

Stripping Off: Pinter's Blue Movie
Reflections on OLD TIMES

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Harold Pinter's *Old Times* is the first of three remarkable nonrealistic works which signal a change in direction for this most original (and, I suspect, most likely to endure) of mid-twentieth century British dramatists. The issues raised in these plays are obsessively, even neurotically dwelt upon. Love and art ("life" and "work" in Yeats's formulation)¹ and the likely consequences of a failure to reconcile or even to be true to them separately are the broad themes which echo and re-echo through *Old Times* (1971) *No Man's Land* (1975) and *Betrayal* (1978). Despite their far greater oddity both of form and content, the first of these (which isolates love as a theme) and the second (which similarly isolates art) are quite as accessible as the apparently more conventional third. While combining both concerns in ways which seem superficially more realistic and more coherent, *Betrayal* finally seems content merely to express human muddle. In the process it supplies an honest reflection of that 'failure' which is, ultimately, the overriding theme of this disappointed romantic. I propose to examine all three plays in some detail. *Old Times*, as the piece which inaugurates Pinter's change of direction, seems to me not only to require extended examination but amply to repay it.

I

The play starts with a wordless tableau, in "dim" light, in which "three figures" are merely "discerned":

Light dim. Three figures discerned./DEELEY slumped in armchair, still./KATE curled on a sofa, still./ANNA standing at the window, looking out. (p.7)

It ends with another, in "very bright" light, involving the same three figures — husband (Deeley), wife (Kate), other woman (Anna) — now much more sharply seen:

Lights up full sharply. Very bright./DEELEY in armchair./ANNA lying on divan./KATE sitting on divan. (p.75)

Already one senses at least part of the truth being expressed. The situation presented remains, in many respects, more or less the same; what varies is

the degree of illumination which has been thrown on it. In this connection a curious passage linking these wordless tableaux is worth considering. This is a speech, halfway through the First Act, in which the most problematic of the three figures (Anna) describes an incident involving two women and a man. The women are herself and Kate, twenty years earlier, when they were friends in London. The man, on the face of it, could hardly be the husband—must be a stranger — since it is for his benefit that the story is now, presumably for the first time, being told :

This man crying in our room. One night late I returned and found him sobbing, his hand over his face, sitting in the armchair, all crumpled in the armchair.... There was nothing I could do. I undressed and switched out the light and got into my bed.... there was nothing but sobbing, suddenly it stopped. The man came over to me... looked down at me.... He stood in the centre of the room. He looked at us both, at our beds. Then he turned towards me.. (p.32)

The man, as I say, is a stranger. Yet his movements, as described here, are precisely those which Deeley will adopt, in relation to the two women, at the end of the play — immediately before the closing tableau:

DEELEY starts to sob, very quietly./ANNA stands still./ANNA turns, switches off the lamps, sits on her divan, and lies down./The sobbing stops.. DEELEY stands. He walks a few paces, looks at both divans./He goes to ANNA's divan, looks down at her.. (pp.73-74)

A supposedly 'past' occurrence thus materialises in the present — though whether it is replayed and revived or (more mysteriously) created and brought into being remains obscure. It is, indeed, the *chronology* of the occurrence which is precisely what is most difficult to determine. And since one of the play's primary concerns is to merge — to blur the line between — past and present, it seems clear that the difficulty is, to some extent, deliberate. In the theatre, as we watch and listen, the Act One speech obviously prefigures (in the sense that it comes before) this Act Two tableau. What complicates matters — making the prefiguring seem more in the nature of a conjuring or prophecy — is the way in which Anna prefaces her account of what 'happened'. This (presumably past) occurrence is actually laid before us in terms which combine past, present — and (because they foretell an action which occurs at the very end of the play) future as well:

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.31-32)

Anna's function as story-teller is, as these enigmatic remarks make clear, given considerable overtones of controlling authority and creative power. It should not surprise us unduly (bearing in mind the "dim" and "brightly" lit respective tableaux which the passage links) that "light" (to some extent again controlled by Anna) is a prominent feature of her tale. The man's moves between the two girls and the two beds are (like Deeley's moves at the end) dimly lit. Anna tells us that, before getting into bed, she "switched out the light" (p. 32) and that, because "the curtains were thin, the light from the street came in": a point which is curiously emphasised ("the light came in, it flicked the wall"). When the man approaches her bed, at first it's described as "quickly". But then Anna (adducing the "light" as the reason for her mistake, and thus once again drawing attention to it) corrects herself:

No, no, I'm quite wrong... he didn't move quickly... that's quite wrong... he moved... very slowly, *the light was bad, and stopped.*

When Deeley asks Anna "What did he *look* like, this fellow?" she is thus, perfectly plausibly, able to say "Oh, I *never saw his face clearly. I don't know*" (p. 34). A closer look at the passage, however, makes clear that it isn't altogether the "bad" light which obscures the man's features. Even before she switches out the light, the man's attitude ("his hand *over his face*") and posture ("all *crumpled* in the armchair...no one *looked up*") are enough to explain her inability to see him clearly. Yet as Anna continues either to recall or to invent the incident (the point is deeply equivocal) it becomes clear that her skills as story-teller or story-maker are being brought to bear on a single intention. This is not merely to obscure the man's features but to erase his identity; make him vanish. First in the sense of depart, and then (by making that departure so definitive) to eliminate all trace and even memory of him. The stages in the process (including an apparent 'return' which nevertheless reduces him to an ill-defined, and again poorly lit, "shape") are clearly marked:

ANNA : He bent down over me. But I would have nothing to do with him, absolutely nothing. /Pause./

DEELEY : What kind of man was he?

ANNA : But after a while I heard him *go out*. I heard the front door *close*, and *footsteps in the street*, then *silence*, then the footsteps *fade away*, and then *silence*. /Pause./ But then sometime later in the night I woke up and looked across the room to her bed and saw two *shapes*.

DEELEY : He'd come back!

ANNA : He was lying across her lap on her bed.

DEELEY : *A man in the dark across my wife's lap?* /Pause./

ANNA : But then in the early morning... *he had gone.*

DEELEY : Thank Christ for that.

ANNA : *It was as if he had never been.* (pp. 33-34)

Anna's 'conjuring' of the man simply in order to dispose of him is, it seems safe to say, central to the play. 'Exorcising' would not be too strong a word. As much as in Ibsen, a dominant concern here is the effect that the ghosts of the past have on the life of the present; on its very capacity to move or evolve. As one of the old songs sung to such potent effect later in the play expresses it, "Oh, how the *ghost* of you *clings*..." (p. 29)

Anna's singleminded attempt to get rid of Deeley (for it is he whom she is targetting) is complemented throughout by Deeley's fumbling, increasingly harried attempts to get rid of Anna. A formidable rival for his wife's affections she seems, simply by pre-dating his own involvement with Kate, to hold all the advantages. By invoking "old times" from which he, by the nature of things, is excluded she ensures that he operates under a handicap throughout. In the apparently closest relationship of his life Deeley is thus made to feel an appendage; an irrelevance. In a phrase which grows cruelly more resonant the more one thinks of it, he is "a man in the dark across (his) wife's lap". Anna, by contrast, is far from being "in the dark". Rather she *is* "dark"; an aspect of darkness itself. The very first word of the play is "Dark" — and it refers, equivocally, both to Anna and to Kate's recollections of her.

Yet as the play proceeds it is Deeley's weak, ineffectual — apparently secondary — attempts to block Anna which finally compel attention. Although undertaken from a position of weakness ("lying", and "in the dark") and, moreover, against a 'standing' opponent who, in symbolic terms of illuminating the situation, controls all the light switches, the eventual outcome is full of surprises.

II

An opposition between 'light' and 'darkness' pervades the play — both literally (as in all the examples involving the switching on and off of lights) and figuratively. In addition the several milieux invoked — from the sun and heat of Sicily to the darkened cinema auditorium where the film being shown is, quite pointedly, *Odd Man Out* — all take their place in the overall pattern. The colloquial expression "in the dark" (meaning 'unaware') remains, however, central. Throughout the play one or other of the "three figures" whom the opening tableau discerns is consistently "in the dark": unaware of a situation to which the other two are privy. This situation, in being played and replayed, is given an edge or *frisson* so markedly sexual as to suggest nothing so much

as a prolonged act of foreplay.

For much of the time we assume (largely because we are invited to : Pinter isn't above 'playing' with the audience) that it is Deeley who is the "odd man out"; the 'unaware' element in the equation; the one most consistently "in the dark". The play's structure (a series of 'bouts' in which the man is bested — chiefly by Anna, though Kate's brief but enigmatic intrusions disconcert him more visibly) encourages such assumptions. Since, moreover, there are hints to the effect that these two women — despite their dissimilarity in the area under discussion ("you *aware*, she *unaware*", p.51) — could, in fact, be regarded as one, the sense of a strong feminine principle outweighing or ousting a weaker masculine one is compounded.

At times, however, the victory being celebrated seems to be the vanquishing of one of the women by the other. Or rather (since the possibility of a single personality being involved has been raised) of one aspect of that personality by another. And while the vague, silent Kate might seem a ready-made victim — "light" (in the sense of insubstantial) as compared with the "dark" (solid, talkative) Anna — the play's surprise closing speech (a long, remarkably dense and detailed monologue for an intensely 'aware' Kate describing how she stood over, watching, an inert and "dead" Anna) causes us once again to revise an opinion about the woman/women in the play which never has the opportunity to become fixed. In this respect, although the play's closing tableau shows us "a man in the dark across (his) wife's lap", the inert Anna which it also shows us ("*lying* on divan") seems, in her unconsciousness, at least twice as 'unaware'. Furthermore, the "light" (while as "dim" as in the corresponding passage) doesn't, on this occasion, remain so. The whole situation involving these three people, and their varying degrees of "awareness" of it, has evolved; not been allowed to stay still. Thus, however equivocal Pinter's choosing to end his play on a frozen tableau may be for any interpretation of *future* time, the "old times" of the title have undoubtedly moved or shaken — strongly affecting — the present.

Whichever (if any) of the three characters is still "in the dark" at the end, it remains a peculiarity of the play that the word "dark" itself is its starting-point or beginning. Not only the first word heard in the play ("KATE (*Reflectively*) Dark. /Pause") but the very first sound that breaks the conscious "Silence" which precedes it. This literally animates the hitherto "still" tableau, beginning that whole process of throwing light on submerged (forgotten, or wilfully buried) areas of experience which is as invariably the concern of a later Pinter as it is of a late Ibsen play. The word refers to Kate's memories of Anna. Deeley wants to know what she was like, this figure from his wife's past —

just as, in response to Anna's story about the "man" in their "room", his need is similarly for a fleshing-out of an obscurely seen figure ("What did he *look like*, this fellow?"). Since that question, as we have seen, initiated an entire voyage of discovery for Deeley — a process in which, from being "in the dark" about the identity of this apparent stranger he found himself more or less filling his shoes — it now occurs to us that his questions about the "dark" and elusive Anna are really (though as yet he is unaware of it) questions about Kate: the apparently familiar woman he has married who may, in fact, be a total stranger to him. Fleshing-out and filling-in the "dark" outline which both these women present is, indeed, the direction now taken by the play:

DEELEY : *Fat or thin?*

KATE : *Fuller than me, I think. /Pause.*

Subsequent 'lighting' of the obscurity surrounding Anna discloses, in addition to physical details like these, manners, tastes, social standing, marital status — the accumulation, piece by piece, of a dossier each item of which is allowed to register by virtue of the "Pauses" which frequently separate them. A kind of jigsaw-cum-mosaic is thus assembled, all of which goes on while Anna is actually there, on stage — albeit in "dim" light and with her back to the audience — "looking out" of the window. The end of this sequence devoted to the past — this conjuring of Anna from memory (p. 17) — shows her turning from the window and joining the others, thus entering the picture and the present. Yet the function, finally, of all this information about Anna isn't, as we shall see, in effect about Anna at all. The real subject of this odd sequence (which, significantly, takes the form of catechism or cross-examination) isn't so much Anna as the extent of Deeley's ignorance of *Kate*. The "Pauses" in a Pinter play have multiple functions. At least one of them here seems to be to allow Deeley time to digest the information which Kate's ostensible recollections of Anna give him about Kate herself. Bearing in mind the possibility that these two women are 'one' the start of the play can, on reflection, be seen as an attempt to recall a figure from the 'past' who may have been 'present' all along: an aspect of Kate which, having been submerged or suppressed, awaits only the animating which a direct invoking of it could provide. In this respect it almost perfectly illustrates the enigmatic remarks of Anna concerning past and present with which our discussion of the play began. By now, however, they seem less an enigma than an accurate representation of what the whole play amounts to. The emergence of the 'Anna' aspect of Kate — and its effect on what appears to have been a peculiarly "unaware" marriage — is of precisely the kind described:

There are things I remember *which may never have happened but as I recall them so they take place.*

III

We have already remarked the *form* which this attempt to recall a figure from the past has taken : a catechism from Deeley to Kate. And already, in being recalled, Anna is defined in terms of her resemblance to or difference from her friend:

KATE : Fuller *than me*, I think. /Pause./

DEELEY : She was *then*?

KATE : I *think* so.

DEELEY : She may not be *now*.

Kate's "fuller" could imply that Anna was more solid or substantial — more rounded or complete — than herself. Certainly the impression Kate makes in her own right is (however superficially) nebulous and vague in the extreme, fitting in with her expressed preference, later in the play, for "blurred" lines over "harsh" edges. The hazy uncertainty of the memory, too, while largely explained by the passing of time, seems somehow in character.

Deeley's proffered distinction between past and present — with its implied related distinction between memory and fact — introduces the important theme of the changes wrought by time. At its simplest — on the literal, physical level — while Anna may have been "fuller" than Kate in the past, she "may not be now". Yet the simple idea of a loss or gain in physical weight is going, as the play proceeds, to be given a less literal meaning. Ideas of weight or substance as they affect the 'solid' Anna and the nebulous Kate will, increasingly, denote matters of character rather than appearance. Kate may, in fact, be the "fuller" of the two in terms of quiet force of character. The passage could, in that case, refer to the superficially more 'forceful' Anna's persistent displacement (or 'upstaging') of Kate in the past : something which her present (patently unrealistic) position on stage during these memories of the past nicely reflects. In the past ("then") the apparently fuller personality absorbed the apparently weaker, the withdrawn and introverted figure being all too easily assimilated by the bolder. "Now" this may no longer be the case. Kate, in a sense, has come into her own. This being so, the "fuller" may also hint at the fuller "awareness" which is going to be Kate's barbed final bequest to Anna. That over-assertive figure from the past (seen here in "dim" light, one should remind oneself) may always have been more "in the dark" than she ever suspected.

Something of the ambiguity of the issue has been observed already. Against the spareness and vagueness — the habitual qualification — of Kate's

speeches must be set the solidity (almost, indeed, the *stolidity*) of her presence and the quiet stubbornness of her will ("I *continue*", as she devastatingly expresses it elsewhere). And, by the same token, the lengthy loquaciousness — the over-detailed fullness — of Anna's speeches cannot, finally, alter the fact that she is shadowy: a figure who emerges from memory and the past to take up a precarious foothold in a present where she is far from welcome. The question as to which of these two women is the "fuller" has, of course, already been rendered largely academic. If they are both aspects of a single personality, the question (while remaining fascinating) nevertheless changes its nature. Which of these aspects is, for Deeley, the more important? Is Kate his woman, or Anna's? Or, more importantly, her own? ("*I've got a woman crazy for me*" (p. 27) he sings, proprietorially, in the course of the singing-bout with Anna. We, however, may be forgiven for wondering how true that is). The closeness of Kate and Anna — a closeness so subtly delineated from the start that the varieties of interpretation it can accommodate include ambiguities as to number and person — represents a minefield into which Deeley, despite his affectation of 'knowingness', almost innocently wanders:

DEELEY : Was she your best friend?

KATE : Oh, what does that mean?

DEELEY : What?

KATE : The word friend... When you look back... all that time.

DEELEY : Can't you remember what you felt?/Pause. (p. 8)

From attempts to build up a physical impression of Anna, Deeley is here moving to the question of her relationship with Kate — or more precisely, as the phrase chosen seems to indicate, Kate's relations with her ("Was she your *best friend*?"). The expression seems neutral enough. In the cumulative context, however, of later expressions to do with the relationship (*underwear, attracted to, Why isn't she married? Normal? What's normal? lived together, shared with someone*) it will be seen to be heavily loaded. Deeley clearly has something in mind, and the expression so apparently casually used carries, in the context of the play as a whole, the pronounced implication of 'lover'. Kate's reaction ("Oh, what does *that* mean?") seems sufficiently open-ended to refer to the phrase as a whole, but when Deeley's "What?" forces her to specify, it is the more unexceptionable of the two words that she chooses to counter with ("The word *friend*..."). This rejoinder seems calculated to defuse a situation which, however obscurely, threatens to blow up. Kate's references to the relationship throughout, it may now occur to us, are all calculatedly cool, remote, neutral: a process in which her habit of qualifying ("I *think* so") and her emphasis on distance ("when you *look back*... all that *time*") play their

part. Deeley, however, is not to be deterred. The "best friend" issue — with the stress quite distinctly placed on "best" — is relentlessly pursued. At first obliquely, with an emphasis on the emotional involvement which any close relationship must surely have entailed ("Can't you remember what you *felt*?"). But, when that is similarly countered ("It is a *very long* time..") more insistently, if still tentatively ("But *you remember her. She remembers you.* Or why would she be coming here tonight?"). The equal weight given both partners in the proceeding is blocked by Kate's firm, if lightly qualified shifting of the responsibility to one partner only ("I *suppose* because *she* remembers me", p. 9). Her last two answers imply that, as answers, they are surely sufficient. Memory is elusive. Time changes things. What was once a friendship may no longer be so.

After a "Pause", however, Deeley returns to the attack. And in a way which — resuming the subject of her supposed 'feelings' at the time — builds on them, bringing back into play the operative (and offending) word:

Did you *think* of her as your *best* friend? (p. 9)

With this, a sense of pronounced opposition (of entrenched positions) is for the first time openly sounded. The word "best" (the sticking-point) is overtly disputed:

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.*

DEELEY : Because you have nothing to compare it with?

KATE : Mmnn. /Pause. /

DEELEY : (*Smiling*) She was incomparable.

KATE : Oh, I'm sure she wasn't. /Pause. (p. 9)

What happens here, from the point of view of combat, is interesting. If Kate 'wins' (as I suspect she does) it is only narrowly. In substituting the word "only" for the word "best" she can hardly be said to defuse the issue. A concentration on the relationship's closeness (which she might wish to have avoided) is inevitably still made: a state of affairs which Deeley's swift juxtaposing of the two words ("Your *best and only*") almost gleefully draws attention to. And Kate's immediate refusal to back down ("My *one* and only") seems to *need* the reinforcement of her position which the thought-out line after the "Pause" gives her. But it is in the form of a pedantry or grammatical exactitude which Deeley cannot resist first drawing attention to ("Because you have nothing to compare it with?") and then — pressing home his advantage — using to produce that concentration on the 'special' character of the relationship which he has been urging Kate to confess to ("*Smiling. She was incom-*

parable"). Her flat disclaimer ("Oh, I'm sure she wasn't") is, in the circumstances, the only hand she can play.

Pinter's evident delight in such moments may be due, in part, to the variety of interpretation which, for all their linguistic meagreness, they afford. I've given the impression here that Deeley almost wins the bout. Yet his closing ploy ("She was incomparable") could equally be seen as a piece of sleight-of-hand which Kate firmly, and very properly, refuses to allow. The other point I would make about the exchange concerns the possibility that Kate and Anna are the same person. That Anna is Kate's "one and only" friend, in addition to emphasising 'closeness' (as it does here) could thus, in retrospect, denote 'singleness'. 'Anna' and 'Kate' as two conflicting parts of a single personality cannot — at least in relation to 'marriage' and 'Deeley' — coexist: something which accounts for the wilful suppression (in the play it is actually represented as a killing-off) of the one by the other.

This later development is prefigured, rather significantly, in what happens next. When Deeley, using the plural, says "I didn't know you had *so few* friends" (p.10) Kate's stress on the singular is almost overemphatic ("I had *none. None at all. Except her*"): a line whose ambiguity as to number is confined to a simple choice between 'one' and 'none'. Kate's self-sufficiency, as we shall see, is enough to make her *seem* alone even in the presence of another — whether that other be friend, lover or husband. Deeley's question as to why the 'single' friend should have been Anna ("Why *her*?") receives a plain "I don't know", followed — after a "Pause" — by a seeming *non sequitur*: "She was a thief. She used to steal things". While apparently unrelated to anything which has gone before, this may well be the single most essential piece of information about Anna which the play provides. It is, in the context of vagueness surrounding Kate's memories of her up to this point, indisputably concrete. And is immediately made more so:

KATE : She used to steal things.
 DEELEY : Who from?
 KATE : Me.
 DEELEY : What things?
 KATE : *Bits and pieces. Underwear.* (p.10)

This exchange accomplishes several things at once. The faintly perverse character of the things stolen (especially when pointed up by Deeley's "Is that what *attracted you to her*?", p.11) emphasises the undercurrents of sexuality which he appears to wish to give the relationship throughout. When, moreover, the incident is more fully recalled and described later in the play (See Act Two: p.65, p.69) it is with a suggestiveness of placing and emphasis which

more than justifies his suspicions. The underwear's range of suggestion as a symbol is, indeed, very skilfully exploited by Pinter — and not simply in the sexual sense, where it encompasses both the normal and the perverse; has distinct overtones both of normal sexuality and of fetish. In a larger sense it is a symbol of Kate's very autonomy so that its theft represents a stealing, bit by bit, of her personality by Anna. Intimate — deeply hidden and personal — things, these "bits and pieces" and "little...tricks" of behaviour (p. 72) may be said, cumulatively, to make up an entire personality, and give Kate motivation for her rejection of Anna which is altogether plausible. The apparent *non sequitur* may thus (in characteristic Pinter fashion) hide an entirely logical process. Certainly when Deeley suggests to Kate that "the fact that she was a thief" (p. 11) may have been "what *attracted* you to her", Kate's flat "No" strongly implies the contrary: a feeling of *repulsion* (as against attraction) for a theft of the very spirit which is enough to account for her rejection of Anna and works logically as the single most important cause. When buttressed by what follows:

DEELEY: Are you looking forward to seeing her?

KATE : No. (p. 11)

the sense of rejection is intensified. Taken together the repeated negatives seem unequivocal. It is as if the relationship were over and done with, the prospect of a revival being unwelcome. Certainly what happens subsequently would seem to bear this out. Anna appears, in attempting to oust Deeley, to have regained some sort of dominance over Kate. Yet when she seems about to exercise that dominance Kate once again gives her her marching orders. Anna (who has ghostly or wraith-like associations not unlike those of that other visitor from the past, Spooner)³ thus 'dies' twice.

My tentative earlier suggestion that Kate and Anna may be one can now, perhaps, be fleshed-out somewhat. Although obviously such an interpretation will need to be judged in terms of the entire play, there are already (such is Pinter's dramatic economy) enough hints to start compiling a dossier. The next exchange is again sufficiently equivocal in terms of 'number' and 'person' to alert one to the possibility. When Kate claims that she is not "looking forward to seeing" Anna, Deeley counters:

I am. I shall be very interested.

KATE : In what?

DEELEY : In *you*. I'll be watching *you*.

KATE : *Me?* Why?

DEELEY : To see *if she's the same person*.

KATE : You think you'll find that out *through me?*

DEELEY : *Definitely. /Pause./*

KATE : I hardly remember her. I've almost totally forgotten her. (pp.11-12)

The ambiguity of the expression "the same person" barely needs demonstrating, while Deeley's confident belief that the 'one' woman is the key to an understanding of the 'other' ("Definitely") increases the sense of identification. The fusion of the two women at the end of the play remains — however inexplicable — remarkably explicit. Things like Deeley's "She was *pretending to be you* at the time.... Wearing your underwear she was.... She thought *she was you*.... Maybe *she was you*. Maybe *it was you*" (p.69) should clearly be regarded alongside this earlier passage. More especially since Kate's immediate response to Deeley at that point is a deliberate echo of one of his lines here ("What do you think *attracted her to you?*", p.70. Cf. p.11). Moreover, although the query is ostensibly about Anna, Kate's immediate (and volunteered) answer to the question she herself has raised seems again an expression of her own rather than another's feelings:

KATE : She found your face very sensitive, vulnerable....

DEELEY : Did she?

KATE : *Oh yes.* (p.70)

There will be time to examine Kate's enigmatic closing speech of the play later. What cannot fail to strike us even now in connection with the present scene's veiled hints at an equation or fusion of character is the way in which her disposal of Anna (of Anna's "dead" and "dirty" body) is quite explicitly represented as an act of ritual self-cleansing: a sloughing-off of another — and unwanted — skin, almost, which is followed by a celebratory "bath" (p.72): a bath which celebrates nothing short of autonomy. Just as a *non sequitur* becomes, for Pinter, the instrument of a quite relentless (if disguised) logic, so may grammatical pedantry, it occurs to us, be a sly means of stating the obvious. When poker-faced Pinter makes Kate and Deeley intone a grammatical rule ("If you have *only one* of something you can't say it's *the best* of anything... Because you have *nothing to compare it with*", p.9) the 'oneness' of the female character in the play is, I think, being characteristically signposted.

IV

While Deeley's cross-examination of Kate on the subject of Anna goes in pronounced stages, it traces a circular (not to say circuitous) route. In a sense, the sole issue from his point of view is the relationship of the two women, any other information elicited in passing (Anna's appearance, her

tastes, her husband) being secondary. Yet this is not altogether the best way of expressing the situation. Rather it is that even these secondary pieces of information, however casually they seem to be received, are quite ruthlessly 'used' by Deeley ; pressed into service as further means of throwing light on, or establishing, the obsessive central fact of Anna's relations with Kate. They are thus 'collected', much as pieces of potentially incriminating evidence — often expressed in an arcane sexual code-language where 'vegetarianism' may imply sexual oddity and a "casserole" sexual relations. Deeley is thus already doing what he tells Kate he will do when Anna arrives : finding out "through" Kate what he wishes to know about Anna. And conversely (and more importantly) finding out "through" all this information about Anna what he wishes to know about Kate. It may be significant that, after his open declaration that he will be "watching" Kate, her responses to his questions about Anna (never exactly models of clarity or helpfulness) become even more off-hand. For example:

DEELEY : Any idea what she drinks?

KATE : *None.* (p. 12)

Or (concerning Anna's husband):

DEELEY : What kind of man would he be?

KATE : *I have no idea.* (p. 14)

In the extended pieces of dialogue from which I've extracted these single lines the impression given, however, is of something stronger than this. A resistance to such cross-questioning ; a digging in of the heels, almost:

DEELEY : She may be a vegetarian.

KATE : *Ask her.*

DEELEY : It's too late. You've cooked your casserole. /Pause./ Why isn't she married? I mean, why isn't she bringing her husband?

KATE : *Ask her.*

DEELEY : Do I have to ask her everything?

KATE : *Do you want me to ask your questions for you?*

DEELEY : No. Not at all. (pp. 12-13)

This is the first indication of a positive meeting, on Kate's part, of the 'challenge' which Deeley's remarks appear to represent. Up till now she has either deflected his questions with vagueness or blocked them with an inconsequence which (staggeringly) is both steely and fey. But those questions have all related to the past. Once we are in the present ("I shall be very interested... Any idea what she drinks?") or have come up to date — once, that is to say, Deeley himself enters the situation — it is as if Kate's watchfulness or vigilance is alerted. Deeley's incursion into the situation (the presence of a third party, and a man) is, despite surface appearances, the central fact of a very odd play.

Whether we view the events of that play as a variation on the eternal triangle of man caught between two women (which is what its surface suggests) or, as I would propose, as a peculiarly searching inquiry into a single marital relationship where the figure of the 'other woman' is simply a piece of dramatic symbolism — a means of densening and of bringing into play additional facets of the one relationship that is actually being dealt with — it is Deeley who is being forced, in either case, to give an account of himself. Although Pinter's variations on the theme of "Odd Man Out" are elegantly enough juggled — so that at one moment it is Anna who seems to be intruding; at another Deeley himself — it is the man who (all appearances, in this opening sequence, to the contrary) is in fact being cross-examined; put on the spot throughout.

The final dialogue in Act Two between Kate and Deeley (pp. 70-71) in fact embodies some such realignment with Kate now openly putting the questions to Deeley. And despite Kate's statement, in Act One, that Deeley and Anna haven't met ("DEELEY: You haven't seen her for twenty years. /KATE: *You've never seen her. There's a difference*", p. 14) by the time the play is over we learn that this is in fact not so ("DEELEY: *We've met before, you know, Anna and I*", p. 69). But we do not have to wait that long. The "man" in Anna's story in the middle of Act One ("*This man crying in our room*", who "stood in the centre of the room" and approached both women, p. 32) is quite clearly meant to be Deeley, as the closing business of the play (where Deeley re-enacts the precise movements described) indicates (pp. 73-75). If the situation remains obscure — difficult to interpret exactly — this is less a matter of identification than a broader problem to do with the peculiar nature of time in the play. The equation of Deeley with the "man crying" is quite plainly made and meant. It is a probability strengthened, by preparation, in the sequence under examination — where the echoes, parallels, re-played lines and phrases are quite pointed. Deeley's curiosity about the man in Anna's story ("What *kind* of man was he?", "What did he *look like*?", pp. 32, 34) is prefigured here in his curiosity about Anna's husband ("What do you think he'd be *like*? I mean, what *sort of man* would she have married... What *kind of man* would he be?", p. 14). Moreover, Kate's response to his question about the one man ("*I have no idea*", p. 14) again prefigures Anna's response to a question about the other ("Oh, I never saw his face clearly. *I don't know*", p. 34). The questions asked about the women in the play (directly in Anna's case; more obliquely in Kate's) are no more nor less important than the questions asked about "the man". And *by* a man. It is a process of self-discovery which is in operation throughout. And it is an almost exclusively masculine process. Kate's repeated injunctions to Deeley to "*Ask her*" (p. 12,

p. 13) and Deeley's — in the circumstances appropriately testy — “Do I *have to* ask her everything?” (p. 13) would seem, again, to have much broader application than the surface of the scene suggests: a process in which Kate's “Do you want *me* to ask *your* questions *for you*?” now takes on quite pointed relevance. Roles and surrogates, scapegoats and substitutes are part of the essential furniture of the piece.

For the dramatic purposes of his fable Pinter invents two couples. But if Kate and Anna are ‘one’ it should not surprise us unduly to discover that Kate's husband and Anna's husband share common features: principally a remoteness from their wives which is given cleverly varied expression. At its simplest, and where Anna's husband is concerned, this remoteness is literal. He is physically absent from the play, and presumed to be in Sicily during Anna's visit to England. Deeley's remoteness from Kate, while almost palpably clear from the start of the play, is a less easily described phenomenon but becomes progressively more acute as the play proceeds. It can best be denoted at this stage by selective quotation. When Anna congratulates the couple on their home, on staying “permanently in such a silence” (p. 19) Deeley confesses to periods of separation and absence (“My work *takes me away* quite often, of course. But *Kate stays here*”, *ibid.*) Later in the Act, when Anna picks up the point, Kate's contribution to the proceedings (brief but devastating) hints not so much at neglect — which, placing the onus on Deeley, would at least give him some substance — but at a remoteness which may largely be a matter of her own self-sufficiency, again, and leaves Deeley seeming an irrelevance:

ANNA : And poor Katey when you're away? What does she do?

ANNA looks at KATE.

KATE : Oh, *I continue*.

ANNA : Is he away for long periods?

KATE : *I think, sometimes. Are you?* (p. 39)

When Anna suggests that she should come and keep Kate “company when he's away” Deeley sharply counters with “Won't *your husband miss you*?” (*ibid.*), leading into one of several extended passages about Anna's “husband” which all follow a fixed and somewhat peculiar pattern. It is this pattern which I now propose to trace.

V

There are three such passages in the play (two in the First Act, one in the Second) and they are all, in one way or another, connected with — indeed expressed through — the subject of food: a state of affairs where words like

"vegetarian" and "casserole" seem to have obscure sexual connotations and to form part of some private mythology of Deeley's own devising. We have looked at the first of these passages before, in another connection. This time it is the code which needs considering; the way in which the ostensible subject (food, drink, cooking) slyly hints at another:

DEELEY : Any idea what she *drinks*?

KATE : None.

DEELEY She may be a *vegetarian*.

KATE : Ask her.

DEELEY : It's too late. You've *cooked your casserole*. /Pause./ Why isn't she *married*? I mean, why isn't she *bringing her husband*? (p. 12)

The first oddity here is the *elision* from the subject of drink to the subject of food: a disquieting sense of short-hand; of a jump with some intervening stage left out. One expects, perhaps, a conjecture that Anna may be a 'tee-totaler', but the sudden jump to "vegetarian" is a jolt to our *immediate* expectations however accurately it may fulfil our longer-term ones. The total effect, of course, remains the same — and is in fact intensified by telescoping. Associations of oddness or peculiarity (already prepared for in the innuendo over "friend" and "attracted", and the hint of perversity in the stealing of "underwear") are obscurely underscored. And when the next question not only addresses itself to this strange lady's 'marriage' but in a way which suggests an immediate retraction of an unfortunate first phrasing, the suspicions of sexual oddity seem inescapable:

Why isn't she married? *I mean*, why isn't she bringing her husband?

Having hinted at Anna's oddness ("She may be a vegetarian") Deeley nevertheless seems disinclined to humour it. The suggestion bluffly (not to say bluntly) made is that she will have to take pot-luck; muck in; join the majority ("It's *too late*. You've *cooked your casserole*") : a statement which Kate at this stage in no way rises to ("Pause"). After the inconclusive passage of conjecture about Anna's "husband" which follows (a passage where Kate's 'blocking' manouvres, while apparently vague, are remarkably effective: "Then why isn't she bringing her husband?/KATE: *Isn't she?*", p. 13) Deeley's return to the subject of the "casserole" with the half-placating "At least the casserole is *big enough for four*" is quite firmly blocked by "You said she was a vegetarian" (p. 14) — where Deeley's apparently playful earlier hint ("She *may be* ..") is exposed for what it, in fact, was: less a suggestion than an accusation ("You said.."). What I most wish to emphasise, however, is the way in which the "casserole" has shifted in width of reference. From being associated simply with Kate (as housewife) it involves, successively, Kate and Deeley

(as married couple); Kate, Deeley and Anna (married couple with slightly awkward guest); finally Kate, Deeley, Anna and "husband" (two married couples). Shifting associations and pairings, sudden isolations and realigned groupings are, of course, the dominant mode of the play — as its repeated allusions to the film *Odd Man Out* indicate. The whole of this opening sequence, moreover, deals with the likely effect on one 'pairing' (Kate and Deeley's marriage) of another: a totally different and anterior 'bond' (Kate and Anna's friendship): a basic 'situation' which the introduction of a deliberately shadowy (and possibly hypothetical) further 'pairing' (Anna's relationship with her husband) does little to dent. The sequence does, after all, end with a quite unflinching focussing on one 'pair' to the apparent exclusion of the other. It is the past association of the two women on which the passage almost overemphatically plays itself out ("DEELEY: *You lived together?... You lived together?..... I thought you just knew each other..... But in fact you lived with each other..... I knew you had shared with someone at one time... But I didn't know it was her*", pp.16-17)

What the "casserole" actually stands for seems less important than the ambiance of sexual suggestiveness which it invariably arouses, and which its carrying over from passage to passage in the play effectively sustains. One could make a case, I suppose, for seeing it on its first appearance (where it stands in simple and open opposition to "vegetarian", with its suggestion of sexual irregularity) as representing something like 'normal' sexual relations — remembering always, as proviso, the sceptical context given 'normal' marriage throughout. (Kate's "*Of course she's married... Everyone's married*" nicely suggests this; while Deeley's "*Normal? What's normal?*" (p.15) — used with reference to friendship — has application in the play as a whole to much broader areas than he may suspect). The "casserole" as a fairly flexible symbol of what holds people together in a sexual sense is thus loose enough to fit the variety of situations touched upon in the play while having enough clarity in particular instances to suggest a more limited application. For instance, when Deeley claims that the casserole is "*big enough for four*" (p.14) he may now (conveniently overlooking the aspersions cast by "vegetarian" earlier) be implying that they are all of the same kind. In the same boat. Or, indeed, bed. (One recalls the insultingly spelled-out significance, for Anna's benefit, of the sleeping arrangements in Act Two: "*These are beds.... they are susceptible to any amount of permutation*", p.48). And Kate's sharp "*You said she was a vegetarian*" may amount to a slap at his inconsistency; a reminder that he has already implied that people are different — in areas of sexual preference as much as anything else.

The next occurrence of the ubiquitous "casserole" harks back to its original source of identification: with Kate. Though in a way which neatly (and uncannily) pays back Deeley for an earlier aspersion. His association of it with Anna's "husband" is parried by Anna's own pointed equation of it with Deeley's "wife". The slip of the tongue there ("... You've cooked your *casserole*. /Pause./ Why isn't she married? *I mean*, why isn't she bringing her *husband*?") is neatly hit off (indeed paralleled) here:

ANNA : You have a *wonderful casserole*.

DEELEY : What?

ANNA : *I mean wife*. So sorry. A *wonderful wife*.

DEELEY : Ah.

ANNA : I was referring to the *casserole*. I was referring to *your wife's cooking*. (pp. 20-21)

Anna so often in the play pays Deeley back in his own coin (the two 'singing' sequences (pp. 27-29 ; pp. 57-58) ; the beautifully timed "Odd Man Out" riposte, p. 38) that after a while one comes to expect it. The play as a whole, in fact, seems at first sight yet another extended 'bout' in the Pinter manner between finely matched combatants (Mick and Davies, Lenny and Ruth, Hirst and Spooner). The paying-back here, however, seems so uncannily prescient on Anna's part as to seem almost supernatural. Being the first occasion it has the added piquancy associated with surprise. How, we ask, could Anna possibly have heard this pre-dinner (one assumes, indeed, pre-arrival) dialogue between Deeley and Kate: a question which the surface naturalism of the situation quite properly (and I think deliberately) prompts. It is only on reflection that we recall Anna's 'presence' throughout. The opening tableau of three persons; the fact that Anna is on stage during Kate and Deeley's exchange, and her clearly indicated 'joining' of the others when it is over ("*ANNA turns from the window, speaking, and moves down to them eventually sitting on the second sofa*", p. 17) all emphasise that naturalism is not, after all, to be the play's dominant mode. Anna's being there (her always having been there and, at the end, her remaining there) account quite logically, in terms of the theatre, for the apparent anomaly. The play, like so many of Pinter's, has an initial and instinctive sense of theatrical possibility which it then, quite dazzlingly, makes capital of. So that the distinct advantages which naturalistic and anti-naturalistic theatre respectively offer are equally utilised. Indeed the clash between both is itself exploited and turned to fruitful account in the play since it becomes part of the subject.

It is the code-language of "food" which we are tracing, however. And the pattern is as carefully picked out as ever. When Anna compliments Kate

on her "cooking" (or Deeley on his "wife": the casserole's meaning remains elusive) it is easy to appreciate Deeley's relief. An earlier suspicion may, after all, have been unfounded:

DEELEY : You're *not a vegetarian*, then?

ANNA : *No. Oh no. (ibid.)*

The 'normal' and the 'odd' continue to jostle each other nevertheless. Anna's tastes in food, it occurs to us (short-hand, it should always be remembered, for her tastes in other connections) were among the first 'facts' about herself which her breathless opening soliloquy volunteered. ("What did we *eat*?" she asks Kate, trying to piece together the facts of their shared past, "Who *cooked*?". And the speech, in following this trail, ranges from "scrambled eggs" at night ("then *bed and sleeping*") to "*lunchtimes* in Green Park... with *our very own sandwiches*": similarly associated with the "*night to come*" and the "excitement in store"). In the circumstances, Deeley's clearing up of the disturbing spectre of vegetarianism and the establishing of comfortable assumptions of good plain cooking and good fresh air has almost comically touching overtones of a return of heterosexual faith. No fetidness here:

Yes, you need *good food* in the country, *substantial food*, to keep *you going*, all the *air*... you know. /Pause. (p.21)

But the atmosphere of solidity so painstakingly and reassuringly reassembled is by no means proof against insidious suggestion. Kate — with her customary air of indefiniteness, of over-qualified statement — introduces an element of doubt, again, which all Deeley's and Anna's efforts to pin her down fail to mitigate:

KATE : Yes, I *quite like those kind of things*, doing it.

ANNA : *What kind of things?*

KATE : Oh, you know, *that sort of thing*. /Pause. /

DEELEY : Do you mean *cooking*?

KATE : *All that thing*.... (p.21)

Kate's oddly timed and placed remark has all the appearance, again, of inconsequence. It doesn't seem to spring from, or to be in any way related to Deeley's immediately preceding remark. What it may do, however, is pick up Anna's compliment on her "cooking", and if Deeley's puzzlement is total Anna's is only momentary. Promptly she presses on with the subject which Kate's response now seems to have given warrant for. In the process the "casserole" — in this reminiscence of a closely shared past — also undergoes development:

ANNA : We weren't terribly elaborate in cooking, didn't have the time, but every so often *dished up an incredibly enormous stew*, *guzzled the lot*, and then more often than not *sat up half the night*

reading Yeats... (p.22)

In attempting to clear up the red herring of vegetarianism, Deeley (to mix metaphors as wildly as any in the play) stirs up a veritable hornet's nest of meat-eating. This is not, from his own point of view, especially reassuring. Anna's recollections of the two women's lives together do have a clarity — a detailed physical exactness ("*scrambled eggs. sandwiches. stew*") — which, in its suggested intimacy, can hardly be welcome to Deeley. Certainly his own descriptions of his present life with Kate find it hard to compete. Spare, generalised, they emphasise (however unwittingly) separation and absence, not intimacy and involvement ("My work *takes me away* quite often ... *Kate stays here*"). Anna's claim that "No one who lived here would *want to go far*" has the effect of stamping Deeley himself, now, as an oddity: an impression which her provocatively displacing follow-up line ("*I would not want to go far*") clinches. It is Deeley who is being excluded; left out in the cold. His "vegetarian" ploy has not simply misfired but backfired.

This does not, of course, stop him trying to revive it. But this is considerably later in Act One, and in the meantime much has happened. His 'combat' with Anna has not only taken pronounced form; it gives every indication of having been lost. The "singing" bout (pp.27-29), the eerily unsettling story of the "man" in her and Kate's room (pp.32-34) and the neat capping of his own *Odd Man Out* story (p.38) have left Deeley visibly shaken. (His "Stop that!" at an especially intimate moment of tete-a-tete for Anna and Kate (p.35) is simply the overt expression of a loss of control which has been threatening to surface all along). In the circumstances his revival of the vegetarian ploy has an air of desperation and of last resource. The passage as a whole (pp.38-39) constitutes a further cross-examination: basically of Deeley by Anna, though with retaliatory attempts by Deeley to reverse the roles. Anna has again, with insidious suggestion, come in the course of her questioning uncomfortably close to displacing him on the domestic front, his admitted absence ("*I have to do a lot of travelling in my job*", p.39) being almost crudely brandished as her opportunity ("ANNA (to KATE): I think I must *come and keep you company* when he's away", *ibid.*) It's in bringing up the figure of her "husband" again, as reproach, that Deeley works his variation on the vegetarian theme:

DEELEY : Won't your *husband* miss you?

ANNA : Of course. But he would understand.

DEELEY : Does he understand now?

ANNA : Of course.

DEELEY : We had a *vegetarian dish prepared for him*.

ANNA : He's *not a vegetarian. In fact he's something of a gourmet.*

We live in a rather fine villa and have done so for many years.

It's very high up, on the cliffs.

DEELEY : You *eat well* up there, eh?

ANNA : I would say so, yes..... (pp.39-40)

Resurfacing in its old guise as an accusation of sexual irregularity, the vegetarian slur again falls flat. Previously attached to Anna, it is now wildly aimed at her husband, and the indirectness of the attack — its petty defensiveness — is a clear indication that Deeley is flailing around. In the circumstances, Anna's leaving out of any intermediate nonsense about "casseroles" and moving direct to "gourmet" status is in the championship class; constitutes, in terms of the bout, something of a technical knockout. Whatever Deeley and Kate may get up to, it's implied, Anna and her husband "eat" (in terms of sexual proficiency) "well" — and have "done so for many years". Any sexual uncertainties in the air are firmly laid, once more, at Deeley's own doorstep. An attempt by Deeley to vary the *terms* of the innuendo fares no better. He is still pegging away at the false target of the husband rather than at Anna. The charge itself (a play on the word "straight") she effortlessly absorbs and neutralises:

DEELEY : How's the yacht?

ANNA : Oh, very well.

DEELEY : *Captain steer a straight course?*

ANNA : *As straight as we wish, when we wish it.* (p. 41)

In the circumstances, all Deeley can really do is repeat himself. The hectoring, over-explicit — only apparently conclusive — way in which he now brings the bout to a close is patently fake: a matter of *macho* posturing, more bark than bite. The obvious brute strength of the speech is, in fact, its greatest liability. Its explicitness, too, almost constitutes loss of face. The entire "cooking" code comes dangerously close to cracking. The pot — to be as explicit, for the moment, as Deeley himself — practically boils over:

Well, any time *your husband finds himself in this direction, my little wife* will be only too glad to *put the old pot on the old gas stove and dish him up something luscious if not voluptuous.* No trouble... (p. 41)

Unable, even after this, to leave well alone he seems about to start an entirely new quarrel with the hypothetical husband ("What's his name? Gian Carlo or Per Paulo?", *ibid.*) when Kate's swift intervention ("KATE (to ANNA): Do you have marble floors?") effectively blocks the manoeuvre.

It does, in fact, considerably more than that. In terms of the First Act as a whole Kate's pointed beginning of a dialogue with Anna quietly excludes

Deeley ; makes him, in terms of that re-aligning of 'pairs' on which the Act ends, redundant : the "Odd Man Out" (for the moment, at any rate) of the game which the Act has so elaborately played and replayed. If we consider the First Act as a series of cross-examinations again — separated by long monologues of one-upmanship for the two combatants and more subtly indeterminate contributions from Kate — it will be seen to fall roughly into three. The original cross-examination of Kate by Deeley on which the play opens (a sequence which has the effect, in itself, of making Deeley *feel* excluded and discomfited even before Anna has officially 'appeared') is balanced and echoed, throughout the Act, by passages in which Deeley and Anna take any and every opportunity that arises to quite sharply cross-examine each other. The latest such occasion is the passage we have just been considering, and it is Kate's intervention (as so often, when we look back on the events of the Act) which marks a 'break' in such cross-examination ; calls a halt. Kate, by virtue of her position, does in fact hold the balance throughout. No matter how interesting or exciting the relative shifts in position which Anna (now up, now down) and Deeley (now top-dog, now underdog) undergo in the course of their bout, the possibilities for movement and manœuvre open to them — however varied in detail — are quite firmly delimited by their roles in the proceedings : combatants who, while using the 'ring' intelligently, cannot ever move out of its confines. Kate's role, by contrast, is altogether less rigid : not simply more difficult to determine or describe but almost impossible (using the word literally) to 'define'. In a broader sense, this fundamental difference between Kate and the others is expressed through a series of such obvious contrasts as : her relative silence and their loquacity ; her stillness and sparseness of movement and their restlessness ; the habitually abstract and vague character of what she *does* say compared with the over-detailed fullness of what they never *stop* saying. There are naturally exceptions to this rule, but they are invariably used to underline its force. Kate's habitual use of qualification, for instance, has the effect finally of causing her occasional unequivocal 'statement' ("*My head is quite fixed. I have it on*", p. 24) to seem doubly solid ; quite startlingly 'real' — and makes her remarkable concluding speech of the play (a 'statement' in all senses) seem, for all its strangeness of detail, persuasively 'actual' (pp. 71-73). I shall have more to say about this later, in connection with her strongly expressed preference for "blurred lines" over "harsh edges" (and what this, in turn, implies for conventional views of what constitutes 'reality'). What I am concerned to demonstrate at the moment is the freedom of choice and movement which her role as outsider (apart from and above the 'combat' which so completely engages the others

as participants) allows her. If, in one sense, she is victim or prize (up for grabs; the bone of contention and the point at issue) in another and broader sense she is the battleground itself: the arena of play and the field of action. And in yet another the arbiter: the judge or decider who has (quite literally in the play) the last word.

VI

This may be the place to point out that she also has the last word here, in the First Act. And that — expressed in terms of the “bath” (another symbol of which Pinter makes astonishingly dense and varied use throughout) — it again leaves one of those rare but striking impressions of Kate as strongly in control; firmly in possession of herself and, to that extent, free. It is the others who, at the “Fade”, are locked in rigid ‘positions’:

ANNA : Shall I run your bath *for* you?

KATE : (*Standing*) *No. I'll run it myself tonight.*

KATE slowly walks to the bedroom door, goes out, closes it.

DEELEY stands looking at ANNA.

ANNA turns her head towards him.

They look at each other. /FADE. (p. 46)

One of the remarkable things about these concluding five pages of the scene, from Kate's question (“Do you have marble floors?”) to the final “Fade” (pp. 41-46) is the way in which Deeley's presence is alternately pointed-up and played-down; affirmed and denied. I said earlier that the effect of Kate's intervention was to exclude him, and this remains true. Her questions to Anna about Sicily are coolly interested inquiries from one woman to another about daily life: “marble floors” and “orange juice” on “the terrace”. Nothing could be further from cross-examination; while the sexual undertones of Anna's and Deeley's probings of each other are quite absent. The tone is literal, almost naturalistic. The low temperature, in fact, emphasises all the more strongly Deeley's heavy-handed attempts to break into the *tete-a-tete*; insist upon his own ‘presence’ (“I had a great crew in Sicily. . . . *As a matter of fact* I am at the top of my profession, *as a matter of fact* . . .”). His speeches, fanciful and even outrageous (“My name is Orson Welles”) are, in fact, more in the nature of being *outraged*. Deeley is making a conscious (and characteristically clumsy) bid for attention: asking for account to be taken of his presence which Kate shows no inclination to give. The situation reaches a climax with an outburst from Deeley (his strongest yet) which Kate, by the simple expedient of repeating her previous question, makes totally redundant:

causes to go for nothing. It is as if he hadn't spoken. As if he simply weren't there:

KATE : (To ANNA) And do you like the Sicilian people?

DEELEY : *I've been there. There's nothing more to see, there's nothing more to investigate, nothing. There's nothing more in Sicily to investigate.*

KATE : (To ANNA) Do you like the Sicilian people?

ANNA stares at her. / Silence. (p. 43)

Whether Deeley is, in fact, "there" is a question which Pinter — considering the limitations of the 'naturalistic' three-character situation apparently being presented — manages to make far more compelling than we might think possible. After the "Silence" which Kate's reiterated question has produced, the scene slips disconcertingly (though in a technical sense remarkably smoothly) into a semi-naturalistic dialogue for the two women which gives a strong sense of coming out of the past. Their past. A shared past in which Deeley would, quite plausibly and naturally, have no part. Certainly his 'presence' as such is completely disregarded. Absorbed in largely feminine questions of what to do ("I'll cook something, you can wash your hair... we'll put on some records", p. 43) or where to go ("We could walk across the park", *ibid.*) or what to wear ("Wear your green", p. 45) the women make the scene, at one and the same time, natural to the point of banality and eerie to the point of ghostliness. Deeley—a character, personated by an actor — is obviously 'present' in the sense that we, as audience, can see him — irrespective of whether the two other figures on stage can or can not. But he can hardly be said to make his presence felt. Pinter gives him just one line of dialogue but, as the quotation will indicate, it almost uncannily (so to speak) goes without saying. Its context, however, is another matter entirely; is almost electrically loaded with meaning. "Food" as subject has by no means exhausted its charge — and it is surely more than coincidence that it should be this which triggers off the only response which Deeley makes in the whole quite lengthy passage:

ANNA : Are you hungry?

KATE : No.

DEELEY : *Hungry? After that casserole? / Pause. /*

KATE : What shall I wear tomorrow? I can't make up my mind.

(pp. 44-45)

In the overall context of sexual sniping and innuendo which food has connoted throughout, the line again seems to represent a gloss, offered by Deeley, on the hidden intimacies lurking beneath the surface of this apparently unexceptionable scene of girls together. Yet the situation's range of suggestiveness

has barely been broached. To regard it simply as a bid for recognition on Deeley's part (forcing a 'past' scene into a 'present' in which he, as third, has a share or foot-hold) or even as a bit of whining masculine assertiveness in a calmly self-contained, exclusively feminine ambience does not altogether fit the facts of the situation presented. If he is *on* the stage (*in* the scene) Anna's suggestion that Kate might perhaps "like... to ask someone over" certainly betrays no consciousness of the fact. And that the people she suggests should all be men (Charley, or Jake or McCabe here, pp. 45-46; Duncan and Christy in the continuation of the dialogue (pp. 62-63) in Act Two) says as little for his masculinity as it does for his presence. No. Deeley *seems* quite absent from the situation. What complicates matters, of course, is that closing stage-direction where, after Kate exits to the bath, Anna quite deliberately "*turns her head towards*" Deeley and they "*look at each other*". No doubt, here, that they are as aware of each other's 'presence' as at any time during the scene.

VII

The explanation for the apparent contradiction — that Deeley seems, at one and the same time, part of the scene and extraneous to it — lies, as so often with Pinter, in his peculiar view of time. Put simply, while past and present vie in the scene — each insisting on its equal right to exist — their competitive jostling is expressed, broadly speaking, in two quite distinct ways. One is a simple and relatively naturalistic procedure involving a straightforward character opposition or personality clash between Deeley and Anna. The other is a considerably more complicated technical process having more to do with the play's structure than its characterisation: a state of affairs where the past is likely to take over from (even displace) the present, without apparent warning and in a way which is as likely to disconcert the audience as it does Deeley — whose position is not unlike the audience's in this respect. The differences between these two processes may be illustrated by example. When Deeley, for Anna's benefit, paints an intimate picture of the closeness of his present relations with Kate, the tone is proprietorial; the intention largely to stake a claim:

DEELEY : *Sometimes I take her face in my hands and look at it.*

ANNA : Really?

DEELEY : Yes, I look at it, *holding* it in my hands. Then I kind of *let it go*, take my hands away, leave it *floating*... (p. 24)

Anna's response, not unexpectedly, is a swift acceptance of the challenge: a recalling of her own 'past' relationship with Kate which is a pointed statement

to the effect that an even earlier claim has been staked. The linguistic similarity (the echo of Deeley's own statement) is not merely deliberate but provocatively so:

ANNA : *Sometimes, walking in the park, I'd say to her, you're dreaming, you're dreaming, wake up, what are you dreaming? and she'd look round at me, flicking her hair, and look at me as if I were part of her dream....* (pp. 24-25)

This particular example of a straightforward vying of the claims of past and present is, in fact, denser than it appears. Deeley and Anna are accomplished snipers with good memories, and phrases used here as ammunition will be lobbed back, with interest, later in the play. Anna's intimate detail about Kate "flicking her hair", for example, is appropriated by Deeley in an even more intimate memory of his own later in the scene ("... she looked at me, didn't you, *flicking her hair back...*", p. 31) taking its place in that overall process of one-upmanship which their relationship amounts to throughout. Anna, for her part, is even more patient; her riposte all the more striking for being delayed. Deeley's "floating" positively boomerangs in Act Two where his almost gross emphasis on Kate's bathing habits is coolly capped by Anna's foreknowledge ("Really soaps herself all over.... Shiny as a balloon. / ANNA: Yes, a kind of *floating*. / DEELEY: What? / ANNA: She *floats* from the bath. Like a dream", pp. 53-54). The issue's expression, however, remains within the terms of a straightforward character-struggle. Anna and Deeley — while representing the respective claims of past and present — still do so, by and large, in recognisably personal terms. And the same is true of all the other occasions on which they lock horns. The only difference is that from being a simple opposition between the claims of a present (Deeley-Kate) and those of a past (Anna-Kate) relationship the situation widens out to include an opposition of contrary 'pasts'. Anna's recollections or memories are countered, as the Act proceeds, by Deeley's own. One of the reasons, indeed, that Deeley is forced to have recourse to memory or the past is that his present relationship with Kate seems so threadbare; so lacking in content. Appears, in its meagreness or sparseness, no match for the detailed physical exactness of Anna's apparently total recall.

Even in the area of memory, however, Deeley doesn't fare particularly well. In the first place, his recollections are considerably fewer than Anna's. Where hers include detailed memories of a shared life in London (ranging over work and leisure, art and culture, and an apparently intimate knowledge of Kate's personality) Deeley's are confined to the long story of his first meeting with Kate in an otherwise empty cinema "showing *Odd Man Out*" (pp. 29-30), the "slightly later stage" when their "naked bodies met" (p. 31) and

reflections, from the same period, on whether he and Kate should make a life together ("a student... juggling with my future, wondering" should I bejasus saddle myself with a slip of a girl not long out of her swaddling clothes", p.35). And even the longer of these memories is devastatingly capped, later in the scene, by Anna's eerily timed revelation that she too, with Kate, had once "almost alone" seen "a wonderful film called Odd Man Out" (p.38). The competitive vying — while becoming progressively odder (less naturalistic) in situation and expression — can thus still be seen in terms of personal struggle. The oddest of all these memories, however, subtly changes the process; marks a development. It is, of course, the eerie story of Anna's that we began with: the story about "This man, crying in our room" (p.32). This is not only the strangest story in the play but the central one. While on one level it again fits perfectly into the overall pattern of competition (it is, after all, a near-perfect capping of Deeley's own anecdote about Odd Man Out) on another it brings the basic question of an opposition of past and present into sharper focus; indicates the direction which Pinter's dramatic handling of the situation is actually taking. Where, previously, simple present has fought past, and one person's past (Deeley's) has vied with another's (Anna's) the play is gradually moving towards a position which cannot be stated so confidently or directly for the simple reason that the line dividing past from present is increasingly obscured. In this connection the words with which Anna chooses to preface her anecdote (the distinctly odd terms in which she presents it) are worth considering. Past, present and future seem wilfully (almost perversely) jumbled:

... I know what you mean. 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.31-32)

We looked earlier at the way in which the movements described in the anecdote were re-enacted in the wordless tableau on which the play ends. What concerns me here is the blurring of time-distinctions which the words represent: that obliteration of the line between past and present which the end of the First Act does so unnervingly embody when Kate and Anna (apparently oblivious to Deeley's presence) might almost be back in London, twenty years previously. That the story of "the man" in their "room" is a dramatic *stage* in this process of excluding Deeley (the outsider or "Odd Man Out" who, in a sense, has no place in their "room") seems clear enough from the phrasing: more especially Anna's tantalising reference to his coming and going ("after a while I heard him go out... But then... I... saw two shapes.... But then in the

early morning... *he had gone*") ending with the conclusive "*It was as if he had never been*" (p.33). Whether this is memory ("recall", as she puts it) or more in the nature of wish-fulfillment — whether, in other words, it is more properly to be seen as fact or prophecy — will be matters which we shall return to. But the *displacement* of present by past which the closing dialogue of Kate and Anna represents is a far cry from the relatively simple open competition which Deeley and Anna have, up to this point, engaged in. It could be said, indeed, to exist on a different dimension. Deeley, who has hitherto shown evidence of a certain enjoyment of the sparring — a relishing of the flexing of muscle which the situation affords him — is, by the end of the scene, quite visibly put out. Anna's conjuring of a situation where the women remain while the man might "never (have) been" is as far from naturalism as one could possibly get. And the deliberate gesture with which, as Kate exits to her bath, "*ANNA turns her head towards (DEELEY)*" (p.46) seems designed, almost, to draw attention to her power; the trick whereby she has virtually replaced him in the situation — and does, to that extent, compound the sense of strangeness. This is what I meant when I said that the *ways* (the dramatic *means*) through which Pinter expressed the vying of past and present ranged from simple (almost naturalistic) clashes of character or personality to purely technical shifts of mood, time and place which are altogether more sophisticated; highly subtle components of the structure of the piece.

Two further examples will, I hope, not only clarify but consolidate the point since they fuse both the simpler and the more subtle means at the writer's disposal. They are, respectively, the use made of songs (where the nostalgia inherent in the play's title is most potently and directly invoked) and — most problematic of all — the whole question of Kate's "bath". This — which she leaves the stage to take at the end of Act One and emerges from in the middle of Act Two — is both a 'present' occurrence and a kind of distillation of all 'past' baths. It also, like the songs, provides a further opportunity for Anna and Deeley to wrangle, and is thus part of the overall pattern of a clash between the claims of 'past' and 'present' relationships. More problematic still, it culminates as a *subject of discourse* in Kate's long concluding monologue of the play in which she recalls another (almost definitive) "bath": the cleansing ritual which demarcates the 'Anna' portion of her life from the 'Deeley' portion. These two examples of Pinter's way of fusing past and present in his play (the songs and the bath) are, moreover, connected since the singing-bout which occurs before the bath in Act One (pp.27-29) is pointedly resumed immediately after it in Act Two (pp. 57-59). We shall look

briefly at the songs first ; more extensively at the bath later.

(Continued)

Notes:

- 1 "The intellect of man is forced to choose/Perfection of the life, or of the work" (W.B. YEATS, 'The Choice'). See L.H. Knight, "Facing Facts: The Case for *Betrayal* as Pinter's Best Play" (*Studies in Foreign Literature*, Vol. II, August 1979, p.1.) (Faculty of Arts, Nara Women's University).
- 2 Harold Pinter, *Old Times*, Methuen (London, 1971), p.7.
(Note : Subsequent page references are incorporated in the text of the present article. Except in the case of stage-directions the italics throughout are my own).
- 3 See Harold Pinter, *No Man's Land*, Eyre Methuen (London, 1975). And L.H. Knight, "Playing Safe. *No Man's Land* : Pinter's Cold Pastoral" (*Studies in Foreign Literature*, Vol. III, March 1981, p.35.)