Chapter – IV

MEMORY PLAYS

For Harold Pinter “writing is discovery and journey,” a journey led that him to become a dissident thinker. Each decade has confirmed a continuing movement in his work. There was a move from East London (in many of his pre-1970 plays) to North London (his post-1970 plays). Though he started his career as an absurd dramatist, later he depended on his own memory dramaturgy that focuses on the past. In fact it is this change that made him a cultural icon in the 1970s.

Critics feel that the plays – *No Man’s Land* and *A Kind Alaska* – that Pinter wrote from the late sixties through the early eighties are ‘memory plays’ and they skillfully dramatize complex ambiguities, comic vagaries, and quicksand-like characteristics of ‘memory.’

Pinter’s *No Man’s Land* is a typical modernist play as it deals with the theme of alienation and also aimlessness of the people in the modern society. In Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot* the two tramps – Estragon and Vladimir – wait for Godot and go back when a boy appears and informs them that Godot will not come that day. Similarly in this play waiting becomes a torturous experience for the people.

*No Man’s Land* can be a strip of desolation vacated by humanity which finds existence more hospitable elsewhere. It can also be the territory separating two warring factions, potential spoils for the victorious. “This unique and haunting play is part mystery drama, part homage to the ghosts of the past and the fiction of memory.” The theme has meta-linguistic connotation. In this play women cannot
play any significant role. Surprisingly four men come together in a twisted family
that disdains love. Here the wandering Spooner, “dressed in a very old and shabby
suit, dark faded shirt, creased spotted tie,” boasts that he derives strength and
security from the fact that he has never been loved. He observes human relations
from afar. According to him

I don’t peep on sex. That’s gone forever. You follow me? ... and
when you can’t keep the proper distance between yourself and
others, ... the game’s not worth the candle.5

In No Man’s Land the hope for love has passed away for these men. Everyone in
this land is in a world of self-deception. Hirst claims that he shared a cottage with
the hostess who served tea on the lawn. Spooner encourages him to reveal more.
Hirst makes a chilling implication about marriage. “In the village church, the
beams are hung with garlands, in honour of young women of the parish, reputed to
have died virgin” (335). After a pause he continues “However the garlands are not
bestowed on maidens only but on all who die un-marry wearing the white flower
of a blameless life” (335). Hirst is silent with regard to his soured experiences in
his love.

The scene of action of Act I is a larger room in a house in North West
London. The play revolves around two ageing characters, Hirst and Spooner, who
meet on Hampstead Heath, and return home for a late night session of witty banter,
sinister power games, and the worship of alcohol. At first Hirst is seen pouring
whisky at the cabinet offering it to Spooner.

HIRST

As it is?
SPOONER

As it is, yes please, absolutely as it is. (321)

In British English the expression ‘as it is’ means straight but in American English it means neat. They drink sip, refill the glasses, move to their chairs and sit again. This can be very powerful on the stage as a detailed account of their drinks is given. During their conversation Spooner reveals that he is a poet and that he has known his illustrious literary host. He also tells him about his mutual acquaintances and relationships in the past. He even makes a few observations on his capacity as a poet and the parties he hosted to young poets who

Read me their verses. I comment, give them coffee, make no charge. Women are admitted, some of whom are also poets. Some are not. Some of the men are not ... young voices occasionally lifted in accompanied ballad. (334)

Towards the end of Act I Hirst’s keepers Foster, flashy and wolfish, a joker, a buccaneer, and Briggs, whippet-like, yet stolid and threatening, seek to fend off the self insinuating Spooner, leading Hirst out of the room and away from him. Foster taunts, after a black out:

Listen, listen, you know, what it is like when you are in a room with the light on and then suddenly the light goes out? I will show you. It is like this.

He turns the light out. (359)

In Act II, Hirst makes a feigned recognition of Spooner as an Oxbridge classmate in the 1930s. He even makes a mention of a woman, Emily, who “loved
the cottage. She loved the flowers. As did I. Narcissi, crocus, dog's tooth violets, fuchsia, jonquils, pinks, verbena" (374). The conversation regarding a series of reminiscences at Oxbridge leads both of them to a world of self deception. Suddenly the bubble bursts when Hirst undercuts “This is outrageous! Who are you? What are you doing in my house?” (382) This abrupt accusation makes Spooner of being an imposter. Hirst continues his embarrassing perorations against Spooner. “You are clearly a lout. The Charles Wetherby I knew was a gentleman. I see a figure reduced. I am sorry for you. Where is the moral ardour that sustained you once? Gone down the hatch” (382). There is comic vein in their conversation. After a while they comically comment thus: “Gone with the wind and down the hatch” (382). With the arrival of Briggs the play takes a new turn. Soon Hirst proclaims to change the subject. But in a confused state he asks “What have I said?” (395) This leads the characters to debate what Hirst’s phrase ‘for the last time’ precisely means. They tune with Spooner that they have gone to “no man’s land. Which never moves, which never changes, which never grows older, but which remains forever, icy and silent” (399). The play closes with Hirst’s utterances “I'll drink to that” and he drinks paralleling the opening words of Act I (As it comes), and the play ends, ambiguously, with a “SLOW FADE of lights” (399).

By the end of the play it is clear that Spooner is failing and the other three are closing ranks against him. But this is a different situation from the one with which the play began. Hirst may finally seek refuge in a no man’s land that excludes Spooner but it was Hirst who initially invited Spooner home. Hirst may remark with a distaste that he finds himself “in the last lap of a race ... I had long
forgotten to run" (338). This is an acknowledgement that Spooner has in fact managed to draw him out into the battlefield of contested and conceded terrain.

Critics feel that there is forward and backward movement in the play. The pose of independence, disinterestedness and disengagement defended in such heroic terms by Spooner turns out to register not a global commitment to fixity. It contrasts easily with a probable value of potential change.

The opening of the play reveals the playwright employing a memory game. It is shocking and alienating as it forces us to enter into a darkroom without knowing whom to expect there. The first line of the text lures the reader into a territory whose conventions, location, rules, time scale and habits are unknown. This is really a shocking experience for the reader as well as the audience. Hirst’s demand is an immediate throwing down of the gauntlet and the exact phrasing of Spooner’s rejoinder suggests a commitment on his part to tell the truth, the whole truth nothing but the truth. Hirst and Spooner attempt to control each other through a manipulation of the past, which is either unknowable or modifiable at will. The rich and the poor, the successful writer and the unsuccessful poet, the parched dipsomaniac and the thirsty beggar, fight for two hours, creating and destroying plausible and implausible backgrounds, inventing different versions of the past, in which they had met or not met; known or not known each other; seduced or not seduced their respective wives or women friends. The factual truth of these fanciful construction is demoted since what seems to master is the game of pressures and counter pressures. The recollection or invention of a second wife, of a different mistress, of a new experience, of a different life style, of different warriors are gambits in the social game. Autobiography becomes subservient to
the necessity of survival, to the requirements of polemics. The character has been married, or fought a war, or belonged to a club, or turned into a homosexual, or a voyeur, if this item of information can be used to humiliate the opponent.

The initial sparring encounter is cut shot by Hirst's drink-sodden departure on Briggs arm, but it starts up again the very movement that Hirst reappears in the Second Act, when he issues a fresh challenge to Spooner by addressing him, with apparent friendliness as Charles. It is tempting to say that Spooner decides to take up this challenge by tentatively assuming the new personae that have been offered him, but the play doesn't provide sufficient evidence to let us decide whether Spooner decided anything. "Temperamentally I can be what you wish" (393), says Spooner, the chameleon to Hirst. In fact he can modify not only his temperament but his name, identity, social position, past experience, residence, and war record, because, side by side with the battle of memory, the play records Spooner's need to settle down which makes him available to any moral, social, or sexual prostitution that will solve his problem. But the density and the pungency of the dialogue distract us from the drama of the two men (destitution and squalor for Spooner); for Hirst "the last lap of a race ... (he) had long forgotten to run" (338) and focuses on the brilliance of the verbal dual rather than on the revelations of anguish and despair. Thus, the memory games in the very opening of the play add charm to the entire text.

The theme of the play is about no man's land and a mysterious limbo between life and death, between a world of brutal reality and one of fluid uncertainty. While reviewing the play for *The Guardian*, Michael Billington observes:
The play is a masterly summation of all the themes that have long
obsessed Pinter; the fallibility of memory, the coexistence in one
man of brute strength and sensitivity, the ultimate unknowability of
women, the notion that all human contact is a battle between who
and whom ... it is in no sense a dry mannerist work but a living,
theatrical experience, full of rich comedy in which one speech
constantly undercuts another.6

In his 2002 discussion for Pinter at the BBC Broadcast on BBC 4 Television
Billington slightly revised his critical perspective. After admitting that No Man's
Land is ‘a haunting weird play’ that he himself can never fully understand, he
reviewed the genesis of the play’s first line (As it is), which came to Pinter in a taxi
cab while riding home from dinner out alone, and the thematic significance of the
titular metaphorical phrase No Man's Land and finds something of Pinter in both
of the main characters, each one a writer whom Pinter may have to some degree
feared becoming; one “with all the trappings of success but (who) is injured by
fame, wealth, comfort” (Hirst): The other, “the struggling marginal the pin striped
writer” who “doesn’t make it” (Spoon): Though when Billington put his theory
to Pinter, Pinter said (jokingly), “Well, yes, maybe; but I have never had two man
servants named Foster and Briggs.”7

The main point to be remembered is that each one in the play is haunted by
the past. Hirst is haunted by dreams and memories. His servants conspire to lead
him to oblivion. Spooner drags him towards the light of the living but his bid fails.
Thus the four characters are finally marooned in no man’s land which remains for
ever icy and silent. We may also see the echoes of T.S. Eliot. Spooner in his
effort to rescue Hirst from drowning, himself drowns in drinks. Spooner, at the end of the play, still remains in the house, a no man’s land, along with Hirst and the play ends in an impasse like that of The Caretaker. One is reminded of Eliot’s The Waste Land where the merchants die by water. Though the play puzzled the viewers there is an unanimous opinion in assessing the play as

One of the handful of indisputable modern classics that Pinter has written, and a piece that will haunt and tantalize the memory of all who see it.8

Hirst, a wealthy author in his sixties, is an alcoholic upper-class litterateur who lives in an upscale house presumed to be in Hampstead with Foster and Briggs, his purported amanuensis and man servant respectively. He seems to be rather senile as he calls others by different names. The entire play takes place inside his head. The remaining three characters are

Figments of his imagination conjured from the dreams, memories and faded photographs that form the core of his most significant speeches.9

His remarks often provoke exasperation and fear among the spectators. He confesses to being in “the last lap of race … I had long forgotten to run” (338). An eroded monument to pomposity, he is tended by two ruffians, thinly masked as servants. His house is the habitat of diminished life.

As a successful poet Hirst ventured out to a pub in Hampstead Heath and brought Spooner back home with him for a night cab, conversation, and possibly sex. He meets with his failure as Spooner doesn’t respond positively. In the evening’s funniest sequence he recalls the sexual peccadilloes of his youth with a
mounting hostility along with his old classmate Spooner. Their rivalry is exhibited when snobbish names like Arabella Hinscott, Charles Wetherby, and Stella Winstanley are plucked out of the past. Spooner accuses Hirst of having seduced his wife Emily. Soon Hirst pounces upon Spooner by saying “This is scandalous! How dare you?” (381) It is clear that Hirst is affected by senility.

Spooner pronounces himself a poet. As the liquor flows he explains that there are two kinds of people in the world: those who have the allure and the trappings of strengths and those who have the intelligence and perception to stick a needle to that posture of the soft flab underneath. He says that he is merely offering his services as a friend and secretary who can put a name to all the faded faces in Hirst’s photograph albums. Hirst treats him as an old classmate from Oxford. He provides enough comic relief to the audience particularly when he and Hirst recall the sexual experiences of their youth with a mounting hostility.

Spooner’s erratic behaviour pleases the audience by providing some comic relief. Towards the end of the play Spooner acknowledges no man’s land which never moves, which never changes, which never grows older but which remains forever icy and silent. He also repeats the statement made by Hirst at the beginning of the play. Thus, Spooner appears as a failed writer who seeks to inveigle himself into Hirst’s household. The very opening lines about the past memories particularly an exchange of words between Hirst and Spooner owe something to drawing comedy. Here is an example:

You’re quite looking remarkably well. Haven’t changed a bit. It’s squash I expect. Keeps you up to the mark. You were quite a dab
hand at Oxford, as I remember. Still at it? Wiseman. Sensible chap ... Did you have a good war? (372-373)

The dialogue with its comic stylization obtains primarily in the upper strata of society. Spooner says “a wit once entitled me a betwixt twig peeper. A most clumsy construction, I thought” (324). This is definitely a mannerism of Spooner. Guido Almansi and Simon Henderson rightly observe that “Spoonier is an outsider seeking to ingratiate himself into the apparent sanctuary of an established household.”

The two characters enter as a sort of brain machine, modifying the links connecting stored recollections and convenient memories. Their past is easily created anew from the imaginative perspective of the present. Thomas Adler has rightly paraphrased how in Pinter

The past is not only what you remember; it is also what you imagine you remember, convince yourself you remember, or pretend to remember.

Here the verbs remember, imagine, convince and pretend cover all possibilities: memory, oblivion, intentional and unintentional distortions, buried recollections, lies, and bloody lies.

A charge levelled against the art of characterization of Pinter in No Man's Land relates itself to the lack of harmony of the characters with the plot. Wardle gives an example of Briggs who announces that Foster will contradict his version of events rather than Foster simply providing the contradictory account that Briggs alludes to. Even Nightingale makes a comment on abstraction and contradiction in the structure of the play. According to him, the audience may feel in the character
of Spooner a part rather more memorable than the play that condenses it. There
seems to be similar comment made by Collins who argues that the point is true not
just of Spooner but of all the characters in the play. Spooner, Hirst, Briggs, and
Foster seem to Collins to be

Excessive to the plot's need of them for they create expectations
that they never really fulfill, and in some sense they stick out
beyond the edges of the play.\textsuperscript{12}

It has often been pointed out that one of the characteristic features of Pinter's plays
is a disharmony exemplified in the unbridgeable distance between characters who
have difficulty in understanding each other. Their mutual opacity tends to affect
the scope of consistency of character development and often produces a radical
disparity between earlier aspects of a character and those exhibited later when
circumstances change. This in turn, has led to the lack of continuity in Pinter's
plays particularly in relation to development of social relationships and individual
personalities. Stanley in \textit{The Birthday Party} is transformed from a talkative,
aggressive individual into a smartly dressed silent and passive one.

The dialogue in this 'memory play' looks trivial and incoherent but it is
serious, comical, at the same time adds thought to the play. After heavy drinking
Hirst slings off to bed. Briggs and Foster, the arrogant housekeepers of Hirst
ignore their master totally and they speak in crisp and confident statements.
Spooner hesitates to answer the questions of the arrogant Foster who signals his
higher status over the visitor: "What are you drinking? Christ I am thirsty. How
are you? I am parched" (341). The situation is serious and at the same time
comical. It is serious because the servants ignore their drunken master, comical
because they would like to cut the visitor to size. Soon, Briggs recognizes Spooner as a busboy at a pub. The rapid fire barrage of questions and answers by Briggs and Foster embarrasses Spooner who tries to be evasive by delivering a long monologue about his past.

Spooner regains his confidence through his uninterrupted speech and he conveniently invites the younger man to his house in the country. He tells the younger men that they would receive warm welcome from his wife and daughters. The inquisitive Foster asks if Spooner’s daughters would love him at first sight. “Quite possibly,” (347) Spooner laughs, calling them “remarkably gracious women” (348). Thus, the sparkling dialogue connotes the fact that love recedes as a painful memory and home becomes a refuge from family instead of its centre.

The play is a compromise between the linguistic idiosyncrasies of the characters and their personal drama built on their psychological emptiness. Spooner and Hirst are “linguistic shells made of words, words, words, but there is nothing inside, since a man with two lives has no life of his own; a man with several pasts has no past that belongs to him.”13

A sense of non-communication among human beings obtains in this play. The play opens with the monologue of Spooner who is invited by Hirst for a drink. Spooner makes an attempt to gain superiority in Hirst’s home replacing two other characters, Foster and Briggs, who are employed to protect Hirst from any outside encroachment. But Spooner doesn’t succeed. Words are spoken in plenty, but the communication is stalled. In Act II Spooner attempts once again to gain control over Hirst’s house, having come from outside. With Briggs and Foster, Hirst
remains secure against outside intrusion, which is capable of altering his life. His no man’s land remains icy and silent.

The dialogue shows that there is a total uncertainty as regards the events of life which we recall. Spooner and Hirst are not defined by their past history which they may distort, or their social status which they are liable to misrepresent. Their attitude is inconsistent and statements are contradictory, as shown by their conversation. Spooner says “Experience is a paltry thing” (326) because it varies from person to person. He asserts that retelling of experience is subject to distortion. “I myself can do any graph of experience you wish to suit your taste or mine” (326). A great indefiniteness encircles human life. When we listen to the conversation of a Pinter character we cannot be sure whether an event narrated by any of them has really taken place. The following dialogue between Hirst and Spooner illustrates this:

SPOONER
I am enraptured. Tell me more.

HIRST
There is no more.

SPOONER
Tell me then about your wife.

HIRST
What wife?

SPOONER
How beautiful she was ... that my wife (...) had everything. Eyes, a mouth hair, teeth, buttocks, breasts ... And legs.
HIRST

Which carried her away.

SPOONER

Carried who away? Yours or mine?

Pause

Is she here now, your wife? ...  

Pause

Was she ever here? Was she ever there in your cottage? ... I begin

to wonder whether you do in fact truly remember her, whether you

truly did love her? ... I have seriously questioned these

propositions and find them threadbare. (336-337)

Pinter's dialogue is realistic as it expresses the nature of a human being in a

particular situation. The characters speak language very much in each other's

presence in person but remain strangers. The dialogue shows a language that

communicates nothing. This is because of the audience in the theatre feels

loneliness, absurdity and meaninglessness. For instance, Spooner holds that the

only accurate expression must be essentially poetic since poetic expression cuts

through time and space to become transcendent. In the dark auditorium the

dialogue creates fear and insecurity.

The shifting perspectives on the past, the feeble control, the

characters exercise on reality, and the truth they construct by their

words point to a threatening world in which the desire for

verification, the need for full knowledge and genuine

communication is necessarily frustrated.¹⁴
Pinter’s realistic perception is made through his explorations of the complex relationship between language, reality and human consciousness. He demonstrates that words fail, expressions are inadequate and we are deceived in the normal communicating process. The following may be taken as an example:

HIRST

It’s a long time since we had a free man in this house.

SPOONER

We?

HIRST

I.

SPOONER

Is there another?

HIRST

Another what?

SPOONER

People. Person.

HIRST

What other.

SPOONER

There are two mugs on that shelf.

HIRST

The second is for you.

SPOONER

And the first.
HIRST

Would you like to use it? (327-328)

Here what Hirst speaks is a continual evasion. Though words are used in reply they do not communicate anything to Spooner and to the audience.

Some characters in the play use a more sophisticated kind of verbal skill. Spooner is known for this art. He says “I’m staunch friend of the arts, particularly the art of poetry, and a guide to the young. I keep open house. Young poets come to me. They read me their verses. I comment, give them coffee, make no charge. Women are admitted ... with the windows open to the garden, my wife pouring long glasses of squash, with ice, on a summer evening ... young bodies lying in the dying light, my wife moving through the shadows” (333-334). Here we are implicitly required by the words to concentrate not so much on Spooner but on the way he is talking to Hirst. The audience is expected to concentrate on the discrepancy between the words uttered by the character and the preoccupations which remain beneath the surface.

Another interesting feature that one notices in Pinter’s use of dialogue is that an intruder with his menacing dialogue aims at spoiling the bliss in a house. But two characters dismantle the threatening dominance with their eloquence. For example, Foster has come to know of Spooner’s menacing presence as a home breaker, an evil force, an intruder from outside world. So he wants Spooner not to try to drive wedge into a happy household.

SPOONER

Would you like me to make you some coffee?
BRIGGS

He thinks he is a waiter in Amsterdam.

FOSTER

Service non compris.

BRIGGS

Whereas he is a pintpot attendant in The Bull’s Head and a pisspot attendant as well. (354)

This passage reveals Spooner’s gradual defeat at the level of dialogue. Briggs attacks Spooner viciously with his verbal weapon.

However at the end of Act I, the menacing Spooner gets menaced. Foster quietly says, “Listen chummybum. We protect this gentleman against corruption, against men of craft, against men of evil, we could destroy you without a glance” (355). These words certainly have an implication of violence.

Words exchanged between Spooner and Hirst imply that their relationship is wrapped in ambiguity and mastery. They could be old acquaintances or they could have confused each other with someone else. Whether they are telling the truth or are lying is hard to determine. Nothing is said in particular. Everything is being suggested by a subtle dialogic design. Hirst and Spooner exchange words which underline uncertainty, creating around them an aura of mystery. At one point looking at Spooner, Hirst says “Who is this man? Do I know him?” (351)

At times as regards this mystery, the dialogue between Spooner and Hirst assumes a comic overtone. The way they start talking about a common acquaintance in the past gives the impression that they know each other for a long time.
SPOONER

Do you ever see Stella?

Pause

HIRST

Stella?

SPOONER

You can’t have forgotten.

HIRST

Stella who?

SPOONER

Stella Winstanley.

HIRST

Winstanley?

SPOONER

Bunty Winstanley’s sister.

HIRST

Oh! Bunty. No, I never see her. (376-377)

This passage reveals a surrealistic note on Pinter’s dramatic dialogue which strengthens a dream image.

Pinter experiments with minimal language for he has

A facility for starting with a particular speech style at a level of mimesis which Beckett found uncongenial and which Eliot could only achieve with strain.\textsuperscript{15}
He knows how he can make remarkable theatrical use of the fumblings and syntactical muddles of the disorderly day to day conversation. He implicitly wishes the audience to concentrate not so much on the individual character or events as on the pattern these characters follow in their conversation emphasizing an underlying feeling. He holds that people are not always ready or willing to reveal their mind or to allow others easily to peer into it. His convoluted language pattern also shows that people are not always capable of accurate revelation of their thought processes. His dramatic dialogue reveals that the speech we don’t hear under the existential predicament is indeed a necessary avoidance. Here Pinter withholds the clear line of definition and information for which audience is always eager. According to Pinter himself,

The desire for verification ... with regard to our own experience and the experience of others, is understandable but cannot always be satisfied.\textsuperscript{16}

The playwright through indirections, conveys his message in a veiled fashion. There is an ingenious mix of the comical and the disturbing which looks at the ultimate emptiness that can accompany old age and asks what is to be done when there is nothing left to do. Moreover, in the modern world, like the protagonists in the play, each one is in his own existential plight. Just as the creative writers in the play do not exactly understand what they write and why their creative energies do not spring up, in the modern world people do not know what they are doing and what exactly their goal is. In a way No Man’s Land becomes T.S. Eliot’s The Waste Land where people lead an aimless, obscene, and
absurdist life. Benedict Nightingale makes the following account of the message of the play.

If you know your Pinter the underlying message is clear; someone is foolishly getting into a situation that he won’t be able to understand, handle or escape.17

Though the play doesn’t lend itself to a full understanding, it turns out to be poetic and indisputably a modern classic. There is a fusion of reality and dream which add beauty to the play. There is a philosophical question of an intruder who threatens the placid life of others. There is a set pattern as one doesn’t understand why intruders always spread the ripples of hysteria in the placid lives of others. Asked about the exact summary of the play, Pinter commented thus:

I can sum up none of my plays. I can describe none of them, except to say; that is what happened. That is what they did. That is what they did.18

A word about the title of the play may go well here. It is a kind of waste land into which individuals may venture but in which no one can establish a sense of belongingness and within which no communities can establish themselves or flourish. Here appears to be a world of unchangingly prosaic limitations: “No Man’s Land ... does not move ... or change ... or grow old ... remains ... forever ... icy ... silent” (340). At the close of the play Spooner repeats with small variations Hirst’s words about no man’s land, and the title, the repetition, and the emphasis provided by Spooner’s final words all serve to give the image special prominence in the play. The question is whether it is then right to regard this image as the governing motif that characterizes the whole action of the play and
which in some sense summarizes the implications of the play’s diversity of incident and discontinuity of action. It is this procedure that leads Jones to conclude that the play is primarily about stasis in the sense of ‘total, final immobility.’ He argues that

Spooner effects no change in the play, that there is no development or alteration of character or situation, that all the play’s images convey a single impression, and that the chief linguistic device of the play is one of repetition.\(^{19}\)

Though such an argument seems quite compatible with the larger stances of disengagement that the characters adopt, it seems less compatible with the rapid changes that characterize their interaction from moment to moment.

While discussing the title of the play we are reminded of certain images that recur in the play. What is immediately evident is the remarkable diversity of the images invoked in the dialogue and also the tendency of several of them to depict not fixity but motion. Briggs presents an elaborate image of the intricate perils awaiting anyone foolish enough to drive into the one way system surrounding Bolsover Street. Foster describes at point a man walking with two umbrellas in the Australian outback, and, at another, a naked beggar somewhere out East making a coin vanish as it flies through the air. Spooner’s anecdotes likewise invoke in pictorial terms events that have lodged in his mind. These include his encounter with the Hungarian émigré who purportedly changed Spooner’s life, the episode in which his mother responded so malevolently to her son, the summer evening gatherings at a country cottage where Spooner and his wife entertained young poets, and a moment in Amsterdam when a canal, a waiter,
a child, a fisherman, two lovers, and a whistling observer came briefly into evocative juxtaposition.

Hirst makes his own contribution to the proliferation of the images with recollections of a ceremony involving garlands in a village church, of a dream in which someone may be drowning in a waterfall, or a lake, of cricketers in action at Lords' just before the war, of Spooner's golden athletic movement breasting the tap at Oxford, of an affair with Spooner's wife Emily, and of a photograph album consisting of further evocative images of lives and times gone by. These are but a few of the images so graphically described in the play, and it is difficult indeed to try to convert their diversity into repetition or to regard them all as variants upon a single theme suggested by the play's title.

The play is riddled with images and an extensive use of them. They are deployed to strategic effect by all the characters who seek to keep each other off balance. When Foster tries to make it clear to Spooner that it doesn't belong to Hirst's home and has no claims on his friendship he resorts to a string of local images to make his point.

FOSTER

Listen. Keep it tidy. You follow? You've just laid your hands on a rich and powerful man. It's not what you're used to, scout. How can I make it clear? This is another class. It's another realm of operation. It's a world of silk. It's a world of organdie. It's a world of flower arrangements. It's a world of eighteenth century cookery books. It's nothing to do with toffee apples and a packet of
Similarly Hirst's images of the seduction of Spooner's wife and Spooner's images of his own remarkable capacities and experiences are often moves in the characteristic Pinter activity of social manipulation. But some of the images have a poignancy that exceeds, without excluding, the strategic activity of combat and conquest. These various uses of a remarkable variety of images serve not only to challenge the primacy of the play's title image but also the most obvious implications of the posture of disengagement all of the characters adopt. This appearance of disengagement that gives the play its atmosphere of abstraction can easily reinforce convictions that no significant changes occur in the play in spite of its variety of incident. But the image of disengagement is an image as strategically employed as all the others, one designed to disguise visually not only what the characters are attempting to achieve verbally but the fact they are actually trying to achieve anything at all.

A word about conflict in the play may go well here.

The apparent conflict between the global posture of disengagement and local actuality of intricate engagement is in fact, a contrast between two different attitudes towards change exhibited in two different speeds of change.20

The reformulation of a key contrast in the play is essential if we are to find a way of reconciling not only the global and the local in the action but also the repeated conflicts between one local detail and the next. This reformulation helps us understand the nature of the conflict between the two major characters. Their
richly various strategies of interaction register not only an initial uncertainty but also a growing disagreement about the value of various changes the quixotic Spooner seeks to introduce. Hirst, who invited Spooner in, speaks of the fear of being alone but also of the fear of being controlled by someone else. His initial response to Spooner is to incline more toward the former than the latter, but Spooner’s erratic behaviour eventually serves to reverse the balance between his competing inclinations. Spooner while more than ready to pose as someone without goals or expectations, is always much more deeply entangled in the local possibilities whose long term consequences is at pains publicly to dismiss. In spite of his deceptive protestations he reveals a readiness to play out the possibilities that this or any other situation prevails, and in this respect he seems very different from Hirst who appears to be more ready to contemplate than to initiate change. Although Spooner recognizes that the potential value changes in a constantly changing world, he pursues possibilities with a tenacity that registers the persistence of hope in the face of contradictory experience. His is not a cynical game playing. If life consists of playing out the hand that has been dealt, Spooner takes pride in playing it with imagination, elegance and flair. “Temperamentally” claims Spooner, while announcing his readiness to serve as Hirst’s friend, literary agent, secretary, companion, servant, or cook, “I can be what you wish” (393). He consistently displays a readiness to change along with the change that throws into relief Hirst’s unwillingness to do likewise.

Pinter employs certain visual images to make his play very powerful on the stage. The images in this play are repeatedly drawn from the past as a means of influencing the present, and they often depict a particular kind of action. Indeed what gives them their enigmatic power is the characteristic form of action they
display. Instead of being completed, the actions are regularly arrested at some key point in their evolution. What these images often suggest is that the actions are interrupted rather than completed processes whose origins and consequences remain elusive. Furthermore, in the context of their recollection they appear to function again in ways they functioned previously, by promising more than they are finally able to deliver. The present action repeatedly displays characters initiating actions that are unable or unwilling to complete, and many of the images they invoke display similarly interrupted action in the past. In particular, the images in Hirst's much described, but never produced, photograph album tend to depict instances of action which have a narrative potential that is prematurely terminated. What the album so described displays and exemplifies is the irreducible variety of an aggregation of images that never fulfill their promise to achieve what Hirst at times seems to want them to achieve, something larger than a mere local significance. This can be illustrated from Hirst's denial of the possibility of living a life in terms suggested by one or all of the images in the album that registers the persistence of the very expectation he rejects.

Hirst's intermittent efforts to attribute a larger significance to the local images are unsuccessful. His attempts to make life exemplify in the album something not only unified and permanent but potentially all encompassing founders as the voice of experience and that of the voice of youth.

She looked up. I was staggered. I had never seen anything so beautiful. That is all poison. We can't be expected to live like that.

(352)
Hirst’s uncertainty about the status of the images is registered in the inconsistent stance he takes towards them. Indeed his description of the images in the album is as discontinuous as the images the album is said to contain. The album so described remains a record of local events that fail to cohere into something larger, an aggregate of promising local images that fail to provide individually or collectively a global model. But what the album fails to supply to Hirst’s changing needs it nevertheless supplies to the play – an analogous text whose structure guides us toward an understanding of the structure of Pinter’s text and the functions of images within it.

The play’s images are also displayed in several places outside of the album. They include evocative and enigmatic images like the Hungarian émigré, the eastern beggar, the Australian in the outback, the cricketers at Lord’s just before the war, the young poets on the lawn, and the athlete breasting the tape suggest what the remarkable faces in Hirst’s album and the beautiful young woman who looked up at him also suggest – interrupted narratives and arrested actions.

In the posture of apparent disengagement adopted by Hirst and Spooner, one sees a larger skepticism that is at odds with local expectations. This serves to exhibit in the current action a discontinuity analogous to that displayed in the narrative images. Such discontinuity is the recurring experience of characters whose present lives and previous experience are made up of local episodes that fail to fulfill their initial promise. It is precisely this aspect of experience that the play seeks to capture and explore. The repeatedly arrested motion of the action and the characteristically arrested motion of the images exemplify Pinter’s interest in portraying the discontinuous aspects of lived experience.
Throughout the play we witness the painful interaction of two men of advanced years whose experience of life is that what is gained locally is what is lost locally, whether it be friendship, love, or youthful achievement. But in those earlier episodes that provide the focus of discussion we encounter images that exemplify the capacity of youth to believe in what the older characters can be only intermittently believe in the possibility that current achievements might have lasting consequences. The optimistic young faces, the moments of athletic success, the achievement of serenity, and the display of beautiful proportion all provide the context for a current interaction constantly revived by the potential of local moments to have lasting effects. The interaction between Hirst and Spooner is renewed by the reminders. The images provide local and potentially lasting belief, but the interaction is disrupted by the other reminder. That disruption is made more powerful by the defensive postures of disengagement that the characters adopt and by their readiness to convert the images of potential intimacy into weapons of conquest and destruction.

To conclude, we may say that the play depicts the perspective of the old age and also the condition of helplessness of modern human beings. The recollections of the protagonist depict a persisting tension between social intimacy and social distance, between revived hope and recurring fear. The title *No Man's Land* is the destination toward which the action moves but it is not the culmination of the action nor is it the image that governs either the world of the play or the world of play's conclusion. These manifestations of mode of existence in which the potential of change and the purposeless of change are locked in persisting conflict, recur in Pinter's another powerful play *A Kind of Alaska.*
Just as *No Man's Land* recalls the events of the past, Pinter's *A Kind of Alaska* also deals with

Recollection of times lost; the past as another country; the perception of getting old; constructing the past; and facing up to the reality of the present.

The play's title was also reminiscent of *No Man's Land* that remains forever 'icy and silent.' The play was inspired by Oliver Sacks' book *Awakenings* which Pinter had read on its publication in 1973. This is not an adaptation of *Awakenings* but a stimulus for an independent work. According to Billington,

It is radically different from all Pinter's other stage plays in that it stems from Oliver Sacks' *Awakenings*: a compassionate, medically detailed account of a group of twenty patients who were victims of an epidemic illness – sleeping sickness – which spread through Europe and the rest of the world in the winter of 1916-1917.

In the very introduction of the play Pinter says thus:

Of the survivors some escaped almost unscathed but the majority moved into states of deepening illness. The worst affected sank into singular states of 'sleep' – conscious of their surroundings but motionless, sleepless, and without hope or will, confined to asylums or other institutions. Fifty years later, with the development of the remarkable drug L-DOPA they erupted into life once more.

Though the play was influenced by Sacks' book, the creative process was astonishingly similar to that with words drawn directly from life; an image, an idea
took root in Pinter’s consciousness before finding dramatic expression. And when it came to the actual writing, the image developed according to its own internal logic. In the 1990s revised edition of *Awakenings* Sacks summarizes Pinter’s method of writing:

> Early in 1982 I received a packet from London containing a letter from Pinter and the manuscript of a new play, *A Kind of Alaska*, which he said had been inspired by *Awakenings*. In his letter Pinter said that he had read *Awakenings* when it had originally come out in 1973 and had been deeply moved; but that he had then forgotten it and that it had stayed 'forgotten' until it suddenly came back to him years later. Pinter had awoken, he said, one morning the previous summer, with the first image of the play – the patient awakening – and the first words of the play (something is happening) clear and pressing in his mind; and the play had then 'written itself' in the days and weeks that followed.25

It is interesting to note how the creative process of Pinter presents the truth and nothing but the truth. The memory of Sacks’ book is secreted in Pinter’s consciousness and exists in a frozen state until released almost a decade later. No one would claim for a moment that artists suffer in the same way as the tragic victims of sleeping sickness, but may be one reason why Pinter empathises so strongly with Deborah in the play – who awakes at the age of 45 after a twenty-nine year sleep – that as a writer he understands what it is like to live in a half-world between furious bursts of activity.
There are obvious reasons why Pinter’s imagination should have been sparked by the subject: it triggers all kinds of reflections on the strange no man’s land between the conscious and unconscious worlds, and the peculiar nature of human memory in which past events retain their morning freshness. But what makes the play so moving is that Pinter subordinates himself to the material and yet allows it to express his own preoccupations. Sacks, as an acute literary critic and neurologist, seized on that very point when he first read Pinter’s manuscript. Margie Kohl, a colleague of New York’s Mount Carmel Hospital to whom he showed the play, remarked, ‘It is not like Pinter. It is just like the truth.’ But Pinter, Sacks replied, is just like the truth. In the words of Sacks

\[\text{I felt Pinter had somehow perceived more than I had written, had penetrated, divined, inexplicably into the heart of the matter, the inmost truth. Despite what Margie said, it was a very Pinterish play: his mind, his language everywhere apparent – no one but Pinter could have written the play. And then again, paradoxically, it was in another sense not really Pinteresque, for the play was utterly transparent and transcendent; the author was there, invisibly, behind it, above it but he had refined himself out of existence.}\]

In the winter of 1916-17 there spread over Europe, and subsequently over the rest of the world, an extraordinary epidemic illness which presented itself in innumerable forms – as delirium, mania, trances, coma, sleep, insomnia, restlessness, and states of parkinsonism. It was eventually identified by the great physician Constantin von Economo and named by him \textit{encephalitis lethargica} or sleeping sickness. Over the next ten years almost five million people fell victim to
the disease of whom more than a third died. Of the survivors some escaped almost unscathed, but the majority moved into states of deepening illness. Five years later with the development of the remarkable drug L-DOPA, they erupted into life once more.

Sacks' *Awakenings* tells the true story of a doctor who discovers beneficial effects of the then new drug L-DOPA. He applied it on catatonic patients who survived the 1917-1928 epidemic of *encephalitis lethargica*. Leonard Lowe and the rest of the patients were awakened after decades of catatonic state and have to deal with a new life in a new time. Pinter ignored the book as a whole and based his play very loosely on Sacks record of one patient, Rose R. Rose R, was the youngest child of a large, wealthy, talented New York family and was endowed with a passion for parties, social life and aeroplanes. She was struck down by *encephalitis lethargica* in 1926 and had slipped into a permanent trance or stupor for forty three long years. In 1969 Sacks started her on a course of L-DOPA and recorded her astonishing awakening: her songs, her jokes, her reference to figures current in the mid 1920s, her obsolete mannerisms and turns of speech, her incontinent nostalgia. She seemed, in fact, never to have moved on from the past. But although deblocked for a few days, she eventually returned to something like her former state of entrancement; the drug produced some reduction of her rigidity but she regressed to the state of Sleeping Beauty whose awakening was unbearable to her and 'who will never be woken again.' But Pinter in his play changed the name of Rose R to Deborah and transferred the location from New York in 1960s to England in the present. In other words, he was not concerned with the historical and medical details or with the wider event, but with the image of a woman in a
white bed who must come to an accommodation with her past. According to Sacks,

It was Pinter’s own awakening one morning in the summer of 1981 with the clear image of a patient waking up and the words “something is happening” in his mind that had provoked him to write the play.²⁷

The scene of action is London. Deborah is seen in a white bed. “Mid forties. She sits up against high banked pillows, stares ahead” (153). Hornby, a man in a dark suit, sits at the table and encourages her. The woman’s gaze passes over the doctor but she stares ahead still. Deborah feels that something is happening to her. Immediately the doctor asks her whether she can recognize him at all. On her awakening Deborah feels that she is still sixteen. It seems that she has been suspended between life and death, as Hornby, her doctor, tells her, “a kind of Alaska” (184). When told that she has been asleep for twenty nine years she is unable to apply this information to her physical self, still believing that she is sixteen and has all her life before her. But the doctor tells her thus:

You have been asleep for a very long time. You are older, although you do not know that. You are still young, but older. (155)

It is paradoxical to note that Deborah feels that she is young though she is old in fact.

Pinter brings out a few changes in his play as he knows full well that he is writing drama but not a case history. He changes the specific circumstances of Ms R.’s case. His heroine Deborah is English well-to-do, not American. The process of awakening, spread over the course of a month in Sacks’ diary, is condensed into
a fifty minute play. And the heroine's relapse into trance like torpor is not reproduced. But Pinter seizes on a crucial point in Sacks' record that Ms R. feels her 'past' as present and that she has never felt 'past' for her. Pinter makes this the fulcrum of his play, contrasting the inner subjective reality of Deborah's remembered world with the outer objective reality of the doctor Hornby who has lovingly tended her for years and that her sister Pauline, Hornby's wife. Both worlds, Pinter implies, are equally valid; the tragedy is that they can never connect each other. He also suggests with tact and quite sympathy, that in a case of this kind the watchers suffer more than the watched. But Pinter's achievement is to turn Deborah's awakening into a metaphor for a sensation most of us experience at some time when even those closest to us – family, friends, and lovers – become figures in a dream.

The subject matter of the play lends itself to Pinter's characteristic concern with the human propensity for consciously constructing the past, as opposed to reporting facts. Initially Deborah's sister Pauline lies about the passage of time, during which her parents and another sister have died, by telling Deborah that they are on a cruise. Later Hornby offers Deborah another version of the past in which her mother is dead and her father is blind and is being looked after by her sister Estelle. This leads to a struggle for possession of the past between Deborah and Pauline. Faced with the physical evidence of Pauline's age, Deborah is forced to admit that she is now a woman, that she is not the age she feels inside but that displayed by her body. Nevertheless, she still clings to the remembered past "Daddy is kind and so is Mummy. We all have breakfast together every morning in the kitchen. What is happening?" (170) She also recalls the encouragement she received from Pauline and says
But at the end of dinner, we were all laughing and talking, and Daddy was making jokes and making us laugh. And you said you couldn’t see him properly because of the flowers in the middle of the table where you had put them … Mummy was laughing and even Estelle was laughing. (180)

The play ends as Deborah reviews information selected from what she remembers and has been told, information that doesn’t necessarily represent the truth. “She is a widow. She doesn’t go to her ballet classes anymore. Mummy and Daddy and Estelle on a world cruise. They have stopped off in Bangkok. It will be my birthday soon” (190). Satisfied with this accommodation with the present, she concludes that, “I think I have the matter in proportion” (190).

When Pinter sent the manuscript of the play in 1982 Sacks acknowledged that the dramatist “had somehow perceived more than I had written, had penetrated, divined, inexplicably into the heart of the matter, the inmost truth.”28 He felt that “Pinter had given me as much as I gave him: I had given him a reality – and he had given me one back.”29 Indeed A Kind of Alaska, from the simple image of someone waking up, effectively reaches beyond its documentary course to encompass universal concerns. It stands as a metaphor for the common human experience of feeling psychologically like one did in one’s youth while exhibiting the external signs of the age. It also encompasses the consciousness common in late middle age, that a life that could have been employed more profitably had passed one by.

A word about the comparison between Pinter’s play and “Sleeping Beauty”30 may go well here. Pinter’s ‘sleeping beauty’ is called Deborah; the part
of "prince charming" is played by Hornby, the doctor. Deborah's sister Pauline, who has no counterpart in the fairy tale completes the cast. As we gather from the foreword to the play we may notice a fictional quality in it viz. the many forms of the illness, the claim that it cost millions of people their lives, the peculiar name of the physician, Constantin von Economo and the miraculous drug L-DOPA seem to owe their existence to the imagination of the author. A closer investigation reveals, however, that Pinter is remaining true to the facts. Everything he claims with reference to Sacks is accurate. What seems to have fascinated him is that the facts to be represented fall already into the pattern of a fantastic story, and that there was no need to invent something additional. All he had to do was to bring reality into a shape that could be used for dramatic purposes.

Sacks in his work discusses the patients who went through three successful stages: first there was the moment of their awakening; secondly, after some weeks their awakening was followed by a crisis during which the symptoms of their illness grew markedly; thirdly, to overcome this crisis, they entered a phase of accommodation during which they learned to live with their disease and control its more negative effects. What can be shown is that Deborah's return to the world also has three stages, only that Pinter has compressed what in reality takes weeks and months, into just a few minutes. Thus, Pinter's play is not a case study but rather a skillfully structured play written for aesthetic purposes. Pinter obviously realized that the moment of awakening to the world after years and years of trance or semi-consciousness would have an enormous dramatic quality and be particularly suitable for being turned into a play. Consequently what interests us in *A Kind of Alaska* is the process of awakening itself and the patient's reencounter with reality. Also we are curious to know in what regions the patient's mind has
travelled, and what feelings and memories are connected with her state. The form of Pinter’s play is expressive of this double interest. The action taking place in the present has a progressive and teleological structure. After her awakening, Deborah is confronted with reality. What follows is a short moment of crisis. Having overcome this crisis Deborah enters the phase of accommodation, during which she begins to adjust to the new situation.

We may comment on the character’s memories that have the function of embedding the past into the present. Pauline’s and Hornby’s memories basically have expositional functions. They elucidate Deborah’s fate and the history of her family, forming a narrative context that gives meaning to the past and to the present for both Deborah and the audience. Deborah’s memories are lyrical in character. Her childhood memories serve to define herself, her identity, in a subjective way. The memories connected with her illness conjure up the phantasmagoric ‘no man’s land’ Alaska, in which her consciousness has travelled in the meantime.

It is pertinent to discuss the interaction of the characters in the play. In fact the text acquires its dramatic character through a discrepancy of awareness between Hornby and Pauline on the one hand, and the patient Deborah on the other, through the juxtaposition of two conflicting interpretations of reality, a subjective one and an objective one. The audience is presented with two mutually exclusive views, but from the beginning it is obvious that Deborah’s physical appearance which indicates her age, proves her wrong, whereas it supports Hornby’s and Pauline’s interpretation of reality.
The playwright employs the technique of contrast to make his play theatrically vital. The contrast between Deborah's world and that of Hornby and Pauline is established partly through language: her slightly dated breathless upper class slang (Have you had your way with me?) has total difference to their cool, spare, unadorned tone. Even a change of tense conveys an impression of seismic emotional shock. Deborah chatters brightly about the future and in particular about the marital prospects of her other sister. At one point she asks:

"Is Estelle going to marry that boy from Townly Street? The ginger boy? Pauline says he's got nothing between his ears." (158)

The response is quietly devastating:

HORNBY

She didn't marry him.

DEBORAH

Didn't?

Pause.

It would be a great mistake. It would ruin her life.

HORNBY

She didn't marry him.

Silence.31

In that short exchange and in the decisive shift from Deborah's future conditional tense to Hornby's emphatic past, one can sense her bewilderment and disorientation. It is as if she is still trying to get her mind round Hornby's denial of a possibility that, to her, remains unresolved. Every word of Pinter's dialogue is exactly chosen and contributes to both the pathos and the oblique humour of the
situation. Deborah’s confrontation, for instance, with her younger sister Pauline is short through with awkwardness and comic confusion, not least because the younger sister is now a middle-aged woman. “Well, you have changed,” says Deborah. “A great deal. You’ve aged ... substantially. What happened to you?” (178). The perfect word ‘substantially’ implies that this saddened grey-haired woman who claims to be Deborah’s sister has altered not only in form but also in substance: she is a different kind of person to the lively romping sister Deborah remembers.

In this ‘memory play’ one is moved by the sense of two different realities coming into collusion. People are moved by the tactful spareness of Pinter’s language. We are also equally moved by the waste of Deborah’s youthful vitality and love of life and by the emotional cost to those who have tended her. “Your sister Pauline,” says Hornby “was twelve when you were left for dead. When she was twenty I married her. She is a widow. I have lived with you” (185). In those few simple phrases one notices that three lives have been destroyed; not just Deborah’s, but also Hornby’s through his monastic devotion, and Pauline’s through her wounded neglect. But the final tragedy is that even though Deborah experiences this brief awakening, she retreats into a confused state in which she accepts Pauline’s falsified version of their parents’ fate rather than Hornby’s revelation of the exact truth. Her last words as she looks first at Pauline and then at Hornby, are:

She is a widow. She doesn’t go to ballet classes anymore. Mummy and Daddy and Estelle are on a world cruise. They’ve stopped off
in Bangkok. It’ll be my birthday soon. I think I have the matter in proportion.

*Pause.*

Thank you.\(^{32}\)

But the words acquire a subversive irony because proportion is one thing Deborah can never possess; but the very nature of things, she can never distinguish between the no man’s land in which she has lived for so long and the empirical reality of Hornby’s world.

One sees the element of paradox in the play. The paradox is in performance one is uplifted more by the spectacle of Deborah’s resurrection than down-caste by thoughts of her future presumed incarcination. On the stage Deborah’s struggle to walk arms extended like a condor’s wings created a sense of recollected gaiety. It also created a feeling of being reborn superbly.

Through its aesthetic skill, intuitive understanding and human compassion the play hauntingly conveyed what Lear called the mystery of things.\(^{33}\)

The theme of the play proceeds from the particular to the universal. Pinter’s rare admission of source material has prompted many critics to argue that the situation of reluctant awakening provided him with perfect opportunity to develop his usual universal themes such as the unreliability of memory, the problematic nature of communication and the uncertain status of human existence and identity.

Admittedly the play raises these issues, but to sacrifice the centrality of the female character in order to support universal considerations
not only ignores the important choice Pinter made when creating the play - Sacks' study after all contains male patients as well as female. But it also ignores the political content of the play. Pinter tells us that the individual consciousness is nothing and nowhere without the stimulus of external reality, without the social relationships that fill that world with meaning and colour.  

There is some improbability in the plot of the play. It leads us to believe that Hornby’s desire to educate and treat Deborah is altruistically motivated. As a good doctor, he has remained with her even after her family left. The playwright dispels Hornby's altruism and scientific objectivity when Hornby himself admits that he has married Deborah’s sister Pauline, then abandoned her to remain with Deborah. While these admissions may be made in order to assure Deborah that she has been loved and taken care of during her illness, it is difficult not to question the motives of a man who has taken a comatose woman as a love object.

The play can be analysed in terms of psychoanalysis. The point is that the female is deceased, hysterical, while the doctor, the subject supposed to know, has the answers. According to Helena Cixous “One is reminded of Grimm Brothers’ "Sleeping Beauty." Through the character of psychoanalytic prince Charming we have a man who will finally order woman, ‘set her to rights,’ by teaching her that without a man she could 'misrecognize'. He will teach her the Law of the Father. Something of the order of: “without me, without me – the Absolute – Father (the father is always that much more absolute the more he is improbable, dubious) – without me you wouldn’t exist, I will show you.”
Lacanian thought may also be incorporated into the story of the play. The situation provides Hornby with the perfect mirror; Deborah is flat and silent. There is nothing to challenge his fantasy of autonomy. Why does Hornby awaken Deborah, this perfect mirror? As Lacan and others have noted, masculine desire shifts and the mirror image is characterized by both jubilation and despair. In effect Hornby wants more; his desire is never satisfied. Rather than examining himself, he turns to Deborah. The "lovely injection" he administers to Deborah is highly charged sexually. It is not just a kiss that awakens Deborah but penetration. Hornby's fluid establishes a more intimate contact with his sleeping beauty. Furthermore, Hornby, who has remained with Deborah throughout her life, possesses her narrative, or so he thinks. He has nothing to fear from this awakened woman, since he possesses the story of her existence. Even his first words to her are a demand for her silence.

Deborah will not remain silent, and she senses that there is something wrong with Hornby's explanations. "I've obviously committed a criminal offense and am now in prison. I'm quite prepared to face up to the facts. But what offence? I can't imagine what offence it could be. I mean one thing that would bring ... such a terrible sentence" (166). As Hornby repeatedly tells her, "She has been asleep." Deborah, however, cannot understand the error in that: "Why do you blame me? I was simply obeying the law of the body" (163). In a patriarchal system that has denied women access to their bodies, particularly through the medical profession, such obedience cannot be tolerated.

Throughout history, the female body has symbolized nothing but chaos and evil, uncontrollable sexual desire. The medical history of
hysteria, for example, blames ‘a wandering womb’ for all female problems, which are solved by a socially, sexually, emotionally dominant husband. \(^{37}\)

By obeying the law of body, Deborah has committed a crime, and now she must be educated in the law of Hornby, the law of the father, the law of patriarchy.

In this play Deborah’s explanations for her condition casts her in a passive role. She thinks that she has been kidnapped and even raped. On the one hand her fantasies illustrate the point at which her female development stopped and from Hornby’s viewpoint, these narratives are insufficient, not right. Deborah’s stories appear deceased, while Hornby’s appear truthful, logical and scientific. On the other hand Deborah’s narratives, although limited, silence Hornby and she revels in her voice, thereby challenging the acquiescent role of women. Further, through the tale-telling process, not Hornby’s direction, Deborah concludes that the narratives are inadequate but perhaps for a different region than Hornby. During one fantasy, she indicates that the passive position of women in these stories separates her from her own desire: “My lust was my own. I kept it by me. You took it from me” (161). She concludes saying that she sounds childish and out of tune. Through this juxtaposition, the play undercuts the usefulness of such explanations as Deborah’s situation because they acquire that Deborah deny her desire and remain passive in the presence of a swash buckling male. In this way the play offers two interpretations of a text, and although both readers come to similar conclusions, the motives underlying their reading process constitute the gender conflict that underpins the play. Hornby dismisses the value of the narratives because they complicate his desire to control Deborah’s identity, while
Deborah's attitude toward these narratives shifts. She realizes that the stories that shape her understanding of herself are insufficient because they too deny her identity.

Hornby's treatment of Pauline solidifies his role as a menacing presence in the play. Pauline doesn't fulfill his expectations and Hornby is clearly irritated when she enters the room without gaining his permission. Later Pauline asks him what she should say. He asserts she should tell both "lies and truth" (177). He is an arbiter of value, power, and language in this situation. Deborah focuses on Pauline as a female object. She is shocked that Pauline has breasts and suddenly discovers her own. When both Pauline and Hornby tell her that she is a woman she retreats to her bed in terror. The implications of this response are difficult to miss: a forty-five year old virgin, a woman who has slept throughout her reproductive years, suddenly discovers her own femininity. Her reaction is not one of joy but of terror. Given the manner in which Hornby treats Pauline, such a retreat is justified. There are no rewards for women in this patriarchal society.

By positioning Deborah's description of her somnambulant state at the end of the play, Pinter not only demonstrates that Deborah has in fact suffered, but he also forces a comparison between Deborah's awakened and sleeping states. Deborah tells that she has been imprisoned in an endless hall of mirrors, a prisoner of reflection. Throughout the play, the education that is given to Deborah asks herself to abandon her narratives and her identity in order to accept her womanliness. Pinter may be asking us to note that the alternative Hornby offers Deborah is just a new kind of Alaska. Mirrors entombed her during her sleep, and female stereotypes threatened to entomb her now.
The play concludes with Deborah coming to terms with her new role and preparing for a birthday party. One of the important issues the play raises is the quality of Deborah’s life and also her lost memory. In other awakening stories, life is usually better after the period of sleep. In ‘Sleeping Beauty,’ Bruno Bettelheim argues thus: “While many fairy tales stress great deeds the heroes must perform to become themselves, the Sleeping Beauty emphasizes the long, quiet concentration on one self that is also needed. During the months before the first menstruation and often also for sometime immediately following it, girls are passive, seem sleepy, and withdraw into themselves. While no equally noticeable state heralds the coming of sexual maturity in boys, many of them experience a period of lassitude and of turning inward during puberty which equals the female experience ... In major life changes such as adolescence, for successful growth opportunities both active and quiescent periods are needed” (225).

Deborah’s quiet period however has not been restful. As she tells Pauline and Hornby, it was a kind of torture. As female spectacle, the object of the male look, Deborah has suffered. Her awakening, moreover doesn’t appear much better – there is no handsome prince or even a happy family to welcome her into the world. Instead she is told lies and truths, promised a pathetic birthday party, given numerous rules for behaviour.

A word about Oliver Sacks’ young women Rose R. and Pinter’s Deborah may be helpful for better understanding of the characters. Like Deborah, Rose R. was a promising, young intelligent woman when the illness struck her. For forty three years she was in a trance like state, though she had the ability to speak unlike Deborah. When she could speak, her conversations echo Deborah and Hornby’s
dialogues. When asked what it was like to think of nothing, which she thought of a great deal of the time, she says

> Worlds within worlds within worlds within worlds. Once I get going I can’t possibly stop. It is like being caught between mirrors or echoes, or something. Or being caught on a merry go round which won’t come to a stop.\(^3\)

Her immediate response to the wonder cure, L-DOPA mine, was similar to Deborah’s – euphoric, adolescent, hopeful assertions. But as treatment progressed she lost control. The drug therapy did not work for her, and she began losing motor control, as well as her mental capacities. Sacks concludes his study in awe of the disease that keeps such a normal and lively personality trapped. He even likens her to the fairy tale princess: “She is a Sleeping Beauty whose awakening was unbearable to her, and who will never be awakened again.”\(^3\)

Deborah at the beginning of the play, sits up against high banked pillows and stares ahead. ‘The kiss of life,’ the injection with the drug L-DOPA, has obviously just taken place and she begins to speak. Her first words, ‘something is happening’ are indicative of a beginning process of self-reflection, although she still ignores Hornby’s questions “Do you recognize me?” Silence. “Do you know me?” Silence. “Can you hear me?” (153-154) Her counter question, “Are you speaking?” is her goal oriented, purposeful act of communication. It shows that she is beginning to rediscover reality, but has no firm grasp on it as yet, her thoughts still dwelling in ‘a kind of Alaska.’

Deborah’s subjective construction of reality comes into conflict with another reality that is objectively defined by her age and by her outer appearance.
This doesn’t mean that Deborah’s definition of reality is less true, or less authentic than what Hornby or the audience hold to be correct. Deborah’s subjective and Hornby’s objective use are both valid because they refer to different realities.

An especially dramatic movement in the course of Deborah’s awakening is reached when she is confronted with her sister Pauline. On the one hand, Pauline is connected with the past; on the other hand, she is also part of the present. For Deborah, therefore, Pauline visibly demonstrates the flow of time, the process of ageing. This process has also changed Deborah, and when she regains consciousness, her own body feels alien to her and Pauline appears as a stranger.

Pauline’s tale is reminiscent of that passage in Sleeping Beauty where the cook wants to box the boy on the ear, but is over taken by sleep at that very moment. This motif was inspired not so much by the fairy tale but rather by Oliver Sacks’ *Awakenings*. What Pauline describes is a typical symptom of the sleeping sickness. According to Sacks, this symptom is typical of an advanced stage of *encephalitis lethargica*, and does not appear right at the beginning. By thus deviating from reality, Pinter achieves a dramatic effect, for Deborah’s illness acquires a mythical quality. Again Pinter has condensed and accelerated a process that in reality takes weeks and months.

While Pauline narrates what happened to Deborah in the past from the perspective of an eye witness, Deborah’s memories elucidate her illness from a personal point of view. She compares her experiences with those of the protagonist of *Alice in Wonderland*. “I’ve been dancing in very narrow spaces. Kept stubbing my toes and bumping my head. Like Alice” (173). Deborah’s statement is indicative of an active consciousness behind seemingly inactive and
lifeless front. A similar conclusion is suggested by the following passage in which the audience can witness Deborah’s illness in reality and from an inner point of view.

**DEBORAH**

Now what was I going to say.

*She begins to flick her cheek, as if brushing something from it.*


*Pause.*

Oh dear.

*The flicking of her cheek grows faster.*

Yes, I think they’re closing in …

*She stops flicking abruptly, sits still. Her body straightens she looks up. She looks at her fingers, examines them.* (187-88)

Like Sacks’ patients, Pinter’s Deborah has to live through a crisis during which the symptoms of her illness become words. Pinter has compressed a process into a few minutes that in reality lasts several weeks. Deborah’s flicking is an imitation of the spastic sticks which Sacks describes in *Awakenings*. The same applies to her eyes that seem to be frozen in an occulatory crisis.

It is important to note that Deborah’s feelings correspond to those of Sacks’ patients. As has already been pointed out, her references refer to both an objective and a subjective reality. Her feeling of being closed in against which she fights in vein, refers to both the ‘closed institution’ in which she had to live, and to illness that is taking possession of her. As a dramatist Pinter has shown a special predilection for closed institutions and the effects they have on the patients’
Deborah remarks - 'chains and padlocks. Bolting me up. Stinking.' The smell may be taken to refer to the undignified circumstances under which patients in closed asylums sometimes have to exist. Her feeling that the walls are closing in on her, or that she is helplessly stuck in a vice, is characteristic of how patients subjectively experience their illness. The objective correlative for this experience can be seen in the Catatonic trances into which patients suffering from *encephalitis lethargica* fall every now and then. The stronger the patients exult their will power not to be overcome by their illness, the more they develop an inner resistance against their own willing, so that they have the feeling of being squashed by two opposing forces. What looks like a freezing of their moments, a ceasing of all their life entertaining functions, is in reality a severe inner conflict the patients fight out with themselves.

Patients so affected find that as soon as they “will” or intend or attempt a movement, a “counter will” or “resistance” rises up to meet them. They find themselves embattled, and even immobilized, in a form of physiological conflict force against counter force, will against counter will, command against countermand.¹⁰

Immediately after her crisis, Deborah is ready for the first time to accept her situation as it is, although she still refuses to face the full truth. This is evident from the ending of the play.

**DEBORAH**

I must be quite old. I wonder what I look like. But it’s of no consequence. I certainly have no intention of looking into a mirror.

*Pause.*
No.

*She looks at HORNBY.*

You say I have been asleep. You say I am now awake. You say I have not awoken from the dead. You say I was not dreaming then and am not dreaming now ... I think I have the matter in proportion.

*Pause.*

Thank you. (190)

Deborah's refusal to look into the mirror amounts to an evasion of reality. Her automatic way of speaking shows that she has not quite accepted Pauline's and Hornby's definition of reality, although she is acknowledging them now. One gets the impression that she is not convinced of what she is saying, and is just recapitulating something she has learned by heart. Especially relevant in this context is the fact that she prefers Pauline's version of the truth, at the same time ignoring Hornby's, which is much more unpleasant. Again this is indicative of her evasion of reality. When she therefore finally claims "I think I have the matter in proportion," this doesn't sound very convincing. The new reality to which she begins to adjust herself is still illusory in character, so that her final words "Thank you" appear in an ironic light.

Pinter's Hornby is an ambivalent caretaker figure in whom positive and negative qualities coincide. Although Hornby succeeds in calling his patients back to life, the final outcome of his medical manipulation is doubtful. Because the play ends with Deborah's accommodation to reality, the further physical and psychological consequences of her awakening do not become clear, but what Pinter's play suggests is that Deborah is also a guinea peg victim of a medical
science whose methods and results can be dehumanizing. Whereas it is Sacks' intention in *Awakenings* to celebrate the success of his psycho-pharmacological experiments, the dramatist Pinter is much more skeptical about the rebirth of Deborah. The reason for this is that both have different concepts of reality. For Pinter, the empirical world is as shifting, ambivalent, unreal as the phantasmagoric Alaska which Deborah has left behind. Conversely Deborah’s no man’s land is for him a concrete reality. Deborah’s awakening therefore produces a conflict between two different kinds of reality, which, although they exclude each other, are both valid and authentic. The result is a mutual relativisation of both concepts of reality, the subjective and psychological on the one hand, and the objective and empirical on the other, so that a final answer to the question of what the actual reality consists of can no longer be given.

It is interesting to note that in Oliver Sacks’ *Awakenings* Pinter found the objective correlative for the fictional kind of Alaska. Although in *A Kind of Alaska* with his strange mysterious and even a bit absurd and the impression is not created by a wilful alienation of reality but rather paradoxically by its imitation. Basically Pinter’s dramaturgy in the play is still founded on a kind of realism that is characteristic of some of his earlier plays like *The Caretaker* or *The Homecoming*.

Pinter’s play concludes by finalizing Deborah’s existential education. As she tells Hornby and Pauline “You say I have been asleep. You say now I am awake. You say I have not awoken from the dead. You say I was not dreaming then and I am not dreaming now. You say I have always been alive and am alive now. You say I am a woman ... I think I have the matter in proportion. (Pause) Thank you” (40). Here the speech reflects the tenuous nature of the human
condition – what is consciousness and what is not – but the including the question of femininity, Pinter also raises the question of gender’s role in this universal condition. Having listened to Pauline and Hornby throughout the course of the play Deborah now remains disturbingly silent. In many ways Deborah ends as she began, laying quietly on the bed a spectacle for Hornby’s look and ours. Such positioning leaves Deborah a mystery, an enigma, a sphinx. According to Helena Cixous,

Not knowing is threatening to patriarchy, while at the same time this enigma of woman reinforces the desire to know. So in the end woman, in man’s desire, stands in the place of not knowing, the place of mystery. In this sense she is no good, but at the same time she is good because it is this mystery that leads man to keep overcoming, dominating, subduing, putting manhood to the text, against mystery he has to keep forcing back.\(^{41}\)

Deborah’s ambitious feature at the end of the play at once challenges and upholds the patriarchal desire for closure.

Thus, the two plays – *No Man’s Land* and *A Kind of Alaska* – that appeared in the middle period of his career heavily draw upon some features of Pinter’s memory dramaturgy in their focus on the past in the present and other tonal differences.
Notes


4. Pinter, *No Man's Land* 321.

5. Pinter, *No Man's Land* 325.


7. Pinter at the BBC, 23rd December, 2002.


30. Sleeping Beauty is a fairy tale classic, the first in the set published in 1697 by Charles Perrault, Contes de ma Mère l'Oye ("Tales of Mother Goose").


41. See Cixous *Castration*.