CHAPTER FIVE

STRUGGLE WITH TRAUMATIZED MEMORY

Harold Pinter’s play *Ashes to Ashes* resumes some of the themes that have already appeared in the playwright’s previous works while, at the same time, it resorts to an innovative form, proposing a new approach to the way collective memory should be handled. In this one-hour play Pinter explores the relationship of a couple in their forties in the midst of a relationship crisis and inserts them in history, more precisely at the centre of a (self) questioning concerning the holocaust. This is a rich play, even more so because it appears at the summit of Pinter’s career as a playwright, comprising, a further development of his treatment of themes such as: the uses of power, memory, desire, and politics in the interpersonal relationship. Although it might at first seem strange to talk of politics in the interpersonal relationship, it still bears a meaning in the case of Harold Pinter’s work, since his characters are in all aspects of their lives in constant confrontation with one another. This confrontation assumes various forms, from the intrusive interrogatory that is intended to make the opponent lose his/her bearings through the lies that hinder any true understanding between people, since they never know where truth lies, up to the total impossibility of getting to know each other’s identity. Such is the universe created by Pinter, where truth more often than not cannot be verified. Words are intended to delude, to mystify, and to withhold instead of revealing. At the same time, this elusive world is charged with powerful images and silences that serve as reinforcement, negation, hindrance, or the ultimate assertion about what remains unsaid. Pinter is a master at suggesting what is never explicitly said, for whatever his characters do not reveal or are incapable of understanding. The world of Pinter’s plays is one in which there are no guarantees, where the figures constantly negotiate their
positions in relation to one another, where identity is built in confrontation with the other. Such quest for identity is not limited to the present situation but is based on a reconstruction of the past, which will lay the basis for a new configuration of the future.

The play *Ashes to Ashes* was first presented on 12 September 1996 at the Royal Court Upstairs (Ambassadors), in London’s West End. Since then it has been performed, among other places, in Canada, Italy, France, Argentina, Germany, Ireland, Brazil, Sweden, Spain and Switzerland. The play has aroused conflicting responses from the critics and audience alike. A man standing alone in front of the Gate Theatre, Dublin, where the Pinter Festival 97 was taking place, probably represents the most negative response. His picket sign read, “Pinter is a liar and a cheat” (Younger, “Pinter is a Liar and a Cheat”). This lonely protest is probably best balanced by critical readings that have successfully demonstrated the complexity of the play. Between these two extreme positions, there is a continuous line with different ratings. Pinter remains relatively obscure to the uninformed audience and *Ashes to Ashes* has not encountered critical acclaim by some of those more acquainted with his previous work. It has been dismissed as a poorer play among Pinter’s oeuvre for its single-mindedness. Nevertheless, other reviewers and critics have called attention to its complexity, by identifying several layers of meaning like the relationship between the couple, the implications of the Nazi holocaust, and archetypal human situations as connected to the theme of the fall of man.

In Pinter’s world the concepts of love, friendship, family, loyalty, and self are all mediated by the power relationship they establish with each other. The negotiation for a secure position, momentary as it may be, can take up all the figures’ assets, be it their intellectual abilities, sexuality, authority granted by an institution, religious disposition, even
their own identity and, together with it, their control over the past. For in Pinter’s plays, very little is concretely verifiable. Most of the times, all that is available are the figures’ words, which more often than not are unreliable. As Andrew K. Kennedy emphasizes, “[…] within his own ‘principle of unverifiability’” (224), which means that there are no clear-cut distinctions between what is true and what is false. Therefore, the past is not an objectively verifiable instance, but it possesses an “ever-present quality” (Gussow 38). Consequently, the past only exists insofar as the figures bring it to life in their speech.

Precisely because this past lacks a concrete quality, it can be put to use in the most surprising ways. Indeed, Pinter’s figures do not seek the past as a key to deciphering their own present situation. Nor are they interested in reviving involuntarily the past in order to create significance where there was none before. In Pinter’s world, the past becomes part of the present to the extent that the figures alter and distort it to fit their immediate purpose. In fact, the past is used as an irrefutable argument whose main purpose is to win control over the present situation. Indeed, “for Pinter, the present is more likely to be a battleground in which the prize is the past” (Regal 111). That is, the direct dispute between figures can only be won by the one whose ultimate version of the past cannot be contradicted. It does not mean, however, that the figures deliberately decide to lie or tell the truth. Most of the times, the ambiguity or unverifiability of the past is a comment on the world inhabited by the figures, which is a place where motives are not transparent to the observer.

Another aspect of this “principle of unverifiability” is that the versions presented do not form a coherent whole. Rather, there are inconsistencies that cannot be accounted for from an outside perspective. Therefore, it is often impossible to say whether the contradictions and indeterminacies in the figures’ speech are a creation of their own intended
to manipulate the course of events, or whether the figures are themselves lost in relation to
their own identities, as well as the time and space that they occupy. Indeed, in his study of the
aspect of time in Pinter’s work, Martin Regal consistently shows that the figures’ sense of
timing presents inner disturbances that prevent them from locating events in time. Many of
the figures in Pinter’s plays seem entrapped in a time universe of their own, where the
experience of the past is so engulfing that they cannot look at it from a different time
perspective. Many times, it is as if they are talking not about the past but from the past. There
is no guarantee that what they remember has in fact existed or not. Whatever is recalled as
having happened somewhere in the past becomes real in the present so long as the present
situation provides, if not the meaning, at least the justification for it. Consequently, this
mutability of past facts ends up affecting the present, which becomes as liable to the
interferences of the subjective mind as the past. As Regal puts it: “If the past is flexible and
mutable, then so is the present” (79). Later on in his work, Regal traces Pinter’s expression of
the subjective nature of time back to Beckett. He cites Colin Duckworth, according to whom,
“the definition of Self [in Beckett’s work] depends on memory, [which] is imprecise” (qtd. in
Regal 133). The difference between the two playwrights lies in the fact that while Beckett’s
figures seem to get lost in the void created by this uncertainty, “Pinter dramatizes the loss and
reconstitution of memory as a strategy for control or power” (Regal 133). Still according to
Regal, the consequence of this relativistic view of temporality is that the self becomes
likewise a “temporally contingent phenomenon,” which demands a constant renewal of the
strategies it uses to protect its fragility (133). Therefore, the figures try, as much as they can,
not to reveal their inner selves, since this leaves them in a vulnerable position. Pinter,
however, denies the conclusion that figures can never say what they really mean. According
to him, “there invariably comes a moment when [the character says what he in fact means],
when he says something, perhaps, which he has never said before” (Pinter, *VariousVoices* 25). Even though they are rare, these moments do happen and offer a profound insight into the figures’ character, since they reveal the emotions that motivate them.

In short, despite the apparent naturalism of the plays, the absence of a coherent past that can explain the present situation undermines the assumptions of realism. As long as the figures are able to transform their present moment by producing a convincing “memory,” they are still in the battleground for the fulfillment of their needs. If, however, they fail, even for a moment, to convince others of their authority over the past, they become helpless in the present. An expression of this is provided by the many pauses and silences, which are present throughout the secondary text in Pinter’s work.

In Harold Pinter’s *Ashes to Ashes* all human history, personal and social, is one act, one essential conflict, which echoes and reverberates in different forms throughout time: dominance and submission, victims and victimizers, and the discovery through imagination and empathy of our power not to be victims. *Ashes to Ashes* places two people in conflict, Rebecca and her would-be dominator, Devlin. In the play we enter history at a particular place — a country house in an unknown location — at a particular time — the present — but we are at the same time in Buchenwald, the mass graves in Bosnia, anywhere in time or place where police sirens are heard, authority worshiped as a substitute for self-responsibility, a lover adored at the price of selfhood, blind masses follow leaders to destruction, gross certainty is mistaken for purity of conviction, social hierarchy is taken for natural order, and innocence and helplessness are regarded as legitimate prey. For Devlin, history is simply fact external to himself, something to be dredged up, forced from Rebecca if necessary so that he can dominate every part of her. Rebecca, however, becomes history, lives it through
imaginative identification and through such empathy discovers her own power not to be bound by the factuality of the past, but rather to reshape herself as non-victim. And we, as audience participate in the living ritual of theatre, to the extent that the play echoes in us and we identify with Rebecca while recognizing our potential for being Devlin, discover with Rebecca that power in ourselves.

In 2005, by then an ardent campaigner for human rights, Pinter suggested that citizens of democratic countries like Great Britain are in some part responsible for the ‘murder, misery, degradation and death’ of innocent civilians in other countries through their support of the governments that carry out these acts in their name (Pinter, ‘Art, Truth and Politics’ 438). This guilt is something that we carry on our shoulders, the act of looking the other way makes us all responsible to those civilians, and all the innocent people throughout history who have been killed in this way. This theme of bourgeois complicity with state-sponsored violence is developed in the play Party Time, where the middle-class dinner party idly discusses their sports clubs while the ‘round-up’ of dissidents occurs outside. Pinter implies in Ashes to Ashes that failing to articulate any ethical response to events in history must force us to ‘acknowledge’ our part in these events; we are implicated in all the crimes against humanity committed in the past since they are still being committed today. Through this play, he forces us to recognize how the ‘past [is] present in our lives’ (Merritt, “Harold Pinter’s Ashes to Ashes 79).

So how can we take responsibility for events over which we have little or no control? Ashes to Ashes addresses this precise question; Pinter suggests that as citizens of the world we are responsible for knowing what is happening in it, challenging us to confront the trauma of existing in a world that has seen such atrocities as the Holocaust and Bosnian ethnic
cleansing. In the months leading up to the writing of the play, Pinter admits to having read Gitta Sereny’s biography of Albert Speer, one of Hitler’s commanders and his Minister for Armaments and Mountain during much of the Second World War:

It’s a staggering book and I was very struck by the fact that Speer organised and was responsible for the slavelabour factories in Nazi Germany. Yet he was also, in some ways, a very civilised man and was horrified by what he saw when he visited the factories. The image stayed with me. Also, the fact that these factories had no proper lavatories and that there were these primitive privies on the factory floor that were, literally, full of shit. Reading the book also triggered lots of other associations: I’ve always been haunted by the image of Nazis picking up babies on bayonet-spikes and throwing them out of windows. All cruelty is monstrous but that seems particularly vile since a little baby is as near to innocence as you can get. I wasn’t actually sitting on holiday thinking I must write a play about all this but, when I got back home, something instantly happened. I started writing, as usual, on a yellow pad with two characters called A (a man) and B (a woman) and the first line originally was him asking her ‘what kind of things’? (qtd. in Billington 374-375)

The associations of Sereny’s book, *Albert Speer: His Battle with Truth* (1995), can be clearly observed in the play. Initially, the factory with the workpeople, who, as has been stated, “would follow Rebecca’s lover over a cliff and into the sea” (Pinter, *Plays 4* 405) is a clear association of the slave labour camps in Nazi Germany, organized by Speer. And the improper lavatories and the primitive privies on the factory floor that Speer mentions are reflected in Rebecca’s description of the factory, where she could not find any bathroom at
all. Also, the place is very damp and the workpeople are not dressed suitably for the weather. As Billington points out, “the image inspired by the Speer book, is of a cowed workforce and an autocratic controller” (377). Besides, as has been seen, one of the central images of the play is that Rebecca’s lover “walk[s] down the platform and tear[s] all the babies from the arms of their screaming mothers” (Pinter, *Plays 4* 419), which resonates with the image in Sereny’s book that haunted Pinter. According to Katherine H. Burkman, “if Rebecca’s former lover seems to be in charge of such factories and can be identified with Speer, Devlin, and Rebecca themselves embody Speer by playing out aspects of his character and ‘his battle with truth’” (“Harold Pinter’s *Ashes to Ashes*: Rebecca and Devlin as Albert Speer” 89).

According to Plunka, “during his trial at Nuremberg, Speer began to have a change of conscience and gradually began to debate taking responsibility for the Holocaust and for crimes he did not commit and of which he had no direct knowledge. And this admission of guilt becomes the collective memory that Rebecca responds to in *Ashes to Ashes*” (320). Commenting on the ideas of D. Keith Peacock that “Pinter’s conception of Rebecca may have been inspired by an unnamed German woman, mentioned in Sereny’s ‘Postscript’, who was married to an Englishman, had two children, and resided in England”, Plunka mentions that “at the age of seventy-five, Speer had an affair with this woman who was nearly forty, approximately the same age as Rebecca. She was particularly impressed by Speer’s book, *The Secret Diaries*, which dramatically altered her guilt feelings about her German past and about her own persona” (320). Apparently, Rebecca and the woman who had an affair with Speer have parallels in their relationships and the following guilt feelings for even having been indirect witnesses of the Holocaust. Thus, they also share a sense of responsibility, which is also created in the audience with an identification of Rebecca.
One of the many questions concerning the meanings behind the text is if it is a play on the Holocaust. Is Rebecca a witness of the Holocaust or is she haunted by the collective and cultural memories constructed in its aftermath? When Mireia Aragay asks Pinter if *Ashes to Ashes* is a play about Nazism, Pinter replies as follows:

It is about the images of Nazi Germany; I don’t think anyone can ever get that out of their mind. The Holocaust is probably the worst thing that ever happened, because it was so calculated, deliberate and precise, and so fully documented by the people who actually did it. [...] But it’s not simply the Nazis that I am talking about in *Ashes to Ashes*, because it would be a dereliction on my part to simply concentrate on the Nazis and leave it at that. [...] The word democracy begins to stink. These things, as you can see, are on my mind. So in *Ashes to Ashes*, I’m not simply talking about the Nazis; I’m talking about us and our conception of our past and our history, and what it does to us in the present. (Pinter, *Various Voices* 226-228)

According to Pinter, the play does not only focus on the Holocaust experience. What it reflects actually is the contemporary audience and their sense of responsibility, not only towards their actions in the present, but also for the sorrows of the past, to which their only tie is their own humanity. If one man is the seed and humanity is the tree, everybody is responsible for the other, as one is diminished by the other’s death. In this regard, Rebecca is a character who is diminished by multiple deaths she is an indirect witness to through the cultural and collective memory she is exposed to.

The stage direction for the time of the play is “now” (Pinter, *Plays 4* pg-391), which addresses the contemporary audience in each production of the play. Thus, the play will aim
at urging the responsibility in its audience as long as it is staged. Even though the light in the room becomes “very bright but does not illumine the room” (Pinter, Plays 4 393), it will always illumine the conscience of the audience. On the other hand, considering the time of the play as ‘now’, bearing in mind that the play was first produced in 1996, one can easily assume that Rebecca or Devlin could not have experienced the Holocaust. As Plunka argues, “since Pinter designates that the play occurs ‘now’, which at the time of the writing was 1996, Rebecca, in her forties, could not have personally experienced the Holocaust; even if she were forty-nine years old, her birth would have been in 1947” (323). In the play, even though she identifies herself with the Holocaust survivors and recounts the events as if she personally experienced them, at the same time she openly denies having experienced them. She says, “nothing has ever happened to me. Nothing has ever happened to any of my friends. I have never suffered. Nor have my friends” (Pinter, Plays 4 413).

There are haunting images of the Holocaust in the play. Even though it addresses more universal issues, each dreamlike sequence narrated by Rebecca resonates with the Holocaust, or actually with the representations of it. Pinter’s own words are noteworthy in this sense:

I think that one of the things that was happening to me when I was writing the play is the realization that what we term “atrocities” and “catastrophes” throughout the world—by the way, not, by any means, limited to what happened in the Holocaust—there is a Holocaust more or less every day of the week. Certainly the Holocaust images do stay with me. They are all contained within people’s experience. [...] the woman [Rebecca] that I felt to be haunted—and, if you like, possessed—by this world around her, which, I
remind you, she had never herself experienced—I mean, she had never herself gone through any of these things at all, and, I hope that that’s made absolutely clear in the play. So that we’re talking about, I think, we’re talking about a haunted person, and a man who really essentially wants to bring her back to just the ordered state of affairs... (qtd. in Merritt, “Harold Pinter’s Ashes to Ashes” 74-75; emphasis in original)

In this regard, Pinter reflects upon how history is full of “atrocities” and “catastrophes” by using images from the worst atrocity ever, the Holocaust. He uses a very familiar setting, a comfortable house in the country with a garden, which might very well be in England. However, the garden beyond, “created it all by yourself” [Rebecca] (Pinter, Plays 4 424), can turn out to be somewhere with a history of atrocities and catastrophes, and therefore could be placed anywhere in the twentieth century Europe. As Billington states, “this elegant country drawing-room opens up into European history” (377).

In contrast to plays such as One for the Road and Mountain Language, which are set in prisons and detention centres, Ashes to Ashes gives the impression of bourgeois comfort and security; a house in the country with armchairs and a garden beyond the living room. As in Old Times, here we have two characters, Devlin and Rebecca, apparently husband and wife, within a domestic space, ‘an impenetrable haven from the ravages of the public, historical and political realms,’ (Silverstein, “Talking about Some Kind of Atrocity” 75) recounting memories of times past. The setting creates an opposition between the private relationship and the public events described that is gradually eroded by the play’s actions. Eventually the private becomes the public as the lighting gradually dims from a well-defined space to an ‘amorphous and permeable’ (Silverstein, “Talking about Some Kind of Atrocity”
space which is penetrated by the images Rebecca imagines and retells. Even though most of them are part of collective and cultural memory, *Ashes to Ashes* contains a lot of images that evoke the Holocaust. Initially, Rebecca’s lover’s occupation is that of a guide who is highly respected by the workpeople in the factory for his “purity” and “conviction” (Pinter, *Plays 4* 405). Drawing from Manuela M. Reiter, Plunka points out that “one translation of the German ‘Führer’, besides ‘leader’, is also guide, which ironically may refer to his role in deportations”, and he states that the words “purity” and “conviction” are euphemisms or code words that call to mind the justification for Nazi genocide (322). Later, Rebecca tells Devlin that in a house in Dorset, she saw guides ushering a crowd of people “across the cliffs and down to the sea” (Pinter, *Plays 4* 416). This image is reminiscent of the previous image of workpeople, who “would follow her lover over a cliff and into to the sea” (Pinter, *Plays 4* 405). Meanwhile, Rebecca hears a police siren, and she gets upset. The police siren also resonates with Holocaust experiences, while it stands for state oppression. Penelope Prentice argues that “the sound triggered a free association to the Gestapo sirens signalling people forcibly taken during the Nazi Holocaust” (Prentice 369). And Plunka also comments on the associations brought about by police siren in Holocaust survivors: “Strangely enough, Holocaust survivors often have mentioned that police sirens can be prompts that elicit latent or repressed visions of life in the concentration camps” (322).

Rebecca’s description of the railway station, where her lover “walk[s] down the platform and tear[s] all the babies from the arms of their screaming mothers” (Pinter, *Plays 4* 419), calls to mind another association with the Holocaust, but it can also be anywhere, drenched in the blood of innocent people throughout the history of the world. She says that the city was “frozen [...] and the snow was a funny colour. It wasn’t white. Well it was white but there were other colours in it. It was as if there were veins running through it” (Pinter,
Plays 4 418). The picture drawn by Rebecca is that of a railway station in a frozen city, the surrounding area covered with snow, and the funny colour is because of the mud and blood in it. The trains in this railway station might be bound for Auschwitz. Rebecca also says: “When I got to the railway station I saw the train. Other people were there” (Pinter, Plays 4 418). This speech calls to mind the deportation of the victims to the extermination camps, and combined with image of the railway station it is reminiscent of the entrance gates of Auschwitz.

Rebecca is haunted by the images and memories of the past. Her reminiscences spring up in the midst of everyday conversation and as Devlin forces her to remember what happened in her past, he takes the role of a Nazi torturer in her memory. Through the mind of Rebecca we are taken on the journey of the memories of the war that constantly haunt her.

The title, Ashes to Ashes, is not explained until near the end of the play when Rebecca begins to sing a song that begins, “ashes to ashes, dust to dust.” This passage is a Biblical allusion: “In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it was thou taken; for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.” This passage from Genesis3:19 suggests that we come from dust and in our death, we return to dust. It is not mere chance that this passage is often quoted during funeral services, nor is it a chance that Pinter places this passage in a Jewish Holocaust play that reminds us that millions of Jews were not only murdered and cremated by the Nazis, but they were also denied a decent burial.

The one-act play is set in “a house in the country with a “large window” and a “garden beyond” (Pinter, Plays 4 393). The time is “early evening” in “summer” (Pinter, Plays 4 393). The room, where the action takes place, “darkens” and “the lamplight intensifies” during the course of the event (Pinter, Plays 4 393). In a very Pinteresque way,
the play opens in medias res with Rebecca and Devlin talking. The opening situation reminds us of an interrogatory, with Devlin standing while Rebecca is sitting. Disturbed by the information she now divulges, Devlin is eager to know more about this relationship and incessantly presses her for more details. Holding a tumbler in his hand, Devlin assumes the interrogator’s position in an attitude evocative of Nicholas in One for the Road. The interrogatory, a recurrent motif in Pinter’s dramatic work, defines a power relationship, where one of the interlocutors tries to subjugate the other. That is what occurs, for example, in The Birthday Party, The Hothouse, and One for the Road. Albeit in the menacing atmosphere prevailing in all of these plays there are important differences that should be stressed. Whereas the former two are made up of farcical devices, such as “riddles, children’s game lines, music hall cross-talk routines” (Innes 284), which create a comic effect despite the general atmosphere of terror that prevails in the end, One for the Road, with its clearer political connotation, leaves no doubt about the authorially intended reception-perspective. The exchange between the figures becomes less evocative of a stock comedy, leaving the menace of power completely bare and closer to reality. If, on the one hand, Ashes to Ashes has in common with One for the Road the lack of a blatant comic effect, on the other, it differs from it in that menace in Ashes to Ashes is almost exclusively exerted at the psychological level. Even if Devlin functions mostly as a foil to Rebecca, they both rise above the type as exemplified by the figures in Pinter’s political plays.

In the stage directions, Pinter notes, “The room darkens during the course of the play” (Pinter, Plays 4 393), which refers to the increasingly somber mood of the two characters as tensions begin to mount. Yet Pinter also writes, “The lamplight has become very bright but does not illumine the room” (Pinter, Plays 4 393). Susan Hollis Merritt’s interpretation is useful here: “This is a crucial stage direction. Pinter suggests that, whereas ‘the room’ is not
being ‘illumin[ed]’ by the lamplight, *something–something else*–is being illuminated–or understood–in a new way” (Merritt, “Harold Pinter’s *Ashes to Ashes* 77). Moreover, as Marc Silverstein has mentioned, this intense lamp light has transformed the quiet of a country room into an interrogation center reminiscent of the setting for several other of Pinter’s political plays (Silverstein, “Talking About Some Kind of Atrocity” 75).

The play revolves around two characters, Devlin and Rebecca, whose relationship seems analogous to the relationship shared between Dusty and Terry in that, not only are they husband and wife, they also share a precarious dialogue with one another. Within the sparse setting that they occupy (two chairs, a table with a lamp, and a window that overlooks a garden), their conversation is centered on Devlin's attempt to reconstruct Rebecca's past experiences with a former lover. As this is a figure to whom Devlin has no prior knowledge, he obsesses over uncovering any and all details about his wife's past experiences with this mysterious figure. As his tone switches back and forth between filial affection and aggressive interrogation, Rebecca replies at times concretely, and at others evasively with facts and details that ultimately may or may not be completely authentic. The crux of the play comes in her partial, subjective construction of history that eventually becomes enmeshed within an alternate narrative that is recognizably a Holocaust-style narrative. It is in this verbal power struggle with one another that Pinter invests their discourse with a tone that is decidedly political blended with the personal and domestic conflict. And it is in the allusions to a historic trauma narrative that *Ashes to Ashes* confronts the vicissitudes of political empathy.

When the play begins, Pinter sets up their relationship in spatial terms as Rebecca sits while Devlin stands over her drinking his beverage. Michael Billington describes the sparse theatricality of the Royal Court production as having had the effect of both characters
occupying their separate spaces who by the end had sunken into the crevices of their respective chairs (383). The tension between the two is driven further by the nature of Rebecca's opening recollections:

Rebecca: Well. ... for example ... he would stand over me and clench his fist. And then he'd put his other hand on my neck and grip it and bring my head towards him. His fist ... grazed my mouth. And he'd say, 'Kiss my fist.'

Devlin: And did you?

Rebecca: Oh yes. I kissed his fist. The knuckles. And then he'd open his hand and give me the palm of his hand ... to kiss ... which I kissed.

*Pause.*

And then I would speak.

Devlin: What did you say? You said what? What did you say?

*Pause.*

Rebecca: I said, 'Put your hand round my throat.' I murmured it through his hand as I was kissing it, but he heard my voice, he heard it through his hand, he felt my voice in his hand, he heard it there.

*Silence.* (Pinter, *Plays 4* 395-396)

Although the beginning of the narrative implies that she is recounting a brutal act of violation on the part of her lover, it becomes (somewhat) apparent that she is a willing participant in
the sado-erotic gestures. Whether or not she is truly a willing participant, Pinter colours their sexuality in terms of power and submission. Her lover's movements recall the gestures performed by Nicholas in *One for the Road* where he places his index and pinkie fingers directly in front of Victor's eyes as a sign of his absolute power over him.

As Rebecca's details become more explicit, so too does Devlin's insistence that he know the minutiae of their sexual performance:

Devlin: And did he? Did he put his hand round your throat?

Rebecca: Oh yes. He did. He did. And he held it there, very gently, very gently, so gently. He adored me, you see.

Devlin: He adored you?

*Pause.*

What do you mean, he adored you? What do you mean?

*Pause.*

Are you saying he put no pressure on your throat? Is that what you're saying?

Rebecca: No.

Devlin: What then? What are you saying?

Rebecca: He put a little... pressure... on my throat, yes. So that my head started to go back, gently but truly.

Devlin: And your body? Where did your body go?
Rebecca: My body went back, slowly but truly.

Devlin: So your legs were opening?

Rebecca: Yes.

Pause

Devlin: Your legs were opening?

Rebecca: Yes.

Silence. (Pinter, Plays 4 396-397)

Rebecca’s responses to her lover's questions show whether or not she would enjoy the torture that he threatens her with. Whereas that conversation had a double meaning in being both playful spousal talk as well as spiteful sarcasm, the sado-erotic performance by Rebecca and her lover underscores a fetishized submission between the two. The pauses following Devlin's questions suggest that in her narrative Rebecca feels no real urgency to address all of his inquiries. It suggests a one-sided conversation in which she may be simply lost in her memory. The pauses also underscore the gravity of her revelations as Devlin voyeuristically insists on understanding not only each gesture as it is performed, but also the meaning underlying each act. He later explains to her:

You understand why I'm asking you these questions. Don't you? Put yourself in my place. I'm compelled to ask you questions. There are so many things I don't know. I know nothing... about any of this. Nothing. I'm in the dark. I
need light [...] It would mean a great deal to me if you could define him more clearly. (Pinter, Plays 4 399)

Devlin's rhetoric is loaded with significance in that it is not enough to simply be told what had happened; he needs further ocular clarity in order to fully know about Rebecca's experiences. Indeed, Devlin's demand for ocular proof is reflected in the stage details as Pinter dictates: “The room darkens during the course of the play. The lamplight intensifies. By the end of the play the room and the garden beyond are only dimly defined. The lamplight has become very bright but does not illumine the room.” (Pinter, Plays 4 393).

He cannot truly understand and know her past without literally seeing what it is that she saw. Without more concrete definition, he does not have full control of the picture that she is presenting to him. As he further inquires:

I mean, what did he actually look like? If you see what I mean? Length, breadth ... that sort of thing. Height, width. I mean, quite apart from his... disposition, what that may have been ... or his character... or his spiritual... standing... I just want, well, I need ... to have a clearer idea of him ... well, not a clearer idea ... just an idea, in fact ... because I have absolutely no idea ... as things stand ... of what he looked like. I mean, what did he look like? Can't you give him a shape for me, a concrete shape? I want a concrete image of him, you see... an image I can carry about with me. I mean, all you talk of are his hands, one hand over your face, the other on the back of your neck, then the first one on your throat. There must be more to him than hands. What about eyes? Did he have any eyes? (Pinter, Plays 4 399-400)
There is desperation in the tone of his insistent questioning. While he may be interested in questions about his character or spiritual standing, for Devlin, such information does not gain him authentic access to her memories. He explains to her that without the precise ‘concrete’ image of her lover, he cannot lay claim to the memory itself, and by extension her past. This desire to know is all the more clarified in his focus on her former lover's eyes. As Nicholas says to Victor at the end of Scene 1 in *One for the Road*, "Your soul shines out of your eyes" (Pinter, *Plays 4* 233). And as he has the power to wave his fingers in front of Victor's eyes, he in turn has the power to lay claim to Victor's soul. Therefore, what Pinter sets up for the audience is a relationship defined in part by Devlin's desire to lay claim to Rebecca's past. By controlling her past, he controls her. In this sense, his demand to know these details becomes analogous to the control wielded by Rebecca's lover over her.

The pauses that follow several of Devlin's questions in the first passage reveal the struggle for power that underlies their discourse. This comes up in her seeming indifference to many of his, albeit repetitive, queries. In response to his demand to know about the details of his physical features, she explains:

Rebecca: I can't tell you what he looked like.

Devlin: Have you forgotten?

Rebecca: No. I haven't forgotten. But that's not the point. Anyway, he went away years ago [...]. ((Pinter, *Plays 4* 402)

Rebecca's responses certainly seem to imply that she does know the answers to his queries, but she chooses not to reveal such information to him. As she ambiguously explains, "that's not the point." Perhaps from her perspective, the importance of the memory lies not in the
way he looked, but rather in his actions, which later in the play are revealed to be rather sinister. Whatever the point may be, it is apparent that her withholding such information reflects a desire on her part to maintain ownership over her memories and, in a broader sense, her past. Clearly, this is the most significant distinction between her relationships with these two men—a distinction that she would perhaps prefer to uphold. Whereas her memories of her former lover are defined by her sado-erotic sexual submission, she maintains a stronger sense of empowerment with Devlin.

Throughout the play, Rebecca's challenge to Devlin's authority and power is reflected in her simple gesture of deflecting attention away from the points that he is attempting to address:

Devlin: […] when exactly did you meet him? […]

Rebecca: By the way, there's something I've been dying to tell you […] It was when I was writing a note, a few notes for the laundry. Well … to put it bluntly … a laundry list. Well, I put my pen on that little coffee table and it rolled off […] This pen, this perfectly innocent pen.

Devlin: You can't know it was innocent.

Rebecca: Why not?

Devlin: Because you don't know where it had been. You don't know how many other hands have held it, how many other hands have written with it, what other people have been doing with it. You know nothing of its history. You know nothing of its parents' history. ((Pinter, *Plays 4* 409–410)
Her disregard for his specific question underscores the precarious nature of their discourse. On a basic level, Rebecca is simply changing the subject to one that she perhaps sees as being just as notable, or irrelevant, as the details that Devlin is after. The absurd importance that she places on the event of the pen rolling off the table signifies the disregard that she feels towards Devlin's authority. Devlin's response to her further illustrates the importance he places on knowing the full concrete details of Rebecca's history. To know an object's history is to know the full character of the object itself. Thus, to Devlin, the amalgam of the pen's history becomes analogous to Rebecca's body and past.

The gulf separating the two becomes more pronounced as Rebecca continues to challenge Devlin's assertions, which in turn become more and more domineering. Rebecca follows up Devlin's remark about the pen's parents by stating:

Rebecca: A pen has no parents.

Pause.

Devlin: You can't sit there and say things like that [...] I'm saying that you're not entitled to sit in that chair or on any other chair and say things like that [...] Rebecca: I'm not entitled to say things like what?

Devlin: That that pen was innocent.

Rebecca: You think it was guilty?

Silence. (Pinter, Plays 4 411)
Rebecca's statements could be perceived as playful spousal teasing or a reflection of her disregard for Devlin's authority, or perhaps a combination of both. Devlin, on the other hand, feels that it is within his purview to determine what Rebecca is or is not permitted to say. It is in this regard that Pinter casts Devlin as a politically authoritarian figure who bemoans, "I'm letting you off the hook. Have you noticed? I'm letting you slip" (Pinter, *Plays 4* 412). In forgiving Rebecca for her insolence, Devlin assumes the mantle of a paternalistic superior who, up until the pen diatribe, had had his position tested by Rebecca. Although his dialogue could also be seen as playful spousal teasing in the same way that Rebecca's could, Devlin's behavior towards Rebecca shows his passive aggressive response to her repeated questioning. On the surface it could be interpreted as just teasing his wife, but underlying this playfulness is the shadow of plain malevolence.

The impulse that drives Devlin's authoritarian behavior becomes all the more apparent as he reflects on the possibility that he is the one who is losing touch with his ability to maintain his position as reflected in his inability to get Rebecca to provide him a full picture of her lover:

Devlin: Or perhaps it's me who's slipping. It's dangerous. Do you notice? I'm in a quicksand.

Rebecca: Like God.

Devlin: God? God? You think God is sinking into a quicksand? That's what I would call a truly disgusting perception. If it can be dignified by the word perception. Be careful how you talk about God. He's the only God we have. If you let him go he won't come back. He won't even look back over his
shoulder. And then what will you do? You know what it'll be like, such a vacuum? It'll be like England playing Brazil at Wembley and not a soul in the stadium. Can you imagine? Playing both halves to a totally empty house. The game of the century. Absolute silence. Not a soul watching. Absolute silence. Apart from the referee's whistle and a fair bit of fucking and blinding. If you turn away from God it means that the great and noble game of soccer will fall into permanent oblivion. No score for extra time after extra time after extra time, no score for time everlasting, for time without end. Absence. Stalemate. Paralysis. A world without a winner. (Pinter, *Plays 4 412*)

It is in Devlin's form of theology that he foments his sense of absolute power in his relationship with Rebecca. His reflections on the necessity of acknowledgement from a higher authority shows his precarious position about his own ‘stalemate’ condition in this entire discourse between subject and object. Without the sanction implied in the recognition by God, there is no longer any purpose to one's actions.

Compounding this sentiment is Devlin's belief in a world divided between winners and losers. Without such a stark polarity of roles, the world loses meaning and purpose. As he explains in his credo:

Devlin: Fuck the best man, that's always been my motto. It's the man who ducks his head and moves on through no matter what wind or weather who gets there in the end. A man with guts and application.

*Pause.*

A man who doesn't give a shit.
A man with a rigid sense of duty.

Pause.

There's no contradiction between those last two statements.

Believe me. (Pinter, *Plays 4 415*)

Blinded by his own obsession with power it comes as no surprise that he would contradict himself so blatantly. The diatribe recalls Goldberg's credo in *The Birthday Party*:

> All my life I've said the same. Play up, play up, and play the game. Honour thy father and thy Mother. All along the line. Follow the line, the line, McCann, and you can't go wrong. What do you think, I'm a self-made man?

No! I sat where I was told to sit. (Pinter, *Plays 1 71*)

Like Goldberg, Devlin's sense of obedience to a higher authority (for Devlin, God; for Goldberg, society) is equaled in magnitude only by his egoistic sense of self. As such, Devlin thinks in terms of the have and have-nots; thus, his wife is an object to possess. On the opposite end of the discourse is Rebecca's insolent response to Devlin in her supposition that God himself is slipping. Indeed, in a society defined by its history of atrocities and oppression that the play will later expound upon, it becomes very easy to assume that God is becoming more and more absent.

Intriguingly, Rebecca at one point experiences a level of anxiety similar to Devlin's paranoia about a world without a larger recognition watching over all.

Well I'm just terribly upset.
Pause.

I'm just incredibly upset.

Pause.

Don't you want to know why? Well, I'm going to tell you anyway. If I can't tell you who can I tell? Well, I'll tell you anyway. It just hit me so hard. You see … as the siren faded away in my ears I knew it was becoming louder and louder for someone else. [...] I hate it fading away. I hate it echoing away. I hate it leaving me. I hate losing it. I hate somebody else possessing it. I want it to be mine, all the time. It's such a beautiful sound. Don't you think? (Pinter, \textit{Plays 4} 407-408)

As seen earlier, the pauses stand in for the couple’s apparent lack of empathy for each other’s experiences. Here, Rebecca voices unease very much akin to Devlin's prior statement in that she fears the loss of an acknowledgement that is produced by a siren that she sees as addressing her. Like Meg's devotion to "the list" in \textit{The Birthday Party} that, in her mind, justifies the presence of her boarding house, so too does Rebecca depend upon the siren's significance as acknowledging her presence. Indeed, her anxiety is further qualified by her fear that someone else will possess it, as the sound of the siren becomes fainter to her and stronger for someone else. She wants to lay claim to the authority invested within the siren, just as Devlin desires to lay claim to her memories and thus her total sense of self. The passage qualifies her resistance to Devlin's questions (as well as frames the final scene of the play). What is at stake here for Rebecca is not merely an unease about her partner knowing all the minutiae of her previous relationship, it is also the space of her experience and history
that is on unstable footing. Therefore, as Devlin pries more and more into her narrative, the more she loses sole authority to define the meaning of her memories.

As Rebecca's memories become more and more specific, the play itself becomes even more amorphously political. As she continues to reconstruct her past, she reveals various cryptic details about her former lover's occupation. At the start he is described as some form of travel agent or guide:

Rebecca: His job took him away. He had a job. [...] I think it had something to do with a travel agency. I think he was some kind of courier. No. No, he wasn't. That was only a parttime job. I mean that was only part of the job in the agency. He was quite high up, you see. He had a lot of responsibilities. He was a guide, you see. A guide.

Devlin: A tourist guide?

Pause

Rebecca: Did I ever tell you about that place... about the time he took me to that place? (Pinter, *Plays 4* 402-403)

It is evident that her recollections are largely fragmented and unstable, given that she is not entirely clear exactly what his occupation officially was. In and of itself this is not too remarkable of a factor given that she is recounting the past. Yet, Pinter wants to make it clear that Rebecca's narrative is unstable in its authenticity. As she continues to recall more cryptic details about his occupation, she explains:

Rebecca: Oh, it was a kind of factory, I suppose.
Devlin: What do you mean, a kind of factory? Was it a factory or wasn't it?
And if it was a factory, what kind of factory was it?

Rebecca: Well, they were making things—just like any other factory. But it wasn't the usual kind of factory. (Pinter, Plays 4 404)

Again, Devlin's semantic quibbles reflect his unrelenting desire to know as much concrete detail as possible in order to fully grasp all facets of her past. There is no room for ambiguity in his perceptions. Either something is, or it is not.

As Rebecca continues her subjective narrative, the details she provides become more and more telling of the broader picture she is attempting to construct:

Rebecca: They were all wearing caps... the workpeople... soft caps... and they took them off when he came in, leading me, when he led me down the alleys between the rows of workpeople.

Devlin: They took their caps off? You mean they doffed them?

Rebecca: Yes.

Devlin: Why did they do that?

Rebecca: He told me afterwards it was because they had such great respect for him.

Devlin: Why?
Rebecca: Because he ran a really tight ship, he said. They had total faith in him. They respected his ... purity, his ... conviction. They would follow him over a cliff and into the sea, if he asked them, he said. And sing in a chorus, as long as he led them. They were in fact very musical, he said. (Pinter, Plays 4 405)

Rebecca does not know why the workers doffed their caps. She knows only that what her former lover had told her at that time. And naturally, his explanation is fairly self-aggrandizing. Although they could have been doing so out of fear and retribution for a perceived insolence, from her former lover's point of view they did so out of respect for his authority. The invocation of purity recalls Lionel's claim in The New World Order that his job as torturer makes him "feel so pure" (Pinter, Plays 4 277). Pinter clearly favors this terminology in that it characterizes how dictatorial authority perceives itself—as always acting in the cleanest, purest principles. All else is tainted and in need of cleansing.

Rebecca further elaborates on her former lover's identity with a rather jarring detail that provides further indication of the basis of the memory she is attempting to reconstruct: "He did work for a travel agency. He was a guide. He used to go to the local railway station and walk down the platform and tear all the babies from the arms of their screaming mothers. Pause" (Pinter, Plays 4 406-407). The discordant recollection theatrically jars both Devlin and audience, as her picture comes to resemble narratives of Nazi atrocities during the Holocaust. Audiences were perhaps cued to this characteristic by her descriptions of the factory where the workers had to doff their caps to their superior. At this point, audiences are no longer certain as to the authenticity of her recollections. It does not seem apparent at all that Rebecca truly lived through these experiences, especially given that the setting details
state that the time period in which the play takes place is "Now" (Pinter, *Plays 4* 391). Pinter remarks on his characterization of Rebecca:

> From my point of view, the woman is simply haunted by the world that she's been born into, by all atrocities that have happened. In fact they seem to have become a part of her own experience, although in my view she hasn't actually experienced them herself. That's the whole point of the play. (Pinter, *Various Voices* 226)

Thus, Rebecca is cast as an empathetic character, sensitive to the history of oppression through which her contemporary society was born. Many of the details that form Rebecca's recollections come from Pinter's own knowledge of Nazi atrocities. It has been mentioned earlier that the references to the factory and the reference to the lack of proper sanitation correlates to Rebecca's recollection came from his reading of a biography on Albert Speer. Thus, Pinter transfers his own self-awareness of images of atrocity onto Rebecca's memories, which may not have necessarily happened to her, but are still nevertheless a part of her. Like Pinter, Rebecca is also haunted by such a past. The difference between the two though is that while Pinter is free to express his political aesthetic through the gauze of his drama, Rebecca is afforded no such expressive freedom as Devlin usurps her memory of this experience:

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Devlin: Now let me say this. A little while ago you made ... shall we say ... you made a somewhat oblique reference to your bloke... your lover?...and babies and mothers, etc. And platforms. I inferred from this that you were talking about some kind of atrocity. Now let me ask you this. What authority do you think you yourself possess which would give you the right to discuss such an atrocity?
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Rebecca: I have no such authority. Nothing has ever happened to me. Nothing has ever happened to any of my friends. I have never suffered. Nor have my friends.

Devlin: Good. (Pinter, *Plays 4* 413)

Thus, Devlin denies Rebecca the space to occupy such memories, regardless of whether or not they truly took place, nor why she feels a connection to such a past. Furthermore, rather than characterize his chastisement in terms of psychological counseling, he instead challenges her lack of authority in laying claim to such memories. Indeed, Devlin's rebuke forces Rebecca into submission as she must repeat his demands back to him in order to placate him. She is forced to distance herself from the memories themselves. The distance is not completely enforced though, as she later reflects upon a dream that she had:

Rebecca: I walked out into the frozen city. Even the mud was frozen [...] And when I got to the railway station I saw the train. Other people were there.

*Pause.*

And my best friend, the man I had given my heart to, the man I knew was the man for me moment we met, my dear, my most precious companion, I watched him walk down the platform and tear all the babies from the arms of their screaming mothers.

*Silence.*

Devlin: Did you see Kim and the kids?
She looks at him.

You were going to see Kim and the kids today.

She stares at him.

Your sister Kim and the kids.

Rebecca: Oh, Kim! And the kids, yes. Yes. Yes, of course I saw them. (Pinter, Plays 4 418-419)

Devlin denies the performance of suffering in the face of historic atrocity by bringing her out of her recollection and back into the present. His disregard for what Rebecca has to say reflects his desire to deny not only her attempt to lay claim to those details, but also his desire to maintain authority over the construction of her memories.

The impact of denying her the space of political empathy is further reflected in her hazy recollections of observing two moments of presumably forced exodus. In one recollection she recalls looking out of a window from a very high position in Dorset at a group of individuals carrying suitcases and being led out into the sea by various guides: "The guides... were ushering all these people across the beach. And I saw all these people walk into the sea. The tide covered them slowly. Their bags bobbed about in the waves" (Pinter, Plays 4 416). In yet another memory, she recalls observing an old man and a little boy carrying suitcases, followed by a woman with a baby all walking down a street in the same direction. The common element in both of these narratives, other than her observation of people being led away in some form, is that she observes both events from "a room at the top of a very tall building" (Pinter, Plays 4 426). What is also reflected in both of these narrative recollections
is Rebecca's passivity. In both memories she is a passive observer separated by the boundaries of the window she is looking through, and the high position that she occupies. Thus, while she may feel some tangible connection to what are abstract images of presumably enforced evictions, her position does not change from passive to active. In her recollections she is a silent observer of political oppression.

Towards the end of the play though, Rebecca does attempt to further connect with the second dream narrative of the woman with the baby. It is Rebecca's one attempt at communing with the realities of the atrocities that she has tried to reconstruct. In the last scene of the play, Rebecca enters a sort of empathic reverie as she substitutes the woman's subjectivity with her own:

Rebecca: She stood still. She kissed her baby. The baby was a girl.

*Pause.*

She kissed her.

*Pause.*

She listened to the baby's heartbeat. The baby's heart was beating.

*The light in the room has darkened. The lamps are very bright. Rebecca sits very still.*

The baby was breathing.

*Pause.*
I held her to me. She was breathing. Her heart was beating. (Pinter, *Plays 4* 427-428)

The details of setting imply that Rebecca's reverie becomes some form of Devlin's earlier demand for "light" ((Pinter, *Plays 4* 399) in order to fully know who her former lover was. Hence, her willingness to empathize with the woman's experience becomes her way of attempting to fully understand the nature of the atrocity of which she is trying to bear witness. In turn, Devlin attempts to substitute his own subjectivity in the role of her former lover:

*Devlin goes to her. He stands over her and looks down at her. He clenches his fist and holds it in front of her face. He puts his left hand behind her neck and grips it. He brings her head towards his fist. His fist touches her mouth.*

Devlin: Kiss my fist.

*She does not move. He opens his hand and places the palm of his hand on her mouth. She does not move.*

Devlin: Speak. Say it. Say 'Put your hand round my throat."

*She does not speak.*

Ask me to put my hand round your throat.

*She does not speak or move.*

*He puts his hand on her throat. He presses gently. Her head goes back. They are still.* (Pinter, *Plays 4* 428)
His attempt to finally lay claim to an authentic representation of Rebecca's prior experiences with her former lover is done through the mimicry of the gestures that she described. If he can imitate what her former lover did, then perhaps he can finally possess the memory itself. Rebecca's response denies this performance full agency, however, as she does not react in the way that she had described. Her only recognizable response comes after Devlin applies force to his action—making it less of an erotic act and more of an act of aggression. Thus, he is denied this space of performed memory.

Rebecca's denial of Devlin's attempts propels her reverie forward as a theatrical ECHO now follows her recollections:

*She speaks. There is an echo. His grip loosens.*

Rebecca: They took us to the trains

_ECHO:_ the trains.

*He takes his hand from her throat.*

Rebecca: They were taking the babies away

_ECHO:_ the babies away

_Pause._

Rebecca: I took my baby and wrapped it in my shawl

_ECHO:_ my shawl

Rebecca: And I made it into a bundle
ECHO: a bundle. (Pinter, *Plays 4* 429)

The echo, on the one hand, could reflect an actual conversation with the past in that her statements garner a response. On the other hand, the echo only repeats fragments of her experience implying that ultimately she is in a vacuum of history. This echo contains a kind of evocative beauty for an audience; it powerfully conjures the voices of the women who have gone before her, and continue to suffer today. Yet it also surrounds Rebecca with a vacuum, cutting her off from communication with another because of her sacrifice, which she ultimately denies. It is this denial that leads to Rebecca’s fate as a victim of atrocity. Pinter, in this play, is engaging with the history of world politics through his depiction of this male-female relationship. However, it suggests that it is Rebecca’s vulnerability as a woman, as a mother, which leaves her open to the victimization of history. As she continues:

Rebecca: And the man called me back

Echo: called me back

Rebecca: And he said what do you have there

Echo: have there

Rebecca: He stretched out his hand for the bundle

Echo: for the bundle

Rebecca: And I gave him the bundle

Echo: the bundle
Rebecca: And that's the last time I held the bundle

Echo: the bundle

Silence. (Pinter, Plays 4 430-431)

The silence, as opposed to a pause, seems to imply silent suffering at the gravity of the mother's loss of her child. After the mournful silence, Rebecca narrates entering the train and arriving at some place where she comes across a woman that she knew who asks her about her baby:

Rebecca: And I said what baby

Echo: what baby

Rebecca: I don't have a baby

Echo: a baby

Rebecca: I don't know of any baby

Echo: of any baby

Pause

Rebecca: I don't know of any baby

Long Silence. Blackout. (Pinter, Plays 4 432-433)

Rebecca's denial of the presence of a baby is filled with significance. Her grief is potentially overcome by her desire to repress the tragedy of the actions of the "guide" at the train station,
who up until now had been her former lover whom she had observed doing this action to other mothers. Rebecca's tragedy is that the memory of the loss still haunts her, no matter how many times she may repress the presence of the baby. Regardless of the possible literal interpretations, she is clearly attempting to move closer and closer to the actual experiences of the atrocities.

Many critics have attempted to qualify Rebecca's actions in this last scene as some form of triumph of her empathy in the midst of Devlin's autocratic personality. Katherine Burkman, in "Harold Pinter's Ashes to Ashes: Rebecca and Devlin as Albert Speer," argues that Rebecca's narration implies that in embracing the realities of the shared experience she can now move towards a fuller life with the ability to truly empathize with the political realities around her (94). Francis Gillen in "History as a Single Act: Pinter's Ashes to Ashes" also argues that Rebecca ultimately is strengthened by the experience through her desire to identify and empathize with the victims of atrocity; she "discovers her own power [...] to reshape herself as a non-victim" (91). While these are valid ways of appropriating her narrative, it is undeniable that there is some correlation between Devlin's inability to lay full claim to her memories and her own inability to posit herself in a position of political agency. Rebecca does, after all, perform the role of the passive observer throughout the play as well as deny the presence of a baby to someone who was not a perceived threat. Indeed, she is not even literally present at the moment of the train station, by Pinter's own admission.

Therefore, Rebecca's role serves a far more complex purpose within Ashes to Ashes subtle political exposition. At one point in the play, Rebecca recalls learning about a condition called "mental elephantiasis": 
Rebecca: Oh by the way somebody told me the other day that there's a condition known as mental elephantiasis.

Devlin: What do you mean, 'somebody told you'? What do you mean, 'the other day'? What are you talking about?

Rebecca: This mental elephantiasis means that when you spill an ounce of gravy, for example, it immediately expands and becomes a vast sea of gravy. It becomes a sea of gravy which surrounds you on all sides and you suffocate in voluminous sea of gravy. It's terrible. But it's all your own fault. You brought it upon yourself. You are not the victim of it, you are the cause of it. Because it was you who spilt the gravy in the first place, it was you who handed over the bundle.

Devlin: The what?

Rebecca: The bundle.

Pause

Devlin: So what's the question? Are you prepared to drown in your own gravy? Or are you prepared to die for your country? (Pinter, *Plays 4* 417-418)

While the reflection is a fairly absurd recollection, her emphasis on not being the victim, but rather the cause of the gravy catastrophe speaks volumes to the notion of affecting change in the face in political atrocity. Rebecca equates spilling the gravy that caused the catastrophe to handing over the child without resistance. Therefore, the bundle that is taken from her stands in for a past that even she cannot fully recover. The reference to mental elephantiasis implies
that even the smallest level of inaction makes a serious impact in a world consumed by political injustice. Devlin's response suggests that he fully understands what she is getting at, but dismisses the notion of wallowing in the past, in favor of acting in the present. Thus, it can be argued that the play ultimately ends on a pessimistic note in terms of conveying Rebecca's recollections as ultimately a matter of political defeat. Devlin's role in this regard is paramount as he continually denies her the space of full empathy with historical atrocity. Indeed, by the end of the play, the echo does not reply to Rebecca, suggesting that the "Long Silence" that follows is the only agency she is permitted with the atrocities of the past.

Devlin, in this regard, falls within the line of authoritarian characters as *One for the Road's* Nicholas and *The Hothouse's* Roote. Their connection to a corrupt past denies them a position of stable authority in the present. Blind to the realities of the past, they have no hope of maintaining any position of power without physical dictatorial authority. The lack of empathy with the past that Devlin feels is reflected in Pinter's statement that

Mrs. Thatcher, I remind you, said immortally: 'There is no such thing as society.' One of her really great statements. And she meant it. She meant by it that we have no obligation or responsibility to anyone else other than ourselves. This has encouraged the most appalling greed and corruption in my society. (Pinter, Various Voices 230)

Clearly he is quite critical of such sentiment and has the greatest sympathy for the position in which Rebecca ultimately finds herself. And while her tragic position may end rather pessimistically, her desperate attempt at empathy does posit the possibility of actual agency in the face of political oppression.
On the surface level the play is an account of Holocaust images that haunt the mind of Rebecca but at a deeper level the play is also an account of discord in the relationship between Devlin and Rebecca. Whether they are husband and wife is not established in the play but it is clear that they are sharing some sort of relationship between them; maybe they are lovers or husband wife to which most of the critics agree. Rebecca is drawn towards her traumatized memory of Holocaust in such a way that she lives in her past or rather brings the past in the present through enactment which certainly disrupts the normalcy in their relationship. On the one hand, Rebecca is struggling to cope up with her trauma; on the other hand Devlin is struggling with her traumatic memory to bring her in the reality, in the present which is “now” in the play. Devlin’s desperate effort to bring some kind of normalcy in their relationship or to start the relationship anew is clear from his enactment of the sado-masochistic role of the torturer as portrayed by Rebecca. Charles V. Grimes in his theses “A Silence Beyond Echo: Harold Pinter’s Political Theatre” rightly raises the issue:

Is Ashes to Ashes a story about an unhappy marriage, as is Old Times? Or is it a debate about historical knowledge, and about the competing claims one owes to posterity versus to oneself in the present? Or is it both? As the play ends, it is difficult to understand what has happened in it, firstly on the mimetic level: how has the relationship between husband and wife changed, if it has at all? Have their apparent differences been resolved and in what way and with what sense of permanence? Who has won the marital battle? These questions demand answers since the conflict between husband and wife has reached what feels like finality. Yet precisely what has happened between the two is a matter which different audience members will surely answer variously. Even on the diegetic level, on which the play’s references to history are located,
Pinter affords only questions without certain answers: What parts of the stories Rebecca tells could possibly have happened to her as she says? What parts of them happened to other people whom she may or may not have ever known? (233-234)

The play verges on the representation of a condition of marital difference, not of an action which revolves those differences in definitive ways. What the play shows taking place between husband and wife is, if sometimes inscrutable, true; what has been denied to the audience is the expected narrative closure that would seem to go along with the play’s vestiges of realistic representation: recognizable characters inside a contemporary domestic setting. Though the dramatic substance of interpersonal conflict is recognizably real, the form in which that substance is embodied does not strictly adhere to all conventions of realism.

As has been seen, Rebecca is totally haunted by traumatic images and experiences with a sense of guilt and complicity. The parallelism between Rebecca and the woman having a relationship with Albert Speer shows that Rebecca imaginatively identifies herself with the victims of the Holocaust and appears to be an imaginative victim/witness of the Holocaust. With her imaginative identification as a victim/witness, she tries to narrate the truth about the Holocaust, the truth of violence, torture, and tremendous sorrow. She struggles to transmit the narrative of the Holocaust, which actually could not be articulated. As she tries to recount her experiences, she frequently falls in silences and pauses that show her incapacity to retell the experience. However, she is haunted by the images in her memory, and the only thing that relieves her is articulating those images. She cannot find any relief in those silences, either. The images act as a barrier between her and the daily life, between her and the normality that Devlin pushes her into. In this regard, she experiences “self-inflicted emotional
imprisonment” (Felman and Laub 79). She is trapped within the images in her memory, and
the only way out is to break her silence and talk. Otherwise, the memory of the survivor can
destroy memory and thus reality. And this invades the survivor’s social life.

The play begins with a silence and there are silences and pauses between every two or
three sentences that Rebecca utters, as she struggles to articulate the images haunting her.
Thus, silences and pauses in her speech stand for the lapses and voids in her memory. They
are always before or after an image resonating with the Holocaust. In this regard, she tries to
comprehend and construct the truth of the events in these silences and pauses, and she
articulates it afterwards. Also, these silences and pauses separate the daily life from
Rebecca’s memories. There are two different worlds for her: the normality, her daily life with
Devlin, and her distorted memories, imaginative identifications with the Holocaust
victims/witnesses. She is talking to Devlin, and seems to be listening to him, but she is
haunted by her memories. For example, towards the end of the play, when Devlin asks her
why she never told him about her lover and states that he has a right to be very angry,
Rebecca, after a silence, changes the topic and talks about the woman with the bundle.
Therefore, her memories distort reality for Rebecca, and the reality of her traumatic
experience, or her constructed memory, surpasses the reality of her daily life. In this regard,
her experience parallels with the ubiquitous nature of traumatic events, because trauma
continues into the present and it is current in every respect, as far as its survivors are
concerned. As Judith Herman says about trauma:

> Traumatic events call into question basic human relationships. They breach
the attachments of family, friendship, love, and community. They shatter the
construction of the self that is formed and sustained in relation to others. They
undermine the belief systems that give meaning to human experience. They violate the victim's faith in a natural or divine order and cast the victim into a state of existential crisis ... Traumatic events destroy the individual's fundamental assumptions about the safety of the world, the positive value of the self, and the meaningful order of creation. (51)

Thus, for Rebecca, it is her traumatic memory that compels her to move away from her reality and ‘ordinary adaptations of life’ which in turn causes conflict in her relationship. That is why her silences and pauses are equally important as her words. When she falls into silence, the echo of her words stays with the audience, and when she speaks, she tries to cover the naked truth, the truth of the Holocaust. The echoes appear in her speech towards the end of the play. As Plunka argues, “[…] with Devlin’s voice silenced, Rebecca is left only with an echo that reverberates throughout the theatre the Holocaust imagery associated with loss: ‘the trains’, ‘the babies away’, ‘a bundle’, and ‘my baby’” (325). Thus, what dominates her language as well as her memory is the Holocaust, both in speeches and silences. Her silences are haunted by these images as well as her words. Jeanne Colleran’s comments on the echo at the end of the play are also noteworthy at this point: “that echo, a reverberation between worlds, connects the unseen, inexperienced but determinative past history of twentieth century atrocity and Rebecca’s growing sense that she must make a moral response lest it overwhelm her” (Colleran 96). In this regard, the echo of her speech also connects the two worlds for Rebecca, the world of her memories that she cannot escape and the real world. Her moral response is to articulate the ‘horror’ of the event in her memories and transmit it to prevent it from ever happening again. Thus, she also addresses the audience, most of whom share the collective memory of the atrocities committed in the twentieth century.
In the play, Rebecca’s silence and inability to narrate her experiences is shared by the man she comes across in the cinema, where she went to see a comic movie. She depicts the man as follows: “He was absolutely still throughout the whole film. He never moved, he was rigid, like a body with rigor mortis, he never laughed once, he just sat like a corpse. I moved away from him, I moved away as far away from him as I possibly could” (Pinter, *Plays 4* 424). And she falls into silence. The man is apparently a victim of trauma, which might be caused by the Holocaust as well as by any other personal or social reasons. However, Rebecca definitely sees his suffering and paradoxically does not want to face him. They share the legacy of a horrific event, which cannot be defined in any logical form. Both of them have witnessed the ‘horror’ of it and thus Rebecca refrains from eye contact with the man.

Colleran comments on the scene as follows:

> Part of the reason she cannot take part in the fun is that the man seated in front of her is apparently a rigid corpse. He is like her vision of the families walking into the sea or the women losing their children before boarding the trains, an example of Levi’s “complete witnesses”, that is, the dead or the utterly reduced, the only ones who fully know the horror but cannot speak. They are the “submerged” and “the drowned”. (93)

Thus, Rebecca is afraid of re-experiencing the event that haunts her memory to the point that she cannot turn back to reality. Half of her life has a deadly quality like that man in the cinema, and the dead part haunts the living part.

In the play, while Rebecca’s mind is occupied with existential questions, Devlin attempts to take her back to the normalcy, order, and comfort of their daily life. After they talk about the rolling pen on the coffee table, Devlin states that he is in a quicksand, because
of his loss of power in the course of the conversation. Rebecca answers, “like God” (Pinter, *Plays 4* 412), and she expresses her distrust in such a world and thus in God, who witnessed the ‘horror’ of the Holocaust.

While recounting the story about the woman with the bundle, with whom she identifies herself, Rebecca feels a sense of “total paralysis with the fear of merger with the atrocities being recounted” (Felman and Laub 72). Afterwards, while Devlin enacts the first scene by forcing her to kiss his fist, she does not move and gets totally numb. On the other hand, it might be said that the main listener in the play is Devlin, who listens to the haunted memories of Rebecca. In this regard, he can be interpreted as a psychotherapist, or an interviewer to the trauma victim. Initially, he shows “a sense of total withdrawal and numbness” (Felman and Laub 72), and he does not care for the stories she tells. He is only interested in the details of her old relationship like a jealous and wounded husband. And towards the end of the play, in a way, he experiences “a sense of outrage and of anger, unwittingly directed at the victim—narrator” Rebecca (Felman and Laub 72). In the middle of her speech, “he goes to her”, “puts his hand on her throat” and “presses gently” (Pinter, *Plays 4* 428), even though she is totally numb at that moment. Devlin is apparently obsessed with the facts about Rebecca’s past and always demands more details. As he says, “I’m compelled to ask you questions. There are so many things I don’t know. I know nothing . . . about any of this” ((Pinter, *Plays 4* 399). And he wants “a concrete image” of her ex-lover that he can “carry about with him” ((Pinter, *Plays 4* 400).

Trying to ingratiate himself with Rebecca, Devlin calls her “darling.” She protests and refuses being called darling by him. For the first time, Rebecca indicates that for her their relationship is already dead. Devlin still attempts to manipulate her so categorical statement
by luring her with a song. He transforms her statement from “I’m nobody’s darling” (Pinter, Plays 4 401) into the title of a song, “I’m nobody’s baby now,” (Pinter, Plays 4 402) (There is a song by Benny Davis, Milton Ager, and Lester Stanley with this line. The title, however, is “I’m Nobody’s Baby.”) Rebecca, however, apparently defeats him twice in this exchange. First, by stating that the title is wrong, it should be “You’re nobody’s baby now,” (Pinter, Plays 4 402) and, second, by denying having used the word baby. Thus, Rebecca manages to say twice that Devlin is nobody’s baby by turning back his statement against him, just like a mirror. Her rebuke lays bare his trick with the song. However, this seeming victory does not last long, because the word ‘baby’ has surfaced and cannot be put down any more.

The conflict in their relationship becomes apparent in a private conversation:

DEVLIN: What do you think?

REBECCA: I think you’re a fuckpig.

DEVLIN: Me a fuckpig? Me! You must be joking.

Rebecca smiles.

REBECCA: Me joking? You must be joking.

Pause. (Pinter, Plays 4 398-399)

The subject of this intense questioning admits several layers of meaning. On the surface level, they are talking about their dying relationship, the mixture of love and desire for possession that characterizes such plays as The Collection, Old Times, or The Lover. Other layers of meaning are suggested by the images through which Rebecca’s memories are evoked.
Obsessed by the traumatic memory, Rebecca uses abusive language which is otherwise in contrast with her careful choice of words in the play. Her smile suggests that Devlin is incapable of realizing her agony in the relationship which demands complete cooperation unlike Devlin’s authoritarian attitude towards her.

When Rebecca continues to talk about her passionate relationship with the man in the past, Devlin doesn’t want to entertain her reminiscences anymore and he tries to bring her in the present once again by asking about her sister Kim and her kids: “Did you see Kim and the kids?” (Pinter, Plays 4 419) Rebecca has been to her house and has met the kids. After some small talk about the family, they discuss Kim’s decision not to accept back her husband, who has left her for another woman and now wants to come back. Actually, Kim’s family works as a counterpoint to Rebecca’s own situation, since she has children and the courage to say that she will never accept her husband back. Rebecca continues, “She says she’ll never share a bed with him again. Never. Ever,” (Pinter, Plays 4 422) and Devlin asks why not, Rebecca veers back to his original question, with what amounts to a refusal to answer, creating a typical Pinter gap that exposes unspoken questions about their own relationship: what monster/lover lives here? “Of course I saw Kim and the kids,” she says, “I had tea with them.” (Pinter, Plays 4 422)

*Ashes to Ashes*, like his other overtly political plays, deals with the real world with a political consciousness, and at the same time this political consciousness is applied to the personal affairs. Therefore, the political and the personal are intermingled in such a way that the local setting of the play and the relationship between Rebecca and Devlin acquires a political and global context. As Merritt in her article “Harold Pinter’s *Ashes to Ashes*: Political/Personal Accounts of the Holocaust” states, “[...] while the apparently realistic
domestic setting of *Ashes to Ashes* is a contemporary English setting room in which a man and a woman are having an intimate conversation, the dialogue encompasses a far greater, global context and raises issues relating to the Holocaust” (74). Therefore, while on the personal level it reflects Rebecca’s dysfunctional relationship with Devlin and her much more perverted relationship with her ex-lover, on the political level it reflects the dysfunctional world politics, state oppression, torture, and violence. As Billington argues, “the play also conclusively proves that for Pinter the ‘personal’ and the ‘political’ are not separate, vacuum-sealed categories; it operates both as a twisted, perverted love story and as an evocation of the arbitrariness and cruelty of state power” (375). Thus, this private country house and the relationship between its inhabitants reflect more public issues dealing with “the real truth of our lives and our societies” (Pinter, “Art, Truth and Politics” 442). As Marc Silverstein in his essay “Talking about Some Kind of Atrocity: *Ashes to Ashes* in Barcelona” argues, this country house “creates an aura of bourgeois comfort and security—the kind of security that both conservatism and liberalism see as transforming domestic space into an impenetrable haven from the ravages of the public, historical and political realms” (75). However, the images that Rebecca’s memory brings forward break through this comfort and security, and this domestic realm morphs into public, historical and political realms. The sound of police sirens, crying babies and drowning workpeople distorts the comfort of this room, and Devlin’s desire for authority, order and control over Rebecca in this private sphere parallels with that of the authoritarian states, which impose violence, torture, and suffering on its people. Thus, Pinter, combining the personal with the political, does not distinguish political violence from personal violence, and points out a need for a shared responsibility for the sufferings of the others.
The dysfunctional relationship between Rebecca and Devlin reflects the reliance on order, authority and rationality. Devlin, “[a] man with guts and application […] A man with a rigid sense of duty” (Pinter, *Plays 4* 415) is obsessed with facts and order. He always asks for more details, because information for him means authority over Rebecca. He feels he is compelled to ask questions, and he asks for concrete images and shapes. He is the only authority in the room; when Rebecca talks about the images of babies and mothers, he says, “what authority do you think you yourself posses which would give you the right to discuss such an atrocity?” (Pinter, *Plays 4* 413). Thus, he denounces any interaction in his authority and order in general. According to Colleran, “Devlin embodies literality—a literality shored up by an uninspected ideological reliance on God, Nation, and order—and so he wants the details of Rebecca’s past, the bits and facts, so he isn’t in the dark” (94). Thus, Devlin, obsessive about the “bits and facts”, searches for the meaning and history of everything, not just Rebecca. When Rebecca says “I put my pen on that little coffee table and it rolled off into the carpet […] This pen, this perfectly innocent pen”, Devlin judges the innocence of the pen: “You don’t know where it had been. You don’t know how many other hands have held it, how many other hands have written with it, what other people have been doing with it. You know nothing of its history” (Pinter, *Plays 4* 410). So, he questions every detail of Rebecca’s history, just as he does with the “innocent pen”. According to Prentice, “his comically attributing volition to a pen allows him to escape acknowledging his own volition and responsibility and, more importantly, hers, as his real concern” (373). Thus, the rolling pen also points out humanity’s responsibility for the atrocities around the world, as they, like the rolling pen, rolled off in front of them. Devlin feels that his authority is disrupted by her speeches full of images resonating with the Holocaust. He says: “I’m letting you off the hook. Have you noticed? I’m letting you slip. Or perhaps it’s me who is slipping. It’s dangerous.
Do you notice? I’m in a quicksand”, to which Rebecca replies, “like God” (Pinter, Plays 4 412). Rebecca, thus, questions the authority of Devlin and God in a world of brutalities and atrocities, as an imaginative witness of them. She, in a way, rejects the idealism of a world of harmony and order.

In another very private dialogue, Devlin tries to ground her in the here and now, “Now look, let’s start again. We live here. You don’t live…in Dorset…or anywhere else. You live here with me. This is our house. You have a very nice sister. She lives close to you. She has two lovely kids. You’re their aunt. You like that” (Pinter, Plays 4 424). He compliments her on her “wonderful garden” and, comically, her “green fingers.” But no sooner does he repeat, “Let’s start again,” than Rebecca counters with, “I don’t think we can start again. We started…a long time ago. We started. We can’t start again. We can end again […] Again and again and again. And we can end again. And again and again. And again” (Pinter, Plays 4 425). They clash in a deadly combat, where accord, compromise and reconciliation are no longer possible, but signal the beginning of the inexorable end: a resolution that can only result in a permanent rift. Devlin, who does not want to lose the linguistic control, warns her: “Aren’t you misusing the word ‘end’? End means end. You can’t end ‘again’. You can only end once” (Pinter, Plays 4 425). This conversation about their personal relationship opens up into a world of atrocities. While Devlin simply focuses on their relationship and their future, for Rebecca “end again” means the end of humanity, which has ended many times upon witnessing the history full of violence, oppression, and atrocities. And it also means that atrocities do not only end once, they end again and again in different parts of the world, from Auschwitz to Bosnia, so actually they never end. As Merritt argues:
The political atrocities echoed by the imagery of Rebecca’s personal memories ‘can’t start again’, because they never truly do end. Such atrocities can be said ‘to end once’ (in one place) and then said ‘to end again’ (elsewhere) [...] If the end is a dying of the ‘start’ of a life, if the ‘end’ is the dying of humanity in the human race, if the ‘end’ is the obliteration of humankind and human kindness through inhumanity and human cruelty, then there is no possibility that we ‘can start again.’ We ‘can’ only ‘end again.’ (78)

Therefore, Rebecca reflects her distrust in humanity and thus the possibility of starting again. The images of atrocities haunt her memory. They do not “start again” and “end once”. They end again and again one after another: babies torn from the arms of their screaming mothers, workpeople ushered by guides into the sea and police sirens. Since she suffers from mental elephantiasis, she is “suffocating in a voluminous sea of” images. After a silence, she starts to sing softly, “‘Ashes to ashes’-/‘And dust to dust’-/ ‘If the women don’t get you’-/ ‘The liquor must’” (Pinter, *Plays 4* 425). The song and thus the title of the play suggest “the circularity of such genocide” (Plunka 326-27). The song is a part of the images of atrocities that haunt her memory, and it reflects the same despair at humanity.

In the denouement of the play, Rebecca has rejected Devlin as being synonymous with the voice of fascism. Like her former lover, he is associated with rape, and, more specifically, with the rape of the century. The implication is that Rebecca recognizes the Holocaust as being rooted in the authoritarian personality personified by Devlin, thus conflating the personal with the political.

In his Nobel Prize Lecture, Pinter expressed his ideas on the play and on Rebecca’s situation in the same poetical way as he used in the play itself:
*Ashes to Ashes*, on the other hand, seems to me to be taking place under water. A drowning woman, her hand reaching up through the waves, dropping down out of sight, reaching for others, but finding nobody there, either above or under the water, finding only shadows, reflections, floating; the woman a lost figure in a drowning landscape, a woman unable to escape the doom that seemed to belong only to others. But as they died, she must die too. (Pinter, “Art, Truth and Politics” 433)

Thus, Rebecca’s hand, desperately “reaching for others”, finds no one but the audience, who identify themselves with her and share the same guilt and responsibility for the atrocities recounted, as they also witnessed them through the same collective and cultural memory and, like Rebecca, experienced the same imaginative identification. In this sense, the play leaves the audience in the middle of this “drowning landscape” amidst “shadows” and “reflections” of many other reaching hands from the depths of history haunting their consciences.

These remembrances of a woman’s experience of the Holocaust, and her vehement denial of it, reverberate in Rebecca’s mind, and the mind of the audience. By the end of the play, Rebecca’s identity combines with the identity of all the victims she describes; she empathetically identifies with the ‘Other’ and thus becomes ‘other’, through her experience as both ‘innocent victim and guilty survivor’ (Merritt 82). The guilt Rebecca feels is the kind of ethical response Pinter suggests is lacking in citizens of democracy, and is criticized in the play: ‘Nothing has ever happened to me. Nothing has ever happened to any of my friends. I have never suffered’ (Pinter, *Plays 4* 413). Billington asserts that Rebecca’s response “implies that we all have within us the capacity for resistance and for imaginative
identification with the suffering of others. Therein […] lies the only hope for change” (383). However, perhaps it is not guilt that Rebecca claims, but responsibility.

Devlin tends to view history as external to himself, occupying a blinkered, empirical, male mind-set that perceives atrocities as never happening. His view of the individual as separated and segregated from others encourages an emotional distance between home and the world. However, Rebecca’s acknowledgement that it was ‘you [Devlin] who handed over the bundle’ ((Pinter, Plays 4 417) suggests that, despite not having actually experienced any atrocities herself, she recognizes that history is not random but a result of human agency, and for that we must take responsibility. Her refusal to evade responsibility embodies Pinter’s suggestion that it is only by taking on the implications of a ‘shared, social sense of subjectivity, that any kind of effective resistance may be envisaged’ (Aragay 292). We cannot ‘move away’ from that corpse in the cinema, or ‘start again’; we as human beings must face the dead and the horrors we have collectively inflicted, and claim responsibility for them.

Pinter’s treatment of memory has undergone great changes since his early plays. In the comedies of menace the emphasis was on action rather than ideas, the past had different values for different characters. Because it was not considered as a key to explain the present situation, the figures did not feel the need to explain themselves. In The Birthday Party and The Room, for example, the figures make a reference to their childhood memories as a kind of loss of innocence. So, for instance, Meg’s father has abandoned her, without taking her to Ireland as he had promised; or Stanley remembers the “fast one” that he received and buried all his hopes of making a career as a musician. In The Dumb Waiter, Gus makes an effort to think about the past, an attitude that will cost him dearly.
In the memory plays like *Landscape, Silence*, the past is interpreted differently by the figures. The past is not something that has happened to them, but something that exists between them and their immediate reality. In fact, the major change here is that the past is viewed not through what is shown but is expressed almost without intermediation from within.

Plays like *The Lover, The Collection, Old Times* and *No Man’s Land* reflect so many possible pasts, with varying interpretations, that the audience cannot possibly decide which version is more likely to have happened. What is at stake here is interpreting the past in the light of a present situation. The shift is from the traditional attitude expressed in terms of “the past holds the answers” to a more versatile one of “who holds the past, holds the present.” In that way, not only the subjective mind interferes in what is perceived, but also tries to present it in the most suitable light.

A different attitude in relation to the past is evidenced in the political plays. In these plays, the figures generally belong to two starkly different and opposite poles. On the one hand, the figure may occupy a position of power, which is either the cause or a consequence of a hubris. In this case, they are not concerned with either personal or collective memory. On the other hand, there are the victims of some absolutist power. For these, memory is a private haven with which they dream but which brings no comfort as they are cut out from society. These individuals, however, represent those who succumbed in their attempt to construct a collective memory.

*Ashes to Ashes* is a combination of these different conceptions of memory, while being more than simply a reworking of these past forms. In it Pinter combines the highly intimate perspective of the memory plays, in that memory in *Ashes to Ashes* is also evoked
through images that must be put together by the audience in order to form a coherent past. *Ashes to Ashes* has the concept of incorporating the literary tradition as an additional layer of meaning. In that way, the past is not depicted as an individual appropriation of the past but as a cultural one. Finally, *Ashes to Ashes* builds upon the concerns expressed in the political plays and invites a questioning over collective memory that has never reached that depth before especially because it explores collective responsibility and guilt in a perfect blend with psychological realism.