numerous occasions memory is buried in discourse and Pinter uncovers his own memories is his dramas thus creating new fiction out of his personal experience. When asked, in 1979, by Mel Gussow how his memory was, Pinter replied (Gussow, 1994):

> *I have a strange kind of memory. I think I really look back into a kind of fog most of the time, and things loom out of the fog. Some things I have to force myself to remember. I bring them back by an act of will. It appals me that I've actually forgotten things, which at the time meant a great deal to me. (p.53)*

George Whalley (1953) has described memory, considering it to be the central factor in the process of image making: without memory there can be no poetic creation (p.73). Historicists have always privileged memory as the nutriment of History and the ultimate shaper of identities, either collective or individual, and cognitive psychologists have created different stages to analyse the impact of memory. In Pinter's canon memory is, along with time, baffling enigmatic and moulded to serve the ultimate purpose of illustrating that life can be a daunting experience which accounts for the necessity of including pauses and silences in his discourse: In the absence of an appropriate 'voice', Pinter dignifies the moment introducing a new sense – that of the unsaid - and uses it as a form of discourse, showing that in the end there are some memories which cannot be translated into full words.

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