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The Silencing of Dissent: Harold Pinter's Bleak Political Vision

Abstract: The article centres upon one of Harold Pinter's last plays, *Celebration*, first performed at the Almeida Theatre, London, on 16 March 2000. Similarly to *Party Time*, a dystopian political play written almost a decade earlier, *Celebration* pursues the theme of a sheltered zone of power effectively marginalising a social "other." This time, however, Pinter adopts the mode of comedy to dramatise the fragile and circumscribed existence of dissent and the moral coarseness of complacent elites. The article traces a number of intriguing analogies between *Celebration* and Pinter's explicitly political plays of the 1980s and 1990s dealing with the suppression of dissident voices by overwhelming structures of established power. It is demonstrated how – despite the play's fashionable restaurant setting, ostensibly far removed from the torture sites of *One for the Road*, *Mountain Language* and *The New World Order* – Pinter succeeds in relating the insulated world of *Celebration* to the harsh reality of global oppression. What is significant, I argue here against interpreting the humorous power inversions of the social behaviour in *Celebration* as denoting any fundamental changes in larger sociopolitical structures. It is rather suggested that the play reveals the centrality of Pinter's scepticism about the possibility of eluding, subverting or curtailing the silencing force of entrenched status quo, implying perpetual nature of contemporary inequities of power. I also look at how the representatives of the empowered in-group in the play contain transgressing voices and resort to language distortion to vindicate oppression.

Harold Pinter's political playwrighting meant to disturb. Whereas political drama, as traditionally defined, seeks to alter audience opinion and behaviour by offering an articulated and "constructive" critique of problematic social matters it addresses,[1] Pinter did not seem to perceive political problems of the kind he

[1] In *British and Irish Political Drama in the Twentieth Century*, D. I. Rabey defines political drama as follows: "'*Political* drama' emphasises the directness of its address to problematic social matters, and its attempt to interpret these problems in political terms. Political drama communicates its sense of these problems' avoidability, with implicit or explicit condemnation of the political circumstances that have allowed them to rise and continue to exist (just as Brecht identifies *The Rise of Arturo Ui* as *Resistible*). In perceiving social problems as avoidable, political drama is necessarily diverging from the worldview that the agents of the status quo would seek to impose for the continued smooth running of society in its present form" (1–2). Furthermore, Rabey acknowledges that it is useful to discriminate between "the comparative aims and styles of political *drama* (or plays) and political *theatre*," for which Sandy Craig has proposed an interesting "working definition" in "Unmasking the Lie: Political Theatre" (6). In this essay, Craig ascribes the difference to a playwright's stance towards the audience: "[T]he important feature

dramatised as avoidable and endorsed no positive ideologies or methodologies of change. The sketchy nature of oppositional values in his writing indicated the artist's distance from other "committed" playwrights of his generation and accentuated his deep-rooted political pessimism. There seems to be little hope for dissent and subversion in Pinter's political vision, only the call for it. In his political output of the 1980s and 1990s, the dramatist portrays power structures that appear invulnerable to subversive critique and stages the triumph of power in stifling protest. Dissidents in his plays are marginalised in a varied and often vicious fashion, while the official power is renewed and strengthened. The plays ostensibly intimate the insignificance of individual experience against a tenacious and complacent status quo; they challenge Pinter audiences to contemplate the futility of progressive action.

This article focuses on Pinter's last full-length play, a comedy entitled *Celebration*, first presented under the author's direction at the Almeida Theatre on 16 March 2000. It aims to investigate certain disquieting parallels between *Celebration*, described by Billington as one of "the funniest, feistiest" among Pinter's pieces ("Space"), and the artist's explicitly political plays of the 1980s and 1990s dealing with the ruthless suppression of dissident voices by overwhelming structures of established power. It demonstrates how – despite the play's smart restaurant setting – Pinter connects the smugly insular world of *Celebration* with the grim facts of political violence practised worldwide. Importantly, the article will argue against interpreting the comic power inversions of social behaviour in *Celebration* as indexing essential changes in larger sociopolitical structures. Rather it will be suggested that the play reveals the centrality of Pinter's scepticism about the possibility of subverting or escaping the silencing, repressive force of the self-righteous status quo, implying perpetual nature of contemporary inequities of power.

In a number of ways, *Celebration* is reminiscent of *Party Time*, a dystopian political play written almost a decade earlier. Set in a luxurious apartment, *Party Time* centres upon an exclusive party of the ruling elite – a chilling "society of beautifully dressed people," connoisseurs of "elegance, style, grace, [and] taste" – gathered to feast whilst roadblocks, checkpoints and round-ups deal with the

which distinguishes political plays from political theatre is this: political plays seek to appeal to, and influence, the middle class, in particular that section of the middle class which is influential in moulding 'public opinion.' The implication of this is that society can be reformed and liberalised, where necessary, by the shock troops of the middle class – and, of course, such people are influential in campaigns and reform. But further, political plays in bourgeois theatre implicitly realise that the middle class remains the progressive class within society. Political theatre, on the other hand, as embodied in the various political theatre companies, aims – with varying degrees of success – to appeal to, and be an expression of, the working class. Its underlying belief is that the working class is the progressive class within society" (30–31).

public outside, efficiently restoring "[a] cast-iron peace" (*Party Time* 299, 293).[2] Similar to *Party Time*, *Celebration* pursues the theme of a hermetic zone of power effectively marginalising a social "other." This time, however, Pinter adopts the mode of comedy to dramatise the precarious and circumscribed existence of dissent and the moral bankruptcy of complacent elites that have apparently dispensed with critical self-awareness. The edge of Pinter's incisive satire is directed here in particular at the nouveau riche whose vulgarity is not disguised by their ostentatious opulence.

The comedy begins in a relatively straightforward manner. There are two tables of diners, two celebrations. At the smaller table, Russell, an investment banker, celebrates his recent promotion with his wife, Suki, an ex-secretary who now teaches infants. At the larger table, a wedding anniversary is being loudly feted by a group of former East Enders. The crass Lambert is treating his wife, Julie, and his brother, Matt, married to Prue, Julie's sister, to a gourmet dinner in "the most expensive fucking restaurant in town" (18). The brothers are influential businessmen and their wives run charities. Yet they are all arrogant and predatory; they enjoy mockery and insulting one another. The revellers remain seated almost throughout, visited by the owner, Richard, and the hostess, Sonia, who engage in general owner-host inquiries, and by an exceptionally loquacious Waiter. Towards the end of the play, Suki and Russell briefly join the other table. Lambert picks up everyone's tab and all exit, excepting the Waiter.

As in previous Pinter plays, it soon transpires that special occasions – birthday parties, tea parties, homecomings – are not quite what they seem (Raby 58). The couple at the smaller table taunt each other with past and present infidelities, trading suggestive innuendoes until Russell eventually calls his wife "a whore" (13) and, a moment later, "a prick" (14). At the other banquet table, Julie, embittered by her husband, tells Lambert to "go and buy a new car and drive it into a brick wall" (11). Lambert reveals to his brother that "[a]ll mothers want to be fucked by their mothers," to which Matt responds: "Or by themselves" (17). When Prue, his wife, corrects him: "No, you've got it the wrong way round," Matt retorts: "All mothers want to be fucked by their sons" (17). The more they drink, the more unsavoury the revelations that crawl out from the past and the more outrageous the invectives hurled. Clearly, in conceit and shallow crudity, the diners surpass even those in *Party Time*: they cannot recall what they ordered for dinner (3–4) or whether they have just seen an opera, a ballet or a play (19–20). Like in *Party Time*, women in *Celebration* tend to be debased by males. And the part of the transgressive speaker who poses a threat to an evening of vulgar conviviality is here taken by the far-from-dumb Waiter intimating a world of eccentric otherness far beyond comprehension of

[2] Where words have been deleted from the quotations from Pinter's plays, the ellipsis is in square brackets ([. . .]) to distinguish these omissions from Pinter's own ellipses in the text.

the self-interested clique. The Waiter's desperate struggle to keep from being invisible and insinuate himself into a conversation with the influential guests only points up his social impotence.

On the face of it, power relations in the world of *Celebration* have been inverted, at least in some respects, for both women and men seem able to exercise power and have resort to force. At one point, allying herself with Julie against their husbands, Prue vouches for her sister's veracity by asserting: "I've known her all my life [. . .] since we were little innocent girls" – an intimation that no innocence remains – "when [. . .] we used to lie in the nursery and hear mummy beating the shit out of daddy" (21). Her recollection is verified with "We saw the blood on the sheets the next day" (21), a hint that these women have been trained in abuse since childhood. Indeed, what all the women in *Celebration* have in common is the ability to stand their ground; not one despairs, wallows in self-pity, cringes to insult or shies away from attack. In another inversion of traditional power relationships, while expatiating upon his professional success, Russell concedes that he has been manipulated and exploited by his secretary: "They're all the same, these secretaries, these scrubbers. They're like politicians. They love power. They've got a bit of power, they use it. They go home, they get on the phone, they tell their girlfriends, they have a good laugh" (7). Ostensibly repentant, he continues: "I'm being honest. You won't find many like me. I fell for it. I've admitted it. She just twisted me round her little finger" (7), pleading innocence in terms of his alleged powerlessness.

One may infer from such humorous reversals of power in the play that a certain mobility within social hierarchy is plausible. The representatives of the working or lower middle class seem to have gained the power of the moneyed classes while women appear to enjoy the power once restricted to men. The husbands even express regret at some of their stereotypically callous demeanour and seem willing to display greater sensitivity and empathy. Matt declares his fellow feeling for their efficient *maîtresse d'hôtel* when Sonia ventures a story of her tragic love life and extinct passion (47). Russell discloses he once wanted to be a poet and identifies paternal rejection as the source of his insecurity: "But I got no encouragement from my dad. He thought I was an arsehole" (29). In a relatively uncommon accurate appraisal of a present self for a Pinter character, Lambert asserts he is going to make it his job to live again and "come back as a better person, a more civilised person, a gentler person, a nicer person" than he is, which is capped with Julie's "Impossible" (56). However, the abuse of authority and violence have not ceased to exist; only the specific identities of oppressors and the oppressed have become more variable.

Indeed, though tempting, it would be erroneous, it seems, to see the comic reversals of the social behaviour in *Celebration* as pointing to some fundamental

and durable transpositions of power in larger sociopolitical structures. Even given that women exercise greater influence at local levels of social interaction – within marriage, the family and small business – there is an inviolable, overarching form of patriarchal authority whose firm hold intimates that control has been reapportioned only in a superficial manner. When Lambert salutes his conception of life as a competition: "May the best man win!" (62), Julie and Prue concur with one another, proclaiming that "[t]he woman always wins" (62, 63), which Suki regards as "good news" (63). And yet, manifestly, these wives are still kept women, oblivious to, and, perhaps, deliberately misinformed about their husbands' financial operations. They enjoy comfort and prosperity, enduring their marginalisation by holding ground, retaliating or adroitly sidetracking their spouses' biting comments, the main form of attention the partners in these marriages bestow upon one another. But they nonetheless initiate little action in the larger, male-governed world in which brutality endures and where money plainly remains in the hands of the well-established power elite. While Russell is a financier, Lambert and Matt are "[s]trategy consultants" whose surreptitious business dealings entail force even if they do not have to carry guns (60).

Aside from the witty power inversions, *Celebration* owes much of its wild humour to the impossible social aspirations of the loutish banqueters, the ribald behaviour of the overdressed women, Prue and Julie, and, above all, the three extraordinary monologues "interjected" by the Waiter (30). These increasingly bizarre, name-dropping tales centre around the Waiter's remarkable grandfather, who seems to have been acquainted with all the early- and mid-twentieth-century luminaries in literature, Hollywood, the arts and politics. It is the Waiter who is ultimately banished from the club of the rich and privileged, left stranded in the empty restaurant as the powerful businessmen and their trophy wives return to the world they control.

The Waiter's "interjections" persistently channel the diners' attention to a realm of cultural achievement, both modernist and popular, effectively underscoring the crudity of the restaurant's parvenu customers. Saying that that he overheard the diners mention T. S. Eliot, the Waiter professes his grandfather "knew T. S. Eliot quite well. [. . .] I'm not claiming that he was a close friend of his. But he was a damn sight more than a nodding acquaintance" (31). The Waiter continues, supplying a roster of acclaimed British and American poets and writers his grandfather allegedly knew in the early decades of the twentieth century, many of Pinter's acknowledged favourites:

> He knew them all in fact, Ezra Pound, W. H. Auden, C. Day Lewis, Louis MacNeice, Stephen Spender, George Barker, Dylan Thomas and if you go back a few years he was a bit of a drinking companion of D. H. Lawrence, Joseph Conrad, Ford Maddox Ford, W. B. Yeats, Aldous Huxley, Virginia Woolf and Thomas Hardy in his dotage. (31)

Moreover, the grandfather could have been slated for

> Chancellor of the Exchequer or [. . .] First Lord of Admiralty but he decided instead to command a battalion in the Spanish Civil War, but as things turned out he spent most of his spare time in the United States where he was a very close pal of Ernest Hemingway – they used to play gin rummy together until the cows came home. (31)

The list of household-name greats in literature stretches to absurd proportion and culminates in a fantastic impossibility:

> [H]e was also boon compatriots with William Faulkner, Scott Fitzgerald, Upton Sinclair, John Dos Passos – you know – that whole vivid Chicago gang – not to mention John Steinbeck, Erskine Caldwell, Carson McCullers and other members of the old Deep South conglomerate. [. . .] He stood four square in the centre of the intellectual and literary life of the tens, twenties and thirties. He was James Joyce's godmother. (31)

The Waiter carries on with his cultural history lesson, moving forward in the twentieth century with a second interjection about his grandfather's familiarity with "the old Hollywood film stars back in those days," saying that his relative "used to knock about with Clark Gable and Elisha Cook Jr and he was one of the very few native-born Englishmen to have hit it off with Hedy Lamarr" (49). The Waiter apparently fails to discern varieties of social difference, levelling all cases of otherness in his description of the "well-established Irish Mafia" in Hollywood: "Al Capone and Victor Mature for example. They were both Irish. Then there was John Dillinger the celebrated gangster and Gary Cooper the celebrated film star. They were Jewish" (50). Incidentally, the Waiter's introduction of violence in his mention of Hollywood's "Mafia" and their friendships among "famous Irish gangsters in Chicago" (50) seems to reflect both Pinter's own youthful infatuation with American gangster films and the artist's restless investigation of violence and its causes in his oeuvre. "They were Jewish" may also recall Fascist attacks on Pinter as a young Jew in the post-war East End, along with the resonances of the World War II Holocaust (Billington, *Life* 17–18).

Later still, this time in front of his employer, the Waiter invokes the previous century's armed conflicts and political leaders with his references to "the Austro-Hungarian Empire" (65), again hauling out his grandfather, who was "an incredibly close friend of the Archduke himself and [who] once had a cup of tea with Benito Mussolini. They all played poker together, Winston Churchill included" (65). The character of the Waiter, whose peculiarly discursive, all-embracing speeches conjoin World Wars I and II, is evidently used here by Pinter to suggest that political violence was an ineluctable feature of the twentieth century.

While the Waiter's rambling reminiscences bring the disturbing early- and mid-twentieth-century history into play, the interactions among the Waiter, his employers and their wealthy clientele evince a more contemporary, capitalist form of subjection and exploitation. The restaurant staff, who desperately need their jobs, are made humiliatingly dependent on the generosity of their employers and customers. Keenly aware of their replaceability, they live in a state of constant insecurity. Clearly, the fact that the empowered consumers occasionally tolerate the fawning underlings' interjections does not entail their readiness to allow for the actual subversion of their position. When the interfering Waiter oversteps the bounds in his attempts to assert himself, the banqueters immediately quell his transgressive monologue by shutting him out. The Waiter's acute sense of dependency and susceptibility emerges in his comments on the almost umbilical connection linking him to his workplace. When Russell brushes aside one of the Waiter's interpolations with: "Have been working here long?" and asks: "You going to stay until it changes hands?" (32), the Waiter takes it as a threat of dismissal and responds apprehensively: "Are you suggesting that I'm about to get the boot?" (32). Unlike his customers, the Waiter openly admits his inadequacies: "To be brutally honest, I don't think I'd recover if they did a thing like that. This place is like a womb to me. I prefer to stay in my womb. I strongly prefer that to being born" (32–33).[3] This honest divulging of one's vulnerabilities, definitely uncommon for a Pinter character, evokes some sympathy in its candour.

The last of the Waiter's interpositions transmutes the biting comedy into something much more sombre. Even though he is not booted out of his job, the Waiter is conspicuously debarred from the world dominated by those he waits on. As the strategy consultants and investment bankers jointly depart to resume their affairs of the world, he remains forlorn in the desolate restaurant. The Waiter's sense of exclusion manifests itself in his painful confession:

> When I was a boy my grandfather used to take me to the edge of the cliffs and we'd look at the sea. He bought me a telescope. [. . .] I used to look through this telescope and sometimes I'd see a boat. [. . .] Sometimes I'd see people on the boat. A man, sometimes a woman, or sometimes two men. [. . .] My grandfather introduced me to the mystery of life and I'm still in the middle of it. I can't find the door to get out. (72)

[3] It could be argued that in this passage Pinter teases those among his critics who pigeonholed him as an absurdist – as opposed to a political writer – and who saw his rooms primarily as places of retreat and protection, akin to the womb as the ultimate shelter, by flaunting these ideas so ostentatiously on the surface of the play (see, for instance, Merritt 172–73). Intriguingly, the characters in *Celebration* also hint at some other themes and motifs commonly associated with the "Pinteresque." Suki, for instance, insists on the filtering of the past into the present: "I sometimes feel the past is never past" (56), whereas Lambert expounds on the tragedy of human existence according to the absurdist model by which all individuals are isolated entities unable to know and relate to others (64).

These genuinely puzzled words clearly suggest that the Waiter finds himself walled in and incapacitated: he can neither see a way out of his life nor participate fully in it. The play's concluding moments further accentuate his entrapment and ineffectuality. The Waiter moves to make his last abortive bid for articulation: "And I'd like to make one further interjection. *He stands still. Slow fade*" (72). Even if the externally dictated restrictions on his self-expression are plainly acknowledged by the Waiter, the character's ultimate stillness demonstrates his impotence. Once again, Pinter dramatises the rigorously demarcated and shrinking space accorded to voices that conflict with the established order.

In his overtly political output, Pinter relentlessly explores and exposes the ways in which the empowered groups control and pervert public discourse. First of all, the functionaries of his repressive regimes effectively muffle opposition by rhetorically marginalising its ideas and vocabulary. In Pinter's post-1980s political plays and sketches, language is the attribute of authority, "the voice of God" (*One for the Road* 227), defined by those in power who do almost all the talking while dissent is made abject or criminalised. Moreover, those whose beliefs and actions appear discordant with the perceived social orthodoxy are silenced in another way: the ruling elites take advantage of the pliability of language, claiming positive ideals as excuses for repression. Terms such as "freedom," "democracy," "peace," "morality" – divorced from their original meanings – become rhetorical tokens by means of which existing power structures are legitimised and preserved. Indeed, one of the most provocative insights Pinter affords in such torture plays as *The Hothouse*, *One for the Road*, *Mountain Language* and *The New World Order* is that the perpetrators of brutal deeds regard themselves not as inhumane tyrants but as agents of an ideology that is transparently legitimate and moral, even when the measures taken to implement it are evidently cruel. Nicolas, a self-righteous interrogator in *One for the Road*, does not authorise murder, battering and rape but is one of the "patriots" who "share a common heritage" (232) and whose "business" is "to keep the world clean for God" (246). Likewise, Lionel and Des, two ruthless henchmen of a despotic regime in *The New World Order*, do not inflict torture on their mute and blindfolded victim but, mystifying their brutality through the language of cleansing, they insist they are "keeping the world clean for democracy" (277).

Intriguingly, even though the self-satisfied males in *Celebration* are not sadistic torturers or tyrannical officers of military regimes, they resort to a similar distortion of language to justify abuses of power. Matt and Lambert, at the top of the thriving "strategic consultancy business" (62), chillingly pride themselves on being responsible for "[k]eeping the peace" worldwide (60). These power-brokers of the world who supply weapons and contrive strategies

of destruction in exchange for exorbitant sums of money only vaguely allude to the nature of their work. Their business is conducted clandestinely except for those in the club who have the funds and know-how necessary to enter the play. Russell, as a banker with money behind the traffic in lethal strategies, postulates, drawing upon doublespeak clichés: "We need a few more of you about. [. . .] Taking responsibility. Taking charge. Keeping the peace. Enforcing the peace. Enforcing peace" (61). Networking to further his own economic advantage, he attempts to affiliate himself with Matt and Lambert: "I'm moving any minute to a more substantial bank. I'll have a word with them. I'll suggest lunch. In the City. I know the ideal restaurant. All the waitresses have big tits" (61). The play's closing move, wedding "peace-keeping" with force, money and sex, apparently unites all these powerful males.

Robert Gordon found the somewhat subdued finale of *Celebration* "surprisingly moving, expressing the shared incomprehension of the audience and the Waiter, implicated in a cultural moment from which there appears to be no escape" (71). Having been exposed to the Waiter's witty false-memory interjections about people who shaped the previous century, the audience look forward to more of his tales. The dramatist, however, intentionally withholds the hoped-for words. In the brutal politics of a Pinter play, language is the privilege of the powerful. The Waiter's muteness seems to be another engulfing silence strongly reminiscent of those marking Pinter's dystopian dramatisations of inhumane power structures in the 1980s and 1990s.

The gruesome persistence of contemporary abuses of authority and social injustice is implied in Lambert's sinister prediction: "Plenty of celebrations to come. Rest assured. [. . .] Dead right!" (69). It seems that Pinter's dramatisation of the impervious, perennially closed system of oppressive power which effectively hems in the Waiter in *Celebration* bears some relation to Herbert Marcuse's views on the functioning of advanced technological civilisation and its capacity to isolate, absorb and appropriate whatever is subversive or oppositional. In *One-Dimensional Man*, Marcuse suggests that whereas technologically developed capitalist society, characterised by "a comfortable, smooth, reasonable, democratic unfreedom" (1), needs the critique of art, art and culture have been integrated into the "technological universe" and institutionalised in such a way that their potential to effect qualitative change will never be realised (xvi). Even if subversive forces and tendencies are granted space in the established universe of discourse, they are quickly digested by the status quo, contained and made void.[4] Such a dynamic – being allowed to

[4] For relevant comments concerning "the remarkable ability" displayed by bourgeois society throughout its history to "absorb and appropriate" subversive energies directed against it, see, for instance, Booker 7–8.

express oneself but culminating in futility – definitely typifies the Waiter in *Celebration.*

The fashionable restaurant setting of *Celebration* and the grim torture chambers of Pinter's political plays like *One for the Road*, *Mountain Language* and *The New World Order* are seemingly worlds apart. Yet the Waiter's final summary catalogue, which eventually prompts the banqueters to intervene and muffle the transgressive speaker, effectively connects the exclusive club of the influential socialites to the brutal realities of global oppression. The Waiter insists that his grandfather was "everything men aspired to be in those days. [. . .] He was full of good will. He'd even give a cripple with no legs crawling on his belly [. . .] a helping hand. [. . .] He was like Jesus Christ in that respect" (66). Next, he launches his last grandiose declamation of twentieth-century poets, playwrights, writers, composers, painters, cricket players, pop singers and comedians:

> He [the grandfather] loved the society of his fellows, W. B. Yeats, T. S. Eliot, Igor Stravinsky, Picasso, Ezra Pound, Bertholt Brecht, Don Bradman, the Beverley Sisters, the Inkspots, Franz Kafka and the Three Stooges. He knew these people where they were isolated, where they were alone, where they fought against pitiless and savage odds, where they suffered vast wounds to their bodies, their bellies, their legs, their trunks, their eyes, their throats, their breasts, their balls— (66)

At this harrowingly anatomical juncture, Lambert stands up and shuts the speaker off, rendering the Waiter invisible by turning to the owner and addressing him patronisingly by his first name: "Well, Richard – what a great dinner" (66), a liberty the host would not dare to take in return, which betokens the hierarchy's tight grasp. The vast bodily wounds itemised by the Waiter suggest the effects of torture. The painstaking exactitude of the recitation makes it plain to the guests and the audience alike how horrifyingly facile it is to inflict suffering and mutilate a human body. What is significant, the Waiter's catalogue encompasses here not the victims of torture but mainly artists whose rejection was more a question of modernist alienation or misappreciation than of actual physical torment. Apparently, as has been rightly noted by Grimes, in this passage Pinter not only seeks to reawaken the audience to the brutal facts of exclusion and political victimisation but he also provocatively fuses the marginalised artist with the marginalised victim of political persecution (133). The diners in *Celebration* instantly check this disturbing reminder of political violence. Lambert's next gesture of yet more appalling superciliousness consolidates his position as he tosses tips of fifty-pound notes, dangles notes in front of Sonia's cleavage and even puts a banknote into the Waiter's pocket. Money guarantees silent obsequiousness and first-rate treatment upon their return; it is a powerful weapon that keeps those who serve in their place.

Pinter's draft version of the Waiter's unpalatable interjection made the allusion to political violence far more pronounced. Characteristically, the process of revision resulted in excising several explicit political references that, though expunged from the published text, more specifically point to the Waiter's role in *Celebration* as well as to the dramatist's sources of inspiration. The draft version of the monologue mentions Sacco and Vanzetti, Paul Robeson, Tim Joad, Oscar Romero, Ernesto Cardenal, Augusto Sandino, Pablo Neruda, Che Guevara, Salvador Allende, Nazim Hikmer and Jorge Ellacuria (Pinter, "Celebration"). Similarly to the Waiter's preceding recitals, the list of names is truly diverse, embracing revolutionaries, social activists, politicians, theologians, artists and fictional figures. Nevertheless, the emphasis on those who struggled with political oppression and on their physical anguish is evident. So is Pinter's affinity with dissenting voices that, undaunted by "pitiless and savage odds" (*Celebration* 66), persevere in their protest against the coercive structures of established power.

It is uncertain why Pinter ultimately chose to erase these easily identifiable details – including contentions issues, such as Latin America, that he addressed with indefatigable dedication in his speeches, essays and articles.[5] One conceivable explanation might be the dramatist's deeply ingrained distrust of "definite statements" and "explicit moral tags" (Pinter, "Writing" 10, 12) as well as his determined opposition to subjecting the characters to "false articulation" and forcing them to speak of what they could never speak (14). Pinter seemed to believe that renouncing equivocality in favour of clear-cut specificity would insult the intellectual capacity of his audiences, placing his playwrighting on a par with all those reductive and moralising agit-prop dramas that he resented in the 1960s. The addressee of this disquieting comedy must be trusted to relate the Waiter's allusions to the generally obtainable, if shamefully neglected, facts of torture occurring worldwide.

Clearly, a number of vital questions as to how to deal with political theatre arise here. One may query, for instance, whether the perplexing ambiguity marking Pinter's drama – including the post-1980 "political" works which generally lack geographical, temporal and political precision or, alternatively, only subtly allude to familiar English contexts (Batty 113) – does not attenuate the intended political purport of Pinter's theatre. According to Nightingale, by insisting on generality in his "political" writings, Pinter runs the risk of dissipating point and impact: "A play can easily end up by being about everywhere, and therefore nowhere at which we are able to direct our feelings of outrage" (151). The absence of explicitly identifiable commitment was also

[5] For a representative sample of Pinter's articles, essays, speeches, letters and interviews expounding his political views, see, among others, the section "Politics" in his *Various Voices* 181–248.

attacked by Pinter's fellow-playwrights, John McGrath, Edward Bond and John Arden, who censured *Party Time* precisely for its being "unconcretised," "taken out of context," and thus precluding a politically viable reading (Billington, *Life* 333–34). But if Pinter's audiences fail to associate the Waiter's contributions with particular acts of political violence and concrete regimes that authorise them, have they really missed the central political import of *Celebration*? Also, while the specific nature of Lambert and Matt's dealings in the world could undoubtedly elude and perplex many recipients of Pinter's texts, the dramatist apparently has confidence in his audience. If he advisedly taps into obscurity, the chief reason for preserving the enigma would seem to be to urge one to question, and in questioning, to begin to pursue answers.

One is tempted to read the final silence of the Waiter in this dark, end-of-the-century, turn-of-the-millennium comedy as the ultimate, if paradoxical, statement of Pinter's political drama. Even though the existence of the individual voice in opposition is theoretically acknowledged by the playwright, the transgressing oppositional individuals in the political plots of his conception are invariably marginalised and muted. Pinter's political plays and sketches, such as *The Hothouse*, *Precisely*, *One for the Road*, *Mountain Language*, *The New World Order* and *Party Time*, conclude in silence and in the impending extinction of potential counterforces to the institutionalised authority. In *Party Time*, to highlight the theme of silence, Pinter even lets his persecuted dissident character, Jimmy, comment briefly, and poignantly, on what it is like to be deprived of speech (313–14). Although silence could be seen as a way of distancing oneself from the world or a manifestation of defiance, it is ultimately a form of withdrawal from struggle, including social struggles. The Waiter's final reticence, even if voluntary and intended, is clearly imbued with a sense of failure.

According to Grimes, who sees the brute victory of power over dissidence as the unavoidable image of his political dramas, Pinter's political theatre could be "summarised as a warning to respect human rights, paired with a lament that such a warning may never be heeded" (220). Indeed, Pinter never concealed his scepticism of a writer's capacity to change political morality. And yet, apparently separating the act of questioning from the possibility of supplying glib solutions to political injustice, he also fiercely clung to his belief that dissent and subversion, even if futile, must be attempted and did not cease to confront his audiences with horrors they would prefer to forget about. As Pinter himself commented on his political playwriting, insisting on the necessity of intellectual determination and subversive critique despite the enormous odds that exist: "I do believe that what old Sam Beckett says at the end of *The Unnamable* is right on the ball. 'You must go on, I can't go on, I'll go on'" ("Play" 20). Given the inevitability of the immoral use of power, Pinter restlessly compelled his audiences at least to recognise their complicity in ongoing social and political inequities.

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